

FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

Our Practice Model

Our practice model:

- ➔ Provides a common, consistent framework to organize our efforts.
- ➔ Establishes parameters for best practices that deliver good outcomes for children & families.
- ➔ Drives decisions and actions at all levels of our organization.
- ➔ Defines our organization, what we believe, what we work to accomplish and what we do to help families keep children, youth and communities protected & connected.

We are guided by the belief that people can change. We work to create opportunities for safety in families and communities. To do this, we partner with caregivers and help them protect children and youth in new ways — all while building on safety that's already present. We also work to establish safety networks for children and youth by organizing other important adults to create safe environments, now and over time.

OUR VISION

Vermont's children and youth live free from abuse, neglect and delinquency – in resilient families that are supported and valued by their communities.

OUR MISSION

We engage families, foster and kin caregivers, partner agencies and the community to increase safety and law abidance for Vermont children and youth. We achieve our mission by:

- ➔ Safely stabilizing and preserving families; *AND IF THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE:*
- ➔ Safely caring for, and reunifying, children and youth; *AND IF THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE:*
- ➔ Safely supporting the development of permanency and lifelong connections for children and youth.

OUR VALUES

We value equity, inclusion and justice. We believe in the diversity of thoughts, beliefs and experiences and embrace all people and their human differences.

Relationships are built on trust, collaboration and communication. We strive to resolve conflict in a way that strengthens connections and repairs and restores relationships.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

- Deserve to be safe, heard and connected to their communities.
- Know themselves best and their expertise should be valued.
- Are viewed in the context of their culture and community.
- Can grow and change with support and adequate resources.
- Are active participants and partners in the process.

STAFF

- Offer their dedication and commitment, which are essential in carrying out our mission.
- Provide quality work that is strengths-based, trauma-informed and influenced by research.

FOSTER AND KIN FAMILIES

- Are primary partners in ensuring the well-being of children and youth.
- Deserve timely training, communication and support.

COMMUNITIES

- Are essential to keeping children safe and promoting healthy families.
- Collaborate to meet the holistic needs of children, youth, and families.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

To achieve safety, permanency, well-being & law abidance, we focus on factors such as:

- Quality contact between workers and children/youth
- Placements with kin
- Length of time cases are open.

We monitor the:

- Completion of decision support tools and staff performance evaluations.
- Ongoing assessment of needs and services.
- Percent of foster care licensing applications closed/withdrawn.
- Opportunities for professional development for staff and partners.

**We use objective tools
to inform decision-making:**

- Danger & safety assessment
- Risk assessment & reassessment
- Youth assessment & screening
- Reunification assessment

**UNWAVERING
FOCUS ON CHILD
& COMMUNITY
SAFETY**

**We embrace
continuous quality
improvement:**

- Policies & practice are based on current research
- Accurate, current data is used to measure quality
- Culture of ongoing support & learning is fostered

**We engage families
to increase safety:**

- Family finding
- Family safety planning
- Solution-focused planning
- Family time coaching
- Restorative family group conferencing

**NO NETWORK,
NO SAFETY PLAN**

OUR APPROACH

Our guiding principles and the way we go about our work.

SAFETY CULTURE - A safety culture recognizes that the need to be attentive to the needs of the workforce in service to creating the best opportunity for strong decision making. A safety culture monitors and plans for vulnerabilities in the system and works toward continuous improvement and accountability. We create “hard stops” to ensure support is offered at points where high risk, high consequence decisions are being made.

SAFETY ORGANIZED - A collaborative approach where we arrange every aspect of our practice around child and community safety. We focus on:

- ➔ What must happen
- ➔ Who must be involved in the everyday life of the child or youth to address danger and create safety that lasts well after the child protection agency is involved.

CHILD-CENTERED - We help children and youth understand why we are involved with their families and make sure they have a voice in deciding what should change.

FAMILY-FOCUSED - We engage with caregivers and families and help them:

- ➔ Develop a new understanding of their children’s needs.
- ➔ Take protective actions that address danger & create safety over time.

