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The Challenge and Opportunity of Parental Involvement in Juvenile Justice Services

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Abstract

The active involvement of parents – whether as recipients, extenders, or managers of services – during their youth's experience with the juvenile justice system is widely assumed to be crucial. Parents and family advocacy groups note persisting concerns with the degree to which successful parental involvement is achieved. Justice system providers are highly motivated and actively working to make improvements. These coalescing interests provide a strong motivation for innovation and improvement regarding family involvement, but the likely success of these efforts is severely limited by the absence of any detailed definition of parental involvement or validated measure of this construct. Determining whether and how parental involvement works in juvenile justice services depends on the development of clear models and sound measurement.

Efforts in other child serving systems offer guidance to achieve this goal. A multidimensional working model developed with parents involved in child protective services is presented as a template for developing a model for parental involvement in juvenile justice. Features of the model requiring changes to make it more adaptable to juvenile justice are identified. A systematic research agenda for developing methods and measures to meet the present demands for enhanced parental involvement in juvenile justice services is presented.

The parent-child relationship, whether positive or negative, is a significant factor in adolescent development. An adolescent moves to independence from this primary relationship, and returns to it in varying ways throughout adulthood. As a result, parental

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involvement is now widely recognized as a crucial consideration for promoting positive child outcomes in education, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice.¹

The potential value of parental involvement and the forms that it might take vary across service systems. In juvenile justice services (as in child welfare services), it can be argued that the importance of parental involvement is still not adequately appreciated, and that the methods for realizing parental involvement are still under-developed. This is not too surprising. The historical rationale for intervention in both of these systems of care is the presumption that the state may need to usurp the parents' role to ensure the safety of the youth and/or the community. Indeed, juvenile justice professionals, under the broad doctrine of *parens patriae*, oftentimes actively assert themselves into a parent role (acting *in loco parentis*), under the presumption that the existing family dynamics are part of the problem that precipitated state involvement in the first place. Child welfare and juvenile justice service providers are often in an adversarial position with the parent, simultaneously trying to engage in a positive and supportive role with parents while still meeting the larger societal goals of community or child protection. The foundational doctrine of *parens patriae*, while often necessary, is nonetheless in conflict with the goal of empowering and supporting parents (Pennell, Shapiro & Spigner, 2011). The idea of working with parents thus often evokes ambivalence from service providers; parents are sometimes a negative influence and sometimes a positive resource to be incorporated into an intervention. For service providers, knowing which view is accurate and how to proceed with parents is an art. Parental involvement therefore is not always considered a positive goal and can often be a practice with more perceived downside risks and problems than potential payoff.

Juvenile justice professionals have recently begun moving toward addressing the challenge of increasing positive parent involvement. A recent survey of juvenile justice probation and correctional leaders (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2008) identified family involvement as one of three most important issues, but also the most operationally challenging issue facing the juvenile system. Juvenile justice personnel in both community and residential settings often express a recognition of the potential value of parental involvement (Pennell, Shapiro, & Spinger, 2011), but remain unlikely to have a clear method for successfully engaging and involving parents. It is also safe to say that the level of recognition regarding the value of parental involvement, and the level of commitment to adopting changes to improve parental involvement, vary markedly across jurisdictions. Rhetoric about the value of parental involvement seems high in juvenile justice currently, but implementation of systematic steps to improve it have been limited to date.

Improving parental involvement in juvenile justice requires a full recognition of the inherent tensions of service provision within the framework of juvenile justice and the development of methods for involving parents constructively in light of these realities. There is, not yet, however, a clear and consistent conceptualization of what parental involvement looks like,

¹It must be noted that, for many youth, a "parental" relationship may not be the one had with a biological or adoptive parent; it may be the one with an extended family member or other caretaker who provides primary instrumental, social, and emotional support. We think of the term *parents* as referring to those with primary responsibility of care for a child regardless of their nominal relationship to that child. When we speak of parental involvement, then, we mean to denote the process of engaging this potentially wide range of individuals in a positive process promoting the successful development of an adolescent.

or should look like, in juvenile justice. Currently, the juvenile justice system is relying on compelling anecdotes about the importance of parental involvement (OJJDP, 2013), but widespread adoption of this practice requires an elaborated vision of what parental involvement might look like in juvenile justice and methods for knowing when satisfactory parental involvement is actually being achieved. Knowing whether parental involvement is related to positive outcomes for adolescents in the system is a question that is even further downstream from these developments.

Elaboration of a model for parental involvement in juvenile justice can allow for the development and distribution of empirical measures. With measures, evidence-based practices can be identified, routinized, and disseminated. Until these basic issues about conceptualization and measurement are addressed, improving parental involvement in juvenile justice will remain an art, a fad, or a political movement with considerable variability within and across jurisdictions. With some common concepts and measures, however, parental involvement can become a developed strategy that can be shared, examined, and enhanced.

