



NFSTAC PRESENTS

# Families Supporting Youth And Young Adults in The Justice System

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**1 – 2 pm EDT**

# Disclaimer

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# Family Engagement, Empowerment and Partnership



A core value and guiding principle that should permeate juvenile justice policy, practice and approaches

## Why?

- Families have extraordinary strengths and are the true experts on their children
- Creates healthier environments for youth and families to thrive
- Outcomes are better for youth, families, staff and communities



# A Work in Progress

While many justice systems have worked to deepen their family engagement and empowerment approaches, several problematic practices remain, such as:

- Continued reliance on incarceration which separates youth from their families, schools, and communities
- System actors' beliefs that families are the problem, rather than the solution
- Exclusion of families in key decision-making re: case planning and services
- Failure to meet the basic needs of youth and families holistically

# An Essential Goal, But a Challenging One to Meet

## Common barriers faced by families:

- Lack of resources
- Distance
- Mental health, substance use, & trauma (exacerbated by the pandemic)
- System distrust based on prior experiences



# Assessing Your Juvenile Justice System

What should I ask juvenile justice system leaders in my jurisdiction to gauge how they are approaching family engagement, empowerment, and partnership?



# Framework for Family Engagement, Empowerment and Partnership

- I. Broadly define and identify families
- II. Encourage youth-family connections
- III. Engage families in services/treatment
- IV. Empower families to improve systems

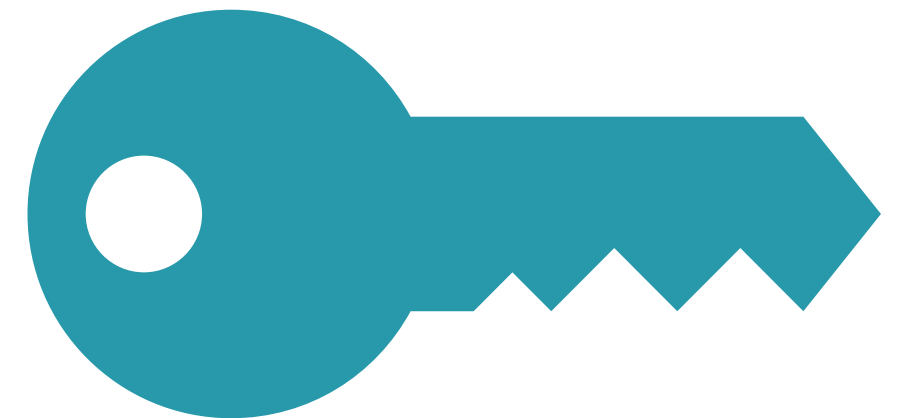
*\* Framework developed by CJJR and used in its Youth in Custody Practice Model Initiative, inspired by the work of the Vera Institute and Justice for Families*



# I. Defining and Identifying Family

## Key elements:

- Broad definition of “family”
- Youth and family-driven process to determine who is “family”
- Initial and on-going assessment of strength and diversity of the youth’s support system

