Indicator #19: Are you ensuring that families are meaningfully involved in treatment planning and ongoing therapy efforts?

Services provided to families should…

"…utilize the strengths of families by: ensuring that they are equal partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services; viewing the child as a whole person and the family as a whole unit, rather than emphasizing the disability; empowering families and children to make decisions about their own lives."

- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, 2001
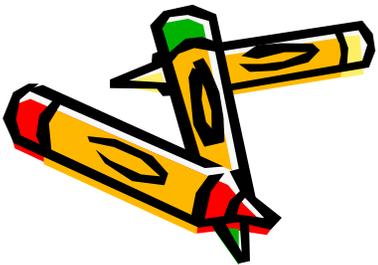
Background

- Shift from viewing the family as a contributor to child maladjustment to viewing the family as a crucial stakeholder and collaborator for ESMH programs.

- The family is the primary and most influential system to which a child belongs.
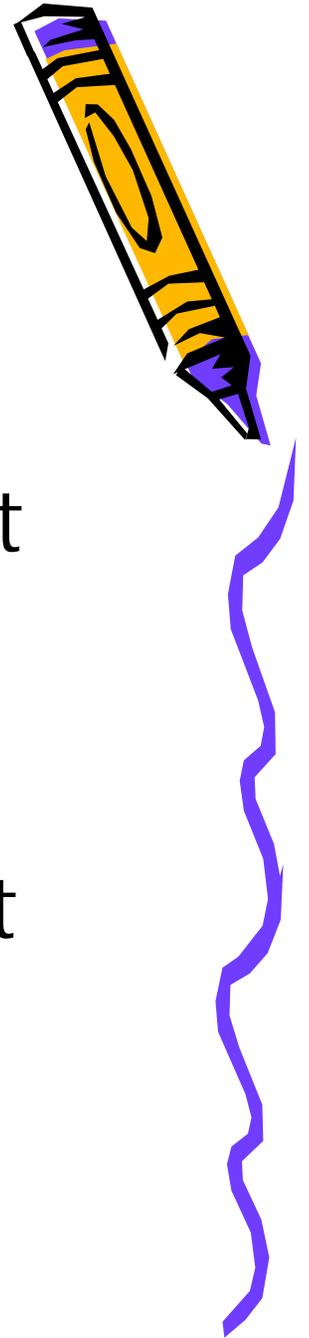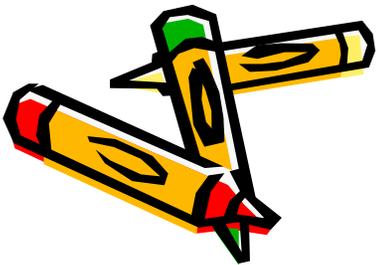
Families can help the school mental health clinician by…

- providing comprehensive information about child's health and development, social history, coping styles, etc.

- promoting children's well-being by enacting changes in their home environment.

- monitoring the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

- collaborating with the clinician to develop realistic and effective treatment plans.
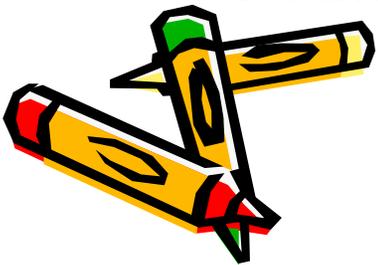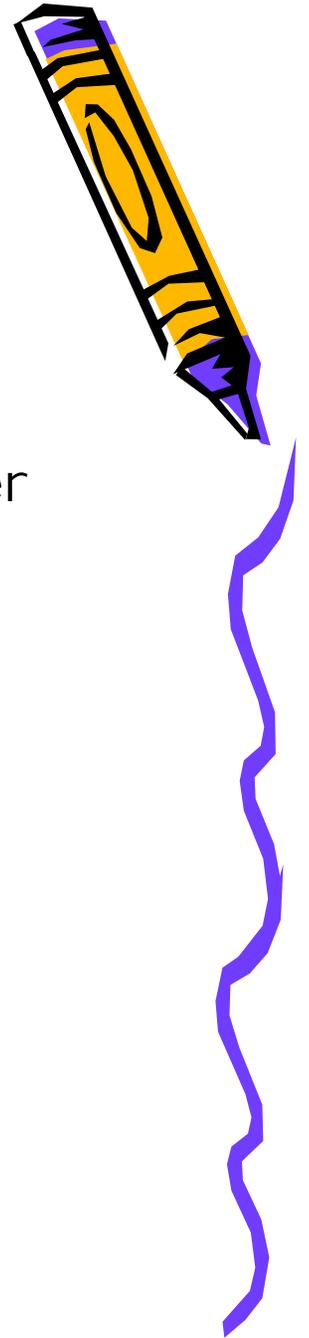
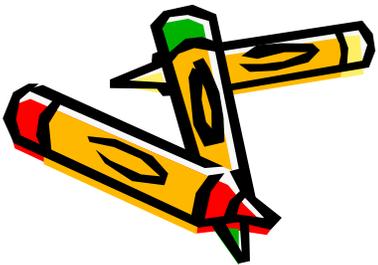# Challenges to Family Involvement: Student Concerns

