

Family Engagement

Developed by the Association for Children's Mental Health



Learning Objectives

- What is it
- Why is it important
- **Barriers to effective engagement with families**
 - Concrete Barriers vs. Perceptual Barriers
 - The 'Culture or Realities' of Families
 - Process, System & Personal Barriers
- What families say makes them feel welcome and/or engaged
- Strategies to address all types of barriers
- Practical steps to enhance family engagement and successfully involve families in evaluation



Family Engagement

What is it?

and

Why is it important?



Family
Engagement
=
More
than
Involvement

- **Definitions of Engagement:**

- the act of engaging
- the state of being engaged
- emotional involvement or commitment
- the state of being in gear
- the act of sharing in the activities of a group

- **Definitions of Family Engagement:**

- An **active** partnership between families and providers
- Supporting families to recognize their child and family's needs, strengths and resources and then empowering them to take an active role in working toward reaching the goals they have identified for their child and family.



Kids live in families, so treatment doesn't work without their buy in and implementation.

Families understand their kids best and can be a valuable asset for planning and making progress!

Research shows that when families are engaged children and youth are more likely to come to treatment, stay longer and have better outcomes.

Family Engagement is Important Because

Barriers

Think about barriers that the families you serve have experienced or barriers they have had the affect their ability to effectively engage in the services and supports.

How are those same barriers present for participation in evaluation?



Types of Barriers

Concrete Barriers

Perceptual Barriers

Systems Barriers

Concrete Barriers

The everyday things that get in the way of families being able to participate:

- Transportation
- Other children's needs; child care; soccer, band practice, etc.
- Work schedules
- Hours in the day
- Overall stress level of families and their responses to it

Perceptual Barriers

The underlying feelings/values/attitudes that may lead families to be skeptical or less engaged including:

- Stigma; Cultural Issues; Family Issues
- Past experiences with mental health or other negative service experiences.
- Personal attitudes about mental health
- Concern about how the information will be used
- Will their response negatively effect their family's service

Family Systems Barriers

The Culture of Families

- Culture includes the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.
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- Families are one such group and families of children with severe mental health challenges certainly develop their individual culture.

Systems Barriers

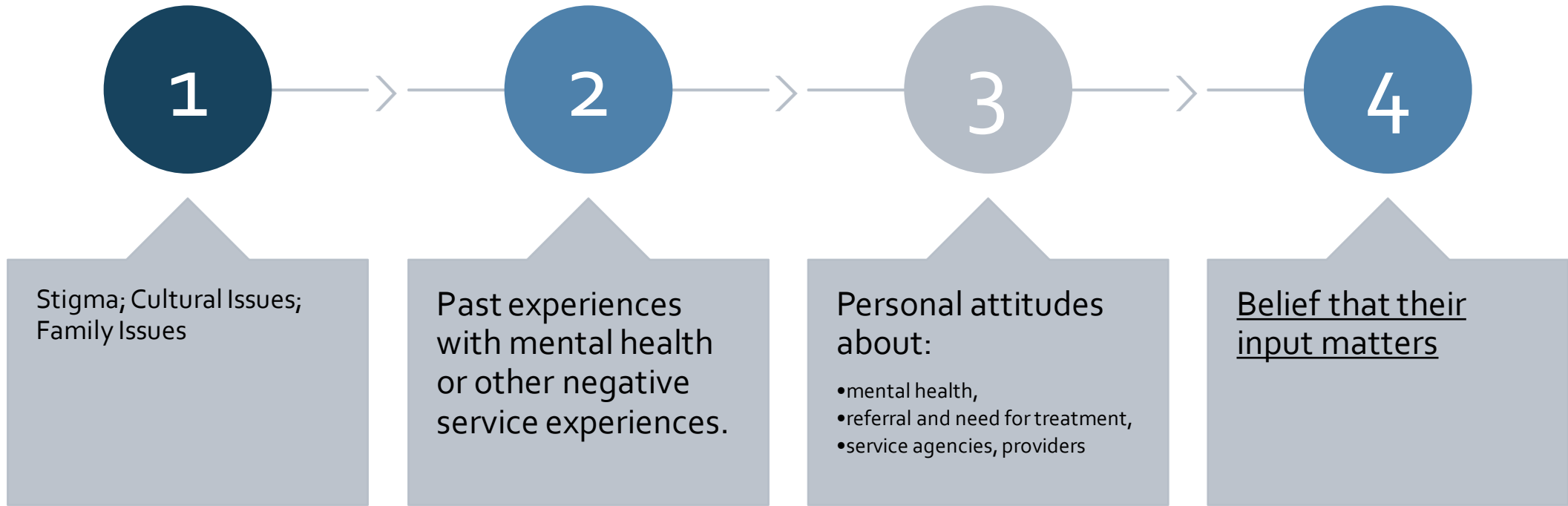
Examples of how culture/reality of families of kids with mental health challenges may affect engagement in evaluation