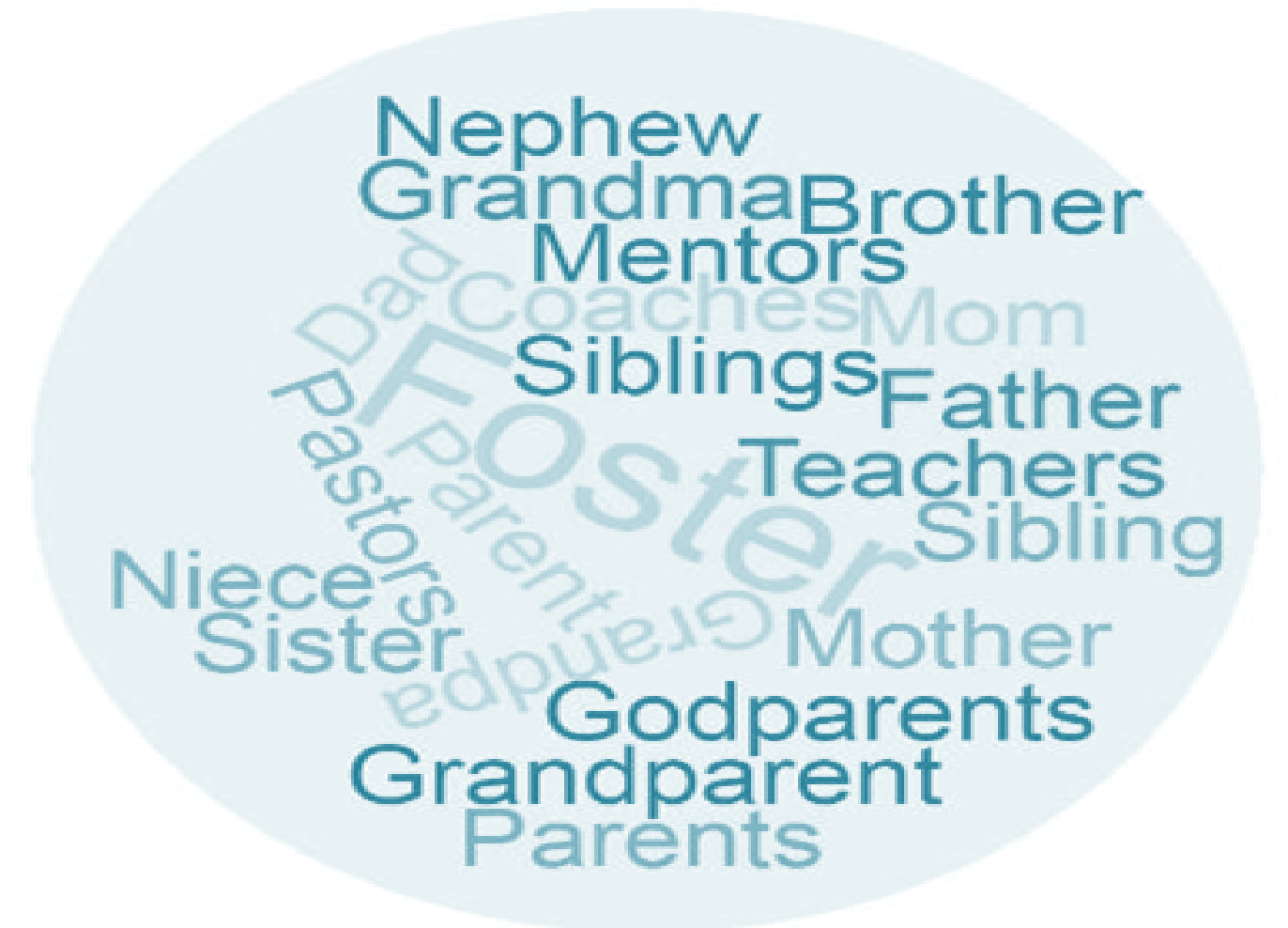




# Defining Family

Move beyond the traditional definition of “family” to capture those who will support the youth

- Parents/guardians
- Blood relatives/extended family
- Foster and adoptive parents
- Kinship caregivers
- Godparents
- Mentors
- Teachers
- Clergy members
- Family friends
- Other supporters



# Sample Definitions Used in Policy

“A family can include people who are united through biology, marriage, or adoption or **who are so closely connected through friendships or shared experience that they are taken to be family members**. Conceived in this manner, ‘family’ might include biological and adoptive parents, legal guardians, foster parents, kinship caregivers, grandparents, godparents, **mentors, teachers, clergy, family friends, and others who support the youth and contribute to the success of the youth’s rehabilitation process.**” – *San Diego County Probation Department*

“Family members [e.g., individuals who may include but are not limited to a youth’s biological, adoptive or stepparents, legal guardians, grandparents, biological or step siblings, children of the committed or detained youth] and **other supportive individuals for the youth including friends, mentors, coaches, and teachers** as approved by Administrative Team in consultation with caseworkers.” – *Massachusetts Department of Youth Services*

# Identifying Families: A Youth-Driven Process

**Systems must work closely with youth to identify their support networks.**

## **Key opportunities include:**

- Orientation
- Case planning
- Transition/reentry

## **Tools to support the process:**

- Vera's Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool
- Family Finding
- Genograms



# II. Encouraging Youth-Family Connections While in Placement

Juvenile justice approaches must recognize the harms of incarceration and work to keep youth in their communities

