

Best Practices: Family Visitation and Contact for Juveniles in Placement

Research demonstrates a positive link between family visitation and juvenile outcomes, with increased frequency of family visitation corresponding to improved juvenile behavior and academic performance. Juveniles placed in residential care who received regular visits from family members demonstrated more positive behavior and academic outcomes than juveniles who received infrequent, or no, visits from their family.

Family can and does look different for each juvenile, and a broader definition of “family” is encompassed in these recommendations. Family can go beyond the parents and/or immediate caregiver and encompasses the juvenile’s circle of care or supportive resources. It is important to engage the family/supportive resources throughout the juvenile’s stay in the facility – both for on-going support and engagement, and in preparation for the juvenile’s transition back into the community.

These recommendations pertaining to family contact are intended to encourage communication between juvenile justice system personnel, families, and juveniles who have been placed outside of their homes pursuant to a juvenile court delinquency disposition. It should be noted that the term “juvenile” is used throughout the document to refer to youth involved in the juvenile justice system, consistent with the Pennsylvania Rules of Juvenile Court Procedure.

Contact Prior To Juvenile Court Disposition

1. Juvenile probation officers should speak with juveniles and their parents/guardians prior to disposition, in addition to prosecutors, defenders, service providers, and human service agency staff involved with the juvenile/family, to inform them about their juvenile court recommendations and the reasons thereof, and to answer any questions.
2. Service provider staff who have a good working knowledge of the program should speak with juveniles and their parents/guardians, prior to disposition, to inform them about their program (including the provision of any written materials), answer any questions, and obtain contact information. Any significant family, physical, and emotional health issues, including types and dosages of medication prescribed, should be identified.

Approval of Family Contact

3. Only the Court should reduce or prohibit contact with family members. Juvenile probation officers should make service providers aware of any restrictions of contact between the juvenile and any family members that have been imposed by the Court.

Safe Arrival Call

4. The juvenile should be permitted to briefly speak with his/her parents as part of the safe arrival call.
5. Service provider staff who have a good working knowledge of the program should notify the parents/guardians of the juvenile placed in their program, that the juvenile has safely arrived at the

program. This notification should ideally be in the form of a telephone call, and should occur before the juvenile goes to bed for the evening on their first day of placement. *(See Related Resources)*

6. Parents/guardians should be asked to confirm whether there have been any changes to significant family, physical, and emotional health issues, including types and dosages of medication prescribed. The safe arrival call should also include general information about the juvenile's education, employment, and treatment, as well as whether an educational decision-maker has been appointed by the Court.
7. Parents/guardians should be given initial contact information of program staff who can provide information about the juvenile and their adjustment to the facility, as well as plans for ongoing communication.

Intake/Orientation

8. Juvenile justice service providers should provide an orientation to the program for the juvenile within 24-48 hours of arrival.
9. Juvenile justice service providers should initiate contact with the parents/guardians of a juvenile as part of the agency's intake/orientation process. This contact should occur within 24–72 hours of the juvenile's arrival to the program.
10. This contact should ideally be in the form of a telephone call, and should provide more specific information about the program including:
 - a. Contact information for a specific staff person both during and after traditional work hours;
 - b. The juvenile's education, employment, and treatment (including services pertaining to physical and behavioral health);
 - c. Arrangements for ongoing communications with the parents/guardians, including visitation; and
 - d. Procedures regarding day passes, as well as home passes that are consistent with the *JCJC Standards Governing Home Passes to Delinquent Children in Placement (See Related Resources)*, including:
 - i. transportation arrangements for the juvenile to and from the home pass;
 - ii. monitoring the behavior of the juvenile during the home pass;
 - iii. reporting non-compliance with the supervision plan during the home pass; and
 - iv. communicating with the juvenile probation department and residential facility staff, following the home pass, to determine the extent to which goals established for the home pass were achieved.
11. Program staff should ensure that juveniles and their families fully understand, and are able to access the facility's grievance procedure, by:
 - a. thoroughly orienting juveniles to the grievance procedure when they first enter a facility;
 - b. using language that juveniles and families can understand;
 - c. providing direct information of who to contact about grievances at the facility;
 - d. following up after incidents to ask if juveniles would like to file a grievance or report abuse;
 - e. supporting juveniles in completing documentation and contacting the appropriate person;
 - f. following up with juveniles and their families about the grievance after its submission; and
 - g. developing a plan for juveniles and staff members, who are the subject of grievances, pending conclusion of investigations.