- The family may have learned that asking for additional supports or sharing information can lead to isolation and exclusion (Boy or Girl Scouts, sports, babysitters, social groups, after school activities/events, friends & family not calling or inviting, etc.)
 - As a result the family may feel that no one else understands what they are going through or wants to help.
- While individual kids with SED are unique one thing most have in common is their inability to effectively manage their emotions or behaviors which affects their ability to function successfully in their home, school and community at least some of the time which presents challenges to daily family life.
- Families may have learned that getting involved in services takes up more time than they have and they have the balance the benefit with the need and the energy needed to support it. MH treatment, supports, agencies



What challenges or barriers exist in your community to effectively engaging families?

What are your agency's strengths/weaknesses in engaging families?



The underlying feelings/values/attitudes that may lead families to be skeptical or less engaged include:

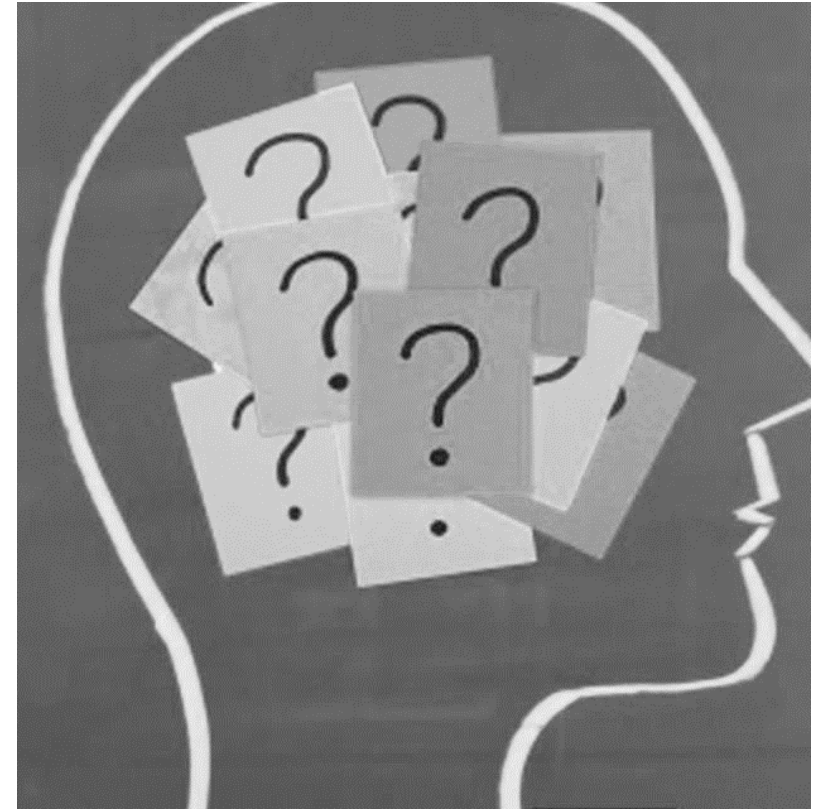
Participation in Evaluation Can be Scary and Uncomfortable!

