



## Family Engagement in Research



In partnership with



CanChild McMaster University

# Family Engagement in Research Course

Delivered by Healthy Trajectories Child and Youth Disability Research Hub

**FER 101**

**AUSTRALIA | 2026**

# the story & science behind

# the FER Course



2017

Three researchers from **CanChild** met two family partners at a **Kids Brain Health Network** Conference in 2017.



They noted there was no training to help researchers and families learn how to work together in research.

After the conference, they formed a team with researchers and family members from inside and outside of McMaster University to create training that would address this gap.

The team received funding from **Kids Brain Health Network** to develop and evaluate a course that would teach the principles of FER and allow them to practice these skills throughout the course.



Theory



Practice

2018

The team met in person at McMaster to plan the course and listened to feedback from family members and researchers about the format and content. Their input—21 people in total—helped shape the course goals and learning objectives.



Led to the development of a unique, experiential 10-week online course.

- ✓ Small group learning.
- ✓ Accessible content + materials.
- ✓ Taught by families + researchers.

## Course Format

- 1 Review weekly course content such as readings and multimedia.
- 2 Four x 2-hour **interactive online sessions**.
- 3 Weekly small group meetings to complete **group learning activities and create a resource** about engagement in research.
- 4 **Group presentation in Week 10** to share how groups worked together to create their resource.

2021

We conducted a before-and-after study of the FER Course outcomes that included 69 learners from the first six cohorts (2018–2021). (Cross et al., 2024)



we found:

- 1 A significant increase in
  - ✓ Knowledge
  - ✓ Skills
  - ✓ Confidence
- 2 High satisfaction (8.5/10) with the course



The FER Course boosts knowledge, skills, and confidence, and these benefits last long after the course ends.

2023

A second qualitative study looked at the impact two years after the FER Course. Twenty-six learners from the first six cohorts, 2018–2021 participated in the study (Soper et al., 2025).



two years later we found:

- 1 Sustained
  - ✓ Knowledge
  - ✓ Skills
  - ✓ Confidence
- 2 Long-term research engagement and FER advocacy

click or scan to learn more



# FER Course Overview

The FER Course is a McMaster University certified 10-week online course that brings together a wide variety of knowledge users including families, researchers, educators, community members, and health professionals.

It is for **anyone** interested in working together on **child health** and **disability** research.

The course teaches the principles of FER and includes discussions about the practical side of research partnerships. Instructors work to create a safe space for trying out ideas and methods, helping learners build skills and confidence in both the theory and practice of family engagement in research.



Weekly Readings



Four 2-hour Zoom Sessions



Weekly Group Activities



Group Project & Presentation

A big part of this course involves group work. The goal is to practice teamwork.



**Theory**



**Practice**

## 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 of family engagement in research & the rights and responsibilities of research 'participants' versus research 'partners'.
- Recognise barriers and facilitators to family engagement in research and identify strategies to support it at individual and team levels.
- Communicate ideas related to family engagement verbally and in writing.

- Understand and utilise resources for the implementation and evaluation of family engagement in research.

This course is designed to provide opportunities for learners to explore and experiment with different strategies for engaging in research partnerships

## Teaching Team

Each cohort is delivered by an experienced teaching team that includes both researchers and people with lived experience of disability.



## Course Fees

Registration	Fee
1 researcher or clinician	\$750
1 researcher or clinician + 1 lived experience partner (registering together)	\$900
1 person with lived experience (not supported by a research team)	\$250*

Course fees include access to all course materials and learning activities.

**\*Full scholarships available**



**Family partners and people with lived experience should not face financial barriers to training and meaningful involvement in research**

Alongside discounted fees for lived experience partners whose registration is covered by a researcher or clinician, we offer a limited number of full scholarships.





These scholarships are made possible through the generosity of our partners - [Melbourne Disability Institute](#) and [CanChild FER Program](#). Scholarships are open to those who identify solely as persons with lived experience and are not connected to a research team able to support them in this training. Selection is based on the strength of each application.

Applications from individuals who indicate both lived-experience and professional roles will be reviewed for funding support on a case-by-case basis.





# FER Course Expectations

Expectations	Details	When
<b>Review course content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This includes readings, resources, and video content.</li> <li>• All materials are provided.</li> </ul>	Weekly
<b>Join 4 x 2-hour Zoom sessions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to attend all 4 sessions, unless something unexpected happens.</li> <li>• If you miss more than 1 online session, you will not be able to continue with, or receive credit for, the course.</li> </ul>	Weeks 1, 4, 6, 10
<b>Group project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will be assigned to a group by the instructors in the first week of the course.</li> <li>• Your group will create a resource about family engagement in research by the end of the course.</li> </ul>	Weekly starting in Week 2
<b>Group learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will meet with your assigned group for 60 minutes each week outside of class.</li> <li>• You will need to communicate with your group to set a meeting time.</li> </ul>	Weekly starting in Week 2
<b>Group presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will present how your group worked together using slides.</li> </ul>	Week 10 Zoom session

# 2026 Schedule

Week	Topic	2026	Online Session
1	What is FER?	24 Aug - 30 Aug	
2	Why is FER important?	31 Aug - 6 Sept	
3	Finding each other	7 Sept - 13 Sept	
4	Working together	14 Sept - 20 Sept	
<b>Break for school holidays 21 Sept - 4 Oct</b>			
5	Roles and responsibilities	5 Oct - 11 Oct	
6	Ethics of FER	12 Oct - 18 Oct	
7	Barriers and facilitators	19 Oct - 25 Oct	
8	Evaluation of FER	26 Oct - 1 Nov	
9	Reflections on FER	2 Nov - 8 Nov	
10	Creating a community	9 Nov - 15 Nov	