- Student concerns
  - Students, particularly adolescents, may not want family involvement in mental health treatment.
  - Students often desire to conceal certain mental health issues (e.g., substance use, sexuality).
  - Students may not want to bring volatile family members and issues into the school or treatment setting (e.g., family violence, abuse, conflict).
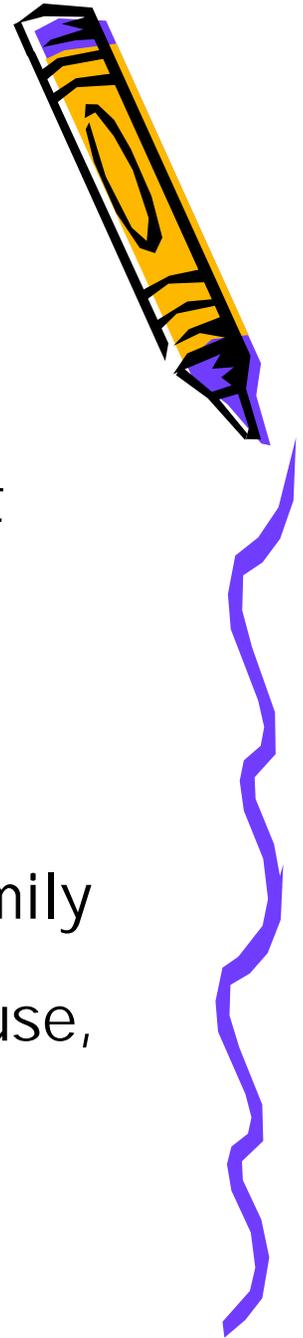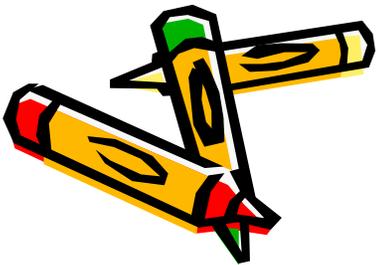
Challenges to Family Involvement: Family Concerns

- Family concerns
  - Some routines/responsibilities take precedence over mental health services (e.g. work)
  - Unavailability of childcare or transportation
  - Fear of being blamed for child's issues
  - Concerns about being spoken to in a condescending manner (or with mental health "jargon")
  - Concerns about confidentiality of information
  - Stigma associated with seeking mental health care

# Challenges to Family Involvement: Clinician Concerns

- Fear that family involvement will slow down and/or complicate treatment process
- Concern that family involvement will negatively impact therapeutic relationship (particularly if family relations are strained)
- Clinician unaccustomed to sharing control with or recognizing expertise of family members
- Clinician time demands hinder ability to engage families
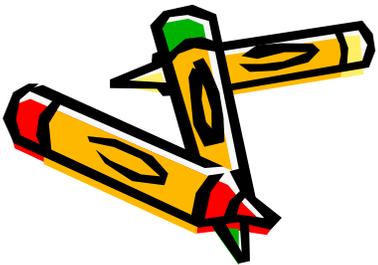
# Additional Challenges to Family Involvement

