

# A FAMILY GUIDE TO GETTING INVOLVED WITH CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

*Prepared by the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, and At Risk*



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# **A Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education: A Model**

**Prepared by the National Evaluation and  
Technical Assistance Center for the Education of  
Children and Youth Who Are  
Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk**

This Guide is designed to meet the needs of both families whose children are involved in the juvenile justice system and other juvenile justice stakeholders, including advocates, family organizations, the court, school administrators, and facility administrators. The first section is the *Juvenile Justice Facility Guide*, which provides stakeholders with an introduction to the model family guide and related tools that will enable the facility school to promote family participation in students' education. The second section is the *Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education*. It is intended to encourage families—including those who are reluctant, fearful, or unprepared—to become more involved with their child's education. Juvenile justice stakeholders need only to personalize the guide (Section Two), then duplicate and distribute the materials to family members of youth enrolled in their correctional education program.



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## **Section One.**

# **A Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education: The Facility Guide**



## THE PURPOSE OF THE *FAMILY GUIDE*

“The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and throughout life.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, programming aimed at involving families and special efforts to engage them in activities do make a difference. However, family involvement in correctional education has not been easy. How do administrators, teachers, families, and students overcome the multiple barriers to family involvement in these systems? In 2007, the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At-Risk (NDTAC) developed *Working With Families of Children in the Juvenile Justice and Corrections Systems: A Guide for Education Program Leaders, Principals, and Building Administrators. A Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education: A Model* was written as a companion to the *Administrators’ Guide*.

Successful outcomes for youth placed in the juvenile justice or juvenile neglect systems can be affected by the level of family involvement in their treatment and/or education. Family involvement can be a crucial element for students who are returning to school following an institutional placement. Some parents of youth in correctional education settings may face many challenges. Parents may require additional supports to effectively navigate systems inside and outside residential facilities. Some of these challenges can be mitigated through collaboration and cross-training with students’ families. Family organizations are an underused resource that can be tapped to support and educate families about the operation of facilities for youth who are neglected or delinquent (N or D), to develop their communication skills, and nurture their desire to become more involved. To find a family organization in the area, check [www.FFCMH.org](http://www.FFCMH.org) for a chapter nearby or go to [www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov](http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov) to find a system of care that has a family network.

## HOW THE *FAMILY GUIDE* WAS DEVELOPED

Topics covered in the *Family Guide* were identified by holding a focused discussion with two expert panels—(1) a group of State program administrators, education administrators, and leaders of programs for youth who are neglected or delinquent; and (2) a group of family members who have or recently had a child in a correctional education program or facility. Panel members were selected to be culturally and geographically diverse. Their responses form the core of the suggestions in this guide. Additional materials were selected from the literature on family involvement, including materials developed by some of the training and technical assistance (TA) centers that are listed in the resource section at the end of the *Family Guide*. Feedback provided by both of the expert panels and staff of the NDTAC contributed substantially to the final product.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors are experienced family leaders who are veterans of the Children’s Mental Health System and System of Care movements. They are respected by families and professionals for their wisdom, knowledge, experience, skills, and integrity. Both have raised children with serious mental health needs who were also enrolled in special education. Both have been active and effective advocates for juvenile justice, mental health, child welfare, and education reform. Both have been involved in conducting research about family and youth involvement. Barbara Huff is also the founder of the family movement for children’s mental health and an inspiration to families across the country. Trina Osher is also the

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on students’ achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center of Family & Community Connections with Schools; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 7.

parent of a youth who spent most of his high school years in juvenile corrections settings and has graduated from the adult corrections system. She is a seasoned special educator with 30 years of experience as a teacher, State administrator, and national policy analyst.

## **GUIDANCE FOR FACILITIES IN USING THE *FAMILY GUIDE***

The *Family Guide* is intended to encourage families—including those who are reluctant, fearful, or unprepared—to become more involved with their child’s education. Therefore, the vocabulary has been chosen carefully so families can relate the content to their own experiences and perceptions. Language has also been chosen to be easily understood by families. The many concrete suggestions in the *Family Guide* are intended to help family members overcome their anxieties. Strategies in the *Family Guide* are designed to make it easier for family members to develop constructive relationships with your facility and your staff.

The *Family Guide* was written as a generic tool to cover a broad range of conditions. However, no guide can be truly universal. Review the *Family Guide* carefully, preferably with some parents of your students. If necessary, carefully make adaptations so the *Family Guide* accurately reflects the policies and practices of your school, program, or institution. To help supplement the *Family Guide*, a sample cover letter is included with this toolkit. Detailed guidance for using it is given below. We suggest that you also have family members help you tailor this letter. They can guide you to find a style and vocabulary to help family members of *your other students* feel comfortable and welcome.

