

# Effectively Engaging Families and Other Primary Participant Social Networks

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# Disclaimer

**Dr. Marshall used to work for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The views expressed in this presentation are solely those of the presenter and do not represent those of the Veterans Health Administration, the Department of Defense, or the United States government. Dr. Marshall has no other conflicts of interest to disclose.**

# Learning Objectives

**Participants who attend this training will be able to:**

- **Summarize the evidence base for family/personal support participation in treatment courts based on evidence from related fields.**
- **Use guidelines to assess the appropriateness of potential family/personal support participation.**
- **Identify ways to incorporate family and personal supports into Veterans and other treatment court model.**

# What is Family Engagement?

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“Family engagement is the process of **identifying, enrolling,** and **retaining** families in treatment services.”

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

# Why Include Families/Support Persons In Your Veterans Treatment Court?

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# Transitioning to Civilian Life is Difficult!

- Transition away from military family and social support networks
- Difficulty reintegrating into family routines after deployment or long periods away for training
- PTSD/MH and SUD isolate the Veteran from important, healthy social relationships
- Adjusting to civilian culture and values
- Accessing healthcare and dealing with health-related issues associated with military service
- Challenges finding civilian employment

# In Other Systems, Family Engagement is a Priority

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## Family Involvement in

- Schools
- Mental Healthcare (especially VA)
- Juvenile Justice
- Family Drug Treatment Courts



# Family Involvement in Schools

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- Meaningful engagement from families results in higher
  - academic achievement
  - test scores
  - graduation rates
  - rates of pursuing higher education
  
- Professional education-related organizations have developed standards for encouraging family involvement.



# National Standards and Quality Indicators

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## **4.1 School staff members demonstrate a strong commitment to family involvement and understand its critical role in supporting high achievement, access to postsecondary education, employment, and other successful adult outcomes.**

See [Supporting Evidence & Research](#)

- 4.1.1 School programs and activities provide a range of opportunities for family involvement and actively engage families and youth in the home, classroom, school, and community.
- 4.1.2 School programs and activities are designed, implemented, and shaped by frequent feedback from youth and families.
- 4.1.3 School staff development includes training on youth and family involvement based on individual strengths, interests, and needs.
- 4.1.4 Youth and families have clear and accessible information regarding school curricula, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, the proficiency levels students are expected to meet, and how these relate to postsecondary choices.

# National Standards and Quality Indicators

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## **4.2 Communication among youth, families, and schools is flexible, reciprocal, meaningful, and individualized.**

See [Supporting Evidence & Research](#)

- 4.2.1 Youth, families, and school staff use the telephone, face-to-face meetings, electronic communications, and other methods as needed to support and enhance communication.
- 4.2.2 School staff individualize communication methods used with youth and families to meet unique needs, including provision of text materials alternate formats and non-English languages.
- 4.2.3 Youth, families, and school staff share reports of positive youth behavior and achievement.
- 4.2.4 Schools, families, and youth enhance communication through participation in school programs that improve literacy and communication skills.

# National Standards and Quality Indicators

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## **4.3 School staff actively cultivate, encourage, and welcome youth and family involvement.**

See [Supporting Evidence & Research](#)

- 4.3.1 School staff use formal processes to help youth and families identify their strengths and needs, and to connect them with other youth and families for support, guidance, and assistance.
- 4.3.2 School staff provide flexible meeting arrangements to accommodate the varied needs of youth and families, addressing childcare needs, transportation needs, language barriers, and families' work schedules.
- 4.3.3 Youth, families, and school staff participate in training on parenting, childcare, and positive family-child relationships.
- 4.3.4 School staff participate in training on creating a welcoming school climate and working collaboratively, respectfully, and reciprocally with youth and families.
- 4.3.5 School informational materials, trainings, and resources reflect the demographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic diversity of the community.
- 4.3.6 School staff provide referrals to community programs and resources that meet the individual needs of youth and families and allow youth and families to make informed choices.

# Mental Healthcare and Family Involvement: an Evolving Situation

Families, specifically mothers, were blamed for mental health issues.

Parent/family causation was debunked.

**Now, we know better:**

If families were the problem, they couldn't be part of the solution.

Families were still distanced from treatment.

They didn't have professional training, how could they help?

When friends and family that are educated about the illness and included by professionals are involved, patient outcomes are greatly improved.

“Family involvement should be part of a specific treatment plan rather than informal and as needed. Families should be actively approached and engaged as early as possible.”

