

# The Family Engagement In Research (FER) Course

Delivered by  
**CanChild Kids Brain Health Network**  
**Family Engagement  
in Research Training Program**  
in partnership with  
**McMaster**  
**Continuing Education**



# THE FER COURSE

The Family Engagement in Research (FER) Course is a 10-week online course designed for **researchers** (graduate students, research coordinators, investigators), **people with lived experience** and their **families** who are interested in partnering in child health and neurodevelopmental disability research.

The course covers principles of FER alongside discussions of the practicalities and challenges of research partnership. Course instructors strive to create a safe space to trial and express ideas and practical methods to help learners develop competency and confidence in the theory and practice of FER.

The FER Course was developed in 2018 by Andrea Cross, Connie Putterman, Donna Thomson, Dayle McCauley, Patty Solomon, and Jan Willem Gorter at CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research at McMaster University. Course development was funded by Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN).

# OBJECTIVES

- Define and describe the benefits of family engagement in research.
- Identify family/research partners and understand how to engage individuals with lived experience throughout each step of the research process.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities of researchers and individuals with lived experience.
- Understand the ethics surrounding FER & the rights and responsibilities of research 'participants' versus research 'partners'.
- Recognize barriers and facilitators to FER and identify strategies to support FER at individual and team levels.
- Understand and utilize tools and resources for the implementation and evaluation of FER.
- Communicate ideas related to family engagement verbally and in writing.

[FER Learning Platform](#)



[Connect with us @FERProgram](#)



[Email enquiries to fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca)

# COURSE EXPECTATIONS

When participating in the FER Course, you will be expected to:

- **Review weekly course content.** This includes readings, resources, and video content. All materials are provided through the [FER learning platform](#).
- **Attend 4 two-hour Zoom meetings in weeks 1, 4, 6, and 10.** You will be expected to attend all sessions, with exception for unforeseen circumstances. Multiple missed online sessions may result in withdrawal from the course and/or not receiving the micro-credential.
- **Work collaboratively with a group assigned by the course instructors in the first week of the course.** A large component of this course includes group work. The purpose of group work is to practice working collaboratively in a team that includes researchers, people with lived experience, and family partners.
- **Meet with your assigned group for 30-60 minutes outside of class time each week.** You will be responsible for communicating with your group to find a time to meet.
- **Develop a resource about family engagement in research with your assigned group.** You will share your groups' process of working together in a PowerPoint presentation given by your group in Week 10. You can check out past student projects [here](#).



[FER Learning Platform](#)



[Connect with us @FERProgram](#)



[Email enquiries to fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca)

## BEFORE THE COURSE

We strongly encourage all learners to complete the [PORCCH modules](#) prior to taking the FER Course. These modules will provide foundational knowledge and skills about the **research process** (Research 101 Part 1 and 2) and **patient-oriented research** (Patient Engagement 101 Part 1 and 2).

If you are new to research, we recommend completing all 4 of the PORCCH modules. If you are new to patient-oriented research, but familiar with the research process, you may consider taking only the engagement modules.



**OCHSU**

ONTARIO CHILD HEALTH  
SUPPORT UNIT



**PORCCH**

## COURSE FEES

The cost to take the course is **\$800 CAD**.

Through partnership funding, we are proud to provide full tuition coverage for people with lived experience and parents/caregivers who do not have funding support from a research project or an organization.

Limited, needs-based funding support available to research trainees (master's, PhD students, and postdoctoral fellows). Please email us at [fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca) for more information.

## UPCOMING COURSE DATES

**Fall 2024 Cohort:**

Sept 16 – Nov 24

**Winter 2025 Cohort:**

Jan 13 – Mar 23



[FER Learning Platform](#)



[Connect with us @FERProgram](#)



[Email enquiries to fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca)

# COURSE SCHEDULE


	Fall 2024 Dates	Winter 2025 Dates	Description
1*	Sept 16 - 22	Jan 13 - 19	What do we mean by family engagement in research?
2	Sept 23 - 29	Jan 20 - 26	Why is family engagement in research important?
3	Sept 30 - Oct 6	Jan 27 - Feb 2	Building an integrated research team: How can we find each other?
4*	Oct 7 - 13	Feb 3 - 9	Building an integrated research team: How can we work together?
5	Oct 14 - 20	Feb 10 - 16	Roles and responsibilities of families and researchers
6*	Oct 21 - 27	Feb 17 - 23	Ethics of family engagement in research
7	Oct 28 - Nov 3	Feb 24 - Mar 2	Barriers and facilitators to family engagement
8	Nov 4 - 10	Mar 3 - 9	Evaluation of family engagement activities
9	Nov 11 - 17	Mar 10 - 16	Family Engagement tools & resources
10*	Nov 18 - 24	Mar 17 - 23	Building a community for partnership

\*Online session this week. Choice of attending Tues 12-2pm OR Wed 7-9pm Eastern Time.

## COURSE COMPLETION

Upon successful completion of the course (i.e., attending all 4 Zoom sessions, participating in weekly group meetings, group project and presentation), you will receive a [McMaster University certified microcredential](#). This is a digitally shareable credential that is emailed to you. You can add it to your resume, LinkedIn profile, and easily share with current or prospective employers.

Family Engagement in Research Program - Certificate of Completion



**Name**  
**Date of completion**

**Description/Learning Outcomes**  
This course is designed for researchers (graduate students, research coordinators, investigators, clinician-researchers, etc.) and family members (parents, siblings, grandparents and other caregivers) who have an interest in neurodevelopmental and child health research. This course is unique in that it brings researchers and family members together in a fully integrated online course. By the end of the course, learners will have increased their knowledge and confidence in family engagement in research and be ready to apply what they have learned and partner on integrated research teams.  
Upon completion of the program, participants are able to:

- Define and describe the benefits of family engagement in research.
- Identify family/research partners and understand how to engage families at each step of the research process.
- Discuss the roles/responsibilities of researchers and families on integrated teams.
- Understand the ethics surrounding family engagement in research as well as the rights and responsibilities of research 'participants' versus research 'partners.'
- Recognize the barriers and facilitators to family engagement.
- Identify strategies to support family engagement in research at the family, researcher, and system levels.
- Understand and utilize tools and resources available for the implementation and evaluation of family engagement activities.
- Communicate ideas related to family engagement verbally and in writing.

**Issuing Institution:**  
McMaster University Continuing Education

**Main Partners:**  
CanChild, kids research network

## AFTER THE COURSE

As a graduate of the FER Course, you become part of the **FER Community**. This growing community of individuals with lived experience, families, and researchers has access to a variety of continued learning, mentorship, and networking opportunities. The community is led by FER Knowledge Broker, Rae Martens. **There are many ways to engage with the FER Community:**



[@FERProgram](#)



[@youth\\_in\\_research](#)



[FER Course Fellows](#)



[@ferprogram](#)



[Sign up for the FER Newsletter](#)

[FER Learning Platform](#)



[Connect with us @FERProgram](#)



[Email enquiries to fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca)

# GRADUATE TESTIMONIALS



"After 30 years of engaging in the health care system as a family partner with lived experience, it seemed natural and fitting to move that engagement to the research world. The FER course was a perfect blend of researchers and partners with lived experience, all with the same goal in mind: to help inform and produce more effective outcomes for those who benefit from research. The value of collaborative research - and community - was palpable throughout the whole course. The instructors were very supportive, passionate, caring, and accommodating. I completed the course with not only more confidence in my ability to provide meaningful contributions to research, but also with a sense of community that I'm certain will continue to be fostered for years to come."

**- Brenda Blais, Family Graduate**



"The FER course was an outstanding experience in learning how to best engage parents in research. I had an amazing time meeting and learning from other healthcare providers and more importantly from parents who took the course with me. I now feel better equipped to work alongside parents as research partners."

**- Dr. Michelle Batthish, Researcher Graduate**

© Cross, A., Putterman, C., Thomson, D., McCauley D., Solomon, P., Gorter, JW. (2023). Family Engagement in Research Course. CanChild, McMaster University. Hamilton, Ontario.

[FER Learning Platform](#)



[Connect with us @FERProgram](#)



[Email enquiries to fer@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fer@mcmaster.ca)

# Questions to reflect on your readiness to participate in the FER Course

- Do you have the time and capacity to commit to a 10 week course?
- It takes time to intentionally build healthy relationships with researchers and community members. Does this sound like something you have the time and emotional capacity to do?
- Are you familiar with the basic concept of health research?
- Building new partnerships may occasionally evoke difficult memories. Are you comfortable asking questions on unfamiliar topics and seeking assistance when needed?
- Are you aware of your role and the advantages you hold as either a researcher or family partner, and how these factors might influence building new research partnerships?



If you're still wondering whether you're ready to take the FER Course after reflecting on the questions above, we encourage you to connect with Rae Martens at [martensr@mcmaster.ca](mailto:martensr@mcmaster.ca) who can answer any questions or concerns you might have.