- meet the needs of youth and families
- repair harm to the community
- promote positive youth development via skill-building and pro-social relationships and opportunities

To the extent that youth are placed in detention and commitment facilities, systems must strive to keep youth connected to their families



# Impact of Family: One Example

## Vera Study on Family Visitation

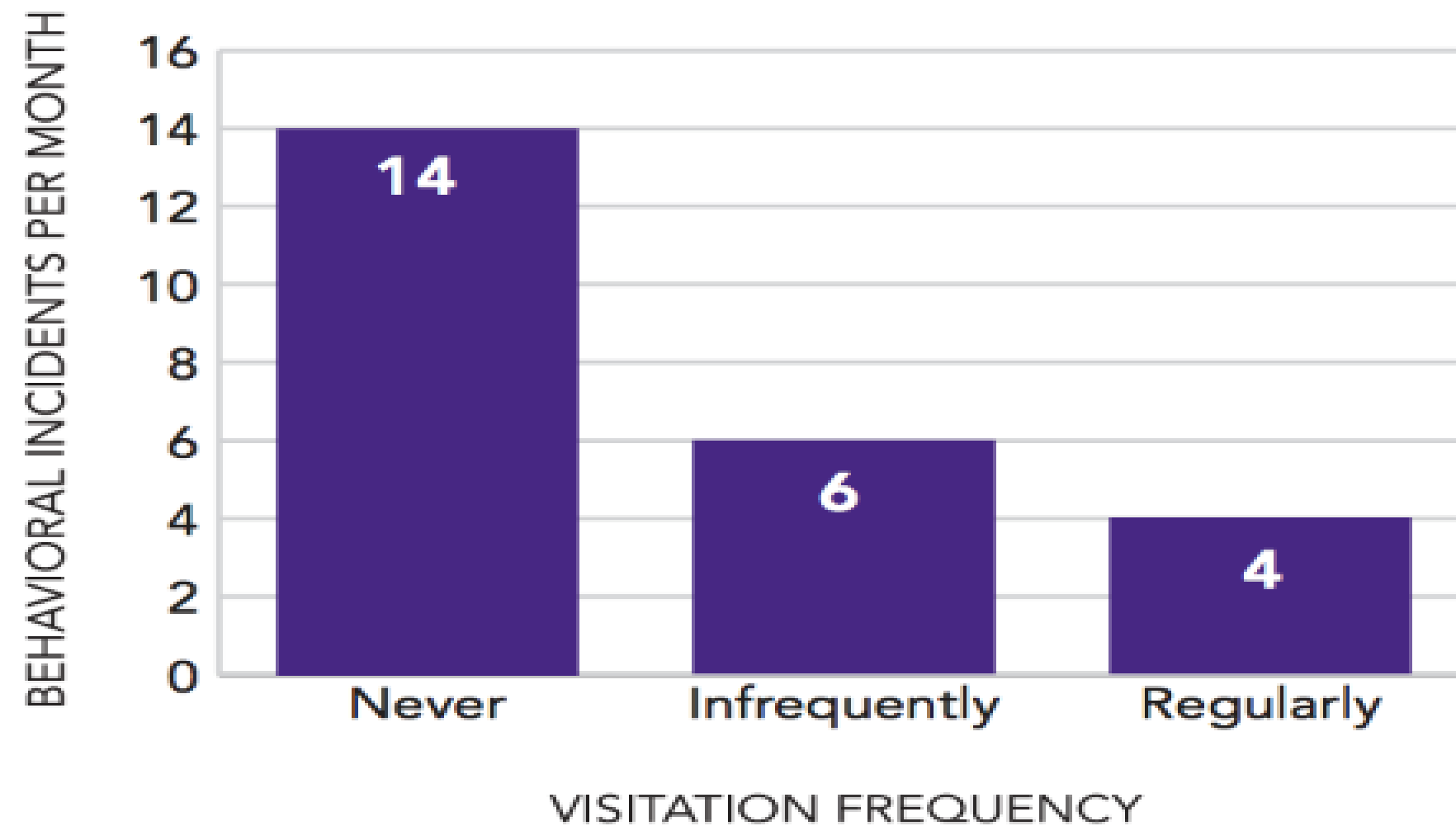
- n = 290 youth from 4 Ohio DYS facilities (2011-12)

