

3.3 Families who are involved and interested

There are a variety of ways the home environment can contribute to engagement with school and learning. Factors include family circumstances (family structure, family functioning, etc.), caregiver circumstances (caregiver education, employment, health, etc.), family member expectations for students and attitudes towards school and learning. Notably, a number of social and economic factors influence the capacity of families to provide a rich home learning environment. Family processes and practices are strongly related to students’ academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes and studies have shown that when schools and families collaborate to support student learning, student outcomes are improved.^{88 89 90}

Survey findings

- 55 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that someone in their family ‘often’ asks about their homework or school work and 86 per cent said their family comes to school events.
- 50 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family ‘often’ asks about their homework or school work and 66 per cent said their family comes to school events.
- 86 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 76 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that their family says it is very important that they go to school every day.
- Students whose families attend school events and ‘often’ ask about school work or homework are more likely to achieve better engagement outcomes (like school ‘a lot’, feel like part of school, achieve highly in their school results and say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them).

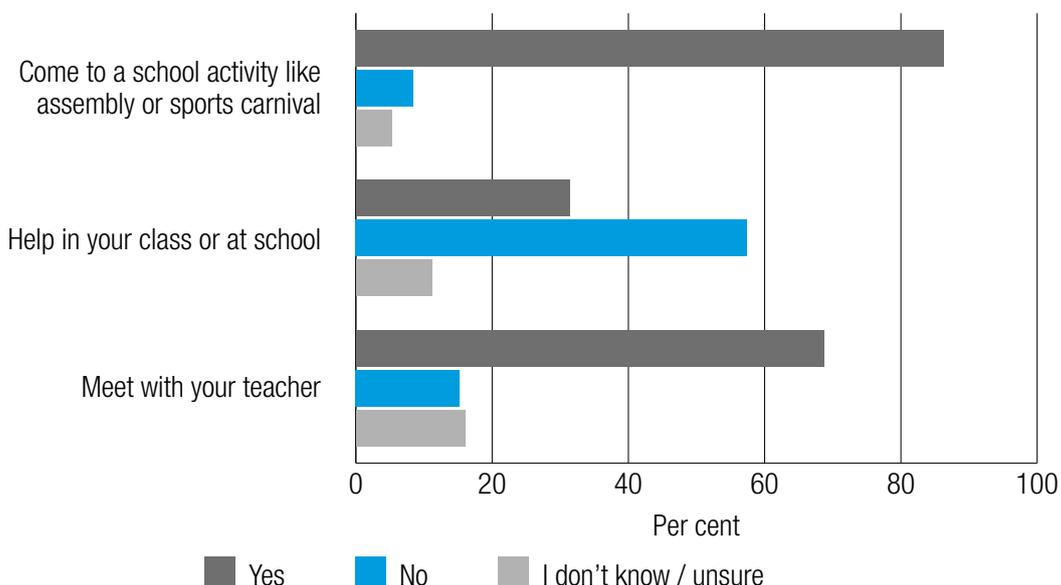
Families’ involvement with school

Students were asked a range of questions about their family’s involvement with school. Nearly all Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that someone in their family asks about their school work either ‘often’ (54.7%) or ‘sometimes’ (41.9%). Around three per cent of students said that no one in their family does this.

When asked about help with homework, one-third of Year 3 to Year 6 students said that their family provides help with homework ‘often’ (33.3%), while almost one-half answered ‘sometimes’ (45.6%). Around five per cent of respondents said they do not get any help from their family. The remaining students (16.3%) answered that they either don’t get homework or don’t need help.

The majority of Year 3 to Year 6 students also reported that someone in their family comes to school activities such as an assembly or school carnival at least once per year (86.3%), and two-thirds said that someone in their family meets with their teacher (68.7%). A smaller proportion of students (31.4%) answered that someone in their family helps in their class or at school.

Graph 3.19: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students answering yes, no or unsure to family being involved in their school, by various activities



Notwithstanding the fact parent involvement generally declines in high school, more than three-quarters of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family asks about their homework or school work either ‘often’ (49.6%) or ‘sometimes’ (27.2%). Around 20 per cent of students answered ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ with the remainder (5.0%) saying this was not required.

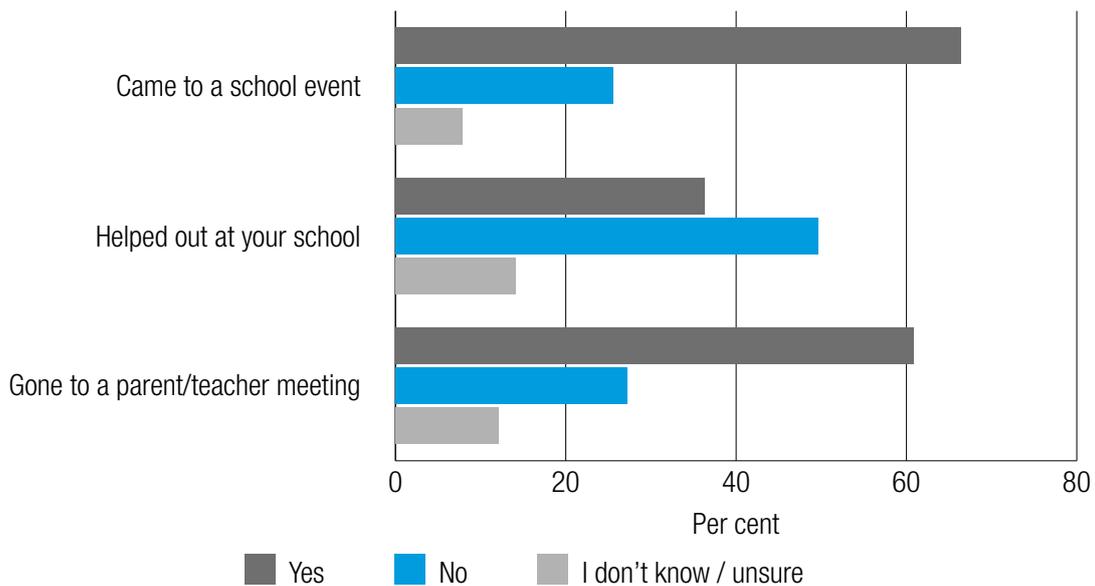
A total of 60 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family helps them with their homework ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’, while 10 per cent of students answered that they do not require help. The remaining 30 per cent of students said that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ receive help with homework from someone in their family. These students did not select that help is ‘not required’ thereby indicating a possible need for help.

