



Incorporating Family Voice into a Children's Mental Health System of Care

When families are included in the development and implementation of mental health systems, they bring lived experience and practical suggestions to the project team. When a behavioral health agency makes a thoughtful decision to support a model that includes family voice, they can successfully integrate families into the foundation of their system. In order to create system-wide involvement, it is helpful to provide opportunities for families to:

- **Join advisory teams as equal members** (workgroups, oversight committees, review panels)
- **Contribute to policies and procedures** (practice manuals, intake, treatment, and appeals processes)
- **Provide feedback** (review documents prior to publication, participate in quality management systems, provide feedback directly to decision makers)

The items listed below may help your agency prepare for and implement successful family involvement.

Getting Started

- Believe that family involvement is essential to the process of creating a quality system of care.
- Ensure leadership is committed to family engagement system wide.
- Identify family involvement champions within your department.
- Establish a family engagement policy and educate staff members about it.
- Partner with statewide family-run organizations to identify families to participate in your system.
- Create engagement opportunities to meet with families.
- Develop orientation and training materials to help families understand the current policies and procedures of the system.

Engaging Families on Teams

- Be flexible with meeting times and locations and provide telephone and video conferencing so all families can participate.
- Be prepared to answer questions about the project history or department processes as they arise.
- Respectfully listen when families tell personal stories to provide context to their suggestions.
- Explain to families how other agencies interact with your system and be open to changing those relationships.
- Include parents in all phases of your project as they provide unique insight and valuable perspective on each aspect of your system of care.
- Consider compensating your parents with an allowance for their travel, childcare, and time.



Facilitating Family Involvement

- Establish clear expectations regarding meeting protocol, attendance, communication, roles and responsibilities, and confidentiality as appropriate.
- Include families in leadership positions within workgroups and committees.
- Foster an environment of collaboration and relationship building by giving families a chance to get to know their agency partners.
- Create a plan for when parents need to temporarily or permanently step back from active involvement on a team due to family responsibilities surrounding their child's mental health.



Useful Tips

- Identify an agency liaison for families to meet with regularly and check in with to discuss questions, feedback, or concerns.
- Work to build trust between agency staff and families.
- With the help of families, eliminate industry jargon, abbreviations, and acronyms from your documentation and communication, because they can reduce user confidence when accessing your system.
- If your system operates to a fidelity model, train your family partners on this model so that they may fully participate.
- Be transparent about the work your agency is doing and the decisions made by agency staff.
- Involve more agency staff as needed to address parent concerns.
- Develop a problem-solving method for your teams to use when problems arise.
- Involve families in the creation of your programs, documentation, communication, trainings, and implementation plan.

Growing Your Family Engagement Program

- Be willing to meet families in their community or in a place of support to listen to them talk about and process their experiences.
- Develop family leaders by providing financial and in-kind support for family focused support networks.
- Sponsor training and networking opportunities for families.
- Communicate with families about the impact they have already made and the impact you hope can still be made.

Strategies Used in Idaho

- Helped families create the Parent Network and continued annual financial and agency support.
- Paid Parent Consultants for time spent in meetings and developing project deliverables.
- Included families in leadership positions on the Interagency Governance Team.
- Met with parents by phone twice a month to share current agency tasks, answer questions and listen to feedback.



Invited parents to author materials for families, including content and graphics, the "Wraparound for Families" handbook.

