

Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice

JDAI Research and Policy Series

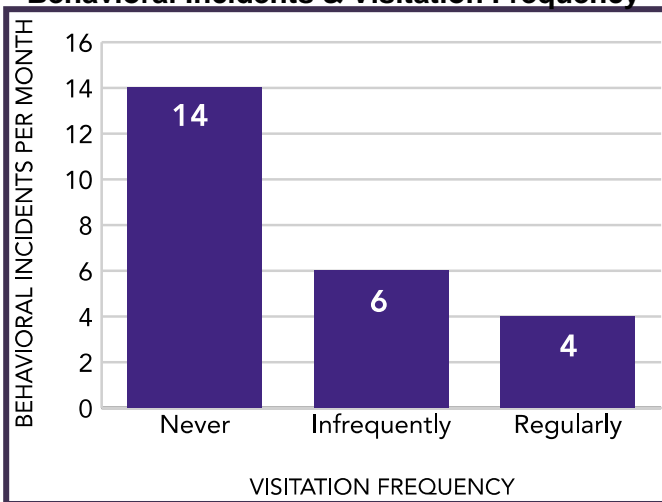
The best juvenile justice systems value the parent-child and the family relationships of the juveniles in their care. System professionals are often well positioned to strength these critical relationships, which ultimately improve rehabilitative outcomes for youth. Genuine family involvement and engagement is vital to achieving positive long-term outcomes for the vulnerable youth in the justice system.

What We Know:

Research shows that juveniles with positive family involvement are more likely to succeed.¹

- Family involvement in planning and treatment will decrease the chance of recidivism.
- Programs that work with families on parenting skills, school success, and greater supervision show success in reducing problem behavior and increasing school achievement.

Behavioral Incidents & Visitation Frequency

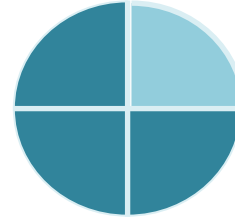


VERA Institute of Justice (April 2013).

Core Concepts of Family Centered Justice²

- **Dignity & Respect:** family beliefs and cultures are acknowledged and incorporated into the services.
- **Information Sharing:** accurate information is shared in a timely manner to build a trusting relationship between families and agencies.
- **Participation:** providers support families in participation and encourage them to do more.
- **Collaboration:** agencies and families work toward the same positive outcomes and goals.

Logistical and Economical Difficulties Families Involved in the Juvenile Justice System Face



Three out of four survey participants reported facing serious impediments to visiting their children.



Nearly two-thirds of parents take time off from work without pay to support their family member as a result of their involvement with the system.



Approximately 1 in 3 families said they have has to choose between paying for basic necessities like food and making court-related payments.

Justice for Families, *Families Unlocking Futures* (2012).
<http://www.justice4families.org/download-report/>

Parents and juveniles face extreme hardships before, during, and after they are involved in the justice system.

- Families often feel blamed and confused during the juvenile justice process.³
- **One in five** families reports having to take out loans to pay for court costs.⁴
- Many families are also victims. Almost **50%** report either personally surviving a crime or had a family member who had.⁵
- Distance is a significant impediment to visitation.⁶
- Higher frequency and regularity of visitation for juveniles in residential programs is associated with positive behavior and a higher GPA.⁷
- **32%** of families report discussing plans with juvenile justice providers prior to the release of their child.⁸

“Perhaps more than any other at-risk group, youth in the juvenile justice system need meaningful relationships and supportive guidance from the adults in their lives.”⁹

Promising Practices:

Families play an integral role in the development and success of our juveniles. The vast majority of the juveniles involved in the justice system have families that are willing to engage in the process. These families, however, face extreme difficulties in many aspects of their lives, which make it difficult for them to fully participate. Add to that a system that is confusing, and you have obstacles that may seem insurmountable for families. An effective system incorporates the needs of the juvenile, family, agencies and public safety in building a treatment plan for the positive development of the juvenile and productive future.

