



# NCYOJ's School Responder Model Podcast Series

## ENGAGING FAMILIES



### INTRODUCTION

This is Aria Jordan with Policy Research Associates and the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice. This episode, Engaging Families is a continuation of our School Responder Model Podcast Series. This discussion will feature Jeff Vanderploeg and Jeana Bracey from the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut as well as Susan Graham, an accomplished family engagement specialist.

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#### | Aria Jordan:

Welcome everyone. Jeana, would you like to start off with introductions?

#### | Jeana Bracey:

This is Jeana Bracey, I'm the associate vice president for school and community initiatives at the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut and I'm joined today by Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg, president and CEO of CHDI. The purpose of today's podcast is to discuss the role of families as key stakeholders in the school responder model. The school responder model or SRM has an alternative approach to exclusionary school discipline that relies on family school community partnerships to meet student behavioral health needs.

And I'm really pleased today to introduce our guest Susan Graham. She's a local Connecticut expert who also has national expertise and has served on PRA's national advisory team to inform this work on school responder models. And Susan has a host of experience, a very unique role and multiple perspectives that she's bringing to today's talk. So I will let Susan introduce herself. Susan?

#### | Susan Graham:

Okay. Thank you everyone. My name is Susan Graham. I am the founder and CEO of Let's Build IT, a leadership training and consulting organization. I've been working as a family engagement specialist for a number of years, also a retired police officer and ran a family focused partnership outreach program with a school district as a social worker. I always think this concept of perspective taking is really interesting and I think I'm going to approach it this way.

I've been working with a group of young adults who are involved in learning to tell their stories for the purpose of advocacy. And recently a young man says, "All the teachers, the adults, the helpers in my life kept telling me what I needed to do, but no one ever asked me what I wanted to do or asked me what I needed." And I have to say when I first heard that statement, my initial reaction was, "Well, you're getting in trouble. You're not following the rules. You're really in struggle. Of course, you want to do what you want to do."

But that's not the response that I took. I slowed down, I took a breath and I asked the follow-up question, "Did you know what you wanted to do?" And then I paused. And the young man said to me, "Not really, but what I needed was someone to walk

alongside me to help me figure it out.” As a mom, I was involved in an IEP meeting or a PPT meeting for special education and there was a situation where someone asked another parent in the room to tell us something special about her son, something that made a difference, something that was important, something that she really loved about him and saw his value.

And when that question was asked, the mom started to cry. So I asked her, I said, “Why are you crying?” And she says, “I’ve been coming to these meetings for over six years and this is the first time that I ever felt somebody cared enough about me or my son to ask me what I saw as value with him. They always tell me what he does wrong, what he needs to do better, it was the first time that I really felt somebody cared.”

Another circumstance, perspective that I’d like to bring to this conversation is one of my very own as a police officer. I had a 15-year-old girl locked up in handcuffs in the back of my cruiser. She was on her way to juvenile detention. And I heard her say, “Well, at least he,” referring to her mother’s boyfriend, “won’t be able to touch me when I’m in jail.” So I asked her, I said, “Why didn’t you ever tell anyone?” And she replied to me, “I tried to, but no one listened.”

So the perspective that I really want to bring to this conversation is there’s a common theme, very different circumstances, but the theme is for me, it seems to be that no one asked or no one listened. So when we talked about family engagement and connecting with individuals to build better relationships, I think asking and listening are two of the most important skills that we can bring.

I thought a lot about this and there’s a colleague that I trained with, his name is Ray Hassett, he’s a retired lieutenant from the New Haven Police Department. I train with him every month and he’s brought this concept to our training called the flaw of the helper. And the first time I heard it, I didn’t know that I really appreciated it as well. But when we really think about it, whether we’re teachers, social workers, police officers, if we’re in the helping profession, one of the main reasons that I think we get involved in this is because we want to help people.

We want to make some kind of difference and then we start to do these jobs and we find ourselves oftentimes frustrated because the individuals we’re trying to help aren’t receiving our help. And if you’re involved in the school responder model and you’re looking to bring young people help instead of handcuffs, I want to believe and I do believe that you’re trying to help this, and perhaps I’ve felt some of that frustration.

When I first heard that this was a flaw, my initial reaction was, “Well, I’m not flawed. I’m a helper. I’m well-trained, I’m well-educated. I really want to help people.” But then when I really started to think about it, I started to think maybe my desire to help, maybe my desire to fix people is really a barrier to me connecting with them, to building the type of rapport and trust that’s necessary for a true and authentic partnership or a true engagement.