The *Family Guide* itself was intended for distribution to your students’ families. However, it could also be useful in improving family involvement policies and practices and the skills of your facility’s staff. Two suggestions follow.

1. Review the *Family Guide* to find policies or practices that your school, program, or institution could adopt to improve relationships with the families of your students.
2. Provide **all** staff with a copy of the *Family Guide*. Explain when and how copies will be given to students’ families. Make it clear that all staff members are expected to courteously encourage students’ family members to follow the advice in the *Family Guide*. Staff may need some training to improve their ability to promote positive relationships with your students’ families.

### ***Guidance for Using the Sample Letter***

The sample letter is intended to help you and your staff introduce *A Family Guide* to families, welcome them to your educational program, encourage them to become engaged in their children’s education, and support your school or facility’s programs. You can use it as is or make changes to reflect your school, program, or institution. It should be printed on your facility’s letterhead and serve as a cover letter when you give the *Family Guide* to a parent.

The sample letter was written to be easily understood by average family members and to cover conditions and practices at many kinds of facilities. You can use the sample letter as it is or make changes to reflect your school, program, or facility. There may be program features and opportunities for family involvement at your facility that are not mentioned. If so, you should add them to this letter. The sample letter may also mention some things not available at your facility. Be sure to edit these out. You want the final letter you sign to give families an accurate picture of what to expect.

The sample letter has text [*in brackets*] at the places where you need to enter information that is specific to your facility or program or about a particular student and her or his family. Family members will appreciate your personalizing the letter and see it as a sincere effort to reach out to them and welcome

them to partner with you and your staff. Translating this letter and the *Family Guide* into the family's own language would be a clear indication that you are prepared to make it as easy as possible for the family to get involved.

In addition to the *Family Guide* and this letter, you should make sure that families get copies of other documents from your facility. Some suggestions are a resource list that is tailored to your facility and the communities you serve. This would supplement the list that is in the *Family Guide*. Families will also need written copies of student and family rights and responsibilities, school rules, the academic calendar, brief descriptions of the curriculum, and procedures for family visiting. Some of these are mentioned in the sample letter.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

### *Your Facility's Letterhead*

*[Insert the date here]*

Dear *[Insert the name of the child's family member this is being given to; avoid using generic greetings like "Dear Parent"]*:

Welcome to our school. While your child is living at *[insert the name of the correction education facility]* we will make every effort to provide your child with a positive educational experience.

We believe that families know their child best. Families can be effective advocates in getting their child the help they need to be successful. Our goals are to keep your child on track toward completing school and to help her or him become a successful young adult. We believe that you share these goals with us and are willing to partner with us to achieve them.

This booklet, *A Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education*, was written by family members like you who have had a child in a correctional education program. Their advice is based on a wealth of experience advocating for children and partnering with schools and correctional education programs, and with the mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems. Every effort on your part to follow any suggestions in the booklet will make a big difference for your child. We encourage you to do whatever you can for your child.

Research has shown that there are many **benefits when families are involved** with their child's education:

- Students are more motivated to learn, and they feel better about themselves. They get better grades, attend school more, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to continue their education.
- Students are likely to use drugs and alcohol less and to have fewer instances of violent behavior and suspensions.
- Teachers are more effective and have higher morale and job satisfaction.
- Youth feel supported, and there is greater support for schools.

The purpose of schools at correctional facilities is providing a quality education for youth. Families who understand this are more involved with the school and tend to be more satisfied with the school program. We welcome your involvement with our program.

Family members can play a big role in improving the overall school climate, making it better for their child and everyone else. This booklet suggests some ways you can help our school staff stay focused on the education of your child for a successful return home and back to a community school rather than focusing on punishment for the actions that led your child to this facility.

We know this may be a stressful situation for you. We want to make you comfortable and welcome. We will treat you with the respect you deserve, listen to your concerns, and take your suggestions seriously.

We will invite you to school and facility events and do what we can, given the resources we have, to make it possible for you to be involved. Let us know what kind of assistance you need—such as *[modify this list to match what your facility can offer]* a translator, transportation, meals, lodging, or care for other children. We will set up a conference call so you can participate if you cannot come to meetings at our facility.

