

Chapter:	Working With Families	
Subject:	Family Services: Initial Assessment and Planning	Page 1 of 5
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 8/15/98 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 2210	Dated: 2/1/95

Purpose

To set policy for completion of initial case plans and outline the considerations in assessing families who will receive ongoing services from the division.

Policy


When a social worker has been assigned to provide ongoing services to a family, he or she will complete an assessment and case plan with the family within thirty days of assignment. A DCF assessment may be done in conjunction with additional expert assessments of specific issues.

The assessment of risk of harm to the child is a critical part of the assessment process. However, assessment of risk is not enough; we must also attempt to understand what factors within and around the family that increase or decrease that risk. Services needed to eliminate or reduce high risk factors should be put in place promptly. All factors that contribute to risk of harm to the child should be addressed by the case plan.

The case plan must assure the protection of the child and focus on reducing risk. In addressing safety and risk, the worker should work with the family to identify the family's strengths and any resources in their natural helping network, including their kinship network, that may be of assistance. When possible, the priorities in the case plan should reflect the family's view of the most pressing issue facing them.

The case plan should be developed with the family, including older children and youth whenever appropriate. The plan should include:

- goals to be accomplished during a specific period of time;
- resources to be provided by the division, the family members, informal support system and community organizations;
- responsibilities of the social worker and the family members for the assigned tasks and time frames for achieving goals;
- time frames for review of progress;
- a description of what will happen if goals are met or not met.

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		71
Chapter:	Working With Families	
Subject:	Family Services: Initial Assessment and Planning	Page 2 of 5
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 8/15/98 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 2210	Dated: 2/1/95

Services specified for the family should be feasible, i.e. the family is able and willing to participate and can get to the service. Goals should be few enough to ensure a sense that they are achievable. Some may need to be broken down into smaller, less overwhelming steps.

The written plan (FS-245) should be in clear language, understandable to family members, concentrating on action verbs and avoiding legal, social work and other jargon.

The goal of the case plan is to ensure a safe and permanent home for the child, to reduce the risk to the child and/or community, enable the family to be supported without involuntary state intervention and to promote permanency and well-being for the child. The plan should effectively communicate what the family and others are supposed to do and how participants will know when the goals are met.

Casework Considerations/General Guidance

Assessment is a continual process that identifies the family’s strengths, resources, needs and problems, and helps to identify measurable, realistic, and time-limited goals for intervention, as well as strategies for their achievement (adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Standards for Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families with Children, 1989). Issues to be considered include:

- safety of children and all family members;
- parenting skills;
- bonding and attachment issues;
- basic needs for food, shelter and clothing;
- family interactions;
- family strengths and competencies;
- formal and informal support systems, to include the kinship network;
- stresses, both chronic and acute, including substance abuse and domestic violence;
- identification of disabilities, including mental illness, that need to be assessed;
- past and present coping strategies;
- communication skills; and
- previous experience with helping systems.

Other issues may need assessing as well, depending on the family, including

Chapter:	Working With Families	
Subject:	Family Services: Initial Assessment and Planning	Page 3 of 5
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 8/15/98 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 2210	Dated: 2/1/95

- nutrition;
- speech and language;
- child development;
- toxic metal screening;
- learning and psychological issues, etc.

The worker engaged in an assessment process should strive to establish rapport with the family, and a sense of respect and courtesy. Permission should be obtained for use of first names. Inquiries about the family’s daily schedule, including the best time for appointments with the social worker, will convey a sense of respect for the needs and preferences of family members.

Some families are upset about division involvement in their personal lives. Allowing all families to express themselves about state intervention is important, as it encourages the open expression of feeling, and can offer insight about the family’s perception of their situation.

The concrete needs of the family deserve prompt attention; parental stress over immediate and concrete needs often increases risk to the child. Offering help in this area helps to build a sense of rapport and collaboration with the family.

Social Worker Tasks

- Reviews case record.
- Discusses family's situation with previously assigned worker and current service providers.
- Meets with family, in their home unless safety factors dictate another meeting place, to complete the assessment and planning process.
- Completes written plan (FS-245) within thirty days, whenever possible.
- Provides copy of plan to family.

Supervisory Tasks

Chapter:	Working With Families	
Subject:	Family Services: Initial Assessment and Planning	Page 4 of 5
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 8/15/98 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 2210	Dated: 2/1/95

- Assists the worker in resolving any difficult issues related to the assessment and planning process.
- Reviews completed plan, signing in concurrence, or recommending any needed changes.
- Enters date of case plan into Supervisory Tracking Form.

APPENDIX A USEFUL AVENUES FOR INQUIRY IN FAMILY ASSESSMENT

Who is in the family?

- Names
- Ages
- Relationships
- Occupations
- Religion

What roles do family members play?

- Who performs parenting roles?
- What subsystems exist? Are boundaries between the adult partner subsystem and other subsystems clear?
- Do family members view the roles in the same way? Are they satisfied with role definitions and expectations?
- Can roles be changed when necessary?

What are the family rules?

- Decision-making
- Child care
- Discipline
- Privacy and use of space
- Intimacy and expression of love and affection
- Expression of anger
- Relationships among generations, including extended family
- Can rules be discussed?
-

How do family members communicate?

Chapter:	Working With Families	
Subject:	Family Services: Initial Assessment and Planning	Page 5 of 5
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 8/15/98 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 2210	Dated: 2/1/95

- Are communication channels identifiable?
- Who communicates to whom and how?
- Is the communication style primarily verbal or non-verbal?
- How are feelings communicated?
- What are the taboos about communication?
- Do messages tend to be clear or ambiguous?

What are the relationships?

- How do family members feel about one another?
- How do members feel about themselves in relation to others?
- Are there dyads that tend to pull in third parties to diffuse tension or relieve anxiety?
- Who has the most power or influence?
- How do parents use their power (e.g. to protect, nurture and socialize children).
- What are the major conflicts in the family, from the point of view of each member?
- What events precede and follow behavior that puts the child at risk?

Family through time

- What are the normal developmental tasks facing a family in this stage?
- What are the significant events in the history of individuals and the family together?
- Are there significant stories, themes or patterns in the family's history?
- How has the family dealt with past challenges and stresses?
- How does the family relate intergenerationally? Are there close ties, strong values, traditions, myths, animosities, etc. that are important to understand?
- What are the family's hopes and dreams about the future?

Family network

- What people or systems are important to the family?
- Who does the family turn to for support?
- Is the family able to meet the basic needs of its members? How much stress is the family experiencing in meeting these needs?
- What is the "fit" between the family and larger society, including school, work, church, etc.
- Are there significant cultural or ethnic factors that influence the way the family functions?