So from my professional perspective, I think that one of the things that I’ve learned along the way that I’d like to share with you is acknowledging that flaw helped me become a better practitioner. I think it helped me to serve people better and I didn’t give up on it easy. And I’ll be honest about that. I’m not saying it’s easy work, but what I do is first of all, I acknowledge that I do have that flaw and although it’s well-intended, it is a barrier.

And then I continually remind myself if this was me, if this was my child, if this was someone I loved and cared about, how would I want them to be treated? And as busy as I am, as frustrated as I am, as many things that are coming at me, what I try to do is I try to pause, remind myself of that and slow down enough so that I can actually show up for that other person in a way that will make a connection as opposed to create a further disconnection. So that’s the perspective that I think I’d like to come from during this conversation.

### **I Jeana Bracey:**

Thank you, Susan. I appreciate you opening with that and really grounding us in terms of kind of the multiple perspectives and the lens that you bring to this. I think it’s wonderful expertise that you bring to this discussion. And so as you know, the goal of the school responder model is to divert youth with behavioral health conditions from exclusionary school discipline in the form of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests for school-based behavior incidents, particularly when incidents when the student’s needs would best be met through either mental or behavioral health intervention and treatment. So I want to ask you, why do you think it’s important then to be sure that families are informed and really engaged directly in the school responder model process?

**I Susan Graham:**

It goes back a little bit I think to this concept of the flaw, that families really are the experts in their own families. Families are the experts in their children. They're the experts in knowing what their family needs, what will work and what they perhaps have tried that doesn't work. So it requires, I think on the behalf of the responder, a degree of humility to accept and to allow that the family member to come to the table with the same degree of expertise, although different, but the same degree of expertise that we, with a lot of letters after our names, feel that we have.

When a family member comes to the table, when families come to the table and we have families sitting at the table, if that expertise isn't valued, families can feel very much sort of like a check-box. And if families don't have the opportunity to bring their voice, and if we don't make a shift in understanding that families do bring value, we'll never really learn I think what the real needs are and how often have we tried to solve problems that may have not even been the problem that families identified or solved a need that families don't really even identify as a need.

So sometimes I think we start to implement solutions that don't even address the actual problem. And as a mom, if somebody is not addressing my problem, I have a feeling that that would make me become more resistant and more disengaged. So we push sometimes families away by not hearing what the need is and actually solving the problem that families know best.

**I Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

Susan, it's Jeff, Jeff Vanderploeg and I'm just joining this conversation as well. And thank you, Jeana for the introduction and Susan, it's always a pleasure to talk to you. I wish we could see each other right now, but in this COVID world, I'm not even sitting anywhere near Jeana who's part of my organization. So I just want to say hello and thank you again for joining us. So I have a question for you, Susan, and it has to do with kind of getting to a definition of what we mean by family engagement.

And what I've heard you talk about with us over the years and you've been so helpful to us in our work here at CHDI is that family engagement really lives on a continuum. And I guess on one extreme end, people ignore families and just don't even consider engaging them in a process. And then you have things like tokenism, which you just mentioned a couple of moments ago and kind of onward it towards full partnership. So I wonder if you could help us by setting a definition for what are some of the key features in best practice family engagement, what does that mean? What does it look like?

**I Susan Graham:**

So I've struggled with this question a lot Jeff, and to try to come up with a way to communicate it in a way that would resonate with the listener. And I'd thought about trying to connect it to sort of building a relationship, what are the best practices when you're trying to build a relationship with someone? You show interest in them, you go out on your first date, you end up perhaps in a more committed relationship and ultimately perhaps get married and have some kind of partnership.

And one of the reasons I move away from that is I'm fearful that that won't land because as a provider, the emotional investment in what we would perceive as a relationship is a lot and might be more than we have in our capacity to bring. So one of the ways I'm going to try to share sort of the continuum, if you will, or the process is it's similar to me to group process, right?

If we look at what's the goal, and I think starting with the end in mind is important, what is the goal of the relationship? And the goal is the best interest of that child, the best outcome for that child. After all, if we're providers within an educational system, what do we want? We want the best outcome for that individual. And that's what parents want, parents want the best outcomes for their kids. And sometimes I think we want the same thing, but we're disconnected in how we're going to get there.

So when I think about group process, the four stages, right? We're forming, we're storming, we're norming and then performing. So when we're forming a group, like when we come together, what are some of those attributes? What are those skills? What are those best practices? While we're engaging, we smile. We get to know people we're welcoming. At the next stage we start to get curious. We start to get curious about that other person, we start to lay down the foundation for trust.

And then if we go deeper into that norming stage, parents and teachers, parents and the school system can really start to work together towards that common goal. And I think when we're actually performing, sometimes teachers, I know when

I've worked with students, I may have been just as frustrated as a parent is. But when we acknowledge that frustration and I felt like the teacher was on board and we were working together in real true partnership, I think that that's where we start performing.

So I think that those are the best practices. Having the ability to sort of name where we are, I find is helpful because sometimes we want to perform with a family and they're still in the storming stage. So we have this incongruity that I may be forming, you may be norming. So at least finding out and sort of doing a good assessment of where is the relationship with this family, or where is my relationship with this student can help me then apply the skills that are necessary.

**| Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

I really appreciate it. Just as a follow-up, do you think that last point you just made, does that help to explain why sometimes families who get involved in an initiative within a school, for example, might come in and say, "I just don't feel comfortable here right now." And then they might come for a meeting or two, and then all of a sudden you can't reach them anymore. Does that help to explain why that happens for schools?

**| Susan Graham:**

I think it might because there's kind of a disconnect, right? Like I have an expectation coming into the school and that need isn't being met, not because the school or the individual isn't trying to meet them, but we're not playing the same music, we're not playing on the same page. We haven't gotten into that level of kind of congruency. When I do consultation with schools on family engagement, a lot of times when I bring these concepts up, people will say, "Oh yeah, we do that." And I believe that people really believe that they do.

I would suggest to our listeners, ask yourself those questions really intently, and what's the tangible activity that you are demonstrating in that piece of engagement? Because when we can name the activities, when we can actually name the best practice, what we actually do, I think we can do it more intentionally. Or even ask family members like, "Do you feel welcome when you come into the school?"

And I think the gold, just like with the first individual I spoke about, the gold is not in the first question, the gold is in the followup question. What makes you feel that way? No, I don't feel comfortable. Yeah, I do. What makes you feel that way? When we ask that follow-up question, the answer that it gives us is something tangible that we can do more of, or we can do less of. Does that help?

**| Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

It does. Thanks, Susan. I'll turn it over to Jeana.

**| Jeana Bracey:**

I love that you're talking about this really as a process, it's not kind of a one-time thing that you meet each other and you're automatically in this relationship. And for me, one of the really powerful ways I've heard you talk about this engagement process Susan is through baseball metaphor. I'm not even a baseball person, but this really spoke to me and it's something I remember throughout the years. So I was hoping you could maybe share that to help our listeners understand this concept more fully, and how do you translate a baseball metaphor into what that looks like in parent teacher relationships?

**| Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

And if I'm not mistaken, Susan, you're a Yankees fan, right?

**| Susan Graham:**

I am not Jeff. Nicely played though, nicely played.

**| Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

I just got to throw that in there for you.

**| Susan Graham:**

Nicely played. So this whole concept, and thank you for remembering it and asking me about it. It's been something

that I've been building on for a number of years. And I think it's really based on this Stephen Covey quote, seek first to understand then to be understood. And it's a framework that has not only helped me, but has helped other people figure out where they are in a process. I teach it in sales, I teach it in leadership, I teach it in policing, relationships. It really works wherever people are involved, and that's one of the things that I really kind of love about it.

And most people do understand baseball, whether you like baseball or not, whether you're a Yankees fan or not. And the first base I always talk about is rapport. And what happens with rapport, sort of getting in sync with another person, it's setting that foundation of trust. It's like your cell phone sinking to your Bluetooth. They have a similar vibe, they're connected. And for a person, the other person, there's a sense of safety. And we are emotional beings who think, not thinking beings who feel.

So until we have a sense of safety, and this really goes to some trauma informed work, right? If we don't have that sense of safety, we really can't move deeper into that relationship building or that full engagement. So that's really sort of what happens on first base. When we moved to second base and I call second base being service-minded or this place of discovery. And second base is the hardest space. This is where empathy lives.

This is where we need to suspend our judgments about another person and really get curious, really listen to what their story is rather than writing it ourselves. How often do we see a person and we write their story? We don't get curious to actually find out what their story is. And it's asking questions. It's asking what questions and how questions. How often do we ask why questions? Why questions always put us on the defensive?

Why are you doing this? Why aren't you doing this? You need to, as opposed to getting curious and asking how and what questions. And then we move to third base. And third base is a place of integrity. Third base is where our character, our consistency, our competency, our expertise can really then meld with that other person so that we can really develop that partnership. If we get onto third base, our next place is to go home, right? So we're going towards the goal, we're moving closer and closer to the goal.

Why I like the baseball metaphor so much is that if on third base where we're supposed to be consistent and we bring a competency, if we come up short, if we fail to deliver what is expected, what happens? We break trust. And when we break trust, we have to go back to first base. We have to go back and restore and rebuild that rapport. So although I sort of explain it linearly, it doesn't happen linear, we're doing this all at the same time.

But we have to stay in rapport in connection with that other person in order to achieve a collective goal. One of the things I like about the first base, second base, third base is when I've trained people and we have this common language, I can be with a colleague and working with a group and kind of in struggle or feeling some level of disconnect and a colleague can say to me, "You need to go back to second base or just stay at second base."

And I know just from that statement where I'm missing it and where I need to go back to. So even having a common language helps communicate among your team to get better consensus as to again, where you are in the process. So Jeana, I hope that helped you and I hope after this year, we actually can get back into a ballpark at some point in time because I'm missing that terribly.

### **Jeana Bracey:**

Absolutely. No, I appreciate that explanation. It's really helpful. And also grounding it in language around trauma informed practice and restorative approaches and using those how and what questions, I think all of that's really helpful in aligning it with the school responder model. It's just so important.

### **Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

So Susan, I want to transition to a different line of question here. It has to do with the situation in which a school is clearly motivated and they want to engage families. And we've talked to a lot of schools, as I'm sure you have, that really want to have families engaged in their work. And perhaps even family members who say, "I really want to be more engaged in what the school is doing."

But my question has to do with the very real, systemic and logistical barriers that exist that prevent us to getting to that fully engaged kind of performing stage that you were mentioning earlier, things like transportation or in today's virtual

environment, the lack of a broadband internet access or a reliable connection or a hardware device that they can connect to the internet, things of that nature, even things like stigma or negative interactions in the past with the school. So I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about some of those barriers and how schools can be successful in helping families overcome them.

**I Susan Graham:**

I love this question and I really think it's two questions and that sometimes they get sort of married together. I think logistical barriers are very real and I don't want to discount or dismiss a family who doesn't have broadband internet. That is a very real barrier. And the logistical barriers I believe are easier to overcome than the non logistical barriers or what I often refer to as sort of safe excuses.

I think when individuals are not feeling comfortable, it's rooted somehow in fear. And what I have noticed, and it was actually brought to my attention when I was working with a mom who said to me quite candidly, she says, "If I wanted to get to the movies, I'd figure out how to get there." And it really resonated with me that sometimes logistical barriers are easier to overcome, the strategies to overcome them are more present, they're more available, the undercurrent of the fear I'm not comfortable.

And I think what she was telling me is, "So I'll revert to saying, well, I don't have transportation because I really don't feel comfortable being there." So I think a lot of times what happens, we try to solve when we don't really know what the need is, and there's not a good connection to understand what problem we're trying to solve. We oftentimes will solve logistical barriers and how often have we created situations where we created opportunities for transportation or overcome those logistical barriers and family members still don't participate?

And then what's the reaction for that? It sort of reinforces this belief that families don't want to, that families are resistant, that families want to be disengaged. So I think it creates a cycle when what is really, probably upfront is getting to that fear. And I think the second based strategies is where we uncover and we create that connection with another person. We listen, we find out who they are, we get to that fear, we get to that place of stigma then we can work better in connection with one another to overcome it.

**I Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

We do sometimes hear from parents who are engaged in this work, Susan, that they even feel there are times when maybe things are condescending or disrespectful towards them. Can you touch at all on that? I mean, I think in those situations, sometimes not the case that school personnel feel like they're being disrespectful or condescending, but it's definitely viewed that way or perceived that way by families. Can you touch on that for us?

**I Susan Graham:**

I think one thing that is common and has to be known, and I'm coming only from the perspective as from a mom, I can't speak for dads, but I've heard it and I believe that it's true as well, when we have a child who is struggling with a behavioral health challenge, the default for us as moms, as parents is we did something wrong. And every place that we go out in community, that sort of guilt, that shame seems to be reinforced.

And when you feel that guilt and shame and you feel blamed for the way that your child is acting or the struggles that your child is having, what ends up happening is you become so hypersensitive to any body language, a little eye roll, a tone of voice. So even though sometimes a school personnel might be saying the right words, as a parent, as a mother, as a dad, as a caregiver, we're not feeling the right words. And again, emotion drives behavior. So we have to connect with that emotion. People have to feel it, not only hear it.

**I Jeana Bracey:**

Susan, I think picking up on that, what you were just saying in terms of feelings of shame or blame and feeling like you've done something wrong as a parent or family member, I can imagine families who have already had engagement or experience with behavioral health system or the justice system as well, maybe having some of those feelings and maybe that's some of the difficulty in kind of building that relationship or following through, perhaps with some of this work. And

so I'm curious if there are particular strategies for schools to consider when working with families who have experience with either the justice system or the behavioral health system already.

**I Susan Graham:**

The awareness that if you think about what it's like without all of those layers of systemic involvement, like a parent, a family is in struggle, just dealing with a child who is struggling behaviorally, mentally or emotionally, every layer you add on that just adds that much more. Sometimes I think we can't make it better. And I've often said I might not be... we have to move away from this idea of trying to fix things because sometimes we can't.

I've sat with a mom in struggle with not only the behavioral health challenges that her child was experiencing, but then all of the layers of the system, stuff on top of it and I couldn't make it better, but I know I could have made it worse because I could have added my own layer, what I also needed her to do. And I always think about it when I hear the words, but what I need you to do, if you're under the blanket of all of this stuff, perhaps you don't need another thing to do, perhaps a better approach would be just to acknowledge this must be a really tough time.

You got life coming at you pretty hard. There's a lot of things going on right now. And if you acknowledge that oftentimes to a parent and you create a space for that, what you might see as a reaction is just like... an exhale. Somebody gets me, somebody gets it. And then that opens the door to be able to really help them to create that connection or that engagement as we're talking about.

**I Jeana Bracey:**

Definitely, I love that. That's a very powerful way to think about that.

**I Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

Susan, I want to talk to you about over the years, we've engaged in a lot of different ways. We've engaged with you as an individual, family representative and advocate, but we've also engaged with you over the years as a member of a family advocacy organization. So I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to the differences in approach there and also talk a little bit with our listeners here about how they might find a family run advocacy organization that could help support their work.

**I Susan Graham:**

So I'll address your last question first. I think one of the easiest ways to identify a family organization is the National Federation of Families. So you can find them at [ffcmh.org](http://ffcmh.org). That's F-F-C-M-H .org. And they are a national organization that really focuses on issues of children and youth with emotional, behavioral and mental health needs and substance abuse challenges.

If you go to their website, they have a map of the United States. You put in your state and their local affiliate's information will come up. That would be the best place to start to connect with a family organization. I think the advantage of working with a family organization is I'll just go back to the reference of second base is hard. Sometimes breaking down and developing a relationship of trust, getting in a place of empathy is hard, we don't have the time or somebody isn't willing to make that connection.

As a family member in a family organization, the value that individuals bring is that lived experience. If I've been there, if I've walked in that mom's shoes, the ability for me to connect with her is much quicker than for somebody who has never walked there. So a lot of times I think one of the real benefits of working with a family organization is, is I call it borrowed trust.

So if a person from a family organization has a relationship with the school and can also build and have a relationship with the family, they can work as that liaison to help disconnect the barriers or break down the barriers that may exist. And it's because both parties trust them and they can bring sort of the two sides, the us and them, if you will, together. So I think that is a real benefit of working with an individual with lived experience in a family organization.

**I Jeana Bracey:**

That's helpful. I think that's often one of the questions we get regularly when we're working with different schools is how do we do this at our local level and how do we go about finding someone like you, Susan, that is an expert in this work to help guide and support as we're trying to encourage this and incorporate it into the work that we do? So I appreciate you sharing those resources.

**I Susan Graham:**

Jeana, if I could just follow up with that quickly, I think that when a group is engaging with a family organization, it's also really important to identify what the role is, what is the expectation. And if we can highlight that it is to serve as that liaison, and it is a bridge, if you will of trust, I think that those relationships are much more solid. Oftentimes what I've seen happen is the role of the family engagement specialist may be a little bit too one sided or the other.

And so really keeping that objective again, working towards the outcome, who is the benefactor of all of these efforts? It's that child. So we're really all serving that child. And if we put the family engagement specialist in the center totally focused on that child, they can be the reminder that that's why we need to come together, and that's the value of coming together to serve for a better outcome for that child.