Table 3.9: Proportion of students saying someone in their family asks about or helps with their homework/school work, by frequency

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not required
Asks you about homework/school work	49.6	27.2	11.9	6.8	4.6
Helps you with your homework/school work	28.8	31.9	17.1	11.6	10.6

Around two-thirds of Year 7 to Year 12 students (66.4%) reported that someone in their family came to at least one school event in the current school year, and 60 per cent said that a family member went to at least one parent/teacher meeting. More than one-third (36.3%) reported that someone in their family has helped out at their school at least once in the current year.

Graph 3.20: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students answering yes, no or unsure to family being involved in their school, by various activities



How important is regular attendance to families?

Students were also asked if their family says it is important that they go to school every day: 86.4 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students answered ‘yes’ to this question and 11.0 per cent said ‘sometimes’. There was a small proportion of students (2.6%) who said that their family does not say it is important that they go to school every day.

There was no significant difference between male and female students, students in regional and metropolitan areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how important regular school attendance is to their families.

Table 3.10: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying their family says being at school every day is important, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes	84.0	88.2	84.4	89.5	86.4	87.7	86.4
Sometimes	11.7	10.5	12.4	8.9	11.2	8.2	11.0
No	4.3	1.3	3.3	1.6	2.4	4.1	2.6

Nearly all Year 7 to Year 12 students answered that it is either ‘very important’ (76.3%) or ‘important’ (21.9%) to their parents or the people who look after them that they go to school every day.

There was no significant difference between male and female Year 7 to Year 12 students, students in regional and metropolitan areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how important regular school attendance is to their families.

Table 3.11: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, important or not important to their parents or the people who look after them that they go to school every day, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Very important	76.1	76.6	77.1	74.5	76.6	70.5	76.3
Important	22.1	21.6	20.6	25.0	21.8	22.7	21.9
Not very important	1.8	1.8	2.3	0.5	1.6	6.8	1.8

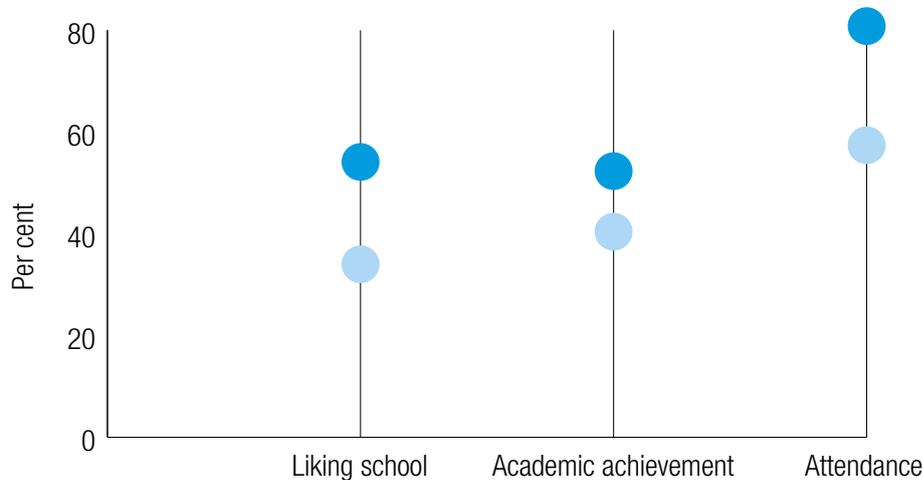
Students with families who are involved and interested – Year 3 to Year 6

Students who said that their family ‘often’ ask about school work and participate in school activities were more likely than students who said their family ‘sometimes’ asks about school work and does not participate in school activities to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (54.1% versus 34.0%).
- Students say they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results (52.3% versus 40.4%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (80.8% versus 57.4%).

The following graph shows results for Year 3 to Year 6 students who said that their family ‘often’ asks about school work and attends school activities (for example comes to an assembly or a school event) and compares them to the results for students who said that their family ‘sometimes’ asks about school work and does not attend school activities (such as above).

Graph 3.21: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who say their family ask about school work often and participate in school activities or students who say their family asks about school work sometimes and does not participate in school activities or students does not know



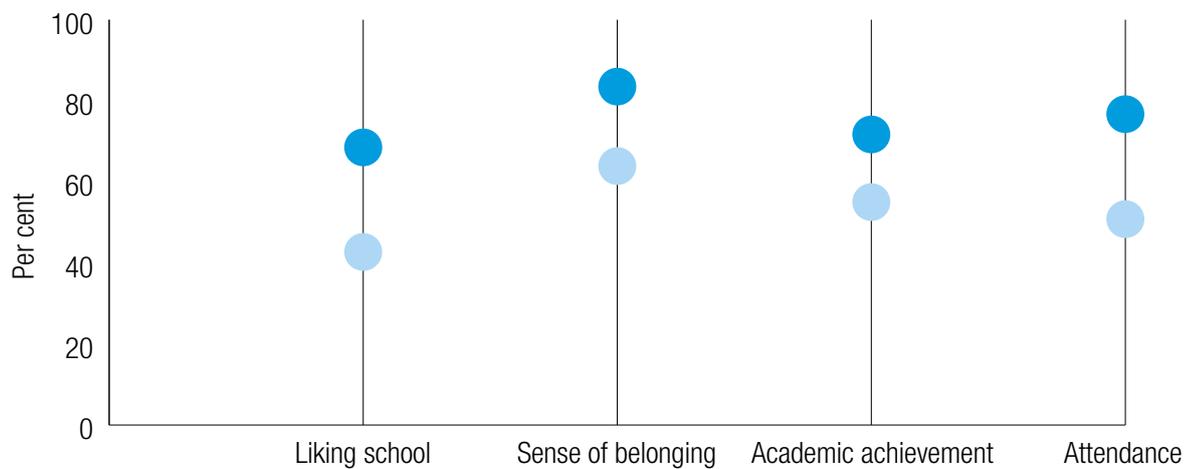
Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. family asks about schoolwork often but does not participate in school activities) have been omitted in this graph.

