



Family-Centered Justice at NCSC

Family-Centered Fridays – Resources and Next Steps

Family-Centered Justice at NCSC is a collaborative effort between NCSC, courts, and communities to cultivate courts that center families and contribute to building strong communities where all families thrive. Family-Centered Justice is an approach to justice that considers court users as members of a family with distinct strengths, needs, and situations. NCSC believes that by adopting processes across all case types that are trauma-responsive, informed by data collection, and rooted in coordination, courts will support well-being and stability, reduce delays, and interrupt generational justice involvement.

Family-Centered Fridays is a monthly series aimed at providing the justice community with opportunities to learn from experts about promising practices and collaborate with like-minded professionals. This document summarizes the sessions that have happened so far and will be updated monthly as new sessions occur. It includes links to important resources and details concrete next steps for further the key Family-Centered Justice practices of Access to Courts, Case Coordination, Community Collaboration, Comprehensive Screening, and User-Centered Court Culture.

Access to Courts

The availability of court-based services for all families and individuals across all case types regardless of physical, mental, psychological needs and/or cultural background.

[Improving Access to Justice with Plain Language](#) (May 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Understand how using plain language enhances the experience of court users, promotes confidence in courts, and expands access to justice.
- 2) Discuss the benefits of plain language for both court users and staff with personnel and leaders who develop and approve materials for the public.
- 3) Commit to adapting your court's forms, documents, and information sheets to use plain language.

Resources:

- [NCSC - Interactive Plain Language Glossary](#)
- [NCSC - Forms Camp](#)
- [Plain Language Resource List](#)

[Alternative Court Hours and Expanding Access for Families](#) (November 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Research common barriers to appearance faced by your court's users and how alternative court hours could address them.
- 2) Examine potential obstacles to implementing alternative court hours and how these could be overcome.
- 3) Review examples from other courts that have implemented alternative court hours and consider how their experience could inform your approach to implementation.

Resources:

- [NCSC - Alternative Court Hours Toolkit](#)

Case Coordination

The appropriate and intentional sharing of information related to families and individuals across all case types.

[Making the Case for Case Coordination](#) (July 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Identify points where a family's cases may intersect and consider how coordination might assist these cases.
- 2) Examine potential barriers to case coordination across case types and discuss how these could be addressed with court personnel.
- 3) Analyze what case coordination techniques could positively impact families.

Resources:

- [A New Model for Collaborative Court and Community Caseflow Management](#)
- [Civil Justice Initiative: A Guide to Building Civil Case Management Teams](#)

Community Collaboration

Ongoing and strategic efforts between community-based services and court-based services that ensure families and individuals have access to a robust continuum of care.

[Community Collaboration and the Court: Resource Fairs](#) (April 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Determine what types of resources are most needed by court users and their families in your jurisdiction.

- 2) Find community partners offering these services and bring them into the planning process.
- 3) Work with community partners to ensure the event reaches your target audience and creates opportunities for organizations to network and coordinate further.

Resources:

- [Community Resource Directory](#)
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[Back to School: How Courts & Schools Can Collaborate](#) (September 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Find opportunities to strengthen relationships with local schools by listening to their needs and identifying shared goals.
- 2) Share information and resources with each other to improve services for families and youth.
- 3) Consider how schools can act as a hub for engaging families and providing support.

Resources:

- [School Justice Partnership Resources](#)

Comprehensive Screening

The process of identifying early in the case related cases, unmet legal needs, basic needs like food and housing, and behavioral health issues, and adapting court processes or referring families to services in the community.

[Comprehensive Screening: Practical Examples](#) (August 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Examine how screening could help save time and resources while identifying the needs of families in your court.
- 2) Figure out what data need to be collected to appropriately identify both individual and family needs.
- 3) Determine points in processes where screening would most effectively connect families to resources and services.

Resources:

- [Screening and Assessment of Co-Occurring Disorders in the Justice System](#)
- [New Model for Collaborative Court and Community Caseflow Management: Screening and Assessment](#)

User-Centered Court Culture

Cultivating a court system that values and is intentionally designed to treat court users and court professionals in a positive, supportive, and trauma-informed way.

[Creating User-Centered Court Culture](#) (March 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Work to understand how trauma impacts court users and how the court process itself can exacerbate trauma.
- 2) Consider how exposure to trauma affects court staff and seek strategies to minimize isolation and burn-out.
- 3) Adopt trauma-responsive court practices to reduce re-traumatization and ensure court users who have experienced trauma can fully and fairly engage in the court system.

Resources:

- [Promoting Well-Being in Domestic Relations Court: Understanding Series](#)
 - [Understanding Series – Chapter Two: Understanding Trauma, its Impacts, and How to Create a Trauma Responsive Court](#)
 - [Secondary Trauma and the Courts](#)
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[Building User-Centered Courtrooms](#) (June 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Survey court users to gain information on their experiences and find points where you can promote accessibility for families.
- 2) Identify a change you can implement to make your courthouse more trauma-informed.
- 3) Train court staff on trauma-informed spaces and discuss how you can navigate obstacles to make the change happen.

Resources:

- [NCSC - Safety and Security Resources](#)
 - [Winnebago County: Family Courts Center Proposal](#)
 - [Justice For All: Designing Accessible Courthouses](#)
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[The Case for Using Universal Practices to Center Families](#) (October 2023)

Next Steps:

- 1) Ask your court users about what practices you could implement or improve to provide them with more equitable and effective services.

- 2) Work to make sure all court staff receive training on the impact trauma has on individuals and how they can provide trauma-responsive services.
- 3) Modify your court policies and procedures to ensure they fit the current needs of court users.

Resources:

- [NCSC - PHASE: A Practical Approach to Implementation](#)
 - [Just Horizons: Building Future-Ready Courts](#)
 - [NCSC – Gender Inclusive Language in the Courts](#)
 - [SAMHSA – Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
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[ACEs-Informed Courts](#) (January 2024)

Next Steps:

- 1) Share information about ACEs and their affects with judges, administrators, and key stakeholders.
- 2) Consider how implementing screening for trauma, risk, needs, and strengths can help improve services for justice-involved youth.
- 3) Identify points where the court can effectively intervene in the lives of young people who have experienced trauma to put them on the path to success.

Resources:

- [ACEs-Informed Courts: Resource List](#)
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This list will continue to grow as new Family-Centered Fridays sessions are added each month. Please look out for future Family-Centered Fridays announcements. For further information or to register for our mailing list, email FamilyCenteredJustice@ncsc.org.