This paper discusses the nuances of parental involvement in the juvenile justice system and proposes an initial framework to clarify this construct in juvenile justice. It argues for increased conceptual clarity and sound measurement. Addressing these issues is an essential first step in determining if and how parental involvement might improve intervention in the juvenile justice system.

Parental involvement in education, mental health, and child welfare services

Parental involvement in child services has been implicated as a necessary element to facilitate positive treatment outcomes in the mental health, education, and child welfare sectors (Waugh & Kjos, 1992; Richards, Bowers, Lazicki, Krall, & Jacobs, 2008; Solish & Perry, 2008; Reynolds, 1992; Zellman & Waterman, 1998; Atkinson & Butler, 1996). It may be particularly crucial when out of home placement is involved (Nickerson, Brooks, Colby, Rickert, & Salamone, 2006). It is important to look at what the idea of parental involvement means to other professionals serving children and adolescents before determining what it might mean in juvenile justice service provision.

Family-driven care

Perhaps the most far-reaching and ambitious movement regarding parental involvement is that of “family-driven” care. Arising out of the systems of care approach (SAMHSA, 2003), family-driven care espouses a powerful, central role for parents in the provision of services, with treatment goals, objectives, and strategies being ultimately decided according to what the parent sees as most beneficial for the family and their child. The idea is that the parent knows best about what makes sense for family members and their child, and that service providers should be able to collaborate with parents about intervention goals and strategies as well as adapt their interventions to the individualized needs of children in their care. In short, the parents are “in charge” of setting priorities and service goals.

The broad application of this family-driven approach sees parents as not only partners in service planning in individual cases, but also as active and equal participants in program operations and policy formation (Williamson & Gray, 2011). In this formulation, parents are more than just individuals who are active agents in the implementation of treatment plans, but are instead proactive agents in the formulation of individual treatment approaches, design of programs, and promotion of policies for services responsive to the needs of parents, families, and communities. This vision of parental involvement assumes, and promotes, the involvement of parents at multiple levels of service provision. This approach is premised on the idea that a smaller, self-selected, but highly empowered and vocal, number of parents will move from active engagement regarding their child's problems to supporting and educating other parents, and on to sitting at the table as an equal partners in governance bodies. As such, family-driven care represents both a highly collaborative system of parental involvement in individual case planning and service provision as well as a macro-level intervention aimed at making the family voice more central to the formulation of policy and practice standards.

The implementation of family-driven care is a complex work in progress (Ferreira, 2011), with numerous locales currently attempting to design effective frameworks that can work across multiple service systems (e.g., special education, mental health, juvenile justice). Empowering families at both the individual case level as well as the policy formation level requires a complex set of activities that coordinate resources and political strategy, and the outcomes of these efforts are unclear. Parents in Systems of Care communities reported highly positive feelings regarding their engagement in services and service planning (SAMHSA, 2003); but it remains unclear if parental involvement influences child outcomes, and which, if any, particular mechanisms of parental involvement are essential for positive outcomes. As Jivangee & Robinson (2007) observed regarding the involvement of families in System of Care evaluations:

local communities have been left largely on their own to develop implementation strategies from the general directives provided by federal policy. Consequently, there is a gap in the knowledge base regarding how innovations are actually implemented, given the varying constraints and opportunities or resources present in local community contexts. (p. 370)

The question of how effective such an approach might be ultimately for improving child and family outcomes is still an open question (Hoagwood, 2005).

Other models of parental involvement

The vast amount of activities related to parental involvement are not as complex as the efforts for family-driven care. Instead, most are focused on enlisting parents to further the aims of the intervention model being used and thus possibly increasing the impact of a given intervention. As a result, the general models of involvement that emerge usually involve parents as recipients of services (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Dowell & Ogles, 2010; McKay & Bannon, 2004), extenders of service activities (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005), or advocates or service managers (MacKinnon-Lewis, Kaufman & Frabutt, 2002; Olin et al., 2010). These roles

vary across settings in ways that reflect the needs or emphases of the service system involved.