Students with families who are involved and interested – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, students who said that their family ‘often’ ask about homework or school work and participate in school activities (for example comes to an assembly or school event at least once in the school year) were more likely than students who said their family asks about school work ‘sometimes’ and does not participate in school activities to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (68.5% versus 42.7%).
- Students feel part of their school (83.5% versus 63.9%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (76.7% versus 50.8%).
- Students’ academic achievements are ‘near the top’ or ‘above average’ (71.7% versus 55.0%).

Graph 3.22: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who say their family ask about school work often and participate in school events or who say their family asks about school work sometimes and does not participate in school events



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. family asks about schoolwork often but does not come to school events) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“They help kids at school by helping you with homework or just supporting you. Some parents help by bringing them to places (school).” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The attitudes and behaviours of family members were a significant influence on student engagement with school and learning for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students described the varied ways in which family members acted that were both supportive and unsupportive of their engagement, noting that a range of factors came into play that also enabled or constrained family member actions.

Family members were noted as generally helpful for engagement with school and learning when they:

- provided resources and a home learning environment that supported education
- demonstrated that they valued the student and education through showing interest and encouraging learning progress (not just academic achievement)
- provided practical, emotional and academic support or assistance
- directly participated in school activities or communicated with the school.

Across these areas, family members were noted as acting in ways that were helpful and unhelpful, with the exception of showing interest in the student and in education. For example, family members were helpful when they participated in school activities but could also be a source of embarrassment. Students wanted family members to show an interest in them and their learning. They explained that family members demonstrated their interest through asking questions about them, what they were learning and how they were feeling about school. When family members engaged with students in these ways, students felt valued and that their learning and school was important. Critically, this was not about family members knowing the answers to homework questions, but about spending quality time talking and listening to the student.

Comments from students indicated how family members largely influenced their emotional engagement with education or created environments within the home that either enabled or hindered engagement. However, practices and circumstances in the home environment can play out at school, influencing cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement.

Readiness for learning

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 acknowledged families as providing a range of practical supports that enabled and promoted readiness for learning. Families were identified as providing food and transport, paying for school fees and supplies such as stationery and uniforms, and providing structure (for example, enforcing healthy sleeping patterns). Families were not helpful for school and learning when this practical support was not provided.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They can take you to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Pack your lunch and your bag."</i></p> <p><i>"Cook food and clean and take you fun places!"</i></p> <p><i>"Get you out of bed in the morning! (in the cold)."</i></p> <p><i>"They provide school stationery."</i></p> <p><i>"She goes to work every day and buys me things for school."</i></p> <p><i>"They can give you a good breakfast and feed you."</i></p> <p><i>"They give \$4,000 for Year 6 schooling."</i></p>	<p><i>"Drive you to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Clean your clothes."</i></p> <p><i>"Provide food when studying."</i></p> <p><i>"Put a roof over my head."</i></p> <p><i>"Support us for travel, supplies, money for residential times, funding."</i></p> <p><i>"Make sure they get sleep."</i></p> <p><i>"Support – Centrelink should pay single parents more money so they can buy more clothes and equipment."</i></p> <p><i>"They pay for our school fees, excursions/incursions and school stationery."</i></p>
<p><i>"Not paying for education."</i></p> <p><i>"Feed you bad food e.g. McDonald's because they have so much advertising. They are also so junky it is hard to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes not bring lunch at all and you sit in class when you are supposed to be listening you are thinking about how hungry you are."</i></p> <p><i>"Not buying you school supplies e.g. shoes, pencils."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't pay notes to the school."</i></p> <p><i>"Not making yummy breakfast."</i></p> <p><i>"When there is no toilet paper."</i></p>	<p><i>"Don't provide their child/children with the right resources. e.g. books."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't provide food when studying."</i></p> <p><i>"Kicking you out of the house."</i></p> <p><i>"Being cheap."</i></p> <p><i>"Not giving you lunch and dinner."</i></p> <p><i>"Not buying me pens = teachers getting annoyed when I ask for a pen."</i></p> <p><i>"Not cooking dinner."</i></p> <p><i>"No cash."</i></p> <p><i>"Not paying fees."</i></p>

For some families, financial constraints made supporting school readiness challenging. Being aware of family financial stress affected how students felt towards school and learning. While families were generally noted as supporting readiness for schooling, students in Year 7 to Year 12 described a range of ways in which schools can support school readiness, including the provision of healthy food and for school supplies, such as uniforms and stationery.

"Kids with financial issues at home have difficulties keeping up with school standards i.e. uniforms, teachers should support kids that struggle with uniforms, equipment, etc." (Year 7 to Year 12)

"Decrease pressure on children e.g. not involving children in personal problems like financial help or problems going on." (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students who were attending boarding schools also noted the financial support, in particular, from families and how financial stress sometimes restricted their participation in activities outside of school in comparison to other students.

An environment for wellbeing

“Be helpful, be supportive, loving, caring and help you with learning.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“My mum helps me prepare for big tests like NAPLAN. My dad helps me to make sure I’m kind. My siblings help me doing my homework.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Families can be a big impact in people’s lives and hurt and make people happy.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The home environment can have a powerful effect on a child or young person’s wellbeing. Through the group discussions students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified the characteristics of, and behaviours within, positive and problematic home environments for engagement in school and learning.

Positive environments that are supportive of school and learning were described by students across Year 3 to Year 12 as environments in which they felt happy, cared for, understood and supported. For students in Year 7 to Year 12, support also included for their decisions. The ways in which families provided encouragement and support is discussed in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. Positive environments were characterised by calmness, kindness, displays of affection, encouragement and were responsive to student needs.