Please stay in touch with us. A list of key staff and how to reach them follows this letter. Do not give up if you don't reach someone the first time you call. We will call you back as soon as we can. We know your child needs you to be involved with our program as you would be with your local public school.

I sincerely look forward to getting to know you and your child better.

—*[name]*, Principal—

**CONTACT LIST FOR [INSERT THE NAME OF THE CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION FACILITY AND ITS ADDRESS]**

Title	Name	Phone	E-mail	Address [if different from the facility address above]
Principal				
Guidance Counselor				
Teacher (subject)				
Teacher (subject)				
Family Liaison				
School Nurse				
Care Coordinator				
Speech Therapist				
Occupational Therapist				
Physical Therapist				
Social Worker				
School Psychologist				

## **SAMPLE EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FAMILIES WITH COVER LETTER**

Date (*current*)

Dear (*parent's or guardian's name*):

We would like to get to know (*insert child's name*) better and learn from you about (*insert "his" or "her" depending upon child's gender*) educational history. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope as soon as possible. The information you give us will help us make sure your child feels supported by us and a successful school experience.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with (*include name, title, phone number, and address for person to contact*).

Sincerely,

(*Name and Title*)

# EDUCATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

1. My child participates in the following school activities (check yes or no for each item):

	YES	NO		YES	NO
Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dance Squad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Activities—please list these:

2. Please list the leisure time activities your child enjoys after school hours and weekends.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. My child's favorite subject is \_\_\_\_\_

4. My child's least favorite subject is \_\_\_\_\_

5. My child usually makes an effort to do his or her best in school.  YES  NO

6. My child is performing to his or her potential in school.  YES  NO

7. My child has **NEVER** been suspended or expelled from school.  YES  NO  
If you checked NO, briefly tell us when and why he or she was suspended or expelled.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. My child has a disability.  YES  NO

If YES, what is it and how does it affect learning? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. My child has a 504 plan.  YES  NO  
If YES, do you have a copy of a current plan?  YES  NO

10. My child receives special education services.  YES  NO  
If YES, do you have a copy of a current Individualized Education Program (IEP)?  YES  NO

11. My child has received the following special services—check all that apply.

	YES	NO		YES	NO
Speech Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupational Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	School-Based Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Services—please list these:

\_\_\_\_\_

12. I have a copy of my child's educational evaluation.  YES  NO

## **TIPS FOR STAYING CONNECTED WHEN YOUR CHILD IS ENROLLED IN A CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

### **Communication and Information Sharing**

- ✓ Ask for an orientation to the school and the facility.
- ✓ Find out if there is a family liaison who can assist you and your family. Get the person's name and phone number. Contact the liaison early during your child's stay at the facility.
- ✓ Communicate often with school staff, and let them know you want to be helpful and part of the team that is making decisions about your child's education.
- ✓ Share what you know about your child's prior education, and provide the school with educational records you may have (such as an IEP, report cards, disciplinary reports, educational evaluations, or State test results).
- ✓ Tell the school staff the name of any medication(s) your child has been taking, and let them know how well you think the medication is working.
- ✓ Tell the school staff about your child's eating habits, especially food allergies or special diets.
- ✓ If religious or spiritual practices are important to your family, share this information with facility staff. Opportunities to participate in religious services should be provided by the facility.
- ✓ Communication with school staff should be respectful, accurate, and truthful.
- ✓ Get a copy of the school rules, read them carefully, and ask any questions you have about them.
- ✓ Write down the name of the person at the school with whom you are speaking, along with the person's title and phone number. Keep short notes as a permanent record of your conversation.
- ✓ Give the school staff your phone number and address. Notify them when the information changes. Let them know the best times to call you—and when NOT to call.
- ✓ Let the staff know if you need transportation or any other assistance to visit the school.

### **Ongoing Activities**

- ✓ Make every effort to attend school functions.
- ✓ Ask to see samples of the school work your child has been doing.
- ✓ Talk with your child about school when on the phone or while visiting. Let your child know that you feel school is important, and encourage him or her to do well.
- ✓ Organize all important records and papers in one place for safe keeping. Some things you will need to keep handy are: Social Security card, school records, government-issued IDs (such as a driver's license, school ID, work permits), Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or 504 plans, treatment plans, transition plans, upcoming appointments.

### **Preparing for Transition Home**

- ✓ Be a major decisionmaker in your child's transition planning. Start planning for her or his return as soon as your child leaves home.
- ✓ Request several visits at home and in the community before your child is discharged. When necessary, use the time between visits to adjust the transition plan.
- ✓ Have your child's school records sent to you and the receiving school in time for your child's arrival—the first day.
- ✓ Work with your child's receiving school on a plan for social, emotional, and academic learning and support that will keep him or her safe, in school, and on track to graduate and prepare for work.

## WRITTEN MATERIALS

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. (2001). *Involving families in policy group work*.

Alexandria, VA: Author. Available at: [http://www.nasmhpd.org/general\\_files/publications/taa\\_pubs/FFCMH/FFCMH%20Family%20Voice%20in%20Policy%20Development%20Tip%20Sheet.doc](http://www.nasmhpd.org/general_files/publications/taa_pubs/FFCMH/FFCMH%20Family%20Voice%20in%20Policy%20Development%20Tip%20Sheet.doc)

National Parent Teacher Association. *National standards for parent/family involvement programs*, available at [www.ptasonline.org/kspta/national\\_standards.pdf](http://www.ptasonline.org/kspta/national_standards.pdf).

Osher, T., Blau, G., & Osher, D. *Working definition of family-driven care*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch. Download from [http://www.tapartnership.org/advisors/family/docs/definition-family-driven\\_care\(12th\\_ed\).pdf](http://www.tapartnership.org/advisors/family/docs/definition-family-driven_care(12th_ed).pdf)

Osher, T., & Huff, B. *Working with families of children in the juvenile justice and the corrections system: A guide for education program leaders, principals, and building administrators*. Washington, DC: National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk, at <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/spotlight200611a.asp>.

Osher, T., & Hunt, P. (2002). *Involving families of youth who are in contact with the juvenile justice system*. Delmar, NY: National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.

Osher, T. W., & Osher, D. (2002). The paradigm shift to true collaboration with families. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 11(1), 47–60.

**Section Two. A Family Guide to Getting Involved  
With Correctional Education: The Family Guide**



## **The Family Guide to Getting Involved With Correctional Education**

**[Insert facility information, including address and logo, here.]**

Recommended citation for this document: Osher, T., & Huff, B. (2008). *A family guide to getting involved with correctional education*. Washington, DC: National Evaluation Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk, at <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org>.

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## I. HOW THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED

“The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and throughout life.”<sup>2</sup> Families know their child best and can be powerful allies to any program serving their child. However, it has not always been easy for family members to get involved when their child is in a correctional education program. This guide presents some practical strategies families can use to build a relationship with their child’s correctional education program that will keep their son or daughter on track towards completing school and becoming a successful young adult.

This guide has sections covering the following topics: Getting Off to a Good Start; Sticking With the Program; Preparing To Return Home; Connecting With Other Families; What To Do When a Family Visit Does Not Go Well; Stepping Up; and Additional Resources.

Each child and family is unique; so is each facility or program. Not everything in this guide may apply to you or to the facility where your child is enrolled. The main thing is to remember that you are your child’s best advocate and that good communication between you and the school is essential.

The authors of this guide are experienced family leaders who are veterans of the Children’s Mental Health System and System of Care movements. They are respected by families and professionals for their wisdom, knowledge, experience, skills, and integrity. An expert panel of family members and correctional education facility administrators across the country advised the authors throughout the writing of this guide. The authors thank the following individuals for generously and honestly offering their experience and expertise.

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<sup>2</sup> Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on students’ achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center of Family & Community Connections with Schools; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 7.



## II. GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

### HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO CONNECT WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL RIGHT AT THE START

A good relationship with your child's school depends on respectful and accurate communication. It is important to share what you know about your child from the very start. You will want to get to know the teachers and others working with your child and find out what they expect from you and your child. Families have a responsibility to keep in touch with the school. If you have not heard from the school shortly after your child enrolls, take the first step and call someone.

#### ***Let the school staff know when and how to get in touch with you and what they can do to help you get involved and stay involved***

- Give the school your address, e-mail address if you have one, and any phone numbers where they could reach you or leave a message.
- You can request that notices and reports be written in your preferred language. Ask for a qualified translator at meetings so you can fully understand and participate in discussions and decision making.
- Let the school staff know when you need help to get to meetings at the school.
- Ask about other supports the facility might be able to provide you, such as *transportation, lodging, meals, or child care.*

#### ***Get to know school staff***

- Get the names and phone numbers for the principal or administrator in charge of your child's education, your child's teacher(s), and any other school staff, such as a nurse or counselor, who you think should be working with your child.
- Request a meeting (or phone conversation) with your child's teacher(s) to get acquainted.
- Ask if there is a family or parent liaison you could meet or talk with.
- Ask for an orientation to the school program. If possible, visit the facility. If visiting is not possible, ask if there are booklets, videos, or other materials to introduce the school program to you.