Parents as recipients of services—Each child serving sector anticipates that parents will at some level participate by receiving services directly or indirectly. The mental health service sector, in particular, has adopted parent involvement as a core value; espousing it as a critical feature of care in the Child and Adolescent Service System Program instituted by the National Institute of Health in 1984 (Stroul & Friedman, 1986). On the whole, work in this area has focused primarily on parental participation in therapy (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Dowell & Ogles, 2010), and empirical evidence suggests that parent and family involvement in services is important (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998) if not essential (Szapocznik & Williams, 2000) for positive child outcomes in treatment. Some intervention models integrate parents into their intervention approach in a more particular and specified fashion (e.g. multisystemic therapy, or MST; Cunningham & Henggeler, 1999) than others. In addition, some attention has been directed toward the concrete, contextual and agency-based obstacles (McKay & Bannon, 2004) or parental beliefs (e.g. Kazdin, 2000a; Logan & King, 2001) that might inhibit or undermine the engagement of parents in therapeutic services. Challenges to family involvement in the mental health system (as well as other service sectors) include lack of funds for transportation and child care, family burden associated with caring for an emotionally disturbed youth, confusing communication with the system, and difficulties accessing appropriate care (e.g. Clausen, Dresser, Rosenblatt & Attkisson, 1998). Overall, however, the scope and depth of empirical research on parental involvement in mental health is limited (McKay and Bannon, 2004), and very few good, empirically validated measures of parental involvement in children's mental health services are readily available.

Parents as service extenders—Parents may be expected to carry out one or more tasks to reinforce or extend the services that are being provided directly for their child. For instance, in mental health services, parents may be expected to help their child practice new skills learned in therapy in interactions at home, such as carrying out exposure and response prevention techniques to reduce anxiety (Knox, Albano, & Barlow, 1996), or to engage in discrete trial training activities for a child with autism (Thomson, Martin, Arnal, Fazzio, & Yu, 2009). Work in the education sector has focused on getting parents to spend time reading or helping with homework. In addition, in education, federal policy (Title 1 of the No Child Left Behind Act) mandates that participating state agencies must include parents as active participants in devising educational plans for their children and that the agency must provide parents with an annual report summarizing their child's progress (a difficult task often complicated by language barriers; Landsverk, 2004). Parents, meanwhile, identify obstacles to becoming engaged in their children's schooling, including minimal opportunities for involvement, lack of respect, and poor communication from schools (Anfara & Mertens, 2008).

Collaborative models of involvement have been developed in education, often focusing on parent-teacher conferences. Walker and colleagues (2005) have developed a hierarchical model in which parental motivational beliefs, parental perceptions of invitations to involvement, and life contextual factors each contribute independently to parental

involvement in child educational services and activities. This model also describes possible mechanisms underlying parental involvement (i.e., parental modeling, reinforcement and instruction), with a number of associated measures (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

Parents as advocates or service managers—Less commonly, service sectors may encourage or envision parents playing a broader advocacy role, including advocacy on behalf of their own child as well as on behalf of a broader population of children. The Parent Empowerment Program (PEP; Olin et al., 2010), for example, provides a manualized training and consultation program designed to prepare family peer advocates working with families in child welfare services. The goals include improving caregiver knowledge about services, increasing service-related self-efficacy, and developing collaborative skills.

Reviews of the impact of different types of parental involvement indicate a mixed record of effectiveness (see Hoagwood, 2005; Brank, Lane, Turner, Fain & Sehgal, 2008; Lane et al., 2005). For example, Mattingly and colleagues (2002) examined 41 studies of parental involvement in education settings, concluding that there was little empirical support for the claim that parental involvement improves student achievement given the design, methodological and analytic flaws across these studies. A synthesis of findings from 67 experimental evaluations of more broadly based parental involvement interventions for children (Mbwana, Terzian & Moore, 2009) indicated that parental involvement programs do not affect all outcomes (e.g. health and nutrition, education, school, mental health and reproductive health) equally or consistently. Similarly, a test of the family engagement efforts within Multisystemic Therapy (MST) found increased caregiver perceptions of service-related empowerment and improved family relations, but no relation to improved youth behavior (Cunningham, Henggeler, Brondino & Pickrel, 1999). Finally, an evaluation of the Vanderbilt Caregiver Empowerment project uncovered sustained growth in parent's knowledge but no effect on caregiver involvement with treatment, service use or the mental health status of the child after one year (Bickman, Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen & Schilling 1998). For our purposes here, it is simply worth noting that there is not yet a uniform, well documented method for parental involvement with a well established record of success. The problem of integrating parental involvement into juvenile justice is thus more involved than simply transferring an existing technology.

Parental involvement in juvenile justice

The extent of family involvement efforts in juvenile justice

Some court initiatives do highlight parental involvement as a focal concern. For example, the balanced and restorative justice approach (BARJ; Bazemore & Umbreit, 1994), adopted by many juvenile systems, recognizes parental involvement as a key component of intervention efforts. This approach seeks to repair the harm of juvenile crimes by involving the entire community in rehabilitating offenders and holding the adolescents accountable for their behavior. Restorative justice approaches endorse aspirational themes regarding parental involvement (e.g. communication, respect, inclusion), and often use family group conferences as a method for facilitating this involvement. These meetings allow the individuals most affected by a particular crime (including the victim, the offender, the family and friends) to discuss the crime and decide how the offender should be held

accountable (Umbreit, 2000). In addition, the widely touted Missouri Model (Mendel, 2010) attempts to systematically engage parents and family members from the first day of a youth's commitment to custody, and to involve parents in planning for release, including re-enrolling in school, identifying extracurricular activities, setting curfews and other rules. Parents are "encouraged to engage, invest, and take ownership in the process as active collaborators" (Mendel, 2010; p, 34). Finally, some other state level juvenile justice reforms (e.g., the MacArthur Foundation Models for Change initiative, <http://www.modelsforchange.net/index.html>) have also identified parental involvement as a target for focused energy.

