

**Trauma-Informed Leadership**

# **Rising to the Challenge: Staying Connected with All of Our Students**

**Appendix B — Guidelines:  
For Administrators in Support of Their Teachers and  
Staff: How to Engage Parents and Caregivers  
of Students of Concern (SOC)**

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**NORTH AMERICAN CENTER™  
FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT  
AND TRAUMA RESPONSE**

## APPENDIX B: GUIDELINES

### For Administrators in Support of Their Teachers and Staff: How to Engage Parents and Caregivers of Students of Concern (SOC)

During the pandemic, many school staff are virtually entering the homes of their students. In many cases there will be ongoing dynamics that may be influencing how the student is doing and their readiness to continue to learn. It should be a priority for school staff to establish rapport (if it does not already exist) with parents and caregivers as soon as possible as they conduct their assessment of the student's level of adjustment. As noted in the “**Family Dynamics During a Pandemic**” audio, (<http://nactatr.com/risingchallenge.html#audio>) there may be a shift in the family hierarchy or family emotional process where a parent who has never had contact with school may now be the primary caregiver or decision maker. For example, the father who works away from home during the week, but is now laid off, may be resentful when he answers the phone and school staff attempt to bypass him and ask to speak to mom.

Be open and honest about the pandemic and how it has changed the way we do business for now. Let them know you are glad to be assigned as the school designate for their child and that you are aware you are entering their space (home) and want to be respectful of the changed dynamic. Underscore the reasons for your contact: How to continue the student's learning and to ensure academic success.

#### 1) Q. I have been thinking about [name the student] and wondering how you and/or your family are doing?

**Note:** Some parents/caregivers will immediately talk about themselves, but others will talk about their child only. This may denote what their priority is right now. If the answer is a generic “ok”, focus on their child only. As you build rapport over the weeks to come, your adult to adult relationship should improve.

**Note:** Where there are two or more students living in the same home and one school staff member has a better relationship with the parent/caregiver than another, it may be useful to have initial joint contact where both staff are on the same call just to say hello and break the ice.

#### 2) Q. How have you and your family been impacted by pandemic and all the shutdowns?

**Note:** Parents and caregivers need to know you are interested in them and their circumstance. The genuine connection you make with them will lay the foundation for your success with their child (student) as well.

#### 3) Q. So who is all home now?

**Note:** This is to understand who may be able to be supportive of the students learning and who may be elevating family anxiety.

**4) Q. Has it been possible for [name the student] to find some time to do some schoolwork?**

**Note:** Use this as your educational lead-in and then focus on the student’s education plan and what parents/caregivers need to feel supported while education is being delivered from a distance. Be ready to show parents any online class connections and to explain what the school’s expectations are for the next week or month(s) during a community ‘shelter in place’ order.

**Note:** If it becomes apparent that there are concerning issues in the home that are impacting the student, let the parent/caregiver know you have regular contact with school administration and that we still have our multidisciplinary team of professionals, including counseling staff who can help. Sometimes the teacher may need to over-function on behalf of the family and say, “I will have the Principal or the counselor, call”.

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*Some people are saying this is our new normal but this is only temporary. We will get back to normal!*

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### **How to End a Conversation**

Try to end on a positive and let them know when you will be in contact again. Consider saying, **“I know some people are saying this is our new normal, but this is only temporary. We will get back to normal but until then I’m glad I had this time to teach [name the student] and hear from you as well”!**

**Note:** Use the final phase of your contact to review and restate the outcomes of your conversation and if it feels like there is something not quite right about your interaction then **Consult, Consult, Consult!**