**I Jeana Bracey:**

No, that's great. And I think that's particularly important right now. I mean, so many people are struggling or are overwhelmed. Given where we are right now and acknowledging this unique time, we actually... As I start to wrap up this conversation, I do want to acknowledge that our country's in the process of a leadership transition following a presidential election. We're about nine months into this Coronavirus pandemic and our country continues to grapple with racial injustice.

And so how does this current context and the climate around all of us really impact these efforts at engaging families on a local level and building those relationships as you're talking about, particularly in those who have been disproportionately impacted by these events? I mean, we're working directly within the school responder model with schools in Louisiana and schools in Michigan who have been particularly hard hit by all of this.

And I'm curious your thoughts in terms of what do you see as best practices for schools and law enforcement and community providers as we all try to work together to build relationships with families to move this forward. As you mentioned, we're all serving the child and with the child at the center, how do we come together at a time like this?

**I Susan Graham:**

So I have been accused of bringing sort of a rainbow and unicorn approach to the work that I do. And I don't want to miss the point that this work is hard and showing up every day is hard and we're not going to always have success. However, I think that there are a few things that I remind myself of, and I'd like to encourage you to remind yourselves of as well, number one, recognize and remember that emotion drives behavior. And it's not only their emotion driving behavior, it's also our emotion driving our behavior.

So we need to look at ourselves first, which is the harder work than looking at others. We also need to acknowledge and realize that emotion, history and trauma are present in every single interaction that we have. And depending on the circumstances, think about the history and trauma that we're currently experiencing. We are in a state of crisis. We haven't even had an opportunity to sort of exhale from the crisis, we're still in it so emotion is high.

Now more than ever, we need to identify emotion first and connect with emotion before we can change any type of behavior. And in order to do that, I think we just need to kind of slow things down. We need to exhale. We need to remind ourselves to go to second base. We need to pause there and breathe and know and acknowledge that this is an ongoing effort, it's not going to happen overnight. We are in a long-term, I call it like a street fight, right?

But our kids are worth it so we have to be willing to stay in the fight. And the last thing I want to leave you with is that the person with the greater level of awareness, the greater ability to self-reflect, the greater ability to understand what all of this sort of factors are, has the responsibility to also lead the way. We have to go first. So we can blame outside of us, or we can look inside and really do the work that we need to do to show up first. We can't expect other people to show up if we're not willing to take the first step.

**I Jeana Bracey:**

Well, Susan, I think we've come to the end of our discussion today. And I just really want to thank you again. I know I've learned so much and you've certainly given us a lot of food for thought, a lot of things that... a lot of strategies, a lot of hope, a lot of ways that we can approach this work and think about first, I think examining ourselves and what our role



is and building true partnerships and relationships with families and all of our partners in this work. So again, I certainly appreciate the perspective that you brought today. I'll give Jeff an opportunity to ask any final questions and wrap us up.

**| Dr. Jeff Vanderploeg:**

I just want to add to that by thanking Susan for taking the time to be with us today. And I know that people who are listening to this will have benefited from your wisdom and experience in this area even right from the beginning where just the simplest thing of asking and listening, those pieces of advice can be so powerful. But you gave us so many nuggets of wisdom and we really appreciate that.

So for those of you who are listening in schools and thinking about how do I make this work, how do I engage families and communities in the work that I'm doing here, I just want to encourage you to look into the resources and read up on this and talk more with PRA and other partners who are involved with the SRM because we really think that family school community partnership is the foundational element that has to be there for initiatives like SRM to work.

And also not just SRM, I mean, all those schools out there who have always wished for parents to be more involved in academic curricula or other initiatives academically, or social, emotional learning, and certainly school responder models are no different, family school community partnership is at the foundation. So thank you again, Susan, it's really great to talk to you and we really appreciate you joining us today.

**| Susan Graham:**

Thank you, Jeana, thank you, Jeff and it's been absolutely my honor and privilege to be among you. And I hope there's something that I said that may make a difference for you. If I could leave with just one final word or statement, it would be to be gentle on yourself. This work is hard and we need to take care of ourselves so that we have something to resource another person. So thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

**| Aria Jordan:**

Thank you to our listeners for joining us in our conversation today. We hope this was helpful for schools and communities to learn ways to enhance their family engagement efforts as part of school responder model implementation.

## CONCLUSION

To learn more and access curated resources about family engagement, please visit our school responder model virtual toolbox at [srm.policyresearchinc.org](http://srm.policyresearchinc.org). Thank you again for listening.