

Support4Families: A program to support families of individuals returning home from incarceration

SUPPORT



FAMILIES

The **reentry period**, which refers to the transition of individuals from incarceration back into the community, presents a multitude of challenges that can significantly impact both the returning individuals and their families. Families, often the primary support system for those leaving prison, face immense emotional, financial, and social pressures during this time. These hardships include managing the complex emotional toll of welcoming home a loved one who may be dealing with behavioral health issues, substance use disorders, or the stigma of incarceration.

Families may also bear the financial burden of providing housing, food, clothing, and other necessities, while simultaneously navigating strained relationships and unmet expectations. The stress of these responsibilities can lead to instability within the family unit, deteriorating mental and physical health and ultimately, a reduction in the overall well-being of both the family and the returning individual.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Support4Families is a family-focused program designed to address the unique challenges families face during the reentry period. While families are crucial to the reentry success of individuals leaving incarceration, their ability to provide support can be undermined by the significant emotional, social, and financial burdens they carry. Without appropriate programs, the positive support provided by families may diminish or turn negative, exacerbating the difficulties of reentry and leading to adverse outcomes for both the individual and the family.

KEY COMPONENTS OF SUPPORT4FAMILIES

1. **Conceptual Framework:** The program is built on two theoretical models: the Main Effect Model of Social Support and the Family Resilience Framework. These models emphasize the importance of positive social support and family cohesion in promoting individual and family well-being.
2. **Program Phases:** **Support4Families** consists of five phases—Connecting, Assessment, Psychoeducation, Communication Skills Training, and Problem-Solving Skills Training—delivered over 12 weeks in a group format. Each session is designed to address specific challenges that families face during the reentry period and to equip them with practical skills for managing these challenges.

3. **Booster Sessions:** After the initial 12-week program, booster sessions are offered to reinforce the skills learned and to provide ongoing support as families navigate the post-incarceration period. These sessions help families adapt to the evolving needs of their loved ones and ensure sustained positive outcomes.
4. **Evidence-Based Approach:** The program draws on existing evidence-driven programs from related fields, such as substance use disorder treatment and caregiving for individuals with dual diagnoses, to inform its content and structure. This evidence-based foundation enhances the program's potential effectiveness and adaptability to the unique challenges faced by families of formerly incarcerated individuals.
5. **Implementation:** **Support4Families** is currently undergoing statewide implementation in one midwestern state and has been pilot-tested in two jurisdictions, with researchers evaluating its feasibility, acceptability, and impact on family and individual outcomes. Early findings suggest that families are highly engaged and receptive to the program, indicating its potential for broader implementation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE



Support4Families represents a promising approach to reentry programs by shifting the focus from individual case management to a family systems perspective. The program recognizes that reentry is a shared experience for families and that strengthening family support systems is essential for achieving long-term stability and well-being for both the individual and the family unit.

As research on reentry programs continues to evolve, **Support4Families** offers a valuable model for how reentry practice can better support the families of those affected by incarceration.

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