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ENGAGING FAMILIES NOTETAKING GUIDE

FIVE FEATURES OF A TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE SYSTEM:

1) Families will be supported before and after challenges arise.

2) Families will have access to peer support from the moment a youth is arrested through exit from the system.

3) Families will be involved in decision-making processes at the individual, program, and system levels to hold youth accountable and keep the public safe.

4) Families will be strengthened through culturally competent treatment options and approaches.

5) Families will know their children are prepared for a successful future.

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Five Characteristics of Family Engagement

1) Treating families with dignity and respect. This component includes acknowledging that family members are sought out and treated with respect and dignity by system professionals. Family beliefs, cultures, and experiences are also acknowledged and incorporated into services in culturally, linguistically, and developmentally competent and sustainable ways.

2) Providing peer-to-peer support. This involves using family members and other youths with previous juvenile justice system experience to provide peer support for families of various configurations. Such support may help build trust, establish safety, and empower families. Some agencies have also hired staff to focus specifically on connecting families who are encountering the justice system with others who will help them navigate the system and stay better connected.

3) Collaborating and partnerships between service professionals and family members. Whether involved with child welfare, schools, or the juvenile justice system, families and service providers share decision-making responsibilities and work together toward the same positive outcomes and goals. Consequently, across these disciplines, families are considered equal partners or participants and are systematically included in developmentally appropriate activities and programs that foster a sense of community, accountability, and respect for others.

4) Meaningful communication across all involved parties. This involves two-way communication and information sharing between juvenile justice personnel and family members or a youth's legal representative. Families are provided information about court processes, expectations of their children, and programmatic activities. They are also considered a valuable source of information, even during the early phases of arrest, interview, and interrogation, as they can supply information and background, including traumas that affected the child and family, and what service providers need to know to decide on treatment options, service plans, and how to improve learning, developmental, mental, and behavioral outcomes for the youths.

5) Sustained familial engagement. Understanding the context and situation of families can help to overcome most barriers to engagement such as functioning (i.e., values, norms, communication, affective expression), denial of problems, and concerns about privacy. Family buy-in increases the likelihood of commitment to treatment goals and significantly influences reunification rates and overall family outcomes Building and sustaining relationships with families can substantially impact the safety, permanency, and well-being of children while both involved in the justice system and when they return to their communities.

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