

Collaborating with Families

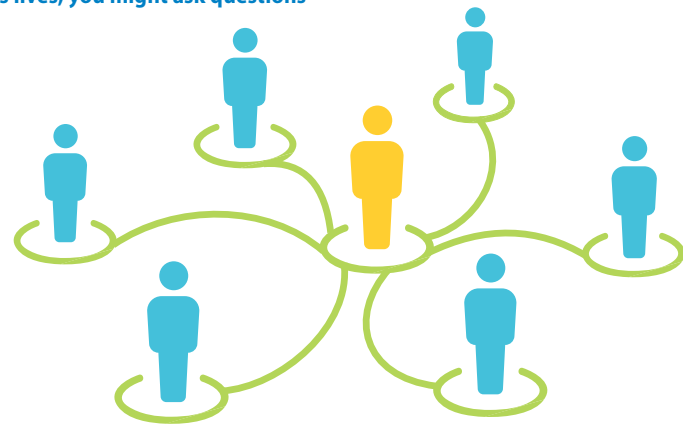
“Family” consists of the people with whom we have the closest connections: the people we count on when we need assistance and who help us meet the challenges of daily life. The individuals who make up our family vary depending on our culture, belief system, and experiences. They could be biological relatives, spouses/partners, relatives through marriage, other unrelated members of the household, friends, spiritual advisors, and others.

Families inhabit a unique position in our social system and should be considered an extension of an individual’s environment. Corrections has come to understand that to best serve people involved in the justice system and to achieve the best outcomes, it is important, whenever possible, to partner with families.

Understanding Who is Family

To understand who a person under supervision considers family, which family members are most important to them, and in what ways they and their family members are involved in each other’s lives, you might ask questions such as the following:

- Who is in your family? Who do you feel close to?
- Who do you feel you can depend on? Who depends on you?
- When something good happens to you, who do you tell? Who shares good news with you?
- In the past, when there was conflict or a crisis, how has your family supported you? How can they support you now?
- Are there any barriers to involving your family? What type of assistance does your family need?



What It Means to Collaborate with Families

The following strategies help bring families on board to support their loved ones’ efforts to lead law-abiding lives:

- **Communicate with families** that your ultimate goal is to help their loved ones live a life free of justice system involvement and be productive members of society. Explain what happens when someone is under supervision, what the expectations are of their loved ones and what expectations families can have of the system, what the rules and conditions of supervision are, and what the case plan priorities will be (e.g., what key life areas you will be addressing, what skills you will be helping people develop). ▶

- **Ask for information** about the person under supervision and about the family's expectations of supervision:
 - What do you see as your loved one's best traits? What are their strengths?
 - What challenges does your loved one have that may be barriers during their supervision?
 - As you look at the agency's rules of supervision and the court's conditions, what things do you think will be easy for your loved one to accomplish? Why? What things do you think will be challenging for your loved one to accomplish? Why?
 - What is one thing you think I should know about your loved one that is probably not in our records?
 - What do you think has contributed to your loved one's involvement in the justice system?
 - Who do you think are the most positive and harmful influences in your loved one's life? What makes you believe that?
 - What interventions and strategies have been tried in the past? What is your opinion about how they have worked?
 - What things would be most helpful for your loved one during supervision?
 - What skills do you think we could work on together to help your loved one avoid future justice system involvement?
 - What outward signs would indicate to you that your loved one is making positive progress on supervision?
- **Talk with families** about how they can support their loved ones. For example, they may be able to:
 - help their loved ones address financial, housing, childcare, transportation, and other needs
 - offer encouragement and emotional and spiritual support
 - become familiar with what their loved ones are learning under supervision and how to support this learning, including practicing newly acquired skills with their loved ones
 - reinforce their loved ones' positive behavior changes and celebrate their accomplishments
- **Ask families** what they need in order to take care of themselves and to support their loved ones. Share information about programs and resources that might be helpful to them.

TIPS FOR INVOLVING FAMILIES



- **Ask the person under supervision which family members they would like to involve. Encourage the person to include family members who are supportive; seek to minimize or avoid the involvement of those who can have a negative impact.**
- **Allow the person to decide the level and type of involvement with family members and what information may be shared with them.**
- **Encourage the person to share their case plans with their families and ask for support and guidance in helping them accomplish their goals.**
- **Help the person under supervision and their family members build the skills they need to work together to increase the likelihood of the person's success. Skills might include asking for help, giving constructive feedback, dealing with frustration, demonstrating respect, and setting boundaries.**