**Question: Does family visitation impact or correlate with youth behavior and/or academic performance?**

See: *Villalobos Agudelo, S. (2013). The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth's Behavior and School Performance. Issue Brief. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.*

# Power of Family Visitation

## CORRELATION WITH YOUTH BEHAVIOR



## CORRELATION WITH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Youth Visited Regularly Had GPAs

2.1

Points Higher Than Those Visited Infrequently or Never Visited

See: Villalobos Agudelo, S. (2013). *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth's Behavior and School Performance. Issue Brief.* New York: Vera Institute of Justice.



# Family Impact Seen Nationally



*Research Brief: Increased Family Visitation Leads to Fewer Incidents and Less Staff Fear* (Mikyuck & Woolard, April 2020)

- Examined data from 62 youth correctional facilities from 2011 – 2016

## Findings:

15

- **Family visitation significantly associated with behavioral incidents**
  - One unit increase in family visits associated with a 2 % decrease in incidents
- **Incidents significantly associated with staff feelings of safety**

<https://pbstandards.org/media/1176/2020-researchbrief-familyvisitationimpacts.pdf>



# What Should Facilities Do?

## In-person visits

- Flexible hours
- Transportation
- Welcoming visitation area

## Virtual visits

- Zoom/Skype/FaceTime/Teams/Other

## Inviting family to facility events

## Access to phone/mail

**Denial of family contact should never be imposed as disciplinary action**





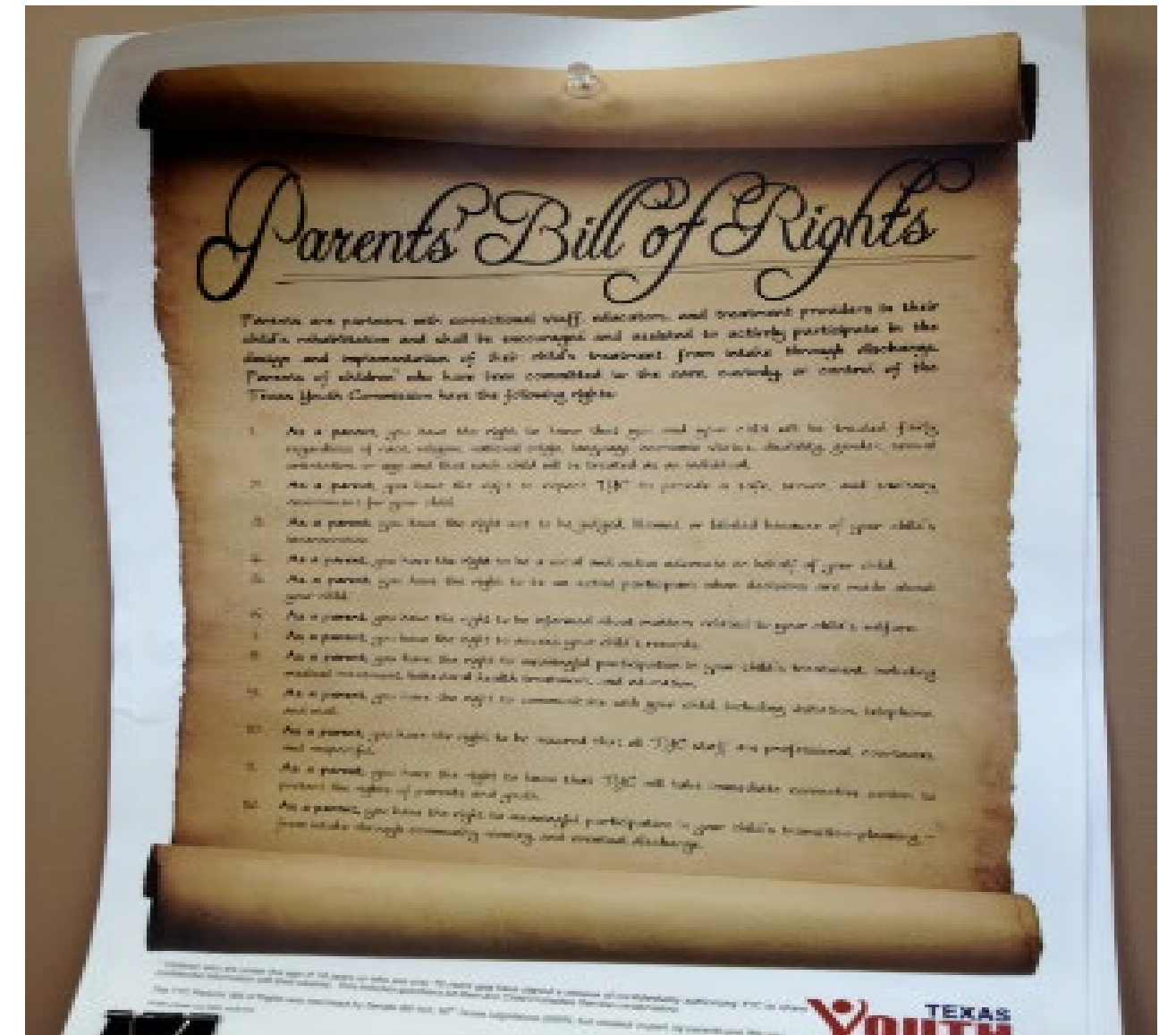
# III. Engaging Families in Services/Treatment

