

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: ACTION SHEET

### Your role

You can help parents to think critically about their social network and how they could utilize it more effectively, as well as the skills and tools they need to expand it. The following strategies may assist you in engaging families in developing social connections:

- Model good relational behavior and use your interactions with families as an opportunity to help parents develop stronger relational skills
- When engaging the family's broader network in teaming or other supports, be sensitive to the quality of existing relationships and help the family identify supporters in their network who will contribute positively
- Invite parents to events where they can get to know each other – with or without their kids – and reach out especially to those parents that may be socially isolated
- If there are specific issues that serve as barriers for the family in developing healthy social connections such as anxiety or depression, encourage the family to address them

### Questions to ask

- Do you have friends or family members that help you out once in a while?
- Are you a member of any groups or organizations?
- Who can you call for advice or just to talk? How often do you see them?
- What kind of social support do you need?
- Do you find it easy or challenging to make friends? If it is challenging, what specific things represent a barrier for you?
- What helps you feel connected?

### What to look for

- Does the parent have supportive relationships with one or more persons (friends, family, neighbors, community, faith-based organizations, etc.)?
- Can the parent turn to their social network for help in times of need (for instance, when they need help with transportation, childcare or other resources)?
- Is the parent willing and able to accept assistance from others?
- Does the parent have positive relationships with other parents of same-age kids?
- Does the parent have skills for establishing and maintaining social relationships?
- Does the parent provide reciprocal social support to peers?

### Activities to do with parents

- Work with the parent to develop an EcoMap showing the people and institutions that are sources of support and/or stress in his or her life.
- Role play with the parent to help them practice skills in approaching another parent to develop a friendship. Have the parent choose a realistic scenario such as starting a conversation at a school event, on the playground or at a place of worship.