

# Family Services Practice Model

Our practice model articulates values and best practices that drive the work we do with children, youth, and families. It also provides a structure for thinking about the work we do every day and guides the development of policy and practice guidance.

## Our Values & Guiding Principles

- All children have the right to be safe.
- All families have both risk and safety factors.
- Everyone is capable of growth and change — with support and adequate resources.
- Engaged relationships hold the promise for sustained change.
- Valuing a family's expertise enhances our work together.
- Separating children from their families is traumatic and should be seen as a last resort.
- Early engagement of the larger family network is a key to success.
- Responsibility should be shared and use of authority limited.
- Each family's cultural, ethnic, and spiritual diversity deserves respect.

**To live these values, we must be intentional, unwavering, committed to addressing capacity, and focused on the long term.**



## **Safety** Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

*Safety is a condition in which children and adults are safe from serious harm now and in the near future and the protective capacities of the individual, family and/or community are sufficient to protect the child and/or the community.*

- Keeping children safe is our primary concern; we address it in every intervention, plan, and contact.
- Safety is a collaborative effort; we engage families and community members to develop safe solutions for families.
- We strive for ongoing safety through frequent, meaningful contact with children and their caregivers.
- We assess safety over time as a child's vulnerabilities change based on age, development, and other factors.
- We use research-based tools to inform our risk and safety planning with families.

## **Permanence** Children have enduring relationships with families that sustain them throughout their lives.

*Permanence refers to those family and community connections that contribute to healthy physical, social and emotional development. The highest level of permanence is achieved when a child or youth is living in a nurturing family setting that offers legal commitment and continuity of relationships.*

- The need for permanence for children and youth is considered at every stage of decision making.
- When children cannot safely live with their parents/guardians, we first consider other family members and friends who are capable of providing safe and nurturing homes.
- Lifelong connections are critical for children and youth; we strive to promote and preserve family and community connections for all children and youth.
- Permanence is best achieved through a legal relationship, such as reunification with parents, adoption or guardianship.

## **Well-Being** Children are successful in family, school, and community.

*Well-being is a blend of abilities, skills, and education in four domains: behavioral and emotional functioning; school and activity experiences; health and health care; and caregiver well-being.*

- We recognize that all families have strengths and deserve a voice in decisions about their children. We serve families from diverse backgrounds in a responsive manner.
- We recognize that families and individuals have the capacity to make positive changes in their lives. We engage family members and state and community partners to inform case planning and service delivery to maximize the opportunities for successful outcomes.
- We utilize strength-based assessments and research findings when making plans with children and families.

## **Law Abidance** Youth are free from delinquent behavior.

*Law abidance is engaging in behaviors that are in keeping with society's laws.*

- Youth on probation receive professional and consistent services based on best practice, collaborative family-based approaches, balanced and restorative justice principles, and progressive responses.
- We are committed to working in partnership with communities and families, and to enhancing connections between families and the communities in which they live.
- We work with the entire family to help keep youth free from delinquent behavior.
- We strive to improve community safety by:
  - Decreasing risk;
  - Providing supervision levels that are commensurate with risk; and
  - Matching placement and services to meet the needs of families and youth.

## **Learning Culture** Staff are supported, valued, and receive ongoing training.

*A learning culture supports staff to continually learn together, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are encouraged and collective aspiration has the potential to be realized.*

- We create and maintain a supportive working and learning environment — with open communication and accountability at all levels and adequate resources.
- Training is focused on building specific skills for engaging families, building safety, and creating permanence, because children and families deserve trained, skilled staff to engage and assist them.
- We learn from children, youth and families to inform our practice.

## **Engaging for Positive Change**

The primary tool we have to help children and families is our positive and respectful engagement with families to assist them in making changes in their lives.

The most fundamental needs of children, such as safety, nurturing, and belonging, cannot be addressed without recognizing and at times attending to the immediate family's needs.