**Starts with clearly delineating commitment to family engagement**

- *Agency vision, mission, & values*

**Staff must model those values**

- *Reinforced by training, supervision, quality assurance*

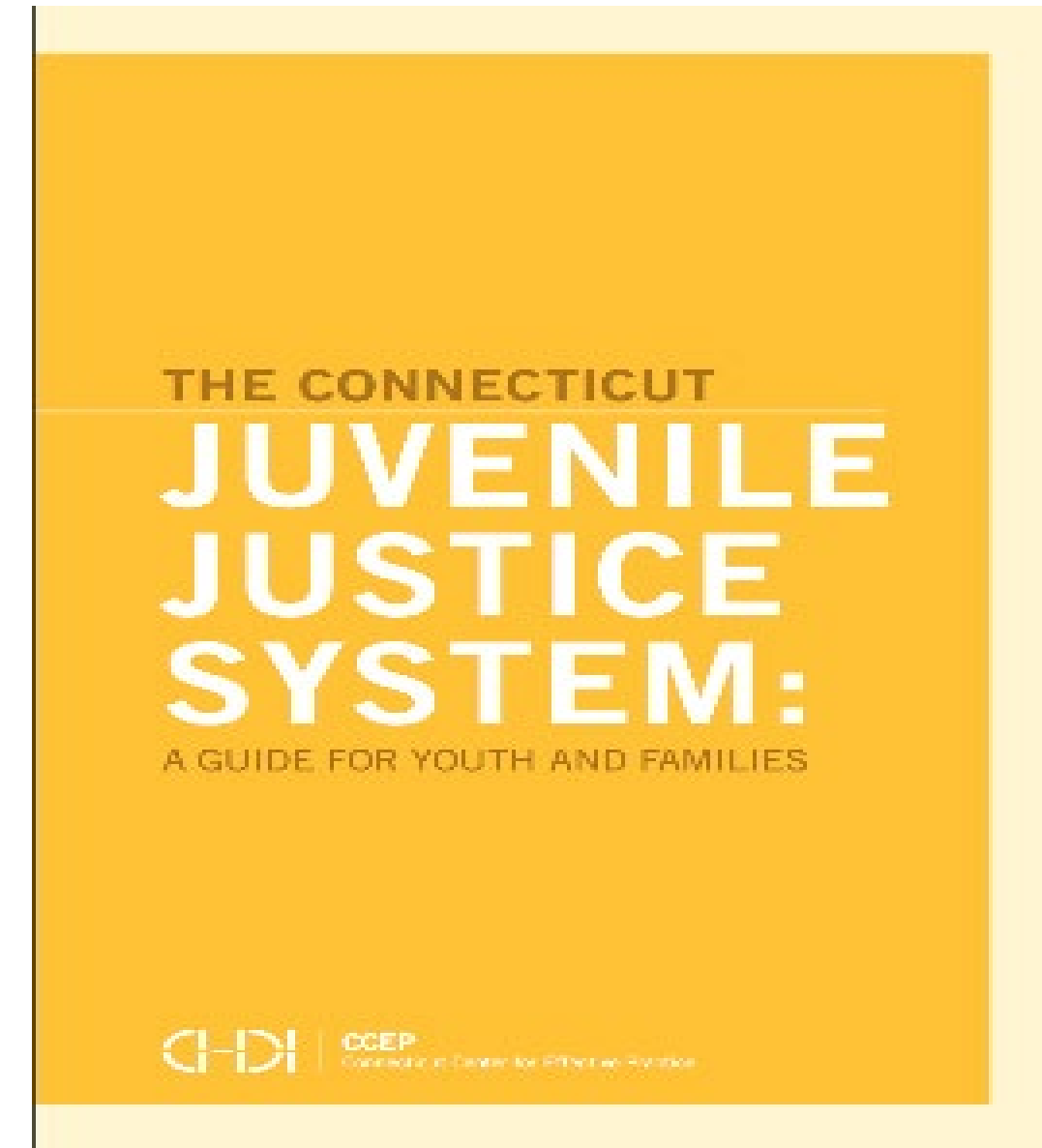
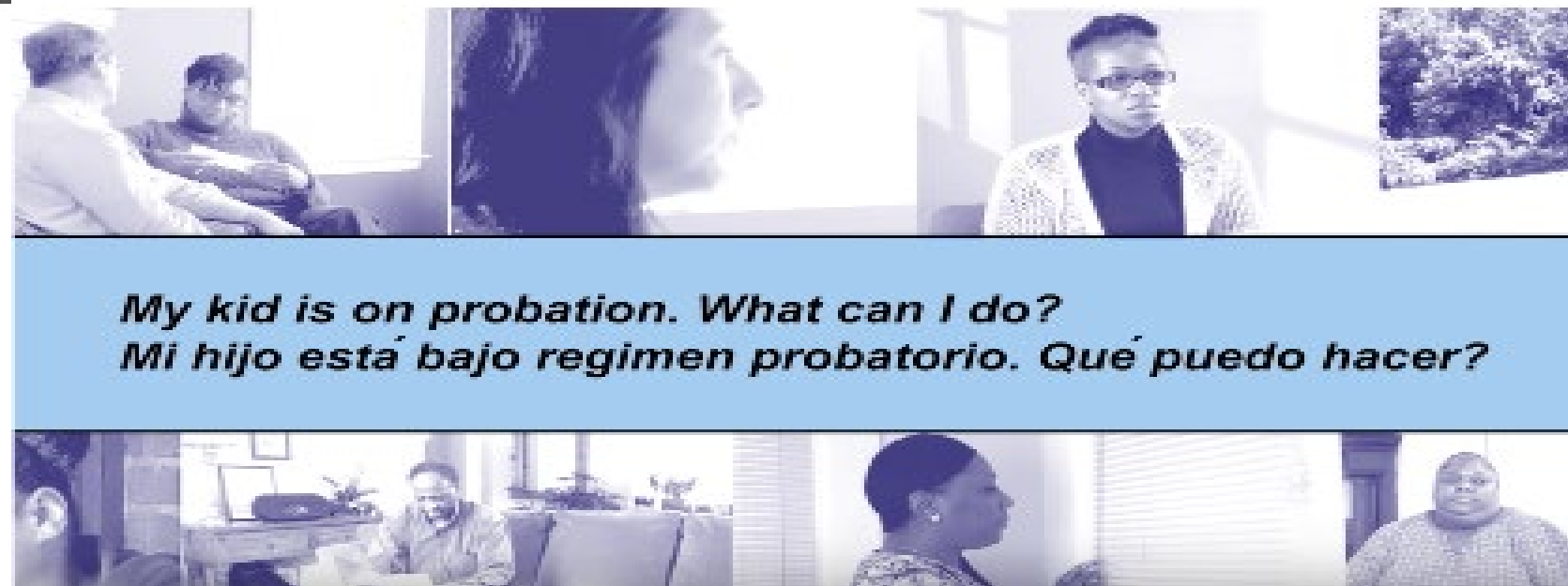
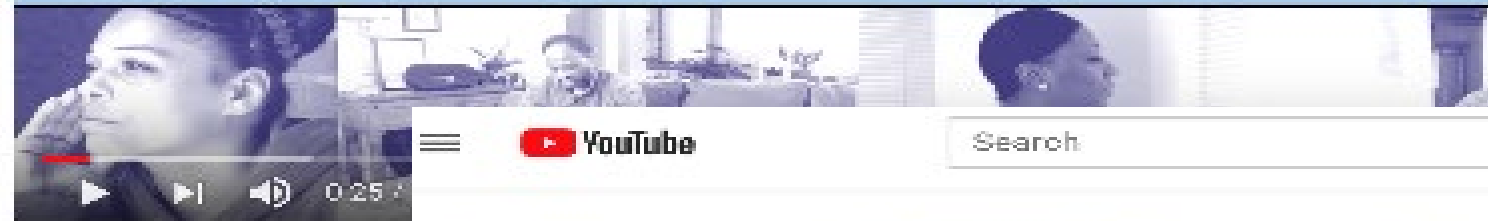


