

**Introduction to
Working With Families Of Children In The
Juvenile Justice And Corrections Systems:
A Guide For Education Program Leaders,
Principals, And Building Administrators**

Webinar for NDTAC

**Barbara Huff
Trina W. Osher**

About the Authors of the Guide

- ♀ Barbara Huff and Trina Osher are:
 - ♀ experienced family leaders;
 - ♀ veterans of the Children's Mental Health System and System of Care movements;
 - ♀ an inspiration to families across the country; and
 - ♀ respected by families and professionals for their wisdom, knowledge, experience, skills, and integrity.
- ♀ Both have:
 - ♀ raised children with serious mental health needs who were also enrolled in special education;
 - ♀ been active and effective advocates for juvenile justice, mental health, child welfare, and education reform; and
 - ♀ been involved in conducting research about family and youth involvement.



Barbara is also:

- ✿ the founder of Keys for Networking, the statewide family organization in Kansas;
- ✿ the founding director of the national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health; and
- ✿ the parent of a daughter who has received services across most systems.



Trina is also:

- ✿ a seasoned special educator with 30 years experience as a teacher, state administrator, and national policy analyst; and
- ✿ the parent of a youth who spent most of his high school years in juvenile corrections settings and has graduated to the adult corrections system.

What is this Guide?

- 👤 This guide presents strategies to help increase family involvement in programs and institutions that educate youth who are neglected or delinquent.
- 👤 Parents of youth in both the juvenile justice and the neglect systems may require additional supports to effectively navigate both the education and justice systems.
- 👤 It is hoped that applying the strategies in this Guide will help maximize the educational experiences of youth while they remain in these facilities and improve their transition to community education or work programs upon their release.

Who Can Use the Guide?

- 👤 This Guide is primarily designed for juvenile justice program directors and lead school administrators because they share joint responsibility for each student who resides in a facility and are central to the success of U.S. Department of Education goals.
- 👤 Anyone working in a juvenile justice program or facility who is in a position to influence policy or program decisions that could encourage and support family involvement in their child's education might also find this guide useful.

Developing The Guide

👤 Input from stakeholders

- 👤 Correctional education administrators
- 👤 State personnel
- 👤 Family members of incarcerated youth



👤 Extracting information from other sources

- 👤 Focus groups from other studies in which the authors were involved (NCMHJJ; Bear Team)
- 👤 Literature on family involvement in education
- 👤 Conversations with key informants of correctional education facilities identified by NDTAC as having effective strategies for involving families

👤 Feedback on drafts

Overview of Contents

- ♀ What is a family? Who has responsibility for family involvement and what should they do?
- ♀ Factors to consider when working with families
- ♀ Engaging families for program improvement and system change
- ♀ What families say helps them get involved with correctional education programs and what they expect and desire from a correctional education program
- ♀ Using family visits to engage parents in school activities
- ♀ What to do when a family visit does not go well
- ♀ How do you know whether family involvement is improving?
- ♀ A final word: relationships are key

Foundations

♀ What is a family?

- ♀ A child's family is the group of individuals who support her or him emotionally, physically, and financially.

♀ Who has responsibility for family involvement?

- ♀ Families, administrators, school staff, students, and, in many cases, the courts.

♀ What is the educational administrator's role?

- ♀ Administrators are usually responsible for implementing policies that make the facility accessible to and hospitable for families.
- ♀ Educational leader should ensure that students have access to their families and that families have access to their children.

Factors To Consider In Working With Families

- ‡ Geography, transportation, financial resources, time
- ‡ Family members:
 - ‡ skills and knowledge;
 - ‡ experiences with education or other systems;
 - ‡ History; and
 - ‡ culture and language
- ‡ Characteristics of the institution
 - ‡ security
 - ‡ staffing
- ‡ Court restrictions

Look in the Guide for a list of opportunities to involve families – see pages 7-8