Our day-to-day work practice must be:

- Child-focused, family-centered, and individualized to meet the specific needs of children and families;
- Collaborative, community-based, culturally responsive, and outcome oriented; and
- Focused on enhancing parental capacity to care for their children and on developing and sustaining life long connections.

We work in partnership with families using family-centered strategies to motivate children, youth and families to envision a better future, and become increasingly motivated to achieve it. These strategies seek to help children, youth and families think differently about their behavior and ultimately to consider what might be gained through change.

# Effective Interventions with Children, Youth, and Families

These four principles provide us with a research-based lens through which we can examine and reflect on the work we do with children, youth, and families. These principles should be visible in the direct work we do, as well as in the services and supports we offer children, youth, and families; foster parents; and other caregivers.

## 1. The Risk Principle.

Resources should be directed to children, youth, and families who are at higher risk. The intensity of the services we provide should match the level of risk. The higher the risk, the more intensive the services.

## 2. The Need Principle.

Our work should be directed at the needs of the children, youth, and families that most contribute to risk and danger. Children, youth and families present with a variety of needs. Effective interventions identify and affect change in the need areas that directly contribute to danger and risk. Our work supports parents in learning to make the best short and long-term choices for their children.

## 3. The Responsivity Principle.

Our work needs to respond to the individual temperament, learning style, motivation, culture and gender of the children, youth and families we serve. We strive to work with youth and families where they are, individualizing our response and utilizing a skill set in family engagement. We also strive to match the people and programs that are delivering interventions to the needs and abilities of the children, youth and families with which we work. We serve children and families of all cultural backgrounds and should provide services and casework that are relevant and sensitive to the needs of a diverse population. Services need to be timely and targeted at the risk and need.

## 4. The Program Integrity Principle.

Our interventions and the services we refer children and families to need to adhere to model fidelity, be evidenced based and proven to work on the particular risk or danger identified. Programs need to be periodically evaluated for their effectiveness.



# Assessing Readiness to Change

We recognize that children, youth and families who need to make changes in their lives may be at different levels of readiness to change their behavior. Social workers work in partnership with children, youth and families to promote positive behavior change.

We acknowledge that in situations of domestic violence, that the perpetrator's behavior, not the victim's behavior should be the focus of change. The preferred way to protect children in most domestic violence cases is to join with the mother in safety and support and to hold the offender responsible for the risk that his violent behavior poses to children.

We recognize the following stages of change as a fluid continuum of readiness. The pace and sequence varies from individual to individual.

1. Lack of awareness that life can be improved by changing behavior (*pre-contemplation*).
2. Recognition of the problem, initial consideration of behavior change, and information gathering about possible solutions and actions (*contemplation*).
3. Acknowledge and communicate the decision to change behavior and reaffirmation of the need and desire to change behavior (*preparation*).
4. Taking observable, perceptible steps to change behavior, for fewer than 6 months (*action*).
5. Maintain positive behavior change for at least 6 months (*maintenance*).

Our approach to working with children, youth and families, as they do the difficult work of changing behaviors and building safety:

- Is direct and transparent, yet non-confrontational;
- Is insightful, yet non-judgmental; and
- Strives to resolve disagreement and conflict in a non-adversarial manner while keeping the best interests of children tantamount.

Our work attempts to increase awareness of the potential problems caused, consequences experienced, and risks faced as a result of the behavior in question.

# Social Work Process

The following casework process attempts to capture all of the steps necessary to effectively engage with children, youth and families to effect lasting change. We recognize that children, youth and families are each unique and have their own complexities. In working with a family, we may cycle through some of the steps many times or need to pay attention to several steps at once, but effective casework requires our attention to all parts of the process.

## 1. Respond, Engage, and Assess

- Prepare - review any information you have been provided about the child, youth or family, without forming biases regarding the potential outcome. Plan your approach based on the purpose of your visit/intervention.
- Introduce - orient the children, youth, and family to the process you are about to engage in together. Respect and trust should be displayed to the family, and the family's point of view should be utilized wherever possible. Do this by seeking to understand the values, beliefs and meanings family members perceive in their stories.
- Assess - engage the family in the assessment process in as open a way as possible so they understand safety, risk, needs, and protective factors. This offers the best opportunity for a comprehensive perspective. Explore exceptions to the danger, harm and risks, which may be creating safety for the child, youth or family.