**Texas Juvenile Justice Department  
Parents' Bill of Rights**

<http://www.tjjd.texas.gov/index.php/family-engagement#parent-s-bill-of-rights-in-english>

# Orientation Processes and Materials for Families

YouTube Search



<https://cca-ct.org/CTJuvJusSystGuide.pdf>



# Meaningful Opportunities to Participate in Case Planning, Services and Treatment

## Family Team Meetings

- Family members have a meaningful seat at the decision-making table
- Importance of well-facilitated, strength-based approaches
- Development of plans that youth and families “own”



# Direct Services to Families

Holistic approach to service delivery — the success of the child is linked to the success of the family

- Systems should provide **direct supports and services for families** (e.g., assistance with housing, parenting skills, therapy, mental health/substance use services)
- **Credible messengers and mentors** can serve as additional advocates and life coaches who help families get connected to essential services
- **Family navigators** can help families navigate complicated legal systems and requirements



# IV. Empowering Families to Improve Services

Vital to get family insight. Strategies:

- Family surveys/questionnaires
- Family liaisons
- Avenues for families to raise concerns (e.g., grievance process)
- Family councils



# Spotlight on Massachusetts DYS

The Massachusetts Family Advisory Council (FAC) brings families of current and former DYS-involved youth together to provide guidance on how to improve family engagement and the family experience throughout the DYS continuum.

- **The FAC's goal is to deepen genuine engagement, communication, and trust between DYS and families**