On the whole, though, efforts to improve parental involvement in juvenile justice remain sporadic and isolated (Pennell, Shapiro & Spigner, 2011). The overall level of innovative programming to include parents into juvenile justice processing still seems to fall short of the likely importance of this activity for preventing reoffending (National Academy of Sciences, 2012). In addition, while many commentators and organizations make the case for the importance of parental involvement (e.g., Harvell, Rodas & Hendey, 2004), these recommendations usually end in generalities (i.e., statements about what "should" be done with few explicit operational statements regarding *how* to make it happen). However, as recently observed about juvenile justice nationwide, there is no "system-wide adoption of effective, evidence based strategies and services that support the family role at both the individual child and the larger policy and planning level" (Luckenbill & Yeager, 2009, p. 5).

Features of the juvenile justice system

Particular aspects of the goals and operations of juvenile justice make the development of systems for parental involvement particularly challenging. Two features of the juvenile justice system are important to consider when thinking about what parental involvement might mean in this sector of services, in contrast to what it might mean in educational or mental health services. The issues that differentiate juvenile justice are 1) problem definition, and 2) the structure of decision making.

Problem definition—The juvenile justice system is mainly designed to address violations of the law rather than a diagnostic condition. In juvenile delinquency cases, adolescents and their families come to the attention of the court because of a specific act on the child's part, and the court searches for ways to address this particular incident, within the limits prescribed by principles such as due process and proportionality of punishment. The primary goal of the court is to resolve an infraction of the law in a way that promotes accountability in the child and family, illustrates fairness, and prevents re-offending (National Research Council, 2012).

This orientation matters for how family involvement might be conceptualized by probation officers and judges. The juvenile justice system is not committed to providing services for an identified long term disorder or promoting positive development in multiple realms of an adolescent's life. The incident that brings an adolescent into the juvenile justice system is usually seen as an opportunity to help an adolescent through a mistake in their life rather than to identify and intervene with a particular psychological problem (e.g., an identifiable

mental disorder). In adolescents with more serious or chronic patterns of offending, the juvenile justice system would be more invested in working with families to avert a long term pattern of criminal offending. In most of the situations coming before the court, however, if the professionals in this system never see the adolescent or his/her family again, things are going well. Extended family involvement thus matters for a small subset of cases that come to the court; for the vast majority of cases, a family involvement approach that motivates parents to do increased monitoring or to engage with other service providers (using something akin to motivational interviewing approaches; Miller & Rollnick 2002; Kinney, Haapala & Booth, 1991) is seen as a reasonable goal. The resources of the court are not sufficient to do otherwise, and increased court involvement in family life is not a central or desirable goal.

Structure of decision making—The juvenile justice system operates according to a set of legally mandated decision points, from arrest to disposition, and each of these is marked by an official hearing, often before a judge. Juvenile justice system professionals prepare reports for these hearings that include assessments of the family's involvement and potential as a resource for promoting the adolescent's positive development. Developing a fully collaborative model for family involvement within this context is a challenge, since family members can well be reluctant to have the regularities of their family life and relationship with their adolescent open for scrutiny in court hearings. In addition, there is little room for negotiation with a judge during a hearing, and often little regard for the family's perspective if it disagrees with the probation officer's assessment. When a judge makes a determination (e.g., an adolescent must attend a particular program or be placed), this is rarely, if ever, the result of a process that heavily weighs the family's formulation of the issues. Implementing an empowering process of family involvement in a system that is structured to vest ultimate power with a judge who receives summary reports is a difficult task.

Juvenile justice professionals also must adjust to the changing nature of parental involvement as youth move through the justice system. Six stages of delinquency case processing are generally recognized: arrest/charging, juvenile court intake, formal processing, adjudication, disposition and aftercare (Snyder & Sickmond, 2006). At each stage, the range of options and opportunities for parental involvement may be delimited, due to statutory mandates and/or the nature of the activities and level of state intervention at that point. There are, however, some aspects of the relationship between parents and system professionals (e.g., level of communication, respect) that are probably consistently important at all stage of processing, although to differing degrees at different points. For example, at the initial contact, police officers indicate they are more likely to use diversion options when parents are involved in a positive manner (Harvell, Rodas & Hendy, 2004). Thus, parents who are simply present and interested are likely to have an impact at this stage of system processing. In contrast, parental involvement during the decision to place a child at disposition or monitoring during aftercare encompasses a broader range of issues, such as access to information about family events, therapy attendance, and involvement in planning meetings. Parental involvement at these later stages of court involvement requires a great deal more time, energy and understanding of juvenile justice system operations and expectations. The main point here is that parental involvement is not a uniform construct

across all types of juvenile justice system processing. The expectations of both systems professionals and parents will shift with the adolescent's level of involvement in the juvenile justice system and the complexity of the issues being faced.

