



# Promoting Family Involvement In Juvenile Justice

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## PACER Center

**PACER.org**

Founded in 1977 by parents of children and youth with disabilities to assist families in accessing services and supports that expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with all disabilities

PACER Center is also the National Parent Technical Assistance Center

(The Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers)

Juvenile Justice Project for Youth with Disabilities (14 years)

1861 Normandale Blvd. Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044 TEL 952.838.9000 TTY 952.838.0190



## PACER Center's Juvenile Justice Project

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- Trains parents and professionals about disabilities, competence in court, special education law, parent and youth rights, and juvenile justice
  - **Works with families whose child is in the system and has an emotional/behavioral disorder and other disorders that put them at higher risk for involvement with justice system**
  - **Works with special education directors, educators, school liaison officers, corrections staff, and attorneys on a case by case basis**
- Provides individual assistance for parents advocating for youth's rights in school, court, and in facilities.
- Develops resources for families

## PACER Center's Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project

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- Helps parents understand their rights and responsibilities when accessing educational and mental health services for their children
- Works with the Juvenile Justice Project to advocate for families whose children are referred to court from schools because of charges relating to a disability
- Connects parents with supports at school and in the community
- Advocates for proactive approaches to managing behavior
- Provides leadership training for youth and parents
- Develops parent-friendly resources

## Family Involvement Strategies

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- Family involvement strategies should begin before a child reaches the juvenile justice system; they should begin in school, and continue in court and the corrections system.
- As more youth are referred to court from school because of disability-related behaviors, better training is needed for school districts about disabilities, their impact on behavior, integrating families in a team approach, and alternatives to court charges.
- There are resources in your communities that can assist you in engaging families (Parent Training Centers, Federation of Families, Nami (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) and other community-based disability organizations).

## Parent Involvement Strategies in School

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- Implement a model of parent involvement such as School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS)
- Reach out to families who are not involved in school through community connections (multi-cultural leaders, neighborhood or religious organizations etc)
- Develop a tool that parents, schools, and corrections systems can share for coordinating the youth's progress in educational, social-emotional, and other areas while in corrections placements.
- Appoint a liaison from school to be in touch with family and correctional staff
- If the youth has a disability, or is diagnosed with a disability while incarcerated, provide information to the parent about his rights and the special education process before the youth returns to the community.

## Parent Involvement Strategies in Court

- Assign a trained liaison to work with parents and prepare relevant information for attorney (e.g., retired attorneys, volunteers in service organizations and corporations, law students)
- Have parent-friendly information or a short video training for parents available in a separate area while they wait in court
- Encourage parents to send information pertaining to the youth's disabilities and their relevance to the charges to the attorney.
- Ensure that cases are heard in a timely way
- Provide assistance for parents if they do not understand the documents because of language or disability issues
- Work with counties to access free transportation for families to get to court

## Parent Involvement Strategies in Facilities

- Provide training for **all** staff about working with families and with youth with disabilities; **include a parent in that training.**
- Engage parents or a surrogate in planning for release as soon as the youth arrives.
- If the parent is unable to participate ask them about a surrogate or other family member or friend who could act on behalf of the child.
- Provide information about the program in several formats so parents with language-based disabilities or those who cannot speak English will understand. Assign a person to speak with parents at the time of the youth's admission about education records, disability issues, and medications.
- Assign one person as a liaison to parents while the child is in placement. The liaison is responsible for connecting with parents about the child's progress and resolving issues parents feel are problematic.
- Develop a monthly bulletin for parents and include their input.

## More Parent Involvement Strategies in Facilities

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- Provide opportunities for discussion about parenting needs, resources in the community, and preparing for the youth's return. Do this either in planned sessions at a visit or in scheduled phone meetings. Provide transportation, food, and child care (consider donations from community sources to cover those expenses).
- Link parents to local parent organizations for support. (parent training Centers, Community Parent Resource Centers, Federation of Families disability organizations)
- Ask these same groups to help provide resources for on-site library (print, visual and audio). (Community and Family Resource Center in Md facility)
- Provide opportunities for parents to express their concerns (suggestion box, questionnaire) without fear of reprisal.
- Build trust and be honest.

## PACER Promotes Family Involvement

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PACER trains probation officers about:

- Special education rights and disabilities
- Inappropriate referral to court for disability-based behaviors
- Family involvement and communication skills

Parents referred to PACER by probation departments have allowed PACER to connect with facilities and schools to prepare for transition to the community.

## PACER Promotes Family Involvement in the Community

### **PACER provides training for specific cultural groups:**

- In the past two years more than 300 Somali families and professionals have received training about their rights in school, court, and in juvenile facilities
- This information has helped them to advocate in school, in court and with correctional staff
- It has also enabled them to assist other parents and refer cases to PACER and other parent resources

### **PACER speaks to communities “where they’re at”**

- Meet with families and agencies in their neighborhoods and wherever they feel comfortable. The goal is to help them translate their frustration and fear into positive steps. But they can't do it without supports
- Recruit volunteers from representative populations in the facility. Provide them with information and encourage their leadership

## PACER Promotes Family Involvement with Family Training

### **PACER trains families by:**

- Developing family-friendly handouts on understanding behavior, planning for meetings about their child's behavior, accessing county mental health support, etc
- Offering free workshops on understanding disability-related behaviors, positive behavior interventions, and using the IEP to instruct and support changing behavior
- Offering alternative formats for information such as audio modules, an interactive site on behavior interventions, and translated resources (Somali, Spanish, etc)
- Offering opportunities for parents to connect with other parents

## PACER Promotes Youth Involvement

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PACER's Youth Advisory Board:

- Is composed of transition-age youth (14-21) with a mental health disorder
- Seeks to decrease the stigma surrounding mental illness, especially for youth
- Enables youth with mental illness who often have few friends to have a group of friends and share experiences
- Develops advocacy, problem-solving, and leadership skills
- Provides youth with skills to manage difficult family situations

## Thank You!

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- Thank you for your interest in this very important subject.
- Feel free to contact Renelle Nelson ([rnelson@pacer.org](mailto:rnelson@pacer.org))
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