Families say they often feel:

- **Under A Microscope** Questions can feel intrusive and judgmental no matter how well they are approached.
- **Judged** Sometimes simply based on the nature of the questions being asked and sometimes because *they are being judged*.
- **Sensitive** Parents often reach out when they already feel they have failed their child in their role as a parent so they are sometimes overly sensitive when asked about their family routines, parenting styles, discipline methods.
- **Fearful** And sometimes realistically so. Parents often walk a tightrope between getting their kids the help they need and fear of being judged or worse.

Personal Reflection

What about our personal values, beliefs, histories affects our ability to successfully engage with all families?



Our Personal Stuff...

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graph TD; A[Our Personal Stuff...] --> B[Our own background, beliefs, values<br/>• Judgements]; B --> C[Personal Considerations<br/>• Boundaries and Realities]; C --> D[Your place, role, situational `stuff`<br/>within your team];
```

Our own background, beliefs, values

- Judgements

Personal Considerations

- Boundaries and Realities

Your place, role, situational `stuff`
within your team

Personal
Barriers to
Engaging
Families

Now what?

- How do we address/overcome the barriers we have identified?
- How will we know if we have succeeded?
- What will it look like when Families Are Engaged?

Ask Families!





Specific Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Initial Engagement - That First Call

- **Remember what they say about first impressions?** This one small interaction can set the tone for all future interactions or lack of them.
- Work with their schedule. Acknowledge that they are taking time out of their schedule to participate.
- **Throw out the welcome mat!** This is often where families decide if they are going to be welcomed and supported and more importantly if they matter.
- Recognize the magnitude of the step they just took in agreeing to participate in evaluation. Sometimes just saying that you understand it takes a lot just to get to this point can be helpful and make families more at ease. But don't overdo it as that can feel condescending.