National Programs and Practices¹⁶

- Pennsylvania created a Family Involvement Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. This committee has developed both a parent resource guide and a training curriculum for probation officers encouraging involvement of families in treatment of juveniles.
- Texas added the position of “family engagement support coordinator” to one of its county’s probation departments to facilitate family engagement with the juvenile probation officers.
- Illinois’ Action Network Family Engagement workgroup created resources for families involved in the juvenile justice system to education them on their rights, the process and locating services.

Research Based Strategies to Support Family Engagement

- Interventions in community-based programs that focus on the family and all other members of the adolescent’s social network have positive program effects.¹⁷ Within the bounds of confidentiality, agencies and providers should allow the juvenile to define their family, which may include grandparents, aunts, stepparents and/or siblings.
- Parent Empowerment Program is a parent peer program that educates parents involved in the juvenile justice system.¹⁸ Once educated about the system, families need meaningful opportunities to participate.
- All families need support based on respect, shared information and authentic opportunities for input.¹⁹ This could include hosting information sessions or support groups, or creating a welcoming environment for families.
- Community-based programming must incorporate cultural competency components in order to make the family members feel respected and understood.
- Research supports Functional Family Therapy as a highly effective practice when compared to traditional juvenile justice approaches.²⁰
- Collaboration between families and agencies is of the utmost importance for dual-involved youth, which are youth involved in both the justice system and the child welfare system.

Sources

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- ³⁻⁵ Justice for Families, *Families Unlocking Futures* (2012). <http://www.justice4families.org/download-report/>
- ⁶⁻⁷ VERA Institute of Justice, *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth’s Behavior and School Performance* (April 2013).
- ⁸ Justice for Families, *Families Unlocking Futures* (2012). <http://www.justice4families.org/download-report/>
- ⁹ Family Involvement Subcommittee of the Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Workgroup for Models for Change-Pennsylvania, *Family Involvement in Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System* (October 2009). <http://www.pachiefprobationofficers.org/docs/Family%20Involvement%20Monograph.pdf>
<http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/family-visitation-and-youth-behavior-brief.pdf>
- ¹⁰ VERA Institute of Justice, *Why Ask about Family?* (2011). <http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Why-ask-about-family-Final.pdf>
- ¹¹ Rozzell, L., *The Role of Family Engagement in Creating Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice Systems*, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (September 2013). http://www.njin.org/uploads/digital-library/NCTSN_family-engagement-trauma-informed-systems_Liane-Rozzell_September-2013.pdf
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- ¹⁶ National Center for Mental Health/Juvenile Justice, *Family Engagement and Involvement: Strategic Innovations from the Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network* (September 2012). http://www.ncmhjj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2012_Family-Engagement-and-Involvement.pdf
- ¹⁷⁻¹⁸ National Research Council, *Reforming Juvenile Justice*, The National Academies Press (2013).
- ¹⁹ Models for Change, *Strengthening the Role of Families in Juvenile Justice*, Innovation Brief (December 2012).
- ²⁰ Garfinkel, L., *Improving Family Involvement for Juvenile Offenders with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders and Related Disabilities* (Nov. 2010).

Definitions

Family: “family may include traditional and non-traditional members. This may mean friends, significant others, clergy, co-workers, or other important people in one’s social network.”¹⁰

Family Engagement: a collaborative relationship between agencies and families.¹¹

Culturally Competent: the ability to work effectively across cultures and backgrounds to achieve set goals.

Strength-based Approach: identify resources to youth and families then use these as a basis to build skills needed to achieve goals.¹²

Family-focused Approach: considers the individual in the context of the family and recognizes that each member affects the overall wellbeing.¹³

Functional Family Therapy: therapist works with the members of the family to solve a wide range of difficulties and issues they are dealing with individually and as a whole.¹⁴

Family Integrated Transition Program: works with the family and juvenile in the re-entry process to improve the transition process.¹⁵