- *Early Psychosis: A Care Guide*



# Family Involvement in Juvenile Justice

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- Requires consideration of the participant's legal rights and the possibility that parents could be involved in court proceedings.
- We must consider how parents are sometimes perceived to be at fault for their child's legal issues.
- When parents feel at fault or judged for their child's behavior, it greatly inhibits their positive participation.



# Family Involvement in Juvenile Justice

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- The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2010) found that
  - **Involving families** in decision making and planning creates **greater investment**, which **increases treatment compliance**.
- The National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (2016) reports that
  - “Families that actively support youth involved in juvenile justice help **reinforce the importance of treatment** and advocate for their child’s needs.”



## Working collaboratively increases the likelihood of:

- identifying a family's unique needs
- developing relevant and culturally-appropriate service plans that
  - address needs
  - build on family strengths
  - draw from community supports
  - use resources for effectively.

[www.youth.gov](http://www.youth.gov)  
(Doolan, 2005)



# Treatment Courts

## Family Drug Treatment Courts

- Created after the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act
- Civil Court (less punitive)
- Shown to increase the likelihood of families reuniting.
- In addition to substance abuse treatment, includes relationships building skills and consider emotional and mental health in treatment.

## Adult Drug Treatment Courts

- Created in 1989
- Criminal Courts (more punitive)
- Shown to reduce criminal behavior and drug use.
- Parent participation in DTC may increase rates of CPS referrals (Gifford et al., 2016)
- Main focus of treatment is to stop drug use and avoid further criminal activity.

# Determining Who Should be Involved

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# Defining Family

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Based on a statement from the  
National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition

The definition of family must be inclusive of and respectful of each family structure, and therefore should not be limited to just:

- spouses
- children
- parents
- siblings

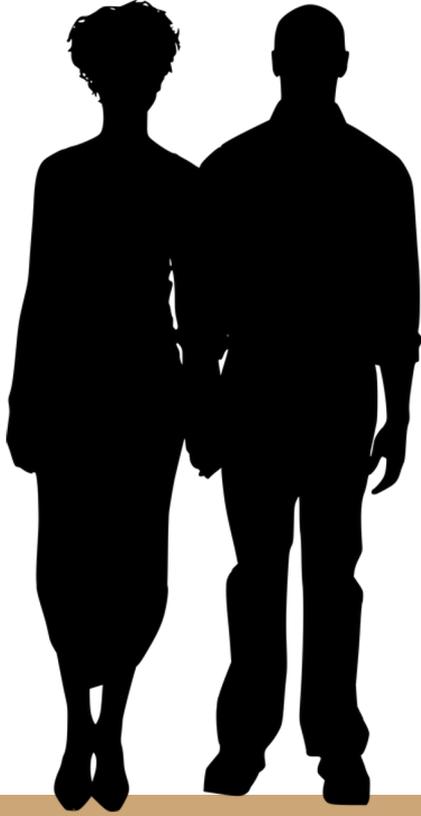
Family may also include:

- extended family
  - grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.
- **any other person that the participant considers family (i.e., a battle buddy).**



# Characteristics of Helpful Relationships

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- Improves physical, emotional, mental, and social health
- Promotes mutual respect
- Increases productivity
- Free from violence
- Avoid drug use and harmful behaviors

# Considering Barriers

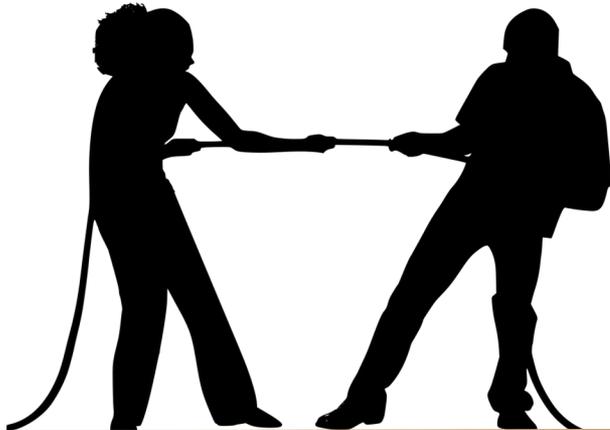
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- External:

- Transportation
- Child Care
- Scheduling Conflicts
- Family/Relationship Stressors

- Internal:

- Health issues (mental or medical)
- Limited cognitive capacity
- Substance Abuse
- Emotional Dependency
- Past negative experiences with the court system
- Cultural beliefs that do not value the work of the courts





