

Developing a Family Guide Handout

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Family Advocates and Juvenile Justice System should collaborate to develop a “Family Guide” that can be tailored and expanded for use by each local jurisdiction

- The purpose of the guide is to help families understand the juvenile justice system and to prepare them to work closely with juvenile justice staff in order to promote positive outcomes for their children.
- People outside of juvenile justice do not know the terminology or the process of how the system works.
- It should be emphasized that it is only a guide and that each child’s experience is unique based on many factors including: needs of the juvenile, nature of the offense (e.g., whether injury or damage was done), prior arrests or adjudications, and potential risk to other people or property.

The guide should include the following, as a minimum:

- definitions and descriptions of all juvenile justice programs and processes, so the family will know what is going to happen to their child as they go through the system from the time of arrest to case termination;
- a list and description of people the family and youth will meet in the juvenile justice system and ways in which the family, juvenile probation, and juvenile court can work together to help the youth be successful;
- a bill of rights and responsibilities for everyone involved, including the family, the juvenile, probation, and the court;
- a flow chart showing the steps from arrest to case closure; and
- general ways that the family can be an advocate for their child, for example: (1) attending court and meetings with the youth, (2) keeping a file with all documents related to their child’s case and notes on who they speak with, scheduled hearings, and other dates, and (3) maintaining a working phone number and promptly returning phone calls to juvenile justice professionals.

The guide should be available in multiple languages, in print, and online. It might also be beneficial to have short videos for families with limited reading ability.

It is recommended that a committee or focus group be created to develop the guide.

- This committee should be comprised of professions from the many agencies involved in the juvenile justice system including but not limited to: Juvenile Judge, District/County Attorney, court services, Juvenile community Corrections, juvenile defense, mental health and DCF.
- It should also be a collaborative effort between family advocates and the juvenile justice system. Having family advocates on the committee will ensure that the guide is comprehensive and understandable to the target population.