Integrating family involvement into juvenile justice practice requires recognition of these features of the juvenile justice system. The aspects of family involvement that must be built into and assessed for juvenile justice may or may not be ones that are central to the integration of family involvement into other service systems. As noted by Jacobs, Miranda-Julian and Kaplan (2011), the first item on the agenda for formulating the next generation of parental involvement in juvenile justice is to "redefine how parental participation or involvement is conceptualized, operationalized and represented in the literature" (p. 215). We would contend that it is equally important to think about how models of parental involvement fit into the operational regularities of juvenile justice and to design and assess any future efforts accordingly.

Accounts of current practice

In juvenile justice, there is little doubt that parents and service providers both see current efforts at parental involvement as inadequate (OJJDP, 2013). Focus groups reveal that parents perceive being blamed for the youth's problems, regarded as obstacles, and insufficiently involved in crucial decision-making and planning processes during disposition, placement, and preparation for aftercare (Luckenbill & Yeager, 2009; Osher & Shufelt, 2006). The themes identified from one set of focus groups were a) "a lack of early, accessible, responsive and effective prevention and early intervention services in the community", 2) an assertion that "respect should be the basis for all interactions between the family and system", 3) "local juvenile justice system leaders should ensure that opportunities exist for proactive and effective family involvement at each stage of involvement", and 4) "that laws, regulations, training and policy should be reviewed to eliminate barriers to, and increase capacity for, proactive and effective family involvement" (Luckenbill & Yeager, 2009).

These aspects of parental and professional dissatisfaction can inform our vision of what optimal parental involvement might look like. The last two themes identified in these focus groups – the need for more opportunities and better policies – are largely prescriptions for policies that promote family involvement. They call for practices and rules that are more sensitive to the realities of parents' lives, but there are no specifics about what might indicate increased family involvement resulting from the implementation of these policies. While valid aspirational goals, they do not identify and clarify broader constructs that might be relevant to the formulation of a conceptual model of parental involvement. However, the first two themes identified in the focus groups – the need for earlier intervention and respect – point to issues that must be considered in the formulation of any framework characterizing parental involvement in juvenile justice.

The importance of history

The first theme of inadequate resources when childhood problems arise initially raises the need to consider, in any formulation of a parental involvement strategy, the creeping

isolation from agencies and natural supports that often occurs with parents of disruptive children. Parent-teacher conferences, soccer games, or interactions with neighbors can often bring confrontations or embarrassing incidents, rather than communal support for these parents. It is thus reasonable that withdrawal from community involvements or estrangement from service providers is a common experience. By the time a child's behavior reaches the level of being known to the court, this sense of being ostracized or ignored can be firmly entrenched. Parents of adolescents entering the juvenile justice system, over time, may have become worn down from dealing with their child's behavior on their own. Many parents of adolescents involved in juvenile justice may thus be relatively unaware of the range of services available to provide support and/or education, or be alienated from these providers. Alternatively, they may be wary of pursuing services from other sectors (e.g., mental health) because of concerns about stigma.

One element of any conceptualization of parental involvement would thus seem to be a consideration of the history of service use as well as the level of knowledge and involvement on the part of the parent; i.e., the efforts taken by the parent to identify community resources to meet their child and family needs and to make connections to those resources. Is the parent passive in their awareness of, approach to, and use of resources, or does he or she invest effort to seek out information, make contact with resource providers, and work proactively to ensure that the resources are delivered as expected? This theme also highlights the need for parents to be informed about available community options and to advocate for inclusion in these services on behalf of the child. Helping a parent to improve knowledge, skills and capacity for this type of investment would enhance the ability to make the most of the services that are available in a particular community. Any accurate depiction of parental involvement would thus need to include consideration of how a parent's service history and prior efforts to engage services for their child has predisposed them to view the court's services.

The dynamic of feeling that there were never adequate services provided early in a child's development may often be intertwined with a parent's feeling of being unjustly blamed for an adolescent's undesirable, aggressive or rule-violating behavior (Mulvey, 2010). It is worth noting that this may be more than just a self-serving justification for poor parenting. Children bring their own dispositions to the parent-child relationship, and some children's behavior may overwhelm even effective parenting strategies. A 10-year study of children who were recruited from outpatient behavioral health treatment found that children's disruptive behavior had more of an impact on parenting behaviors than parenting behaviors had on children's behaviors (Burke, Pardini, & Loeber, 2008). Some parents may simply be worn down from years of struggle and a sense of failure by the time that a child becomes engaged in juvenile justice services. Their reserve capacity for positive engagement may be understandably low.