A **family or parent liaison** is an experienced family member who understands what you are going through and has knowledge and training to help other family members navigate the systems that serve their children.

#### ***Share what you know with the school***

- Share what you know about your child's educational history and information about your child in general—for example learning style, strengths, weaknesses, motivators, and any special programs your child was in, such as advanced placement, English for English language learners (ELLs) or remedial reading.

An Individualized Education Program (**IEP**) is a written agreement between a parent and school that describes the special education program to be provided for their specific child. Details about the content and requirements for IEPs are in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). See <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C10%2C>.

- Give the school copies of report cards, your child’s most recent Individualized Education Program (IEPs), progress reports, papers, and any other documents that would help them know about your child’s academic abilities and accomplishments as well as his or her educational needs.
- Let school staff know about any medications your child takes, any effects of the medication that you have noticed, and how these effects might affect your child’s school performance.
- If your child has been in special education, you may need to ask your child’s public school to hold a team meeting to review and revise your child’s IEP so it can be implemented at the correctional education facility. Be sure to invite staff from the correctional education program if the meeting is not held at the facility.
- Tell the school staff about any religious or spiritual practices that you would like your child to observe while living at the school.
- If important to you, offer to help school staff recognize and better understand your family’s cultural background and spiritual practices. You could also offer to make suggestions about how these can enrich the school program, if appropriate.

***Let the school know you want to be involved and stay informed about your child’s progress and care***

- Introduce yourself to the administrator and school staff when your child first gets there—before they contact you about a problem.
- Find out how academic progress is monitored and when progress reports and report cards are to be given out.
- Approach school staff with a positive attitude that shows that you believe they can help your child get back on track to complete her or his education, graduate, be independent, and prepare for work.
- Ask about opportunities to be involved with your child’s education.
- Let the school staff know that you want to be helpful to the school. Ask about other ways you can be involved with the correctional education program.

***Know what is expected of your child***

- Ask for a copy of the school rules, and ask to be notified whenever there is a change so that you will know what is expected of your child.
- Ask about any restrictions on family involvement.

***Express your concerns respectfully***

- You are your child’s advocate. It is important for you to speak up if you have something to contribute at the “intake” or if you have any questions.
- Get the name of person and title who is available to answer your questions. Get this person’s phone number, and find out when this person is available to talk with parents.
- Ask about your rights as a parent. Ask how you can get an advocate to help you understand and exercise your rights if you feel the need for additional help or support.

### **III. STICKING WITH THE PROGRAM**

#### **HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD IS MAKING GOOD PROGRESS IN THE SCHOOL PROGRAM**

**You should expect to have the same kind of relationship** with your child's correction education program that you would have with your neighborhood school. You will want to make sure both the school staff and your child know that you are interested in your child's educational progress and want to support the school. Continue building your relationships with the correctional education program by responding to their requests and participating in school activities as much as you can.

#### ***Keep in touch with your child's teacher(s)***

- Make every effort to attend school activities such as a parent-teacher night, an open house, a student performance, or a recognition ceremony.
- Try to combine school meetings with visitation day at the facility.
- Ask for opportunities to meet with teachers. Arrange for a regularly scheduled phone call or meeting at a time that is convenient for everyone—especially for you. You can also ask to be given a brief written progress report periodically.
- Request that a visit with your child's teacher (or someone from the education program who knows your child) be scheduled whenever there are court dates that you must attend. Ask the judge to support these requests, and arrange it early on. You can get help communicating with the court from your child's lawyer, probation officer, or case manager if you need it.

#### ***Let the school staff know that you are interested in your child's progress***

- Ask to see samples of your child's class work, test scores, and report cards so you can see for yourself how your child is doing. Ask school staff for explanations if necessary.
- Encourage the school to offer your child courses required for graduation at her or his community school and to stay on track to earn a high school diploma, GED, or prepare for work in the community.
- Ask for paper copies of your child's official school records, and keep them safe.

#### ***Show your child that you are interested in her or his educational progress***

- Talk with your child about school work when you visit or talk on the phone.
- Let your child know when you are pleased with his or her effort and proud of the work accomplished.
- Have high expectations for your child.
- Encourage your child to take courses that will lead to a diploma or to develop skills needed for work.
- Ask your child what would help him or her to make better progress.