# Preparing for the FER Course

Checklist		Details	When
	<b>Check your schedule</b>	<b>Self-reflection: Do I have the time to commit?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This course will take about 30 hours over 10 weeks.</li></ul>	Before you apply
	<b>Check your access</b>	<b>Self-reflection: What do I need to support my learning?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All course materials are included.</li><li>• The materials work with screen readers. Plain language summaries are provided. All videos have captions, and Zoom sessions offer closed captions.</li></ul>	Before you apply
	<b>Check your capacity</b>	<b>Self-reflection: Do I have the energy for this?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building strong relationships with researchers and community members takes time.</li></ul>	Before you apply
	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Get in touch with us!</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Email: <a href="mailto:healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au">healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au</a></li></ul>	Anytime

# Accessibility in the FER Course

We strive for a learning environment that is accessible to all learners and where accessibility has been proactively embedded into the program.

We have worked with individuals with disability and an Accessibility Consultant to ensure all course materials are accessible. Some examples:

- Readings have a short summary, page count, and estimated reading time
- PDFs have been manually checked to ensure proper reading order for screen reader use
- Text alternatives are provided for visual graphics and low-contrast resources
- All videos and audio materials include captions and transcripts
- Images and graphics include alt text and descriptions

The FER Program offers support from an **Accessibility Consultant** who can meet with learners before the course to discuss access needs.

 Questions

**email:**

[healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au)

- Two options for Zoom meetings each week
- Zoom meetings have built-in breaks
- Slides provided ahead of time


## After the Course Ends

Upon successful completion of the course expectations, you will receive a McMaster University **Certificate of Completion Course** (sent electronically a few weeks after the course ends).

It is an official recognition of your achievement that you can add directly to your resume or LinkedIn profile.



 @ferprogram

 [linkedin.com/in/ferprogram/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ferprogram/)

FER Course graduates become part of a growing community of family partners, researchers, educators, and health professionals.



Plus get access to the learning platform and materials for 1 year after the course ends.

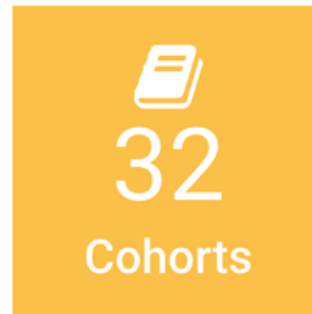
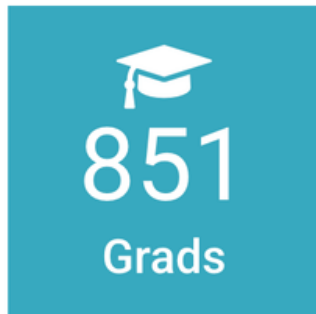
“What a great experience, I walk away from this course feeling connected and so hopeful for the future”.

“I really appreciated learning about the different perspectives and being able to get to know everyone. I also appreciated all the feedback and information from the instructors. Including all opportunities to stay connected to this area of research, and to the course alumni now that we are finished.”

# FER Course Impact



Overall 8.5/10 FER Course Satisfaction



94% FER Course Completion

"I loved how the team created groups so that a range of people and experiences could be represented. It was like having a mini co-design experience in the course. I think this is one of the strengths. The instructors' commitment and knowledge about co-design was truly inspiring. Hands on work on power dynamics was challenging and therefore, extremely enriching."

*FER Course Graduate  
Australian Cohort 2023*

"I liked the collaboration and diversity, which also includes people with lived experience of disability, and the consideration of the actual research process, which is not often discussed until practical tasks need to be completed. These included appropriate funding and the respect for the participants' time."

*FER Course Graduate  
Australian Cohort 2024*

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the time commitment?

About 30 hours total (3-4 hours x 10 weeks) - varies per week.

## Are Zoom sessions recorded?

No. Sessions are not recorded.

## Why do I have to attend the Zoom sessions?

These sessions focus on connection and shared problem-solving. Rather than traditional lectures, they take an interactive teaching approach, allowing learners to discuss ideas together based on the readings and resources.

## Is this course relevant outside of academic research settings?

What you learn in this course can be applied in many settings—not just research—like healthcare, community programs, and services by making sure work is shaped by the people it's meant to support.

## How many people are in each cohort?

20 individuals: a mix of researchers/clinicians and people with lived experience.

## Can research teams enrol together?

Yes. We encourage researchers to attend together with a lived experience partner from their team.

## Can I miss a Zoom session?

You are expected to attend all 4 of the sessions over Zoom. Please check your schedule before you apply and hold the dates in your calendar.

## How do I apply?

**Applications open:** Thursday 11 June 2026

**Applications close:** Friday 10 July 2026

**Notification of outcome:** Tuesday 14 July 2026

The application form will be available at:

<https://healthy-trajectories.com.au/fer/>



# Questions? Connect With Us



[healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:healthy-trajectories@unimelb.edu.au)



<https://healthy-trajectories.com.au/fer/>



<https://ferprogram.ca>



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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-Onset Disability Research at McMaster University. Course development was funded by Kids Brain Health Network and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

