



Virginia  
**HEALS**

*Caring Collaboration,  
Empowering Families*

# **Family Engagement: A Guide to Partnering with Families to Improve Service Outcomes**

# Purpose

The purpose of the Family Engagement Tip Sheet is to provide child, youth, and family serving agencies and organizations with guidance on how and why to meaningfully engage family members into the decision-making process around the content and direction of services, interventions, and/or referrals made in the course of case management and planning.

# Audience

Front line service providers, middle and upper management staff in local government agencies, and community-based child, youth, and family serving organizations.



# Meaningful Family Engagement

is a significant focus of the service delivery system for many child, youth, and family serving agencies and systems. The fields of child welfare, behavioral health, public health, juvenile justice, education, early childhood development, housing, and victim advocacy all address meaningful family engagement as both a method of service delivery and as a philosophy.

## Common themes across systems include:

Child-centered approaches

Trauma-informed, strength-based responses

Joint planning and decision-making

Family involvement (including children, youth, caregivers, and extended family) at the system and service-delivery levels

Individualized services

Open, honest, and respectful interactions

Interagency and multisystem collaboration





## Who is considered "family?"

The inclusion of kin, extended family members, and supportive people in a child's life increases the opportunities for meaningful family engagement. Staff should include all forms of family to help identify connections, recognizing that some people who play the most supportive roles in a child's life may not be related, but who have been an emotionally significant relationship with the family or child.

## The Benefits of Meaningful Family Engagement

Meaningful family engagement can help improve outcomes for children and families and can improve how families cope in times of crisis. It can also enhance the well-being and satisfaction of those working with families by building their capacity to support families and helping to improve community resources.



Specifically, increased family engagement can:

- Enhance the fit between family needs and services
- Improve families' abilities to cope with the issues that they are experiencing
- Enhance systems' capacity to support children, youth, and families, including improved services and resources
- Enhance the helping relationship
- Boost staff morale by improving service outcomes and improving workforce skills

# Strategies for enhancing family engagement

Strategies for enhancing family engagement should address the safety of children, youth, and non-offending family members and may occur at three levels:

- Practice level: Methods, plans of action, and strategies designed for frontline staff
- Program level: Approaches and procedures used by agencies and organizations
- System level: Processes and policies to support larger networks of agencies and organizations

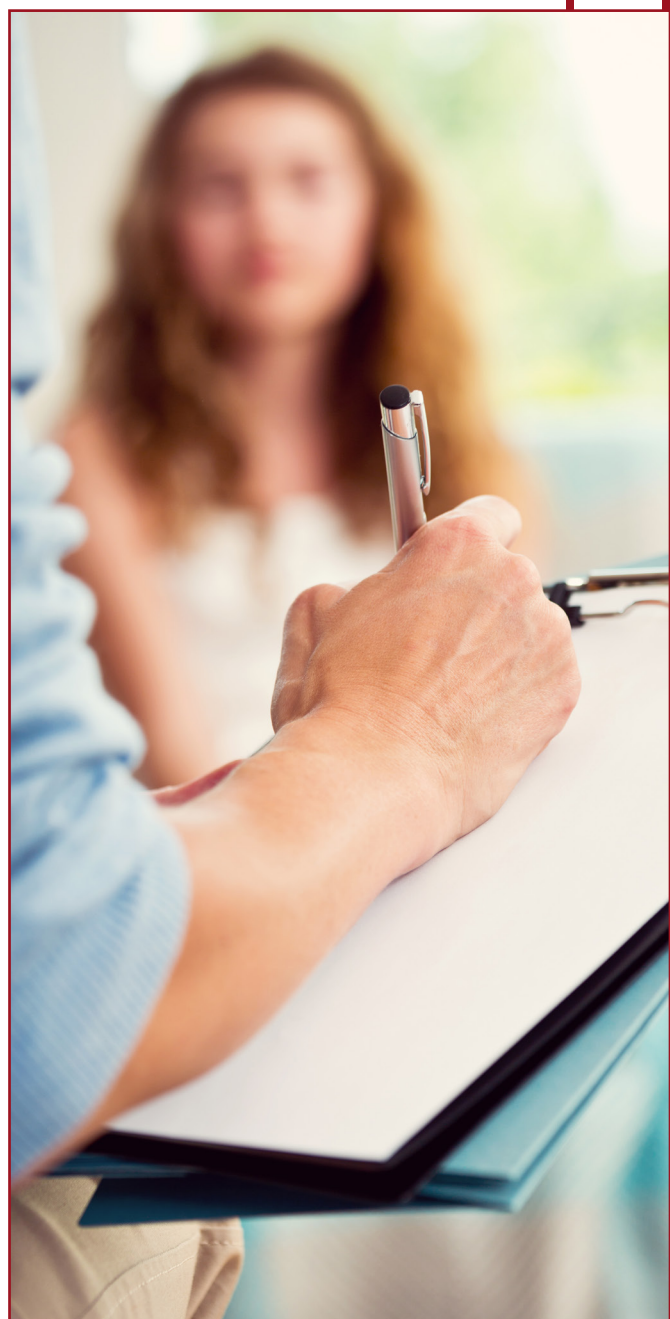
## Program-Level Strategies

1. Hire staff with specific experience as a family member or former system-involved individual to coordinate family engagement and assist in developing staff training
2. Train staff on meaningful family engagement strategies
3. Implement strength-based programming including, but not limited to, parenting education, family therapy, and/or parent mentors
4. Understand the strengths, beliefs, and practices each family's unique culture carries with it
5. Ensure that interventions and services respect diverse cultures
6. Institutionalize an organizational practice of providing interpreters and translators during meetings, events, and trainings for families that have limited English proficiency
7. Provide diverse interventions in order to individualize services specific to family need



## Practice-Level Strategies

1. Help families understand the issues and reasons for agency involvement
2. Actively include families in planning and decision-making
3. Be consistent and transparent with families
4. Provide timely resources, referrals, and interventions
5. Set measurable, achievable, and mutually satisfactory goals in case management and planning
6. Respect cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and spiritual identities
7. Respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions
8. Provide services and information in family members' preferred language
9. Clarify terms and processes in order to de-mystify the system



## System-Level Strategies

1. Collect and analyze feedback from families to identify points of friction, opportunities for additional engagement, and potential policy changes
2. Map opportunities to collaborate with existing family support organizations and develop family support program resource directories
3. Work to create greater equity, given the inherent power difference between families and child, youth, and family serving organizations and systems
4. Engage with families to examine state policies related to children, youth, and families
5. Partner with families to advocate for adequate and meaningful resources to support children, youth, and families





[VirginiaHEALS.com](http://VirginiaHEALS.com)

This document utilizes, adapts, and expands upon a compilation of definitions and general content from: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2017); The Family Engagement Inventory (FEI): A brief cross-disciplinary synthesis. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

This product was supported by cooperative agreement number 2018-V3-GX-K064, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.