#### ***Recognize when school staff get to know your child and are dedicated to helping your child make the most of the educational opportunities at the correctional education program***

- Ask the school staff to give a report or a presentation to the court about your child's educational progress.
- Respond promptly to calls from the school.
- Even though you may feel a lot of stress, try to remain positive and solution oriented. Show school staff you want to work with them when difficulties arise.

## IV. PREPARING TO RETURN HOME

### HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S RETURN TO YOUR HOME AND TO SCHOOL SMOOTH AND SUCCESSFUL

A successful return to the community is the goal of the correctional education program and is what every family hopes will happen. Initially, some families feel relief knowing that their child is in a safe and secure facility. At the same time, separation can be stressful for you and your child. If all goes well, your child will learn new skills and behaviors for coping with community life. Many families feel they need to get re-acquainted with their child and understand the individual that their child has become. You will want to start planning and preparing for your child's return home as soon as your child enters the correctional education program. A lot needs to be done to make sure that everyone is ready for your child's return home and that the necessary supports are in place.

#### ***Get supports in place before your child comes home***

- Work with the school staff to have conferences at the facility with all the community providers you and your child will need before your child leaves. For example, your child may need to have vocational training/education, mental health services, drug and alcohol support programs, recreation programs, transitional housing, or transportation.
- Have some conversation with someone working closely with your child (such as a teacher, guidance counselor, or care coordinator) to get to know how your child has changed. Talk with someone who can tell you about habits and experiences your child had while away (e.g., hygiene and personal care, food preparation and eating, studying and homework, taking responsibility for chores). Ask what the staff did to support your child and how you can do the same at home.
- If you have a good relationship with the care coordinator<sup>3</sup> assigned to you, ask him or her to stay involved as you go through the transition process. Have a back-up plan if this person cannot continue working with you and your child or leaves unexpectedly.
- Make sure you and your child understand any medication regimen, and have prescriptions filled. Ask staff for help getting insurance or Medicaid payments if necessary.
- Make sure connections have been made to the adult service system or a transitional youth program if your child is approaching age 18 and is preparing to live independently.

#### ***Phase in the transition***

- Request short visits at home, if possible.
  - ❖ Start with a visit that includes a counselor from the program.
  - ❖ Gradually increase the length of these visits.
- Get help resolving any issues and concerns your other children may have about their brother or sister returning home.
- Ask for mediation to help your family resolve any conflicts with your returning child.

#### ***Make sure your child is prepared for life in the community***

- Your child will need some type of valid proof of her or his identity. Collect all identification, registration, and case numbers. Obtain a Social Security card number if he or she does not have one, and obtain an identification card with a photo like the ones available from your State's motor vehicle registration bureau.
- Help your child line up an afterschool job in the community, if appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> There are different titles for this role—such as family liaison, case manager, service coordinator, or research specialist.

### **Get help preparing the community school for your child's return**

- Make sure academic records of courses taken and credits earned towards graduation are transferred immediately.
  - ❖ Ask the receiving school to request records and tell you when they are received.
  - ❖ Ask the facility to send records and tell you when they are sent.
  - ❖ Offer to hand carry the records yourself.
- Ask facility staff to tell the returning school staff about specific teaching and behavioral management strategies that worked well for your child.
- If you feel that staff from your child's home community school may not welcome your child back, ask the facility staff to describe and document how your child's behavior and attitudes have changed. Make sure the receiving school gets this information in advance and has an opportunity to ask questions.
- You can also work with the receiving school to:
  - ❖ Develop a positive behavioral support plan if necessary.
  - ❖ Develop an emergency or crisis intervention plan if necessary.
  - ❖ Try to link your child with a positive peer and/or an adult mentor for social support at the school.
- When it is practical and appropriate for your child, arrange for your child to transition gradually back to his or her community school.

A **positive behavioral support plan** looks at a student within the larger context of his or her environment in school, at home, and in the community. It identifies the factors that influence or trigger challenging behavior and develops an understanding of how to provide the instructional and other supports the child needs to behave appropriately.

An **emergency or crisis intervention plan** is designed to enable the student to self-manage, reduce, or end a crisis by seeking help from a specific source. The plan is needs driven, strength based, and developed collaboratively by the family, youth, school, and other team members.