Disruptive environments for doing well with school and learning were described as uncaring, chaotic, stressful, unpredictable and lacking communication. Students described how the actions of family members or circumstances within the home environment affected them emotionally – with students feeling upset, hurt, unloved or hated. These feelings made it difficult to engage with school and learning and had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

For students living away from their families, such as those in boarding schools, communication was particularly important as they could not physically spend time with family members. As such, when phone calls were unanswered, not made or unable to be made, students felt their families did not care about them. For these students, financial pressures can place tension on phone communication. Students explained that relatives taking them out on the weekend alleviated feelings of homesickness.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Being kind.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working as a family. Supporting one another helps build a stronger education for the child, because feeling loved can encourage the student to do better in school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you laugh.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hug you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Comfort you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They love you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Stay calm.”</i></p> <p><i>“Never shout.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Be loving towards all family so kids can concentrate on work and not depression.”</i></p> <p><i>“To encourage them to try new things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Safe environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be honest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Supportive in all your choices.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be positive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents who care.”</i></p> <p><i>“By helping them out and giving them love!!”</i></p>
<p><i>“Don’t spend time with you and don’t really care about what you do or help with anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Never keep calm.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families might have got angry at student which makes the student sad and have a bad day. Support the student because if they have a bad day they won’t learn as much.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can hurt your feelings.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could have been bullies and want to bully you!”</i></p> <p><i>“They could be abusing you and you could have a hard time at school from it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t love or care about you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You could struggle at school because they [family members] aren’t nice.”</i></p>	<p><i>“If parents favour one child over another child and not support children equally.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hate.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your mum has a boyfriend and you don’t like them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get angry over the smallest problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Caring more about themselves than the child.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not making time to spend with their children and build stronger relationships with them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Speaking aggressively to kids – being very strict.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not caring about their children’s education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not loving them.”</i></p>

For students across Year 3 to Year 12 positive environments were also characterised by family members spending quality time together. There is a distinction between the quantity of time available and the quality of the time used.⁹¹ While family members may have a limited quantity of time available (in hours and minutes) students valued quality time, particularly when the time was spent to support their learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Help you do your homework and spend lots of time with you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make time for us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Spend more time learning together.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sit down with us and we can work things out together.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Spend more time with kids [so] they don’t feel like they are being rejected [would help with school and learning].”</i></p> <p><i>“By not making time to spend with their children and build stronger relationships with them [is unhelpful to school and learning].”</i></p>

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 noted the quantity of time available to family members sometimes impeded on their ability to provide support for learning. They recognised that other family members, such as younger siblings or family members with disability, or work demands may require more time of people.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Spend too much time on little siblings.”

“If you have a death/disabled sibling or family member in the family.”

“Being so involved with their own work and lives that they don’t support the kids enough.”

“Family problems – (relationships) (work life).”

Finally, students identified a range of problems within families, such as drugs, alcohol and family violence, which had an impact on how students felt about coming to school and their capacity to concentrate on or engage with learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Fighting because the kid would be sad and angry at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“My family will not help by fighting and talking loud plus playing music.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fighting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Drugs (drinking) (smoking).”</i></p> <p><i>“Drink driving.”</i></p> <p><i>“Big fights (swearing) (violence).”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents fighting and not co-operating with each other or the child.”</i></p>	<p><i>“If family fights a lot or drinks/drugs it can be a bad influence on their children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pre-existing social issues – drugs/substance abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“Influence of drugs or booze.”</i></p> <p><i>“Divorced parents!”</i></p> <p><i>“They may be fighting and might have a lot of work to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“Broken households.”</i></p> <p><i>“Beating you up.”</i></p> <p><i>“Abusive parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad background and home life – abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kicking you out of the house.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not fix problems that are at home that you try to fix by yourself.”</i></p>

An environment that promotes learning

“Creating learning space.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“And encourage you to do your best. They could make rewards for getting good marks and studying. Make homework a fun time to talk to you about the importance of doing well in school.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The home environment can reinforce the value of education through family members contributing to an environment that is conducive to learning. This includes creating space and time in which students can concentrate on their learning and also providing structure to support learning.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 described environments that are not supportive of learning such as those where families (and pets) were noisy or created distractions – either actively or passively. These distractions made it difficult for students to concentrate and complete their work. Students explained it was important for families to ‘be considerate’ when they were working at home.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Cat sitting on homework when doing it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Family can be noisy when doing homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Your sibling wants to play with you when you’re working.”</i></p> <p><i>“My dad watches TV when I do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Loud music or party.”</i></p> <p><i>“By yelling at you when you are doing school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be not considerate.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Siblings (distraction) (ask too many questions).”</i></p> <p><i>“Create too much noise.”</i></p> <p><i>“Distracting from homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Playing loud music when trying to do homework. P.S. they have crappy taste in music!”</i></p> <p><i>“Talking loud when you’re trying to study.”</i></p> <p><i>“Preventing you from doing your work.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can be a distraction from studies.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pestering for no apparent reason.”</i></p>

Structure was generally seen to support learning for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to the negative implications of structure (as noted below), however, students in Year 7 to Year 12 acknowledged enforcing dedicated time for learning as important and helpful.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Force their kids to go to school.”

“Make you do your homework.”

“Push you to do work.”

Students explained how household responsibilities or expectations of attendance at events reduced the time they had available for work. Students wanted family members to appreciate their competing demands.