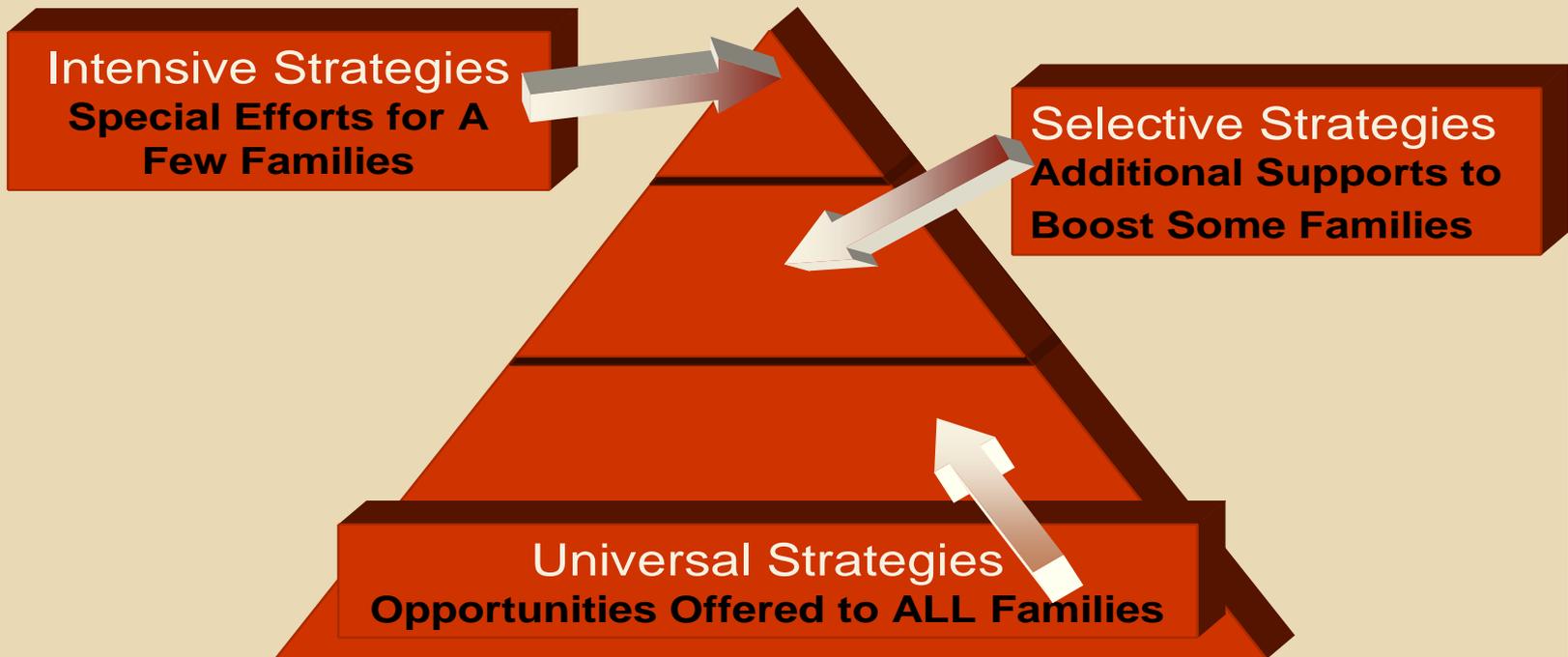
What Families Say Helps Them Get Involved

Consulting with families of students will help an institution's leaders choose strategies best suited to their specific families and that can work in their setting.

See the Guide (pages 11-13) for suggestions in five broad categories:

- culturally comfortable settings**
- trust building**
- communication mechanisms**
- outreach strategies**
- family support services**

Three Tiers of Family Involvement



National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center
for the Education of Children Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk —
Neglected-Delinquent.org

Universal Strategies for All Families

1st Tier

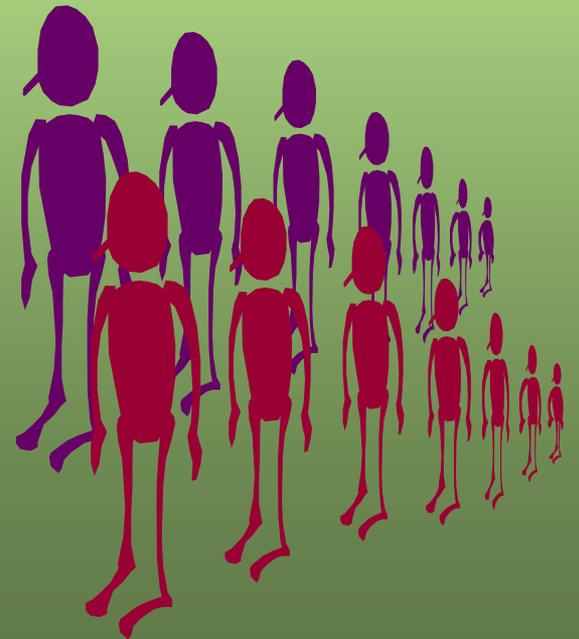
- ♀ Create a welcoming environment
- ♀ Solicit family input
- ♀ Provide an orientation
- ♀ Establish ongoing communication
- ♀ Sponsor social activities