Respect and communication

The identification of respect as a central component of parental involvement highlights the importance of developing a positive affective tie between a service provider and parents. Part of parental involvement involves a felt connection, not just a series of completed

actions. Experiencing reciprocity in the working relationship between parent and provider should logically enhance the degree to which the parent feels and expresses commitment to work with a provider (Garland, Haine-Schlagel, Accurso, Baker-Ericzen & Brookman-Frazee, 2012; Marcus, Kashy, Wintersteen & Diamond, 2011). At least part of this connection with a service provider would seem to be the ability of the parent to communicate their beliefs, opinions, concerns and suggestions openly. The importance of creating an atmosphere that promotes this type of exchange is evident in many juvenile justice system parent handbooks which assure parents of professional, courteous and respectful treatment (see, for example, the Texas Youth Commission, 2008).

Developing a model of family involvement for juvenile justice

Necessary components of any model for parental involvement in juvenile justice

As mentioned previously, the decades-long difficulties with developing strategies for increasing or improving parental involvement in juvenile court service provision arise largely from a lack of conceptualization and agreement on the relevant components and definitions of parental involvement in the context of the juvenile justice system. As also indicated above, there is little specific guidance from other service sectors about the most relevant components or processes underpinning successful parental involvement. Our review so far leads to several conclusions about some aspects of a model for parental involvement that increase its likely effectiveness in juvenile justice.

First, longer term, intensive efforts at parental involvement are probably most likely to succeed in juvenile justice if they focus on serious, chronic offenders. These cases are seen differently by the juvenile justice system, and warrant a longer term view in which parental involvement is salient. In the educational and mental health systems, the problems precipitating parental involvement in the first place (educational or behavioral disruption, identifiable mental health problems) are usually indicative of issues that these systems are going to have to deal with for a longer time period with that adolescent and family. The situation where the idea of longer and more intense parental involvement makes sense in juvenile justice is one where the adolescent is a chronic or serious offender who will probably be repeatedly involved in the justice system, possibly needing institutional and re-entry services, in which the parents usually play an important role. Focusing initial parental involvement efforts on these situations where the juvenile justice system sees a more lasting involvement would probably be useful. As mentioned previously, an intervention to promote use of community-based services by parents in the initial stages of involvement with juvenile justice could be a useful service, but this does not match the general idea of parental involvement as envisioned in other service sectors.

Second, the implementation of a model stressing empowerment and integrated decision making with the juvenile court will be difficult to accomplish initially. As mentioned above, the juvenile justice system is oriented toward structured decision making about specific acts or decision points, with limited investment in long term involvement with families. In addition, the formalized and sequential decision making present in juvenile justice is not structured well to accommodate the level of clinical process required in most parental empowerment models. Integrating parental involvement into court practice in terms of how

parents can work effectively with probation services and other service providers (as service extenders or case managers, as outlined above) and documenting these efforts for court review would be an initial strategy more in line with the current court ethos.

Third, a conceptualization of family involvement in juvenile justice needs to include methods for addressing the affective ties between court personnel and parents as well as the parent's history of program involvement. Focus group results and models of parental involvement in other areas all stress the importance of respect and communication in the relations between service providers and parents. This aspect of the provider-parent tie appears central in the juvenile system, where blame for an adolescent's behavior is easily attributed to the parent and the formality of legal involvement creates possible mistrust regarding motives. In addition, models of parental involvement in juvenile justice would do well to address a parent's prior experiences with service providers and the sense that an adolescent's problems might be intractable by the time the situation gets to court involvement. Predispositions about the value of services appears to be a strong factor related to parental investment and participation.

The need for measures

As mentioned earlier, clarification of the dimensions of parental involvement in juvenile justice is the first step toward implementing these initiatives in a systematic fashion. The other activity that must be pursued in tandem with program operations is the development and application of measures regarding types and levels of parental involvement. The development of sound measurement strategies that reflect the components of these interventions is essential to the dissemination and assessment of the impact of these efforts.

Unfortunately, there are few established measures of the process of parental involvement. Based on our earlier discussion, it seems clear, however, that any method of measuring the process of family involvement in juvenile justice should try to tap, at a minimum, the level of parental involvement in court mandated activities, parental predispositions to service provision, and the affective quality of the relationship between the parent and court personnel or providers. These dimensions of parental involvement could be valuable to assess over time to see if increases in different dimensions are related to outcomes.