Engagement

What things make a family more likely to be engaged?

What things keep them from being engaged?



What Families Say About Engagement



- Engagement starts from the very first connection/phone call. If the first person is rude or doesn't know how to handle the call/or situation, it may turn a family away.
- Families need to know their voice is important.
- Families want to feel lifted up and empowered.

Families feel more engaged:

- If they feel like they are making a difference
- If they feel like they have some control
 - Location of interview
 - Time of interview
- If the meeting times and spaces are convenient
- If reminder calls are made and re-scheduling can be flexible
- If they are provided in a safe and non-judgmental environment



What makes families feel disengaged?

- When they feel their ideas and issues are not heard, validated or most importantly implemented.
- When they feel blamed or judged.
- When they feel you are not really listening.
- If they don't trust you enough to share information or 'partner' with you.
- Clinical language/phrases, for example too much focus on 'Stage of Change' can make families feel uninformed, intimidated or worse.
- When you display "disinterested body language, for example have arms crossed, texting/answering phone, or fiddling with paperwork or files while parent is talking.
- Interrupting parent to talk about something unrelated to what the parent was/is talking about.



What else helps families feel engaged?

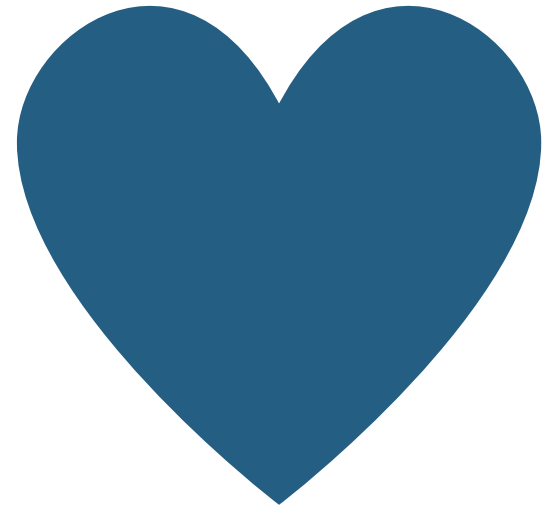
1. When they are treated with respect, as an equal at the table.
2. When they have a clear understanding of their involvement.
3. Being invited to or included in the decision making process. It makes them feel valued and important to the success of treatment.
4. They value a thorough explanation of the services and how evaluation will be used.



We asked families!

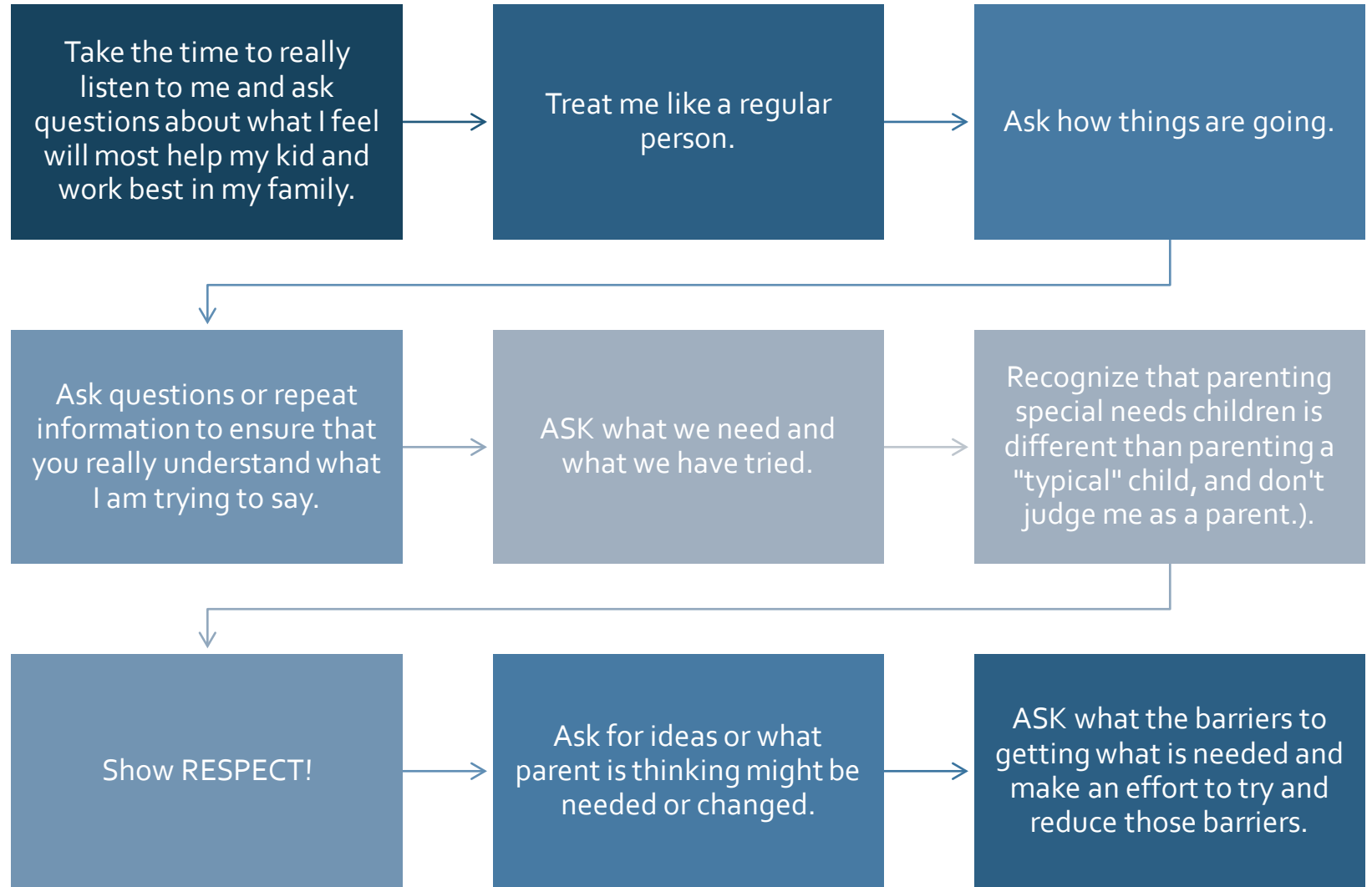
Things that make me feel engaged are:

- Feeling like what my family thinks/says/needs is important
- Respect and consideration of my family and their needs
- Understanding not blaming