## V. CONNECTING WITH OTHER FAMILIES

### HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO GET SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FROM OTHER FAMILIES AND GIVE SOME BACK

It is not uncommon for families to feel alone and powerless or feel intimidated by staff. You may have experienced negative attitudes from staff or had a bad school experience of your own. You want to protect your child and your family and “keep it together,” but you may be afraid to ask questions or express your concerns. Likewise, teachers are not eager to deal with angry or challenging family members who are not familiar with what the school can do for their child. Connecting with other families having similar experiences can help overcome these problems and get you more involved with your child’s education.

#### ***Look for some options either at the school or in your community***

- Contact local advocacy resources and family support organizations. (See the resources listed at the end of this booklet.)
- Introduce yourself to other families on visiting day.
- Take a parent advocate, neighbor, or friend to school meetings to help you remain calm, focused, and actively participating.
- Join or start a parent support group in your community or at the facility. (See the resources listed at the end of this booklet.)
- Stay involved even after your child has left the correctional system. Ask if there is a program at the facility where you can mentor other parents and help advocate for other youth. Or, you could connect with a family-run or community agency that offers training, support, and supervision for peer mentors.

## VI. WHAT TO DO WHEN A FAMILY VISIT DOES NOT GO WELL

Your visits to your child are very important to you, your child, and the facility where she or he is living. Make every effort for these to be pleasant social occasions. If the facility rules allow it, you might bring food, other necessities, your child's favorite things, and gifts. You might share stories and experiences and make plans for the future. But sometimes, things don't go well—there is a disagreement, someone gets angry, or someone storms off. Unless such events are addressed quickly and appropriately, the bitter or resentful feelings may last, disrupting your child's progress. You or others may be so offended by the incident, or the way the institution has responded to it, that you or they just give up and stay away. There are several ways to help turn a bad family visit into a constructive learning experience. Strong support from facility staff can help you and your child deal with a bad visit.

For example, trained mediators or professional counselors, if available, can help by stepping in to calm things down as soon as a conflict begins to develop. Everyone involved should be taken to an emotionally safe environment to cool down. Then a facilitated discussion can take place that looks for the roots of the conflict without laying blame on anyone.

A **mediator** is a neutral person with training to assist in negotiations and conflict resolution.

### ***Explore ways to help resolve stressful visits***

- Ask for additional counseling to work on the problems or conflicts so they are resolved before your next visit or before your child returns home.
- Continue to talk with your child, even if it is hard or progress goes slowly.
  - ❖ Use phone conversations if face-to-face meetings are too explosive or provoke anger for anyone.
  - ❖ Ask the school to encourage your child to record thoughts and feelings in a journal. Ask your child to share this with you so you can better understand how he or she feels.
  - ❖ Try to find some common ground.

## VII. STEPPING UP

### HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE SCHOOL AND THE CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IMPROVE OVERALL

Correctional education programs need family input to improve conditions, opportunities, and outcomes for all youth. Your experiences and recommendations, and those from youth served by the program or school, are very valuable. Let the program administrator know if you are interested in helping to make the correctional education experience better for other youth and their families.

#### ***Volunteer to participate in system improvement activities***

- Ask administrators to support your involvement on:
  - ❖ Governance boards
  - ❖ Planning councils
  - ❖ Advisory groups
  - ❖ Working committees
- Encourage education administrators to seek family input when developing any plans to improve family involvement in their institution or program. Suggest they download a copy of *Working With Families of Children in the Juvenile Justice and the Corrections Systems: A Guide for Education Program Leaders, Principals, and Building Administrators*, available at [http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/docs/Family%20Involvement%20Guide\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/docs/Family%20Involvement%20Guide_FINAL.pdf).

## VIII. TIPS FOR STAYING CONNECTED WHEN YOUR CHILD IS ENROLLED IN A CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

### COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

- ✓ Ask for an orientation to the school and the facility.
- ✓ Find out if there is a family liaison who can assist you and your family. Get the person's name and phone number. Contact the liaison early during your child's stay at the facility.
- ✓ Communicate often with school staff, and let them know you want to be helpful and part of the team that is making decisions about your child's education.
- ✓ Share what you know about your child's prior education, and provide the school with educational records you may have (such as an IEP, report cards, disciplinary reports, educational evaluations, or State test results).
- ✓ Tell the school staff the name of any medication(s) your child has been taking, and let them know how well you think the medication is working.
- ✓ Tell the school staff about your child's eating habits, especially food allergies or special diets.
- ✓ If religious or spiritual practices are important to your family, share this information with facility staff. Opportunities to participate in religious services should be provided by the facility.
- ✓ Communication with school staff should be respectful, accurate, and truthful.
- ✓ Get a copy of the school rules, read them carefully, and ask any questions you have about them.
- ✓ Write down the name of the person at the school with whom you are speaking, along with the person's title and phone number. Keep short notes as a permanent record of your conversation.
- ✓ Give the school staff your phone number and address. Notify them when the information changes. Let them know the best times to call you—and when NOT to call.
- ✓ Let the staff know if you need transportation or any other assistance to visit the school.