- Lack of resources (funding, staffing) to provide evening/weekend appointments, child care, transportation
- Lack of clinician training to facilitate family involvement
- Schools may not welcome families
- Parents who had problems in school may avoid coming due to painful memories
- In poorly performing schools, there may be tension between families and schools
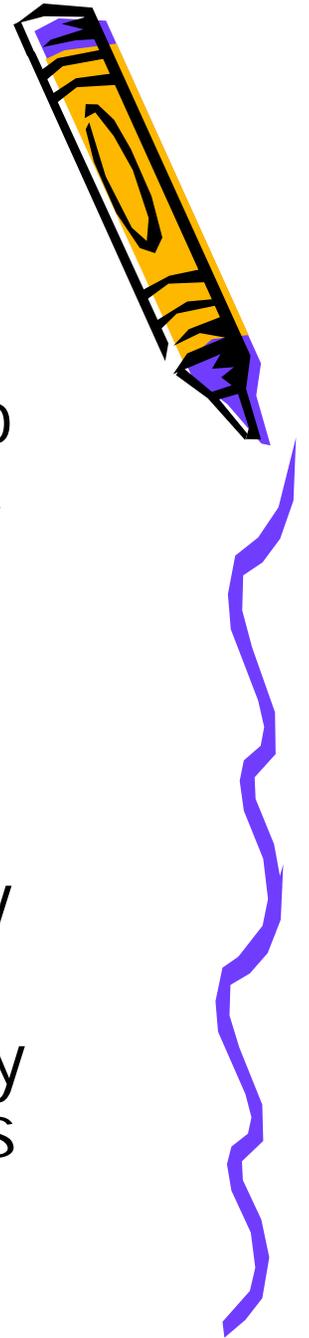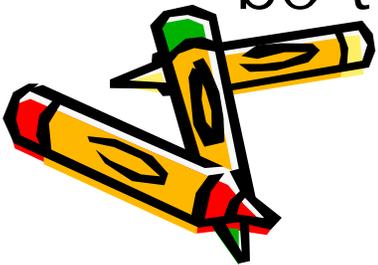
Actively engage families!

- Studies have demonstrated that actively engaging families in the treatment process from the beginning results in better attendance and follow-through with children's mental health services
  - Strategies to actively engage families include:
    - Reminders about missed appointments
    - Intensive family-focused telephone engagement
      - Establishing rapport; identifying and problem-solving potential obstacles to follow-through; gathering treatment information
    - First interview engagement
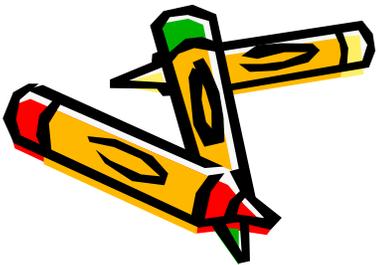
Menu of Suggested Activities

- Invite parents to participate in the intake process, treatment planning, and follow-up appointments. Set up regular appointments or phone contact during the school year.

- Develop parent handouts to describe their role in achieving common treatment goals.

- Brainstorm as a group about how to better involve families in treatment planning and ongoing therapy efforts. Implement three strategies from this discussion.
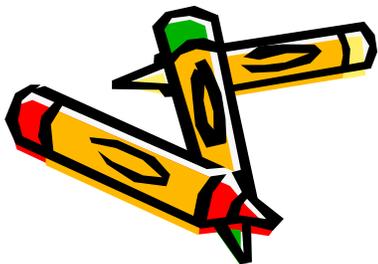
Menu of Suggested Activities

- Develop a system for Parent Updates (telephone/letter).

- Ask parents to assist in monitoring progress of interventions.
  - Have parents complete pre- and post-measures of student outcomes (e.g., behavior, academics).
  - Develop parent update forms for treatment objectives and collect throughout treatment.
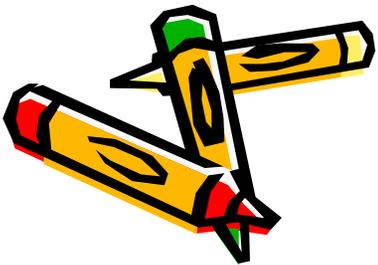
Helpful Hints

- Treat families how you would like to be treated. Always be respectful and recognize families as experts about their children.
- Ask students and families about what they think the presenting problems are and work together to come up with how to address them.
- Discuss with families how to best involve them in the treatment process. Develop clear communication strategies.
- Try to arrange an office hour(s) (in person or by phone) that families can always know they can reach you.
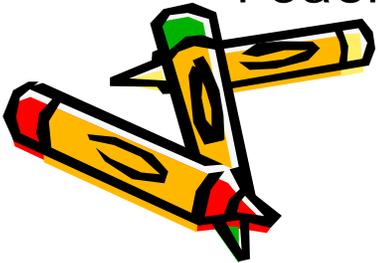
Helpful Hints

- Have parents and students sign treatment plans that are developed.

- Regularly assess with families the progress of therapy and their concerns.

- Recognize family and student strengths and incorporate them into treatment plans and ongoing therapy.