A lack of structure or not enforcing study at home was noted as detrimental to learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Sometimes they don’t give you time for your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“They clog you up with lots of chores.”</i></p> <p><i>“Embarrassment!!! Chores taking up homework time. After school activities that also take up homework time that children don’t necessarily want to do. Not doing the dishes with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you do jobs and you don’t have time to do your homework – get in trouble by teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keeping kids up late and the effects are not concentrating.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let you stay up on technology late at night.”</i></p> <p><i>“No organisation.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Letting the children do anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other activities like taekwondo and horses.”</i></p> <p><i>“Watching TV/Playing games.”</i></p> <p><i>“Buying you PS4/games.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you put out the trash.”</i></p> <p><i>“Jobs around the house.”</i></p> <p><i>“Piling child with household duties and also expect homework to be completed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pre-set agenda of household responsibilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have to go out when you have assessments or homework.”</i></p>

As they developed greater autonomy within their lives, students in Year 7 to Year 12 described positive environments as characterised by structure, balance and understanding. Students valued when family members enforced time to be spent on school work and engaged in their learning, but equally important was time to support their wellbeing, including free time, time alone or time to spend with friends. Wellbeing and breaks from learning were important to enable students to concentrate and feel motivated about studying – as discussed further below and in Chapter 4.8 – Feeling physically and mentally well. Communication and understanding from family members facilitated the creation of such environments and students felt it supported their learning.

Inflexible and forceful environments were noted as unhelpful, and having a negative influence on student health and wellbeing, and subsequently learning.

Year 7 to Year 12	
Ways families are helpful for school and learning	Ways families are not helpful for school and learning
<p><i>“Understanding how their child feels.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talk to them and make them feel comfortable.”</i></p> <p><i>“In some cases, leave the students alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not grounding them for everything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Understand that the school system has changed since they have been at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give us space.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give them a little freedom to hang out with their friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give kids time to study or be with friends alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not always talk about school.”</i></p> <p><i>“By supporting them and giving them time to self.”</i></p> <p><i>“When the kids finish their homework they can do whatever they want to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could be strict on their children and school work.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They keep telling me to study.”</i></p> <p><i>“Strict parents because they pressure you to succeed/ study more often.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families can often force or push students with their work which can create stress to the student. This can cause health problems to the student and also make them rush the work or incomplete their task. Families also might give wrong advice to the student causing friend problems or get the child into trouble. This will ruin reputation for the student caused by the family.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might apply too much pressure on their child causing them to stress which may lead them to not concentrating.”</i></p>

Students expressed a desire for independence and increasing but manageable levels of responsibility for their learning. They felt that within a positive environment, family members would support them to manage their demands. Young people want to have a sense of control over their lives and to solve problems on their own, knowing that supportive adults are there to provide assistance as required.⁹²

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Only help when asked, but also check if they need help. If they say no don’t try to help.”*
- “Take an engaged view in the learning of their kids but let them work at their own pace and let them figure it out.”*
- “Showing compassion and trusting us.”*
- “Letting us explain ourselves.”*
- “Allowing you to be independent.”*

Involvement and interest in the student and their learning

“Families can help encourage children in their learning and social groups. They can talk to students about how they went at school on that day and how they are going with their friends and teachers. They can also ask if the student has any homework or schoolwork that they need help or could be struggling with.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Families were identified as an important overall influence on how students felt about coming to school and learning. Through their values, attitudes and expectations, families communicated to students the perceived importance of education. These factors influenced student engagement – while also noting the pivotal and complementary role of friends and teachers as outlined in Chapters 3.1 – Having friends and positive relationships with other students and 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future respectively.

The value of families taking an active interest in their learning (and life more generally) was a common theme identified by students across Year 3 to Year 12. They described that families show their interest through proactively asking about school, learning and how they feel and, critically, listening to their responses. To students, this active interest meant that family members cared about them and their learning.

The actions of family members resonated strongly; students explained that when families did not show an active interest, it demonstrated the family member/s did not care about them, their wellbeing, their education or their future.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“They show interest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Asking them how they feel about their work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask about your day.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask you how you did in test and other activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask if you need help with your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talk with them.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Talk more to them and make sure they are OK.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have an interest in what their kids are doing in school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Check up on them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask about their day.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families can make a difference by asking simple questions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Care and make an effort to understand what is happening in your child’s schooling life (and out of their life/socially).”</i></p>
<p><i>“Not encouraging their children, not helping at all, not doing anything about their school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just dump their kids at school and not care about what they are doing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t spend time with you and don’t really care about what you do or help with anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not helping or even caring about how their kids feel at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might not be interested.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not listening to their kids when their kids are telling them what they did at school.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They don’t ask them how they’re doing at school and if they are being bullied or not.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not caring for their child’s education.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they don’t come to school events or talk about what you’re doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don’t care about your education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not listening to their child.”</i></p> <p><i>“Only asking if you’ve done your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not asking if their kids are OK and by trying to find out about the wrong stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“By ignoring the kids.”</i></p>

Further, some family members indicated through their actions that they did not value education, actively discouraged students or did not support school work or attendance.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“By saying ‘Boo homework schoolwork!’”</i></p> <p><i>“Not letting them read and write.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Some families don’t even help them and tell them to go watch or do something else rather than doing their work and then they can do whatever you want.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discouragement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Restrict the learning/recreational activities that their children take part in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t motivate them to achieve their best.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might despise of the idea of school and that will have an impact on the child’s life.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not valuing education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having other priorities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being a good influence.”</i></p>

There were a range of perceived benefits to receiving encouragement for school and learning from family members. Students outlined that encouragement developed self-confidence, motivation, resilience and determination in school, learning and extracurricular activities. Promoting these capacities in children and young people is important for school and beyond. Self-confidence, resilience and determination enable students to navigate academic difficulties which, for some, may be experienced in a classroom on a regular basis. The active interest and encouragement from family members motivated students to attend school and to try their best to do well.