There are some examples of efforts to develop measures of parental involvement in child welfare services, which shares some key features with involvement in juvenile justice setting (e.g. a lack of volitional participation, potential antagonistic purposes between parent and provider, possible out of home placement). These can serve as guides for the types of measures that might be developed in juvenile justice. Two such examples can be found in Yatchmenoff (2005) and Alpert & Britner (2007); each presents a measure of parental perceptions of their relationship with caseworkers and whether caseworkers are providing helpful services. The multidimensional model of Yatchmenoff (2005), supported with confirmatory factor modeling, serves the present purposes somewhat better than the unidimensional approach taken in Alpert and Britner (2007).

The Yatchmenoff (2005) measure was used in a study of sources of income among families in the child welfare system in the state of Washington (Marcenko, Hook, Romich, & Lee,

2012). Parents who had initiated the contact with child welfare of their own volition (i.e. without an official referral) were significantly higher in engagement, providing some validation of the measure. Somewhat surprising, however, parents who acknowledged substance use reported higher levels of engagement. The authors speculated that a willingness to disclose substance use may signal a greater receptivity to engagement in services, or that the child welfare system was somehow seen as supportive of efforts to seek help for substance use (Marcenko, et al., 2012). The Yatchmenoff (2005) measure has not appeared extensively in the child welfare literature, although it has been implemented statewide in the child welfare system in Washington (Marcenko et al., 2009).

This model is presented here not as an endorsement of the specific model for direct adoption into juvenile justice. It simply provides a potential starting point and illustration of the types of dimensions that might be considered in a measure meant to tap parental involvement in juvenile justice settings. The model identifies factors related to the involvement of parents as recipients of child-related services, but also addresses issues related to the notion of parents not being involved with services by their own choice, as is common in juvenile justice.

The model identifies five dimensions that, taken together, characterize the construct of parental involvement. First, there is the *receptivity* of the parent. This reflects the parents' openness to receiving help, while also recognizing any problems that led to the initial interventions by the agency. Second, *expectancy* describes the parents' perception of benefit, or the sense of being helped and the belief that positive change will result from service involvement. Third, *investment* describes the commitment to the helping process, with active participation in planning and initiative in help-seeking or obtaining services indicating higher investment. Fourth, the *working relationship* between the parent and the service provider is considered, involving characterization of the reciprocity and quality of the communication in the relationship. Finally, *mistrust* is considered a relevant dimension, representing the degree to which the parent believes that the agency or worker is manipulative and malicious regarding the family. Each of these dimensions depicts a characteristic of the client-provider relationship that will contribute to the overall quality and potential productivity of that relationship.

The dimensions of the model have face validity when applied to juvenile justice involvement, although they do not capture all the potentially relevant dimensions that might be included in a model tailored to juvenile justice. In line with the focus group findings described earlier, the receptivity, expectancy, and investment of the parent based on prior experiences are included as key factors that delimit initial involvement in activities and can change over time. The characteristics of the working relationship and the level of mistrust also reflect the importance of considering the ability of the provider and the parent to forge a mutually beneficial and safe relationship over time, a key challenge identified by service providers in both child welfare and juvenile justice services.

However, there are also elements of this framework that do not fit well with juvenile justice or are simply incomplete in capturing the nuances of parental involvement in this system. For instance, involvement in child protective services typically occurs because of suspicions of abusive or neglectful parenting behaviors. In juvenile justice, the role of the parents in the

precipitating situation is much more varied and ambiguous. In addition, the item content of the model is framed around the idea of the parent having a relatively passive role as recipients of system services. Ideals pertaining to parental investment in juvenile justice often include broader and more proactive roles for parents beyond their interactions with the system during a given service period (Luckenbill & Yeager, 2009; Olin et al., 2010; Osher & Shufelt, 2006). The lesson here is that relevant dimensions tapping the engagement process between parents and court-based service systems can be derived successfully, and such work is possible in juvenile justice.

System context—A comprehensive and useful model of parental involvement in juvenile justice also has to recognize an array of contextual factors affecting parental behavior and attitudes. Parents may be invested, accepting, expectant and trusting, but may still have to confront a lack of resources, constraints on time, competing demands, medical concerns, and a host of other factors that might impede their full involvement (Justice for Families, 2012). System characteristics, such as the flexibility and availability of staff and the aspirational goals and policies of the agency, can also be expected to affect parental involvement. Like individual resources and barriers, these system characteristics may function independently to limit otherwise engaged parents. They may also act to change dimensions of involvement for better or worse. For example, actions that communicate a lack of respect on the part of service providers or a disinclination to work towards meaningful inclusion may cause parents to increase their mistrust, reduce their own investment or worsen their receptivity.

