

SERVING YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Topic

In this video, Meri Viano of Justice for Families shares strategies for supporting youth with disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system and their families. She offers unique insights based on her own experiences as a parent.

Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

Meaningful family engagement benefits everyone involved with the youth/juvenile justice system. When families are engaged in revising policies and practices in juvenile justice and related systems, there are many positive results for youth, families, and the community. For example, youth and families are more likely to engage and remain engaged in services, and youth are less likely to participate in future criminal behavior leading to incarceration. When families are engaged, staff report feeling happier and more satisfied with their jobs and are less likely to leave the job due to high stress and burnout.

Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities are at greater risk for juvenile justice system involvement and are less likely to have their needs met by the system. Family engagement has benefits for all young people but is especially important for youth with disabilities (YWD). Families can assist YWD with advocating for their needs, and this leads to fewer YWD being placed in care outside their homes. Family engagement also helps reduce harm and trauma for young people in systems settings and leads to less restrictive treatment settings for youth. When families are engaged, youth involved with the justice system are more likely to successfully reenter the community following incarceration.

Recommendations for Creating Systems Change

- Assess the degree to which policies, programs, and practices effectively engage families.
- Increase family voice within the system by utilizing Family Focus groups, Family Advisory Councils, Family Navigators, Family Peer-to-Peer programs, and/or hiring family members for paid positions.
- Provide initial and on-going training to all staff regarding effective family engagement.

Learn More

Justice for Families Resources:

[Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice](#)

[Focus on Youth and Families-](#) Guidebook for leading focus groups with families.

Campaign for Youth Justice- [Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice](#)





Juvenile Justice Information Exchange- [Benefits of Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice System](#)

Vera Institute of Justice- [Fact Sheet on Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice](#)

PACER Center- [Family Involvement Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Needs](#)

Strong Families/Forward Together [Forward Together Website](#)

Presenter Information

Meredith (Meri) Viano is a consultant for Justice for Families (J4F), a national organization committed to ending the youth incarceration epidemic. J4F is founded and run by parents and families who have experienced the juvenile justice system with their children. As a parent of young adults with developmental and mental health disabilities, Meri supports families through leadership, training and advocacy. Meri's areas of expertise include mental health policy, LGBTQ policy, working with police departments and family- and youth-driven voice and advocacy across multiple systems. To learn more about Meri and J4F, go to [Justice for Families website](#)