## 2. Plan

Families, their extended support networks, and other caregivers are essential to effective planning for safety and sustainable change.

- Engage - work with children, youth and family and other caregivers to acknowledge areas of danger and develop ways to build safety and mitigate risk by building on protective factors and identifying areas for change. Understand and acknowledge steps the family has already taken prior to involvement with the agency.
- Prioritize - prioritize targeted danger/safety, risks, needs and protective factors. Work collaboratively to set goals, tasks, and responsibilities. Acknowledge when there is evidence-based research which supports prioritizing one risk over another
- Assess - explore confidence, willingness, motivation, and readiness to change.

### **3. Coordinate**

- Intervene – our interventions pay attention to the safety of the whole family with the goal to do no harm. Be specific regarding which risks are being addressed through the intervention and steps taken by the family, extended support network and other caregivers. Develop a case plan which directly relates to the needs identified by the family and the social worker. Communicate targeted case plan goals to all stakeholders and service providers.
- Enhance supports – incorporate and build the families natural support network and foster long-term and permanent connections. Referrals to effective programs and services may be appropriate.
- Collaborate – integration of kin, foster parents and providers to support parents and primary caregivers in addressing safety and risk and create mutual accountability to outcomes and plans.

### **4. Support and Reassess**

This should be accomplished with the help of a family team, the group of people who helped develop the plan during family centered meetings.

- Monitor and evaluate progress – identify successes and obstacles to change. Utilize natural family supports when appropriate to provide monitoring and feedback regarding progress
- Adjust safety/case plan – modify plan(s) consistent with immediate presenting danger, risks and needs. Risks in this context should specifically relate to the existing danger and harm.
- Reinforce and reassess – reward even small positive change and develop strategies to sustain positive changes made.

### **5. Transfer or Closure**

- Transfer – purposeful, deliberate process to assist in understanding risk, safety, and protective factors in the context of permanence, well-being and law abidance.
- Termination – purposeful, deliberate process to assist in understanding the experience i.e., where you started and came to, and preparation for moving beyond the current relationship to the next.

# Tools for Engagement

To successfully implement the Family Services Practice Model, each district will incorporate into practice:

## Motivational Interviewing

Staff assess an individual's readiness to change, and partner with people to enhance their willingness, confidence, and motivation to change. Motivational interviewing occurs throughout the life of a case.

## Family Finding

- The purpose of family finding is to develop and strengthen positive connections for children, youth, and families over the life of a case.
- This can be an informal widening of the circle of support available to children, youth and families through discussions with family members and the use of tools such as ecomaps and genograms. Social workers should do this in their initial meetings with family members.
- This can also be a data base search, with subsequent attempts to engage and assess as many potential supports as possible.

## Family Meetings

- These are meetings of as many extended family and natural supports as possible, facilitated by independent facilitators.
- The initial family meeting (usually a Family Safety Planning meeting) occurs as soon as possible after initial contact with the family, but during the assessment/investigation phase. A family team is formed through this first meeting, and the family meeting leads to the initial case plan.
- Ask "Why wouldn't we hold an external FSP"?
- The initial child and family support team meeting should not, in most cases, be delayed if a Family Group Conference (FGC) is being considered.
- An FGC is especially useful when family relations are so tense that an immediate FSP would not be safe, where there is a need to repair harm, or where long-term decisions need to be made. *Until further guidance, we will not use FGC when there has been sexual abuse or serious physical abuse and the family is not fully acknowledging the abuse.*

- A formal family meeting should occur anytime a major crisis or decision point arises (e.g., new youth or parent offense, escalating patterns of risky behavior, a placement or permanence decision, case closure).
- Case closure meetings are recommended when a young person will soon be transitioning out of custody, when a youth with sexually offending behaviors is aging out, when there is ongoing risk and a need for a safety plan, and/or plan for ongoing support for the youth/family post FSD involvement. Case closure meetings provide an opportunity to celebrate a family's growth and success.
- Note: federal and state statutes require us to develop transition plans before youth exit care.