Low expectations, negative comments or ‘put downs’ from family members were discouraging and hurtful for students, and not helpful for how they felt about school attendance and learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Families encourage kids to learn and are happy when they do well.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to try their hardest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keep trying.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support their kids to go school by telling them that their good.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give positive comments.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gives ‘talks’ so you want to do good and so you behave.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Encourage kids to not give up.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivate them to do well in school.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can give moral support to communicate with their child.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to be better at school and not just sit around and let their kids do nothing.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can encourage you to participate in school activities (e.g. plays, competitions, etc.).”</i></p>
<p><i>“By not encouraging their children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Say bad things about your work.”</i></p> <p><i>“No good comments.”</i></p> <p><i>“They criticise you when you did nothing wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teasing brothers and sisters.”</i></p> <p><i>“Saying their kids are stupid.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Say you’re not good enough.”</i></p> <p><i>“Say you can’t succeed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Call you lazy/procrastinator.”</i></p> <p><i>“Telling them they are stupid and extremely dumb.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very low expectations.”</i></p>

While students generally appreciated the encouragement provided by family members, they explained family members' aspirations and expectations could also be a source of stress. Expectations related to academic achievement and other aspects of their lives, such as future career paths, extracurricular activities, family or social lives. Expectations that were "overly high" (Year 7 to Year 12 student), perceived as unattainable or not in areas of interest to students translated to pressure, anxiety and stress. Students feared disappointing their family members and this affected their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Pressure you too much."</i></p> <p><i>"You may get hurt if you don't get an A+ on everything."</i></p> <p><i>"They DO NOT understand mistakes."</i></p> <p><i>"Want to get you into a good school e.g. [name of school] by making you do homework until 10pm at night and 5am in the morning."</i></p> <p><i>"They expect too much."</i></p> <p><i>"They might push you, when you don't want to be pushed."</i></p> <p><i>"Put too much pressure on sporting events."</i></p>	<p><i>"They might pressure them too much (e.g. have high expectations, making the students feel that they cannot keep up with them)."</i></p> <p><i>"Pressure excellence making someone stressed or anxious not to disappoint."</i></p> <p><i>"Their expectations can seem unattainable."</i></p> <p><i>"They want their kids to have high grades at school."</i></p> <p><i>"Expect too much: job + school + social life + family + sleep."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't expect me to be the 'the perfect student' while pushing me to do more out of school."</i></p> <p><i>"Understand that each teacher marks differently in one class I could get an 8 and another a 6 (IB system)."</i></p> <p><i>"Not accept if you don't get good grades."</i></p>

In addition, comparisons to peers or siblings were unhelpful for learning and self-esteem. When family members made these comparisons, students felt their own identify and capabilities were not valued. Students wanted their family members to understand their individuality and their strengths.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Comparing you to your friends and saying they are better than you."</i></p> <p><i>"When they cheer on someone else."</i></p>	<p><i>"Compare us to other kids."</i></p> <p><i>"Using other people as examples of who we should be like."</i></p> <p><i>"Pressure/excessive expectations – different for each child."</i></p> <p><i>"Comparing them to other people."</i></p> <p><i>"Always comparing to other children and family members."</i></p> <p><i>"To not put them down to be like their older siblings."</i></p>

While high expectations from family members were generally seen as a positive influence for school and learning, students were careful to temper comments with provisos such that expectations must be related to the student's ability and interest, and facilitated by support from family members.

Students wanted family members to believe in them and support them to achieve academically, however, they also wanted these adults to celebrate and promote their success. This included acknowledging their personal learning progress (as opposed to academic grade) and their effort. For students, simultaneously emphasising learning progress and academic achievement alleviated some of their experiences of feeling pressured to succeed, and encouraged persistence and resilience.

For students in boarding facilities, family encouragement and reminders that they were acting as role models for their communities positively influenced the way students felt about school and of being away from home.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Tell you things like never give up or do your best."</i></p> <p><i>"They will [tell you] you're smart no matter what."</i></p> <p><i>"They support you no matter what."</i></p>	<p><i>"Knowing their child's ability not what someone else can do."</i></p> <p><i>"Supporting children and not minimising kids due to their ability."</i></p> <p><i>"Do not force kids to do subjects not desired."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't put children down if they do bad at an assignment or test."</i></p> <p><i>"Encourage them to do homework and strive to be the best that they can be."</i></p> <p><i>"Appreciate their efforts."</i></p> <p><i>"Have high expectations but also have an understanding behaviour."</i></p> <p><i>"Understand how different each individual student can be."</i></p>

Recognising their individuality also played out for students in Year 7 to Year 12 with regard to their choices and future pathways from school. Students wanted family members to recognise and support their decisions, and to acknowledge that school prepares students for a variety of pathways.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Forcing child to do all hard subjects e.g. physics and chemistry."

"Not supporting child decisions."

"Making it seem like school is the only aspect of them and that if they don't succeed to senior students they are a failure."

"Being disappointed if they don't go in the direction you want them to go in or decide to change where they want to take themselves/can't achieve what you expect."

"Family ideas of what career you should have."

"Not understanding academics isn't everyone's number 1 priority."

Providing academic and emotional support

“Helping when they need help for homework and bullies because sometimes students can be depressed about school.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Comments related to the provision of academic ‘help’ or ‘support’ were the most common response to the question ‘In what ways can families help kids do well at school and learning?’ Family members were also noted as important providers of emotional support; as someone to count on, to talk to and as promoters of behaviours that supported wellbeing.

Academic support

Helping with homework, assignments and topics difficult to understand emerged as a strong theme of the ways in which families support school and learning. Students explained they required help when they were ‘struggling’ and ‘with understanding’ the work. Assistance from family members included providing explanations of words, topics or tasks, using resources such as the internet to find more information, providing tips for study, and help with solving tasks, preparing for tests and with specific subjects.

Students wanted family members to show an interest in their learning by moving beyond asking if students have homework to questions focused on what they are learning about and if they needed assistance.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Explain and encourage their children and talk them through the task and how to work it out.”</i></p> <p><i>“They let them work out the work with a little help.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help you do homework with you and they can explain different things you don’t know.”</i></p> <p><i>“They talk to me about learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“My parents try their hardest to help me with my spelling.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They can help them do their work with them and help them if they don’t know some meanings or spelling. They can [...] help their children do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask if they need help – give advice and/or help them.”</i></p> <p><i>“To help them if they are struggling with any school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Interacting and asking about what they are learning about, if they don’t understand they help in some way; researching or memory.”</i></p> <p><i>“Using internet to help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Constructive criticism.”</i></p>

Beyond assistance with prescribed work or homework, students indicated families supported school and learning by providing additional opportunities or resources for learning. The most common suggestion, particularly from students in Year 7 to Year 12, referred to hiring a tutor. However, families were also noted as creating learning tools and learning opportunities, discussing topics in more detail, and encouraging learning behaviours, such as reading. It was also helpful if a family member was a teacher.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Maybe if kids are worried about how well they are doing parents could give them tutoring or giving them special workbooks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Making them do worksheets.”</i></p> <p><i>“Do more homework with them because these days we don’t get homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teach them things at home.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having a meeting with you and teach you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can make you read at night.”</i></p> <p><i>“Home schooling your children.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Help child, where help is required e.g. get a tutor, allow child to develop ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“They teach you the things you didn’t understand at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hire a tutor.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discussing more advanced knowledge about a topic they’re learning about.”</i></p>

Students largely felt supported by family members. Some acknowledged a range of social and economic factors that made the provision of support for learning challenging for family members. Several students spoke of competing responsibilities, such as work commitments and requirements to travel, or domestic responsibilities such as caring for other family members. Whereas others highlighted family members may not have the requisite knowledge or skills to provide assistance, or that their parents' own experiences of schooling may influence their capacity or level of comfort to provide assistance. Some students felt that family members did not prioritise education or support for learning.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 identified support for homework and homework programs provided through schools as useful for students, particularly when support was not available within the home environment.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Too busy for kids (BOO)."</i></p> <p><i>"Because their parents might not be well educated."</i></p> <p><i>"They might forget things."</i></p> <p><i>"It can make it hard because they don't get much education from their parents/carers so they don't do as well but they get extra support from teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Embarrassment, chores and pressure and also parents work so they can't always help with homework, pressure or worries."</i></p> <p><i>"My mum and my dad go to work a lot sometimes I miss them."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes it hard for kids to get the help they need because their parents might not know much about school work and the kids don't know what to do."</i></p>	<p><i>"They may not care about school or are too busy to help."</i></p> <p><i>"Always busy with work or travelling."</i></p> <p><i>"Might not be able to help with homework/classwork."</i></p> <p><i>"Being so involved with their own work and lives that they don't support the kids enough."</i></p> <p><i>"They cannot be helpful with school things that they do not know."</i></p> <p><i>"If a family member is away, they can't give the support for them."</i></p> <p><i>"Not setting aside time."</i></p>

The actions of some family members were deemed as not helpful because they did not provide assistance for learning, and homework in particular. Students expressed frustration if they perceived family members had availability to provide assistance, lacked interest or ignored their request of assistance.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"When they don't help the student work out the problem."</i></p> <p><i>"Ignore you and abuse you and be mean and horrible and don't help with homework."</i></p> <p><i>"They will tell you to do your homework by yourself."</i></p> <p><i>"They ignore you! When you ask them to help you."</i></p> <p><i>"Not telling their children how to do stuff."</i></p>	<p><i>"They don't help them and don't remind them to do their homework."</i></p> <p><i>"Not bothering to assist with homework or revision when asked."</i></p> <p><i>"Telling you to work out a hard question by yourself."</i></p> <p><i>"Not being helpful at home with schoolwork."</i></p> <p><i>"Not be bothered and just leave the kid to figure it out on its own."</i></p>

The provision of assistance with learning is an extension of family members showing interest in student's education. While generally students appreciated assistance, they expressed frustration when describing some of the ways family members' well-intentioned actions were not useful for school and learning. This included completing the work for students, making explanations too difficult, providing incorrect information or disagreeing with the student's work and dismissing or destroying student work.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They don't understand the question."</i></p> <p><i>"Take over."</i></p> <p><i>"Make it too hard to understand."</i></p> <p><i>"Wrong advice."</i></p> <p><i>"When they do it their way so it makes it harder."</i></p> <p><i>"Stick nose in lessons."</i></p>	<p><i>"Want to help you (too much)."</i></p> <p><i>"By not getting the question."</i></p> <p><i>"Clingy – try to help without actually being helpful."</i></p> <p><i>"Doing the work for them."</i></p> <p><i>"When they are interfering with my homework and I am concentrated."</i></p>

Emotional support

Students identified families as an important source of emotional support. They felt family members were reliable sources of support and advice who were genuinely concerned with their wellbeing. Families were helpful to talk to about concerns and, through these relationships, students explained that they were taught or modelled skills and strategies to respond to the challenges they were facing. The development of social and emotional skills equips students to understand and manage their emotions and the behaviour that emotions can provoke.

Family members also encouraged behaviours that support wellbeing, and this was particularly pertinent for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Actions included promoting breaks from learning, or encouraging students to participate in sport, spend time with friends or to have days off. Students in boarding facilities indicated they felt better when family members in town took them out for the weekend. This range of supports enabled students to be emotionally ready and able to concentrate on their learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They give advice."</i></p> <p><i>"Talk to them if they are finding things hard."</i></p> <p><i>"When you are having a hard time at school to do with friends, or teachers, your family will always help you! And support you!"</i></p> <p><i>"You can tell them your troubles."</i></p> <p><i>"Listen to you and not yell at you when you complain about teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"If your parents teach you about words it can help you with teasing."</i></p> <p><i>"Always be there to help your siblings or children if they need it."</i></p> <p><i>"If you've done too much work they can let you go outside and ride your pony in the bush!"</i></p>	<p><i>"Parents letting you see friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Sporting activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Having breaks from work."</i></p> <p><i>"Balances between things."</i></p> <p><i>"Allowing them to have days off school, within reason, if they need mental health days."</i></p> <p><i>"Take you to a sports game to keep you healthy."</i></p> <p><i>"They are someone to talk to if you are struggling."</i></p> <p><i>"Listening to the students and paying attention to what's happening around them."</i></p> <p><i>"Take away kids from stressful learning environment to relax which can help with learning."</i></p>

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular referred to the past experiences and knowledge of family members as useful.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Families should always be there if needed to help their kids in anyway required and share advice/past experiences."

"Parents or family members that are older will have more knowledge and experience of what younger kids go through."

"Relatable."

"Parents know a lot."

However at other times, students felt family members did not understand their situation – underscoring the importance of friendships, particularly for emotional support and understanding.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They don't understand the pressure that some kids have because they might be behind at their work."</i></p> <p><i>"My family sometimes just say: don't listen to the bully, but they don't understand that it isn't that simple."</i></p> <p><i>"When they don't understand what I'm going through."</i></p> <p><i>"If you've had a bad day and when you get home they start yelling at you!"</i></p>	<p><i>"Use their experience and apply it to our experience."</i></p> <p><i>"They themselves might not understand the importance of school and grades."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't understand that school isn't the same as when they went."</i></p> <p><i>"Parents being older they don't understand your issues."</i></p>

Direct participation in school

The participation of family members in school activities or operations could be both helpful and unhelpful for engagement in school and learning. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 described a wide array of ways that families can be involved in schools, including classroom activities, school operations, such as the canteen, coaching, Parents and Citizens/Friends (P&C/P&F) and fundraising, or specific events, such as excursions, sports carnivals and discos. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to family involvement through attending parent/teacher meetings and school events. Through their participation in these events, family members demonstrated their support for students and for education.

When family members did not participate in school activities or meet with their teachers students indicated it was not helpful for school and learning. As above, students perceived a lack of support through the level of participation of their family members.

However, students acknowledged barriers to family participation, such as work schedules.

"Parents make kids school lunches so when they go to work they may not be able to help out." (Year 3 to Year 6)

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"With family coming to school and help children."</i></p> <p><i>"Support them in education by going to their class or school event, because knowing that someone is supporting you can help you do better in school work."</i></p> <p><i>"Be there for them at sporting events."</i></p> <p><i>"To help in class for one day."</i></p>	<p><i>"Coming to parent-teacher meeting."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help them by coming to school and checking up on them to see how they're doing."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting involved in our schooling."</i></p> <p><i>"Parent-teacher days."</i></p> <p><i>"Participate in school functions/events/activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Be involved in school."</i></p>
<p><i>"Not go to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't meet their teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Not coming to parent meetings and assemblies."</i></p> <p><i>"Not supporting the carnivals."</i></p> <p><i>"By not helping out at events."</i></p>	<p><i>"Not being involved with kids school work."</i></p> <p><i>"If they don't come to school events or talk about what you're doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don't care about your education."</i></p> <p><i>"Does not want to help."</i></p>

Although family involvement in school was generally perceived as positive, some involvement was deemed problematic by students. They described feeling stressed or unsupported when there was a disjuncture or disagreement between family members and others at school. This disjuncture made it difficult for students to get the help and support they needed as they felt constrained by competing loyalties.

Family members were also a source of embarrassment. Students referred to family members enforcing rules, discussing personal or irrelevant topics with teachers and dress sense.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Parents don't like who you're playing with."</i></p> <p><i>"They might disagree with what you do at school!"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers give us too much homework so our family doesn't like them because I became STRESSED."</i></p> <p><i>"Your parents might not like your teacher so they might make you stressed and not happy."</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe if you have out of school commitments your parents make you go to all the time, you don't have enough time for school work. And your teachers don't always approve."</i></p> <p><i>"Dress choices."</i></p> <p><i>"At sports carnivals cheering loudly."</i></p> <p><i>"By telling off kids that are doing things wrong."</i></p>	<p><i>"Sharing a bad opinion as it's not helpful to the situation."</i></p> <p><i>"Parents/siblings on bad terms with teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes during parent-teacher meetings they don't believe you."</i></p> <p><i>"Embarrassment."</i></p> <p><i>"Yelling at people when they won't move out of the way! (at school)."</i></p>

Family communication with the school was generally seen as beneficial, particularly when family members were advocating for the student. For students in Year 3 to Year 6, communication with school was mostly related to bullying and learning, whereas for students in Year 7 to Year 12 communication with the school was focused on learning. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also indicated that parents were able to provide teachers with information that would support the student at school.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Talk to teachers if the work that the student is doing is too hard or easy."</i></p> <p><i>"Asking the teacher where they could improve."</i></p> <p><i>"They come to school and make friends and your child will come school."</i></p> <p><i>"They talk to the teacher about problems at school and try to help fix them."</i></p> <p><i>"Your parents can have a talk to principal if you are getting bullied."</i></p>	<p><i>"Communication with the teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"Families can get involved and maybe talk to teachers more. Help you out with study."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting parents and teachers to talk to get a better understanding."</i></p> <p><i>"Go to the parent/teacher meetings to see if they need any extra help."</i></p>

Suggestions from students

Families were a significant influence on student motivation and engagement with school and learning. Students valued time spent with family members and felt this was sometimes hindered by too many or competing school commitments and time spent completing homework or assignments. Students suggested greater connections between home and school could be made through learning activities. Reducing school commitments and consideration of the timing of assessment pieces were also suggested to enable students to spend more time with family.

“Less school time so that we can [have] more time with family.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Put on performances for families or old people’s homes (school plays/musicals).” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Having less homework. We spend most of our day in our room doing homework. Homework isn’t needed because we spend 6+ hours at school learning so why add more hours? We should spend the time we have with family.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 were clear about the ways families can provide a home environment that supports learning. This included having positive relationships, structure, promoting wellbeing and an interest in the student and their education. Students recognised the influence of the home environment and felt better supported when the connection between home and school environments were harmonious.

“Parents need to discipline also.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“Speak to your parents if you are having an issue.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“Meet up at home so that parents understand the personalities.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The descriptions from students on ways in which families support or hinder engagement provide valuable insight into the areas where positive change is possible – in the ways families support students and also how systems support families. Critically, students identified schools as essential in meeting the needs of students when support was not available or not consistently available within the home environment. This included providing food, transport, school resources and learning support, as well as social emotional support.