Selective Strategies to Boost Family Involvement

2nd Tier

- 👤 Connect families with each other
- 👤 Offer families education and training
- 👤 Take advantage of family visits to their child
- 👤 Recruit family members to serve on advisory groups



Intensive Strategies for Hard to Reach Families

3rd Tier

- ✿ Tailor approaches to each family
- ✿ Repair relationships between the student and their family
- ✿ Hire Family Liaisons to work with families 1:1



Suggestions for Smooth Transition Home

- ♀ Include the student's family in transition planning from the start.
- ♀ Help the family gather necessary information and help them foster the relationships with their community school education program before the student makes the transition.



Engaging Families For Program Improvement and System Change

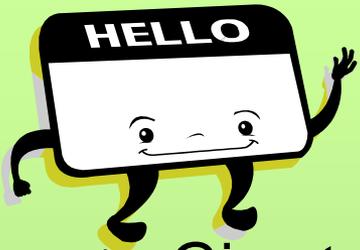
- ♀ Identify governance boards, planning councils, advisory groups, and working committees where family input would be desirable. Recruit, train, and support families who serve in this capacity.
- ♀ Seek family input when developing any plans to improve family involvement in an institution or program.
- ♀ Demonstrate genuine respect for family members, warmly welcome their collaboration, and generously provide support to make the partnership work.

Look in the Guide for a list of strategies that work— see page 10

Families Expect Programs To Be Therapeutic and Family Friendly

Families Want Students to Have

- ♀ High-quality education, not simply one that pushes all students toward a GED regardless of their abilities and goals;
- ♀ Staff who are qualified and experienced;
- ♀ Vocational education assessments and training;
- ♀ Creative but rigorous alternative learning strategies;
- ♀ Social skills training;
- ♀ Qualified professional mental health services; and
- ♀ Staff who treat their children with dignity and respect.

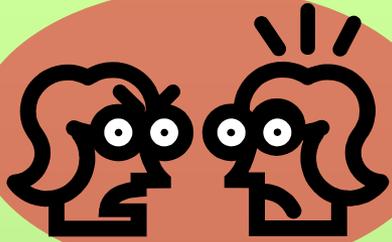


Take Advantage Of Family Visits To Engage Them In School Activities

- ♀ Give tours of the school on visiting day.
- ♀ Open a family resource center in the school where:
 - ♀ families can pick up information relevant to their child's education and transition to a community school; and
 - ♀ teachers can explain the curriculum and what students have been working on.
- ♀ Display samples of student work in the visiting area.
- ♀ Give each student a packet of their recent work and coach them to review it with their family on visiting day.

Look in the Guide for strategies that administrators say are working in their facilities – see page 14

What To Do When A Family Visit Does Not Go Well



- ♀ Establish institutional policies that support family visits and direct how problems should be handled.
- ♀ Respond to a bad family visit with efforts to heal the breach and not react punitively.
- ♀ Trained mediators or professional counselors on hand can:
 - ♀ step in to de-escalate a conflict as soon as it begins to develop;
 - ♀ Facilitate a discussion that looks for the roots of the conflict and resolves them without laying blame on anyone.
- ♀ Offer families counseling to work on the difficulties they have when their children make a visit back to their home.
- ♀ Use phone conversations if face-to-face meetings are too volatile.

How Do You Know Whether Family Involvement Is Improving?

- 👤 Give families and youth a lead role in designing the questions and methods of getting feedback that is meaningful, culturally appropriate, and family friendly.
- 👤 Hire and train families and youth to collect the data, to make follow-up calls when surveys are not returned, conduct phone interviews, and moderate focus groups.
- 👤 Satisfied family members can be the best advocates that any correctional education program can have.
- 👤 Families can support objective data by adding their personal testimonies when it is time to report on the program's or institution's impact.

A Final Word: Relationships Are Key

- ✿ Establishing communication with a student's family may require some creative effort and persistence.
- ✿ Don't assume that the family is not interested just because you don't get a response right away.
- ✿ Use more than one strategy to reach out to each family such as:
 - ✿ sending a message in the mail;
 - ✿ making a phone call; and
 - ✿ trying to meet them in person the next time they visit their child at the facility.



Look in the Guide for a list of specific questions to ask families about communication – see page 17

Where Can You Get More Information?

- 👤 Look in the Guide for lists of:
 - 👤 References
 - 👤 Resources and
 - 👤 Other centers for technical assistance and information