# Review the VTC Social Support Questionnaire

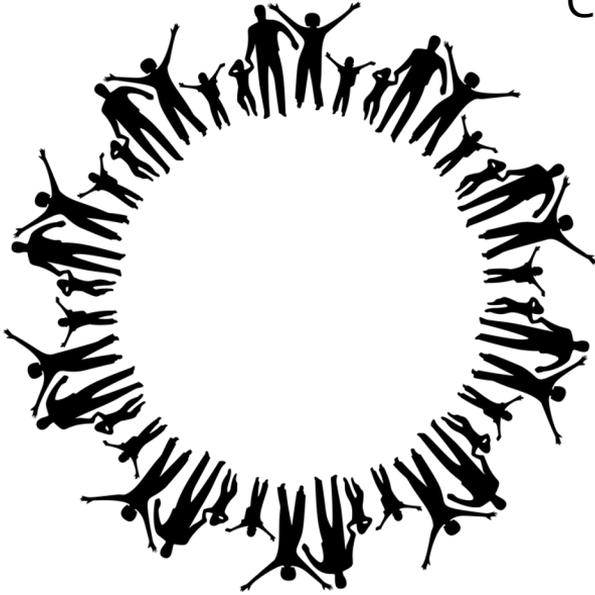


# Ideas for Engaging Families

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# Considering Wants & Needs

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Can wants/needs be used as incentives?

- Tangible Needs
  - Gift cards for gas or public transportation
  - Food (provided during a meeting or gift cards)
- Relationship Building/Strengthening
  - Family Events
  - Memory Building and Bonding Activities
  - Holiday Celebrations
- Healing Opportunities
  - Counseling/Therapy
  - Support Groups

# Past and Present Programs Used by Courts in the US

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## Savannah, Georgia - Family Dependency Treatment Court

- Celebrating Families Program ([www.celebratingfamilies.net](http://www.celebratingfamilies.net))
  - “The Celebrating Families curriculum:
    - is an **evidence based cognitive behavioral, support group model** written for families in which one or both parents have a serious problem with alcohol or other drugs and in which there is a high risk for domestic violence, child abuse, or neglect.
    - **works with every member of the family, from ages 3 through adult**, to strengthen recovery from alcohol and/or other drugs, break the cycle of addiction, and increase successful family reunification.
    - **Fosters the development of safe, healthy, fulfilled, and addiction-free individuals** and families by increasing resilience factors and decreasing risk factors while incorporating addiction recovery concepts with **healthy family living skills.**”



# Past and Present Programs Used by Courts in the US

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## Savannah, Georgia - Family Dependency Treatment Court

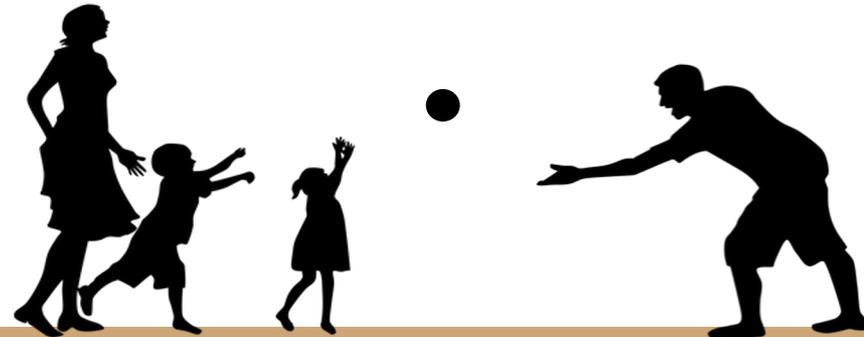
- Strengthening Families Program  
([www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org))
  - “The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) is
    - An **evidence-based family skills training program**
    - For high-risk and general population families.”
  - Parents and youth attend **weekly classes** together
    - Focus on learning **parenting skills, youth life, and refusal skills.**
    - During the first hour of the class, parents and youth are separated.
    - The second hour of the class is a **joint family practice session.**



# Past and Present Programs Used by Courts in the US

## San Bernardino, California- Adult Felony Drug Courts

- (Voluntary) Quarterly potluck dinners for family members.
  - Participants are encouraged to **bring any family member** that they want, including kids.
  - Some dinners are scheduled near **holidays and include themed activities**:
    - Easter- Egg Hunt
    - Christmas- provide presents for kids from donations
    - Fourth of July- games and a BBQ
  - **Allows treatment staff to interactive with participants and families in a relaxed environment.**
  - Creates relationships and opens the door for more structured services.
  - Provides a positive, court related experience.
- (Voluntary) “Family Nights” offered by marriage and family therapists
  - provides **support network for significant others** (not kids).