- Create an environment that is supportive and welcoming to families and that encourages input from them.
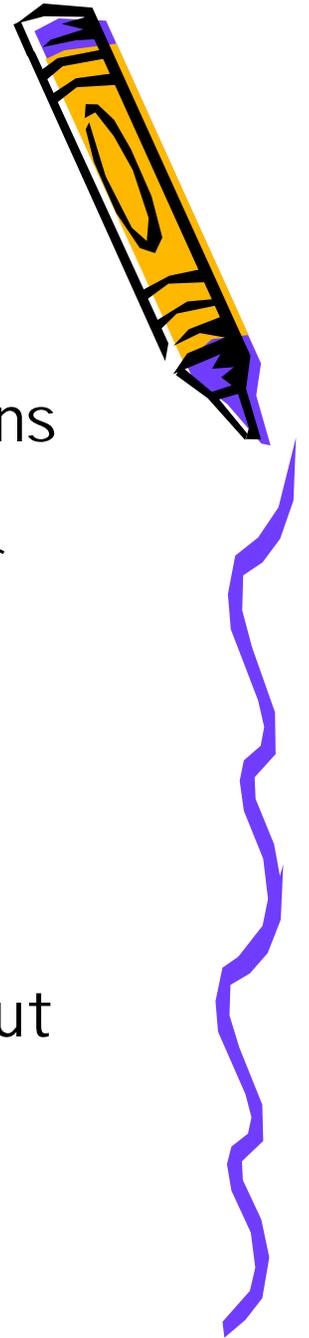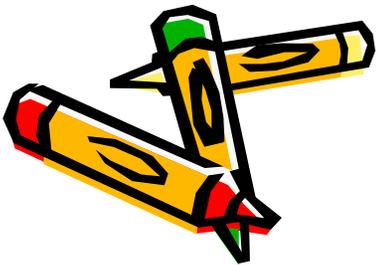
Web Resources

- Center for Mental Health in Schools, Parent and Home Involvement in Schools (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent.pdf)
- Family Engagement Resource—Mary McKay (http://rtckids.fmhi.usf.edu/rtcconference/17thconference/17th_handouts/pdf/Session%2052/McKay-HoagSym.pdf)
- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (http://www.ffcmh.org)
- National Center for Family Support (http://www.familysupport-hsri.org/)
- NW Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series (http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html)
- Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health (http://www.rtc.pdx.edu)
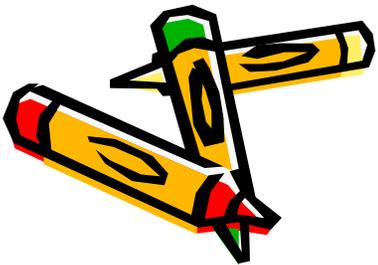
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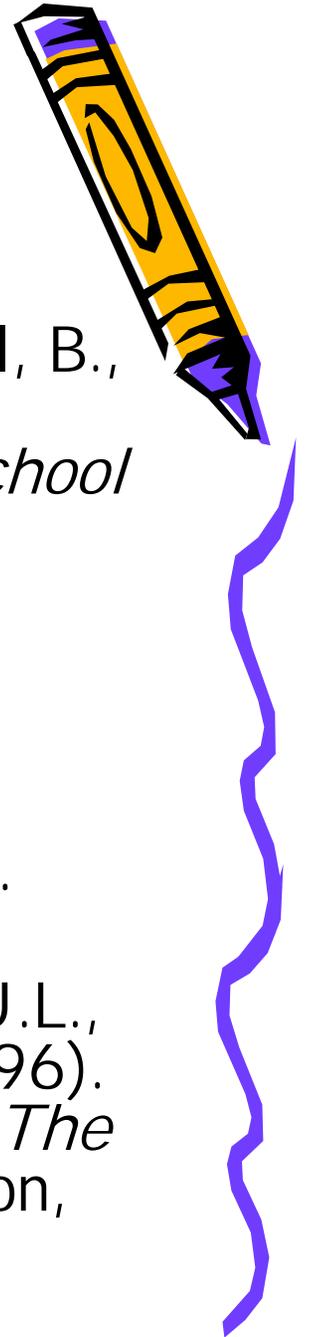
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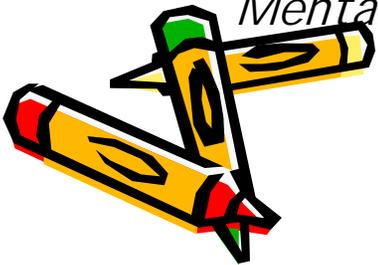
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