



# Fairfax County Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court

## Family Engagement Bench Card

### Juvenile Justice Definition of Family Engagement

Within juvenile justice, family engagement occurs when the justice system respects family members as partners and facilitates their ongoing participation in decision-making regarding the youth's rehabilitation. Family engagement: any role or activity that enables families to have direct and meaningful input into and influence on systems, policies, programs, or practices affecting services for children and families.

### Benefits of Family Engagement

- ◆ Leads to positive outcomes for children
- ◆ Establishes working partnerships, leads to follow through of service plans, and court orders
- ◆ Smooth transition once system involvement ends
- ◆ Communicates shared responsibility for youth

### Core Partners- Who should be invested in Family Engagement

Judges

Court Service Unit

Prosecutors

Defense Counsel

Court Clerks

Service Providers

### \*What are three questions each group can ask

- ◆ Does the person(s) I am working with, have a clear understanding of my role?
- ◆ Have I taken the time to explain the process?
- ◆ Have I consistently communicated with the person(s).

### Footnotes

Models for Change

Vera Institute

ODJJP





# Fairfax County Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court

## Vision

Supporting and strengthening individual and family involvement through collaboration and partnership.

## Mission

As a Court Service Unit, we promise to engage individuals and families with respect and integrity, while empowering all to identify and develop their strengths.

## JDRDC Family Engagement Principles

**Educate**– Information is regularly provided to families from the time of initial contact until case closure. Information is provided in a variety of means .

**Collaborate**– Individuals and family members are actively sought out and their views, insights, and experiences are valued and utilized, taking into consideration their culture, norms and beliefs.

**Participate**– Individuals and family member should be active participants during meetings and court hearings. Individuals and family members should be involved in the process of policy and procedure development.

## Barriers to Family Engagement

- **Mistrust** – families may be skeptical of the intentions of court service personnel based on past experiences.
- **Difficulty with functioning**-challenges with communication, finances, mental illness concerns, access to health care, misunderstanding, conflicting values and norms between parents and children or confusion over the legal system create barriers.
- **Lack of follow through on services and court requirements**-competing challenges between work, school, and court requirements as well as not understanding the relevance of court ordered services may create poor follow through.
- **Privacy concerns and isolation**- families may be reluctant to reach out to extended family, faith based support groups or professionals over concerns for privacy, and embarrassment over court involvement. The more isolated the family becomes the greater the isolation.
- **Safety concerns**- some situations may present court service workers with concerns over personal safety due to the family's history.

## Family Engagement Tools

**Build rapport      Family Engagement Map      Structured weekly phone call script**

**Family Guide to Fairfax County's Juvenile Justice System**

*Building on individual and family strengths to improve client outcomes  
while remaining focused on public safety and promoting equitable and effective justice.*