Face to Face Visitation

12. All juveniles should be eligible for face to face visitation with family members unless safety issues preclude such visits.
13. Family members should be encouraged to participate, in person, during the initial treatment planning process. Family members should be encouraged to participate by telephone, or other advanced communication technologies, if they are unable to participate in person.
14. Family visitation should be offered as often as possible.
15. The duration of face to visits should be at least one hour. Face to face visits should occur for more than one hour, whenever possible, especially if family members traveled a significant distance to visit the program.
16. Visitation by siblings, and other family members and supportive people, should be encouraged and supported as much as possible. However, the Court should approve the specific individuals who are permitted to visit the juvenile while in placement.
17. Service providers, juvenile probation departments, and other human service agencies that are providing services, should work together with families to support the logistics of family visitation.
18. The degree to which visits are supervised/monitored should be individualized as appropriate to the circumstances of each case, and correspond to the level of security within each facility.
19. Juveniles should never be punished by denying them access to face to face visits with their families.

Telephone Calls and Electronic Communications

20. Juveniles should never be punished by denying them access to telephone calls or electronic communications with families.
21. The degree to which telephone calls and electronic communications are supervised/monitored should be individualized as appropriate to the circumstances of each case, and correspond to the level of security within each facility. The level of supervision/monitoring should be reviewed regularly and discussed with the assigned juvenile probation officer. However, the goal should always be to allow the parent/child privacy, whenever possible.
22. Telephone calls should be supplemented with other electronic communications (email, text, video-conferencing, etc.) as available. Juvenile probation departments should assist service providers and families to facilitate this communication with any means possible.
23. Telephone calls and electronic communications with families should occur as frequently as needed, but at least weekly.
24. Telephone calls and electronic communications should be of sufficient duration to keep the family fully aware of the child's progress in the program.

Home Passes

25. Home passes are critical to the successful transition of a juvenile from a highly structured residential program to home. The *JCJC Standards Governing Home Passes to Delinquent Children in Placement (See Related Resources)* provide detailed procedures for authorizing and arranging short-term home visits for juveniles in placement, including communicating and clarifying the following parental responsibilities associated with home visits:
 - a. Transportation arrangements for the juvenile to and from the home pass;

- b. Monitoring the behavior of the juvenile during the home pass;
 - c. Reporting non-compliance with the supervision plan during the home pass; and
 - d. Communicating with the juvenile probation department and residential facility staff, following the home pass, to determine the extent to which goals established for the home pass were achieved.
26. Plans for communicating with the juvenile throughout the home pass, and transportation plans (including back-up transportation plans), should be developed.

Related Resources

Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services. *The Family Involvement Project, Initial Conversation Script-Current Residents.*

<https://www.jcjc.pa.gov/Publications/Pages/default.aspx>

Cavanagh, C. (2015). *The Impact of Family Involvement on Youths' Success.*

<https://pbstandards.org/resources/index/274>

Juvenile Court Judges' Commission *Standards Governing Home Passes to Delinquent Children in Placement*

<https://www.jcjc.pa.gov/Publications/Documents/Standards%20Governing%20Home%20Passes%20to%20Delinquent%20Children%20in%20Placement.pdf>

Juvenile Law Center and Juveniles for Justice (2018). *Broken Bridges: How Juvenile Placements Cut Off Youth from Communities and Successful Futures.*

https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2018-12/2018BrokenBridges-FINAL-WEB_0.pdf

Shanahan, R. & Villalobos Agudelo, S. (2012). *Families as Partners: Supporting Incarcerated Youth in Ohio.*

https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/families-as-partners-supporting-incarcerated-youth-in-ohio/legacy_downloads/families-as-partners.pdf

Vera Institute of Justice (2014). *Family Engagement in the Juvenile Justice System Fact Sheet.*

https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/family-engagement-in-the-juvenile-justice-system/legacy_downloads/family-engagement-juvenile-justice.pdf

Villalobos Agudelo, S. (2013). *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth's Behavior and School Performance Findings from the Families as Partners Project.*

https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/the-impact-of-family-visitation-on-incarcerated-youths-behavior-and-school-performance-findings-from-the-families-as-partners-project/legacy_downloads/impact-of-family-visitation-on-incarcerated-youth-brief.pdf