### ONGOING ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Make every effort to attend school functions.
- ✓ Ask to see samples of the school work your child has been doing.
- ✓ Talk with your child about school when on the phone or while visiting. Let your child know that you feel school is important, and encourage him or her to do well.
- ✓ Organize all important records and papers in one place for safe keeping. Some things you will need to keep handy are: Social Security card, school records, government-issued IDs (such as a driver's license, school ID, work permits), Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or 504 plans, treatment plans, transition plans, upcoming appointments.

### PREPARING FOR TRANSITION HOME

- ✓ Be a major decisionmaker in your child's transition planning. Start planning for her or his return as soon as your child leaves home.
- ✓ Request several visits at home and in the community before your child is discharged. When necessary, use the time between visits to adjust the transition plan.
- ✓ Have your child's school records sent to you and the receiving school in time for your child's arrival—the first day.
- ✓ Work with your child's receiving school on a plan for social, emotional, and academic learning and support that will keep him or her safe, in school, and on track to graduate and prepare for work.

## IX. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATIONS AND WEB SITES—LISTED ALPHABETICALLY

You should ask the school for local contact information and additional resources.

Resource	Web Site	Phone
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law	<a href="http://www.bazelon.org">http://www.bazelon.org</a>	202-267-5930
Building Blocks for Youth	<a href="http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org">http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org</a>	e-mail to <a href="mailto:infobby@erols.com">infobby@erols.com</a>
C.H.A.D.D.—Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders	<a href="http://www.chadd.org">http://www.chadd.org</a>	National: 800-233-4050 Local: check Web site for chapter list
CECP—The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice	<a href="http://www.cecp.air.org/">http://www.cecp.air.org/</a>	E-mail to <a href="mailto:center@air.org">center@air.org</a>
EDJJ—The National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice	<a href="http://www.edjj.org">http://www.edjj.org</a>	Partner organizations and contact information for them are listed on the Web site
FFCMH—National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health	<a href="http://www.ffcmh.org">http://www.ffcmh.org</a>	National: 240-403-1901 Local: see Web site for chapters by State
LDA—Learning Disabilities Association of America	<a href="http://www.ldanatl.org">http://www.ldanatl.org</a>	National: 412-341-1515 Local: check Web site for local chapters
MHA—Mental Health America	<a href="http://www.nmha.org">http://www.nmha.org</a>	National: 800-969-6642 Local: see Web site for affiliate network
NAMI—National Alliance for the Mentally Ill	<a href="http://www.nami.org">http://www.nami.org</a>	National: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) Local: see Web site
NASP—National Association of School Psychologists	<a href="http://www.nasponline.org/families">http://www.nasponline.org/families</a>	National: 866-331-NASP
NCMHJJ—The National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice	<a href="http://www.ncmhjj.com">http://www.ncmhjj.com</a>	1-866-9NCMHJJ

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Web Site</b>	<b>Phone</b>
NDRN—National Disability Rights Protection and Advocacy	<a href="http://www.ndrn.org">http://www.ndrn.org</a>	National: 202-408-9514 Local: check the Web site for a listing of Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System and Client Assistance Programs (CAP) by state
NDTAC—The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk	<a href="http://www.neglected-delinquent.org">http://www.neglected-delinquent.org</a>	E-mail to <a href="mailto:NDTAC@air.org">NDTAC@air.org</a> or check the Web site for a staff list
NWI—National Wraparound Initiative	<a href="http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/nwi">http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/nwi</a>	206-685-2477 or 503-725-8236
PACER—Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights	<a href="http://www.pacer.org">http://www.pacer.org</a>	1-888-248-0822
PTA—Parent Teacher Association	<a href="http://www.pta.org">http://www.pta.org</a>	National: 312-670-6782 Local: see Web site for local contacts
SOC—Systems of Care	<a href="http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov">http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov</a>	240-276-1980
TAP—The Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health	<a href="http://www.tapartnership.org">http://www.tapartnership.org</a>	202-403-6827
Youth Law Center	<a href="http://www.ylc.org">http://www.ylc.org</a>	415-543-3379