# Past and Present Programs Used by Courts in the US

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## San Bernardino, California - Juvenile Delinquency Drug Courts

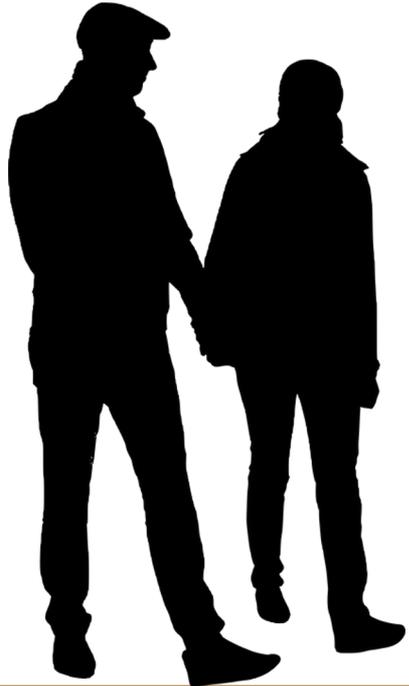
- Provide Cash Incentives
  - **\$20 gas gift cards** for showing up to court
  - Once a month Parent Orientation/Group Orientation
    - Includes **pizza and another \$20 gift card**
    - Other incentives for consistent participation
  - Since starting these cash incentives, **parent participation has increased by more than 50%.**
- Families can bring children and are able to connect and create an unofficial support network.
- **Bilingual counselors** and **translators** are available.
- Focus on **creating positive court related experiences** and **showing families that they are important** to positive participant outcomes.



# Past and Present Programs Used by Treatment Courts

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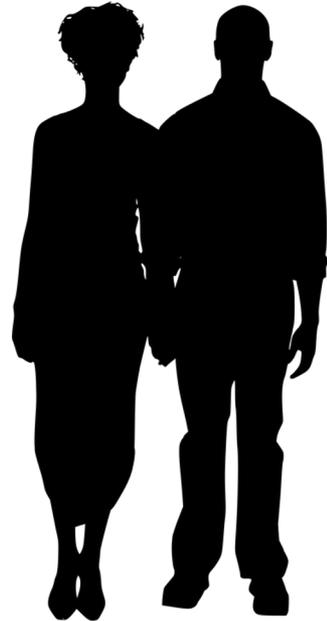
## Marion, Indiana - Grant County Drug Court



- Behavioral Couples Therapy (BCT) Curriculum
  - Goal is to **engage significant others** in the treatment and **enhance practical support for recovery.**
  - BCT uses **cognitive behavior therapy** to develop skills.
  - Occurs during 12 sessions.
  - Treatment sessions are provided by counseling graduate interns.
- Early data suggests:
  - Use of BCT Curriculum leads to **increased “program persistence” and “reduced rearrests among participants.”**
  - Other data from BCT use shows **“reduced substance use, reduced intimate partner violence, and increased relational harmony.”**

# Hines VA Hospital Family Empowerment Network Model

- Quarterly workshop series where adult family members are invited to:
  - Interact and ask questions of licensed treatment providers and other experts
  - Hear presentations on relevant topics (i.e., PTSD, SUD, brain injury, vocational therapies)
  - Build community with other families with a loved one receiving treatment
  - Provided with breakfast and lunch
  - Prizes raffled off to attendees
  - Questionnaires administered to Veterans and attendees to encourage feedback and improvement of program offerings



# VA Couples Coach App

- Five levels of expert-written education and engaging behavioral exercises informed by science.
  - Ex: Using I Messages and Active Listening
  - Explore assessments and share results
  - Learn about different approaches to common relationship issues
  - Review available resources in their communities
  - Comprehensive relationship information for couples living with PTSD
  - Not a replacement for face-to-face couples counseling
  - Couples counseling locator for finding a professional counselor along with several other local and national resources



<https://mobile.va.gov/app/couples-coach>

# Takeaways



- Family participation is valued by different organizations throughout our country.
- Family participation increases positive outcomes across different disciplines.
- Family looks different to everyone.
- Participants in treatment court should consider whether a relationship is helpful or harmful.
  - *Consider using the VTC Social Support Questionnaire*
- Courts need to consider barriers and the needs of families when attempting to increase participation.

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graph LR; A((Questions?)) --> B((Final Thoughts)); B --> C((Thank You!));
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Questions?

Final  
Thoughts

Thank You!



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