

POLICY 3.3

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

3.3.1 Purpose

To guide local Community Policy and Management Teams (CPMT) under the Children's Services Act (CSA) concerning effective engagement with children and families seeking and receiving services. Effective family engagement is a core component in the system of care and is essential for achieving positive outcomes for children, families, and communities.

3.3.2 Authority

- A. Section 2.2-5200.A. of the *Code of Virginia (COV)* defines the intention to the CSA "to create a collaborative system of services and funding that is child-centered, family-focused and community-based ..." emphasizing the key role of children and families as partners in the CSA process.
- B. COV Section 2.2-2506 states that the CPMT "shall manage the cooperative efforts in each community to serve better the needs of troubled and at-risk youth and their families..." This responsibility includes the duty to: "Develop interagency policies and procedures to govern the provision of services to children and families in its community. (§2.2-5206 (1))
- C. COV Section 2.2-2508 (2) specifies that the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) shall "Provide for family participation in all aspects of assessment, planning, and implementation of services."
- D. COV Section 2.2-2508 (3) specifies that the FAPT shall: "Provide for the participation of foster parents in the assessment, planning, and implementation of services when a child has a program goal of permanent foster care or is in a long-term foster care placement."... "The opinions of the foster parents shall be considered by the family assessment and planning team in its deliberations."
- E. COV Section 2.2-2649 (4) requires the Office of Children's Services (OCS) to "provide training and technical assistance to localities in the provision of efficient and effective services that are responsive to the strengths and needs of troubled youth and their families." COV Section 2.2-2649 (10) requires OCS to identify, disseminate, and provide annual training for CSA staff and other interested parties on best practices and evidence-based practices related to the CSA program.

3.3.3 Definitions

"Community Policy and Management Team (CMPT)" is the entity that develops, implements, and monitors the local CSA program through policy development, quality assurance, and oversight functions.

For this policy's purpose, "Family" is broadly defined to include the youth and all persons the youth considers/defines as part of their family and who may be involved with or affected by the services provided. The family includes birth parents, relative or fictive kin, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, siblings (including half- and adult siblings), legal custodians, natural supports, and any other primary or secondary caretakers, including prospective caretakers in the case of children in the custody of a child-servicing agency.

"Family engagement" is a relationship-focused approach to establish and maintain full participation of families in the CSA process to make decisions leading to successful long-term outcomes. Families must be included as critical stakeholders to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of youth and their families. Family engagement acknowledges, respects, and incorporates the family's unique history and experiences, including cultural, linguistic, and other essential aspects of self-identity into all decision-making processes.

"Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT)" is a locality's Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) that implements the CSA by recommending services for children and families. When making a decision, the team will take into consideration every child and family's unique strengths and challenges when addressing their specific needs as best they can. Families are included in all FAPT assessment, service planning, and decision making.

"System of Care" is the collaborative framework used in CSA to address youth and families' needs, ideally generating optimal solutions to complex situations. The System of Care places the youth and family in the central role in service planning.

3.3.4 Values Statements

- A. The State Executive Council for Children's Services (SEC) maintains that meeting the legislative intent for family participation in CSA must go beyond simply inviting family members to attend FAPT meetings and informing them about the decisions made in the FAPT process. The decision-making process must be family-driven.
- B. The underlying values of CSA and the System of Care include the following beliefs:
 1. All families have strengths;
 2. Families are the experts on themselves;

3. Families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect;
4. When supported, families can make well-informed decisions about themselves and their children;
5. Family voice and choice is a trauma-informed approach to service engagement;
6. Families are shaped by their rich and unique histories and cultural backgrounds. This includes the entirety of those elements that shape individual members' identities and the family as a whole. Such elements include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, and history of personal and collective trauma.
7. Outcomes improve when families are involved in decision-making; and
8. A team that genuinely includes youth and family is often more capable of creative and high-quality decision-making than individuals or groups of professionals alone.

3.3.5 CSA Family Engagement Requirements

- A. CPMTs must have written policies for FAPT processes that describe how they ensure family and youth involvement in the assessment, planning, delivery, and review of services.
 1. Policies should make allowances for family members who cannot attend meetings held during regular business hours. Local CSA programs should consider holding FAPT meetings at non-traditional hours, prioritizing maximum family engagement.
 2. Local CSA programs should explore and, where feasible, arrange audio, video, and other Access and Functional Needs component platforms for virtual participation, when appropriate.
- B. All communication with youth and family, whether oral or in writing, will be provided, as feasible, in the youth and family's language of choice, and be mindful of various dialects and literacy needs.
 1. CSA programs and participating agencies should identify resources and arrange for translation services where needed.
 2. CSA program policies and practices should incorporate a review process to assure that all communication materials are easily understandable and accessible to families. This should include minimal use of jargon and technical language.

3. The Office of Children's Services will provide a list of resources to assist localities with this requirement.
- C. The CPMT is responsible for equitable, consistent, efficient, and effective CSA services to children and their families. Redundant or duplicative processes should be streamlined, both within the CSA program and across child-serving agencies, to promote family engagement.
 1. For example, processes that require a youth and family to repeatedly "tell their story," which may be a traumatic trigger, should be eliminated to the greatest extent possible.
 - D. Youth and family shall be given accurate information regarding the CSA process, their role and rights during the process, and how decisions are made regarding service delivery. This information includes an explanation of the affiliations and roles of the various participant in the process.
 1. Training, along with general information regarding the eligibility for CSA and the CSA decision-making process, should be available for all interested stakeholders.
 - E. CPMTs are responsible for implementing procedures to assess and measure the quality of family engagement protocols and processes. These include, but are not limited to, periodic surveys of youth and families to better understand the CSA process from their perspectives. Local CSA programs should strive to stay aware of the success of their family engagement efforts and areas for improvement.
 - E. CSA program staff and agency participants should hold themselves to the highest standards of respect for and responsiveness to all aspects of diversity, including differences in race, economic status, culture, disability status, gender identity, and other areas when interacting with youth and family.
 - F. Local CSA programs should engage in outreach regarding the CSA process to marginalized youth and families, including, but not limited to, non-English speakers, those experiencing housing insecurity, and those experiencing poverty. In doing so, the CPMT should form partnerships with diverse and representative families, businesses, and community organizations.

3.3.6 Role of the Office of Children's Services (OCS)

- A. Following its statutory responsibilities (OCS) will provide training and technical assistance to local CSA programs regarding family engagement. Such training and technical assistance can take place through a variety of formats and delivery mechanisms.
1. OCS shall review family engagement practices in local CSA programs as a component of its interactions with local CSA programs. OCS will compile periodic state-level reports summarizing family engagement practices, activities, and available resources.
 2. OCS shall provide tools (e.g., a model family survey, program self-assessment frameworks) for use by local CSA programs in evaluating and improving their family engagement policies and practices.

Public Comment Draft