- People who listen and understand what I am going through. People who don't judge.
- People who ask and don't tell me what needs to be done or worked on.
- People who respect my family and child and make us feel like our opinion matters.



We asked families!

Things that professionals can do or say to make me feel more involved are:



We asked families!

Things that make me feel less engaged or included are things like:

If I'm feeling judged as a parent.

When scheduling of meetings, etc. isn't flexible to meet the needs of my family.

Not being heard.

People assuming that they know what is going on or what our life is about.

Not showing up on time.

Concerns not taken seriously.

When they don't seem to remember any of the detail of our case or situation.

Do:

- Ask questions
- Do compliment me and my family when we are making progress and do something right.
- Do encourage us to do things on our own and spread our wings
- Do show up
- Do realize we are thankful for your support even though we may not voice it all the time.
- Recognize that parenting children with special needs is exhausting, and often takes its toll on the family in many ways– and
- that those tolls (like lack of sleep, financial stress, etc) can often be important areas to acknowledge

Family advice on 'Do's and Don'ts' for professionals working with families:

Don'ts From Families

Assume things.



Judge



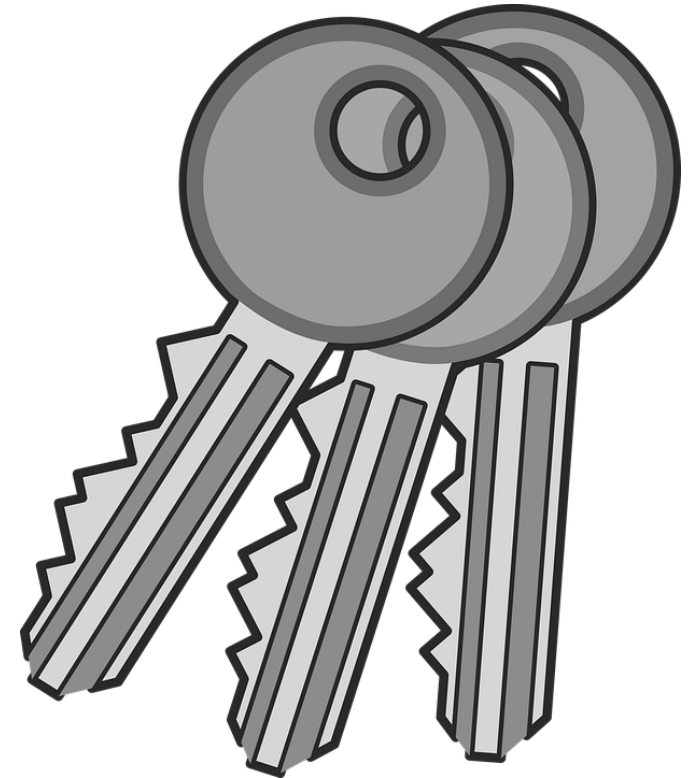
Be condescending



Speak down to families. Let them be an expert of their own feelings.

Keys to Strong Parent Professional Partnerships

- Effective Communication
- Shared Power
- Honesty and Transparency
- Respect
- Ability to acknowledge each other's expertise
- Working toward a common goal
- Emphasis on solutions instead of causes
- Interactions that are positive and proactive
- Ability to question each other's thinking, disagree openly
- Ability to be *real* with each other
- Relationships Are Key to Success!



Think About

01

Your personal barriers to effectively engaging families?

02

How about your strengths?

03

Which of the types barriers discussed today do you feel you have the most trouble addressing?



I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou