Train and support staff to understand that their role is to support family engagement. Sometimes staff step in and take over an interaction in an effort to help kids and parents who are struggling through a STEM activity. Guide them to offer support and encouragement with questions like: What are you thinking about? How do you think you can go about this? We learned these tips from Harold Asturias at Lawrence Hall of Science. You can find more ideas in Family Math offered by the Lawrence Hall of Science.

Use engaging, real, and relatable language and activities that all parents regardless of background, will find fun and interesting to learn about. Elaina Oumet with Boys & Girls Clubs of America advises, “Don’t presume parents understand or relate to “STEM.” They might not know the terminology or they might rule themselves out and think it’s not for them. Instead describe activities with simple, relatable language like “Make your Own Light” instead of “Come and Do STEM.”

Be ready for family engagement and involve parents right from the start. At family STEM events, it’s common for parents to arrive and quickly cluster in the back while their kids rush to the activities. Family Engineering has some excellent, straightforward ideas to get parents active. They set up openers or table top activities that are ready to go the minute the first family arrives. As these first families arrive, staff make very clear that there are things to do together.

For more promising practices visit www.stemnext.org/promising-practices