## Family Time Coaching

- Shared Parenting meetings occur in all cases where children are removed or when a placement changes — within five working days of the placement change. They then occur every 3 months to discuss changes/progress and plan for the future.
- The social worker attends one family time and post-family time meeting a month to allow the parents an opportunity to demonstrate and discuss their ability to meet the child's needs.
- Family time typically occurs in the most normal (to the child) and natural setting possible, and only rarely occurs in an office setting.
- Progress in family time coaching is formally assessed every three months with the parent(s), coach and social worker. If the parent's ability to meet their child's needs is not progressing, a family meeting to discuss the child's needs should be considered.

When a child or youth is placed out of home, family time coaching includes:

- A pre-family time meeting of the coach and parent(s) to discuss the child's needs and strategies the parent will use to meet these needs (and the coach will support).
- Family time with the coach in the room, actively coaching and assisting the parents.
- A post-family time meeting with the coach and parent(s) to assess how family time went and to plan for the next time.

## **Danger, Safety and Risk Assessment**

Assessment and decision making occur with child, youth, and family participation.

SDM - all instruments are completed *with* the family, unless including family members may pose imminent danger.

- A danger and safety assessment is completed during the first home visit. A Family Safety Plan is developed if danger is identified.
- A risk assessment is completed with the family at the closure of the assessment/ investigation (within 45-60 days).
- A risk reassessment is completed with the family every 90 days the case is open.

YASI - all YASI instruments are completed after engaging the youth and family in the assessment process using a motivational style interview. Results are shared with the youth and family. The social worker clearly states and explores with the family their strengths and protective factors as well as danger, harm and risk factors.

- The pre-screen may be completed before preliminary hearings, but must be completed before Merits.
- The full assessment is completed between *merits* and *disposition*.
- The reassessment is completed every 6 months or when a new charge, escalating pattern of risky behavior, or case closure for moderate/high risk occurs.

### **Each district will use teaming or other specific plans to ensure they have:**

- Regular planned safe opportunities for reflection and learning, and a culture that encourages an openness to giving and accepting feedback;
- A staff that feels supported, empowered to try new ways to improve their practice (little tests of change), and involved in decision making within the office;
- Opportunities for families, parents and young people to participate in planning and provide practice feedback;
- A case transition process that seems seamless to families when they have to experience a change in workers; and
- Consistent, cohesive practices throughout the office, aligned with practice guidance and policy.

**Be the change you want to see.**

# Definitions

## *Danger*

An immediate, significant and clearly observable family condition occurring in the present tense, already endangering or threatening to endanger the child and/or community; it is currently in process of actively endangering a child and/or the community.

## *Safety*

A condition in which the threat of serious harm is not present or imminent or the protective capacities of the individual, family and/or community are sufficient to protect the child and/or the community.

## *Risk*

Refers only to the likelihood that child maltreatment or youth acts of delinquency may occur in the future.

## *Protective Capacity*

Refers to the individual and family strengths, resources or characteristics that mitigate threats of serious harm to a child or demonstrate that the child is being adequately protected by his or her caregiver(s) or mitigate acts of delinquency. In this context, family strengths or resources refer only to those characteristics that directly affect the safety of the child, or the appropriate behavior of the child at home and in the community.

## *Safety Plans & Case Plans*

These are differentiated by timeframes, severity of harm and focus of intervention. Danger must be controlled in the present through a plan for safety. Plans that address risk and case plans have more long-term goals identifying changes that include activities required to resolve the underlying and contributing factors that lead to the child or community being unsafe or that are intended to reduce overall risk and improve child well-being.

## *Family-Centered Practice*

A respectful, strengths-based approach that views the family as central to decision making in the best interests of the child.