

## Family Engagement and Transitional Age Youth

Family involvement may drop off during adolescence as young adults tend to spend more time with peers. However, youth are greatly assisted by creating and maintaining connections with caring and supportive adults. Definitions of family may be broad and wide. Strong family engagement happens when families have a primary and meaningful role in all decision-making. Fostering family engagement begins with the first contact a worker has with the family. It's important to listen carefully and let family members know they have been understood. This does not mean agreement at all points. At times, team members should be clear and as transparent as possible about the Department's role. A family engagement approach views family as experts on their challenges and seeks to support them in finding solutions. Treatment team members engage families in planning and goal setting related to safety, permanency and aspects of well-being. Family engagement empowers and encourages families to partner with the Department to ensure safety and improve outcomes.

Department staff are well suited and skilled in family engagement. These specific strategies may be helpful additions to the team's existing toolkit when engaging families:

- Demonstrate respect for all family members and show that the family's strengths, challenges, concerns and cultural differences are recognized and accepted. Each family is to be respected and recognized as having expertise about their own family and need to be actively involved in making decisions for the young person. Rather than engaging with a problem the family has, it's best to engage the family as a whole unit, doing the best they can within their means.
- Understand who is identified as a family member and include kin and extended family early in case planning. Work with TAY, providers, and family members to identify and name the personal family system that includes peers, mentors, and providers who they trust and can count on for support.
- Understand the family's community.
- Access the Quality Parenting Centers.
- Referrals to family supports.
- Understand the supports available to different family members.
- Assess if a family can satisfy their most essential needs.
- Understand family member's identity (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) in assessment.
- Learn what the family wants after careful listening.
- Acknowledge that collaboration is possible and productive. Family and staff partnership are most successful when both staff and families are prepared to communicate and collaborate.
- Reframe resistance and non-compliance.

- Keep a focus on safety.
- Focus on small changes.
- Reach out to fathers and work with them to enhance their positive involvement with youth.
- Reserve judgment of family members.
- Involve family members early in the process.
- Gather and assess information thoroughly.
- Continue frequent and substantive family visits.
- Match strengths and needs with supports and solutions.
- Attend to readiness for key transition points, such as reunification.
- Shift the focus from problems to the concept of fostering well-being.
- Acknowledge family progress.
- Understand the family's race, culture, ethnicity. Seek consultation if you need help understanding issues that may be relevant.
- Share openly with family members about what to expect (timelines, court)
- Focus on strengthening family skills
- Seek commitment from the family that they will engage in tasks
- Be mindful of family members obligations when scheduling
- Offer a welcoming space for conversations
- Build on assets
- Offer choices and adjust plans if the plans are not productive or helpful
- Listen listening reflectively and ask direct questions to promote change. Help families explore and resolve ambivalence and anxiety
- Leverage kinship and peer connections to increase brainstorming, placement and permanency options.
- Arrange meetings between biological families and foster families where they are encouraged to share information and support each other
- Involve parents and TAY in office councils and boards

**Resources:**

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Family engagement: Partnering with families to improve child welfare outcomes*. Washington D.C.: U.S.: Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

Family Engagement: A web-based practice toolkit: Core principles of family engagement practices. Retrieved at <http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/family-engagement/introduction.htm>

Turnell, A., & Edwards, S. (1999). *Signs of Safety. A Solution and Safely Oriented Approach to Child Protection Casework*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.  
<https://www.youth.gov/youth-topics/family-engagement/>