These factors must be considered in any comprehensive model of parental involvement. These may be either moderators of the effects of family involvement or parental involvement may mediate the effects of these organizational factors on outcomes (see Petrosino, 2000). These broader contextual factors set the limits of what might be expected in any particular juvenile justice system or community. As mentioned earlier, the relative influence of these dimensions of parental involvement and the effects of the contextual factors may change with which point of juvenile justice processing is being examined. A general framework that considers these types of contextual factors, however, would appear to capture the essential possible elements of parental involvement that might be operating across the range of situations in which parental involvement is expected in juvenile justice services.

Systematic research could use such a model with history, process, and contextual factors as an orientation point, and enrich our understanding of parental involvement in juvenile justice. Initial studies would be needed to develop items that tap the components of parental involvement, most likely through careful interviews with parents and system professionals. Other methods could then be used to characterize the social contextual variables. For example, court records of service funding might be used to determine features of the system characteristics possibly affecting parental involvement. In a second stage of research, the interrelations among these factors could be explored, and field applications of the instrument could then provide data regarding its reliability and change over periods of involvement with court services. A third phase of research could then relate these changes over time in dimensions of parental involvement to outcomes for the adolescent and parents.

Potential benefits for practice

Clarification of the idea of parental involvement in juvenile justice services and empirical investigation of its effects would provide significant benefits (National Academy of Sciences, 2012). First, it would allow for examination of how (or if) parental involvement really makes a difference in terms of outcomes for system-involved youth. It could provide information about which outcomes are affected by parental involvement, what forms of involvement are most important, and which youth in what circumstances benefit most from higher levels of parental involvement. This line of investigation could provide information to program administrators about where to focus efforts and what actions really make a difference - information now unfortunately absent.

Developing a reliable, valid, and usable measure of parental involvement is a requirement to achieve these goals. Development of a measure is the first step toward the accumulation of scientifically sound information. It could, however, also have rippling effects. Such a measure would in all likelihood be adopted by service providers and family-focused organizations as a component of quality assurance. Providers who believe that they have identified and implemented models of positive parental involvement could use such a measure as a metric to see if they are improving parental involvement over time and meeting a level of acceptable practice. Regional planners and policy makers would be able to evaluate programs and agencies on their ability to engage parents in services in a positive and productive fashion.

The development of an empirically sound measure could also have several positive effects on direct practice. Without an established multidimensional measure, parental involvement can be assessed only by subjective assessment or by counting the number of meetings a parent attended. This form of assessment is inherently limited, however, by its post-hoc, unidimensional nature. While it is possible to say who was or was not involved in meetings, it provides little information about the dynamics of parental involvement. Providers do not know why a parent did or did not attend a session, meeting, or activity, and thus how parental involvement could be strengthened.

A multidimensional measure of parental involvement would go well beyond this current practice, providing a nuanced picture of what the family and service providers see as problems and steps that might be taken to address barriers to parental involvement. Such a measure could be used at intake, allowing service providers to have a picture at the beginning of juvenile justice system involvement of the strengths and areas of need related to involvement for a specific family. It could also be used at later points in service involvement to see if these issues have been addressed. A reliable and multidimensional measure of parental involvement could thus provide direction about how to address issues for a given family as well as accountability for these efforts. This could provide an ongoing picture of what works and does not work for individual families and what methods are most useful over time for most of the families seen.

The use of a measure could also affect the interactions between service providers and parents. A measure, and the underlying model, would establish the framework for greater

and more open discussion between parents and a service provider at the outset of their work together. Without a common understanding of what parental involvement is or could be, a shared discussion with parents to enhance their involvement is not possible. The lack of an established tool and common language about involvement leaves parents and providers alike to find their way on their own, a circumstance fraught with possibilities for miscommunication, misunderstanding and perceptions of blame and recalcitrance. Conversely, a model of involvement and a measure could provide all involved with clear, shared indicators and goals, and an ability to measure whether those indicators were present and goals were met.

In summary, the importance of parental involvement in juvenile justice is nearly universally recognized. However, without further work to establish a multidimensional definition and sound methods for measurement, we cannot address the critical questions about whether, and how, parental involvement might matter for youth, family, and provider outcomes. Not addressing this task soon has potential negative outcomes for practice in juvenile justice. The momentum toward increased family involvement in juvenile justice services is real, but this may shift without solid efforts to improve practice. The necessary scientific and research infrastructure can be developed by adapting work from other areas of practice to reflect the particular features of service involvement in juvenile justice. We have presented a preliminary model for organizing these efforts. Taking on this challenge seems preferable to having parental and service providers know that parental involvement matters, but not knowing how to improve it. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity to do research that could significantly improve practice regarding such a basic issue.

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Highlights

- Consensus is high that parental involvement in juvenile justice services is crucial.
- Meaningful advancement is limited by the lack of agreed upon definitions or measures.
- A valid measure would be beneficial in both applied and research contexts.
- We propose a research agenda to advance methods and measures of involvement.