COLLABORATIVE - We work with members of a child or youth’s safety network to create actions of protection over time. We are responsible for child protection and youth justice and we fit within the larger child welfare system in communities.

SUSTAINABLE - We join with caregivers and their safety networks to develop sustainable safety for children and youth.

RESTORATIVE - We enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm done to individuals and communities to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge the impact and take steps to make it right.

OVERARCHING INTERVENTION FOR SAFETY

Our process refers to the set of actions we carry out to achieve desired outcomes. These actions are at the core of our practice competencies. Our intervention is the least intrusive required and happens as quickly as possible to achieve child and community safety. Our goal is to mobilize caregivers and safety networks to take action quickly, knowing that each intervention has an impact on the long-term outcome for the child/youth. *The best permanency happens in the earliest stage of the case.*

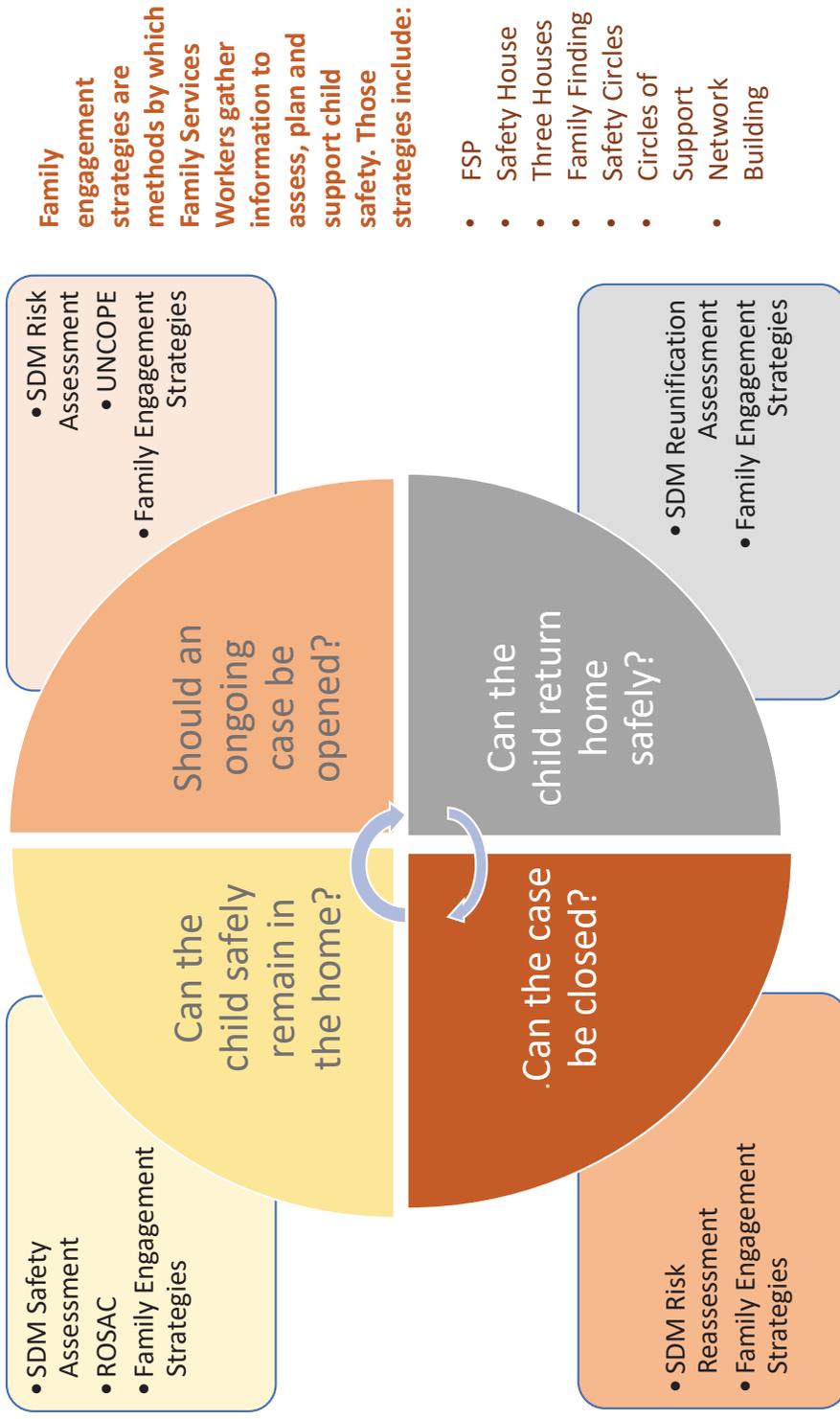
All plans rigorously address the day-to-day dangers to children and youth.

Assessments are based on balanced, unbiased, and factually-supported information.

Safety Organized Practice

Child Protection Services

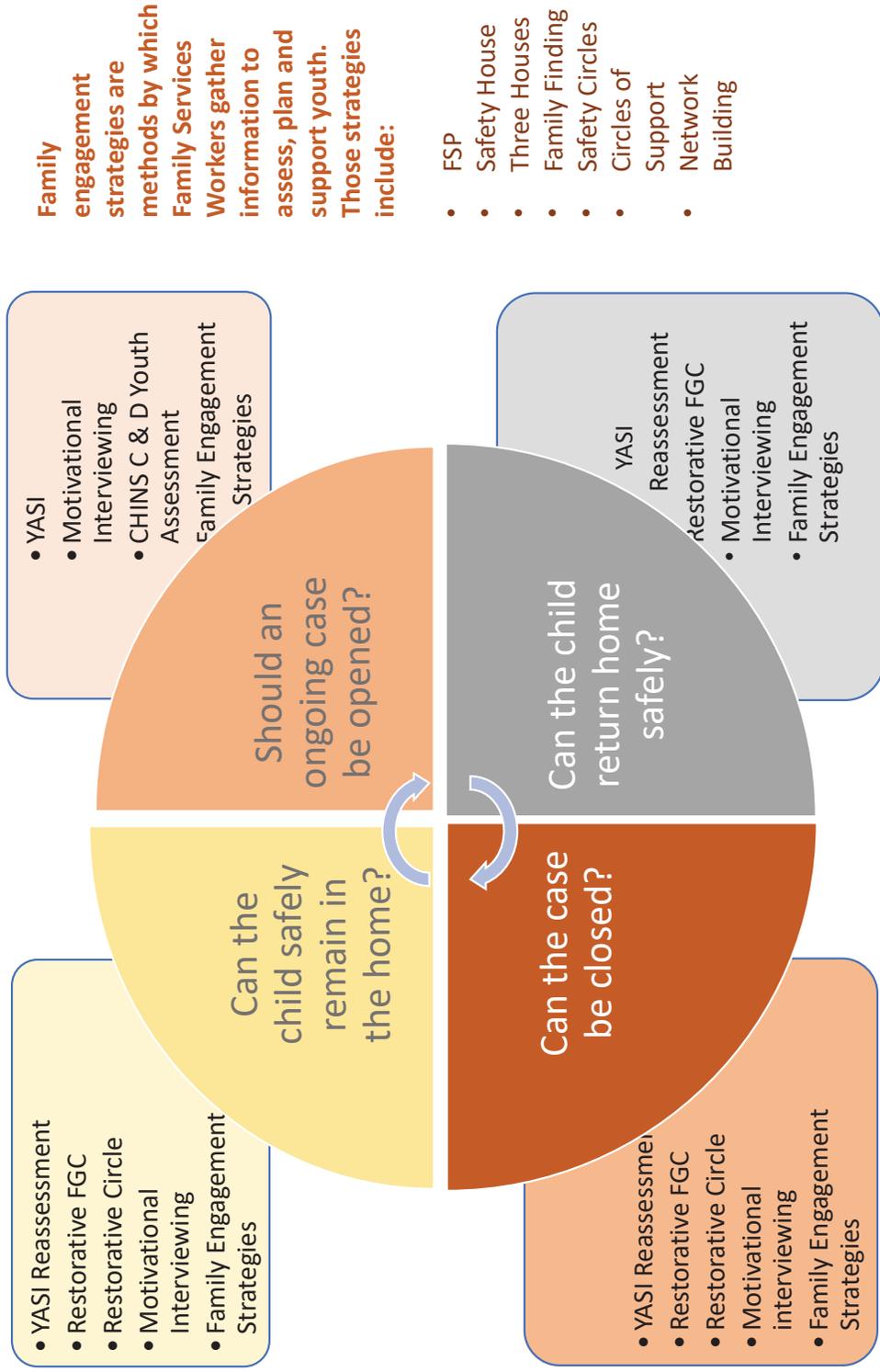
Structured Decision-Making assessments are research-based tools which help us understand immediate and ongoing risk/safety for children.



Safety Organized Practice

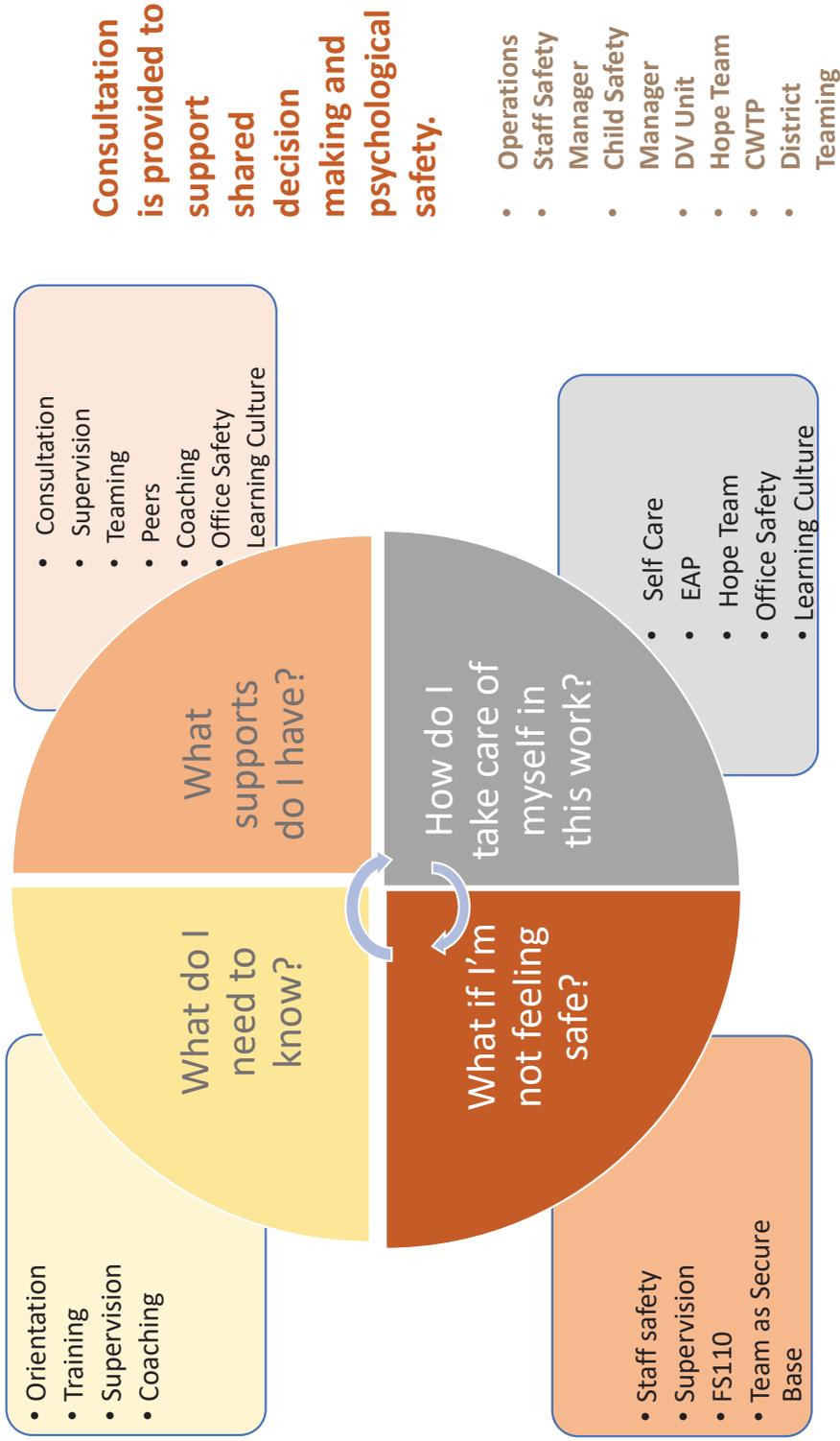
At Risk/Justice Involved Youth

The Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) is an evidenced-based validated tool that predicts the risk the youth will reoffend. In addition, it provides risk factors that contribute to their risk for targeted intervention.



Safe & Resilient Workforce

Family Services Division contracts with service providers who support our staff in their work with children, youth and families.



ENGAGING involves:

- Developing trusting relationships with children, youth, families and safety networks.
- Collaborating with caregivers while remaining vigilant about danger.
- Developing strategies that motivate caregivers to make changes that will positively impact their lives and the lives of their children.
- Viewing family and safety network members as resources who can contribute to solutions.
- Using solution-focused strategies to learn about caregiver and family actions that contribute to safety.

Prescribing solutions without the family's input creates contention and undermines the family's ability to take responsibility for change.

Engaging children and youth involves:

- Providing developmentally-appropriate explanations of our concerns so they understand what planning will look like.
- Creating opportunities for them to participate in the process.
- Assuring them that their voices are heard.

ASSESSING safety, permanency, well-being and law abidance is based on balanced, unbiased and factually-supported information. Our assessment tools are objective and reliable, and they guide our decision-making. We define the problem in a way that's solvable and describe our concerns in terms that define the dangers and risk to children and youth.

We team with members of a child or youth's safety network to strengthen patterns of connectedness between the child or youth, caregivers and other adults who can help support safety in real time.

We seek information from caregivers, safety network members and others involved with the family. We share relevant information, continuously seek new information and revise our assessments accordingly.

The voices of children and youth are important to assessment. We ask about their worries and wishes and share them with caregivers and safety network members so the adults have complete information.

Assessments about case closure are not based on compliance with services, but rather on:

- Behavioral change that mitigates danger and risk.
- The caregivers' protective actions that address danger over time.
- The sustainability of the safety network.

We help families and safety networks envision what safety will look like in the family so everyone knows what needs to happen to close the case.

NETWORK BUILDING involves assembling a team (safety network) to work with the child/youth and family to achieve safety, permanency, law abidance and well-being. Constructive relationships are critical to effective child protection and youth justice work.

At the heart of an effective safety network is an engaged relationship with caregivers.

For sustainable safety to occur, safety networks must include adults who will play a long- lasting role in the lives of children, youth and families. Other professionals, community members and resource families are also important contributors to the safety network.

Effective safety networks require good collaboration. This is all about:

- ➔ Developing understanding so everyone is clear about why we are here, what we're trying to accomplish and how we're going to do it.
- ➔ Making sure everyone's voices are heard and they feel ownership in the process.
- ➔ Having a shared commitment to the actions and outcomes.

Safety networks can help:

- ➔ Caregivers understand behaviors that are not safe for their children.
- ➔ Youth understand behaviors that are not safe for their communities.

This knowledge empowers caregivers and youth to take responsibility for outcomes.

We lead safety network meetings early, and often, as a means of integrating information and developing change strategies and specific safety plans. Our primary role in the safety network is to establish safe patterns of connectedness between children/youth, their caregivers and other people who will help ensure they are safe — both now and over time. We mobilize families and safety network members to take identified actions to ensure sustainable, real time safety of the child or youth and community.

Developing plans requires us to first define the problem in a way that is solvable. This means we describe our worries to families and safety networks in behavioral terms that define the danger to the child or youth. We also help families and safety networks create a picture of what safety will look like in the family so everyone knows what needs to happen to close the case.

PLANNING involves setting goals, developing strategies, prioritizing tasks and creating schedules to meet goals. When services are part of an intervention plan, our role is to help caregivers and youth connect what they learn to protective actions that address danger and risk and create opportunities for them to demonstrate new behaviors over time. Services are coordinated to avoid overwhelming families and unintentionally sabotaging their efforts.

We are committed to keeping children and youth within their family networks when safely possible, as research shows they have better long-term outcomes.

The goal of our intervention is for the family to rely on their own safety network should challenges arise in the future, negating the need for system intervention. Working towards incremental, attainable objectives is the most effective approach to helping caregivers make changes that keep their children safe. We hope to see the presence of new, protective actions rather than simply the absence of problematic behaviors.

- ➔ Plans are action oriented. They start with what caregivers are already doing to keep children and youth safe and ways to strengthen those behaviors.
- ➔ Tasks assigned to caregivers and safety network members are behaviorally specific and directly related to dangers as well as permanency and well-being.
- ➔ All plans rigorously address the day-to-day dangers to children and youth. Contingency strategies are developed to account for the what-ifs that might disrupt a plan.
- ➔ Children and youth play an important role in planning. Their worries and wishes, along with those of caregivers and safety network members, are included in planning. When compatible, their goals are united with our goals and written in a way they understand.

Plans are routinely reviewed with children, youth, families and safety networks. This requires us to continually consider why we are involved with a family and to describe what safety in the family will look like.

- ➔ Continued involvement with a family means the child/youth or community is unsafe.
- ➔ Plans are promptly adjusted to meet changing conditions and the needs of children, youth or families.
- ➔ Strategies that have proven to be ineffective are stopped, and new solutions are found.

Participation in services alone does not equal child or community safety. While monitoring is part of our work, creating lasting change in families is our priority.

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

Our organizational strategies help ensure our work is integrated and aligned with the practice model. Our work is guided by our Strategic Plan at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/FSD/pubs/Strategic-Plan-2019.pdf>.

LEADERSHIP

Leaders throughout the division are practice model experts and hold themselves, their peers and other staff accountable for demonstrating skills that are consistently aligned with the practice model.

An important part of leadership is creating and sustaining an organizational infrastructure that supports our practice model. Our practice model lives in our infrastructure. This includes recruitment, training, supervision and evaluation of staff, as well as policy, tools, organizational structure, programs and services.

Building excellence in practice requires leaders to promote a culture of learning, even from challenges and support among our workforce. This means leaders create routine opportunities for staff to share ideas and accentuate good work rather than focusing solely on compliance.

QUALIFIED, SAFE & RESILIENT WORKFORCE

Our staff members are change agents who utilize their professional skill set to promote effective intervention in line with the practice model. The division sets standards for staff that are in accordance with our practice model and provide support to staff to enhance their capacity to put our practice model into action.

The division, in conjunction with the Child Welfare Training Partnership, develops staff using a combination of professional training, coaching and supervision. Supervision, coaching and training methodologies support staff to continually improve their critical thinking skills and ability to practice with confidence and innovation. Supervision is strength-based and reinforces the focus on collaboration reflected in our practice model.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

We collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data for the purpose of evaluating our service delivery and how well it aligns with the practice model. Our quality improvement system is not just a data reporting mechanism but instead supports continual practice enhancement consistent with the practice model.