



## IS YOUR FAMILY LIKE MINE? A PANEL OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS

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**LEVEL:** Parents/guardians and educators.

**LENGTH OF TIME:** 60-90 minutes in the evening.

### GOALS

- To bring parents/guardians in your school community together.
- To help people feel more comfortable answering children's questions about different kinds of families.
- To help parents and educators understand different kinds of families.

### OBJECTIVES

- Parents/guardians and community members will have the opportunity to listen to a panel of parents/guardians speaking about their own diverse families.
- Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and listen to responses.

### NOTES

Parents/guardians representing diverse families from your school form a panel to talk about their families. Also invite people from families not reflected in your school population so that all family structures are represented. Each panelist uses the perspective of, "How do we talk with our children about our family?"

### PLANNING

1. Form a committee of parents/guardians and staff to plan the event. It helps to have the evening sponsored by an established group within your school — the PTO/PTA, Site-Based Council, Diversity Committee, etc.
2. Select a date and reserve your space. This panel can also be combined with a PTA meeting or other event at the school.
3. Determine how the event will be publicized and who will follow up on this important piece. Decide who will invite the panelists and whether they will phone, email, or write letters.
4. Determine the number of panelists based on the diversity of families in your school. Consider such categories as:
  - Single parents
  - Multi-racial parents
  - Divorced parents
  - Gay or lesbian parents
  - Adoptive or foster parents
  - Grandparents, or other relatives raising children
  - Blended families
  - Multi-ethnic or multi-religious families

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5. Invite a diverse group of parents / guardians to be panelists. Ask the principal or teachers for suggestions of parents who would be good on the panel. They may know of people that you don't. Look for ethnic and racial diversity as well. The panel will have the most impact if you select warm, honest, open parents or guardians rather than "polished speakers."
  6. Ask someone from your committee or your school to be the moderator. This could be the school principal or a teacher or parent with experience leading group discussions.
  7. As a committee, create a list of questions for the panel. A good first question is, "How do you talk about your family with your children?" Also, make sure you ask people to describe their families. Otherwise, they may forget or assume people know. Ask people to speak in their own voices. Make sure they don't feel like they have to represent all families like them.
  8. If possible, have a pre-meeting of the panelists and moderator so that they can meet each other before the event. It can also be helpful to check in with panelists to find out the language they use to refer to their families.
  9. Offering childcare allows more people to attend. Having food at the event also encourages people to come.

## **NIGHT OF THE EVENT**

1. Have the parents seated in a semi-circle in front of the audience.
2. Have the moderator explain the purpose of the evening and then have each panelist take a few minutes to "introduce" their family.
3. Then have the moderator ask the pre-arranged questions, but be ready to be flexible if an interesting line of talk "just comes up."
4. Based on your own particular community, you should decide in advance whether you will allow questions from the audience. If you allow questions you open the possibility of a rich dialogue between all participants. If you open the evening for questions, make sure that your moderator is experienced in facilitation. Consider distributing three-by-five-inch cards so audience participants can write their questions down. Collected cards can then be summarized, screened or interpreted by the moderator. This prevents audience members from having a direct dialogue with panelists and creates a safety zone.
5. Be sure to emphasize not only what makes each family unique but also what families have in common, such as shared values, experiences, goals and concerns.

**WHO'S IN YOUR FAMILY?**

*Developed by the Bridge Elementary School PTO, Lexington, MA*