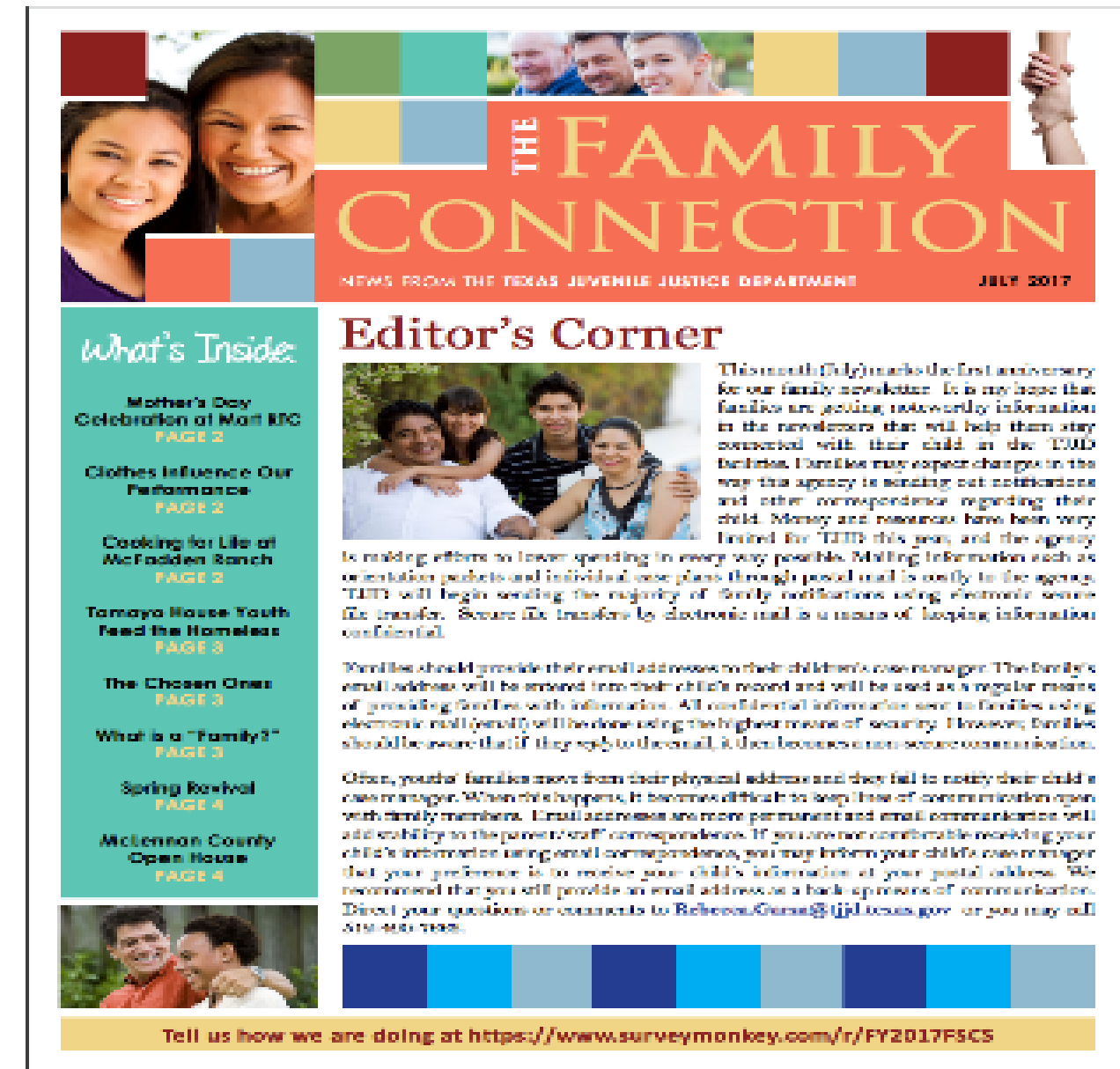
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The FAC has informed the development of DYS policy on residential visitation, classification of youth committed to the agency, etc.



# Communicating with Families

While gathering family insight is important, equally vital is following up with families to let them know how the agency/system is taking action to improve



**Texas Juvenile Justice Department's Newsletter:**  
**The Family Connection**  
<http://www.tjjd.texas.gov/index.php/doc-library/category/298-family-connection-newsletter>

# A Relentless Pursuit

“Family engagement begins with a fundamental belief that all families care for their children, have strengths that can be built upon, and can be engaged and empowered.

Family engagement is not about one single policy or practice or program, rather it **lives in the culture of an organization** and its evidence is seen in **how families are treated and partnered with at a systemic level.**”

- Justice For Families



# Questions



# Follow Up and Next Steps

**In our follow up email, within 3-5 business days, look for:**

- A link to the recording of today's presentation
- Today's presentation slides
- Invitations to upcoming events
- Additional resources
- Ways to stay connected with us
- A letter of participation emailed to you

[www.nfstac.org](http://www.nfstac.org)



# Upcoming Event Announcement

## Important Strategies for Family/Caregivers and the Family Peer Support Workforce Working with Families of LGBTQ+ Children

Join us for a panel discussion with three parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+) children who will discuss their own journeys and share their expertise with the audience. Attendees will hear important information that will build understanding about what a family may be experiencing after their child discloses that they are LGBTQ+. Panelists will also discuss the importance of support from others with lived experience, including strategies that Family Peer Supports should consider when working with families of LGBTQ+ children and youth.

**Wednesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> from 1:30 – 2:20 p.m. ET – [Register here!](#)**

# Feedback Survey



**Thank you for joining us!**

Please complete the SAMHSA-required Feedback Survey you will be directed to when the webinar ends.



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Thank you for joining us!

