

Staying on TRACK in Family Partnership: Guiding Challenging Conversations Between Researchers and Family Partners

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ABSTRACT

Involving people with lived experience, those personally affected by a living condition, is increasingly common in research focused on their experience.¹ Families may participate through partnership, meaning their active, significant involvement as members of the core research team. In health research, this approach improves families' connection to care, increases participant retention, enhances outcomes, and produces more relevant research findings.^{2,3,4,5} However, effective partnership requires time, resources, communication, and clearer role definitions.⁶ **Staying on TRACK** is an infographic tool designed to guide difficult conversations in research projects where family partnership is central. Although partnerships often begin with a plan, communication can break down when unexpected challenges arise. **Staying on TRACK** includes an infographic and worksheet that can be used before or during tough conversations. It supports researchers and family partners already working together to pause, refocus their partnership, and plan next steps to keep their project on **TRACK**.

KEYWORDS: Lived Experience, Family Partnership, Communication, Team Building, Guideline

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH: STAYING ON **TRACK**

Communicating openly in your research team helps you stay on **TRACK**. Sometimes, research projects don't go as planned and it becomes difficult to communicate clearly, meet projected deadlines, or collaborate meaningfully. The **TRACK** approach helps family and research partners handle these 'bumps in the road' together.


T

Meet as equal partners to talk about the problem and how it impacts the project and the team. This helps everyone **understand** what's going on and fosters a **collaborative space for problem solving**.

R

Create a safe space for team members to openly share their thoughts and **ask questions**. Sharing builds trust and fosters collaboration, allowing your **diverse perspectives** to inform potential solutions.

A

Pause and look closely at the problem. **Break it down into smaller parts** and begin to make a plan. This makes the problem less overwhelming and **provides clarity** on next steps.

C

Explore available resources—this could be **team knowledge or external support**, like funding, collaborations, or helpful literature. **Use the tools you've gathered** to keep moving forward.

K

Talk with your team about the challenge and **remind everyone that it's a chance to learn and grow**. Staying positive helps people work together and come up with new ideas.

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH: STAYING ON **TRACK**

Use these key prompts to walk through challenging conversations that may arise during a research project and STAY ON TRACK. This sheet is designed to be used by **all partners**.



TAKE A TIMEOUT

Think about the problem and what might be causing it. What have you done so far, and what can you do next from your role? Take a step back to reflect before jumping into solutions.



REINFORCE COMMUNICATION

What do you need to share about the challenge? How can you say it in a clear and kind way that helps everyone feel safe to speak up? How else can you contribute to creating an open dialogue?



ASSESS AND ACT

Identify key areas where your knowledge, connections, and experiences can make a difference. Reflect on actionable steps you can take to help the team address the challenge and move forward effectively.



CALL ON RESOURCES

What similar situations have you seen before, for yourself or for others? What worked, and what didn't? Use past lessons and helpful ideas to guide your next steps.



KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

How can you help the team stay hopeful and focused? What do you need from your teammates moving forward? How can you celebrate your upcoming successes? Plan how to talk things through, keep communication open, and move ahead together.



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Use this page to write out your thoughts based on the prompts listed on the previous worksheet. If you can't fit all your suggestions here, download extra pages.



TAKE A TIMEOUT



REINFORCE COMMUNICATION



ASSESS AND ACT



CALL ON RESOURCES



KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

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