

CWS1071W

Family-Centered Case Planning

Learner Handouts

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

LTD Local Training
and Development

HANDOUTS

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COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

COURSE CWS1071: FAMILY CENTERED CASE PLANNING

COMPETENCIES:

- CWS1071-1:** The trainee will be able to develop case plans that include objectives and service activities to address high priority needs and problems, and build on family resources and strengths.
- CWS1071-2:** The trainee will work collaboratively with the family, including extended family members and service providers, to plan and coordinate services.
- CWS1071-3:** The trainee will initiate permanency planning activities, including concurrent case planning, to assure children's safety and stability.
- CWS1071-4:** The trainee will complete case documentation and organize and maintain family case records.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this training participants will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of case planning in child welfare.
2. Describe the various types of case planning that are conducted in child welfare services.
3. Define and list in order the steps in effective case planning.
4. Describe strategies for engaging families in the case planning process.

5. Learn how issues of culture, motivation, and change impact the development of the case plan.
6. Understand how family members can be involved in group planning and decision-making meetings.
7. Develop skills in using interview strategies to engage families in case planning.
8. Learn how issues of culture impact the development of the case plan.
9. Learn why it is important to involve fathers and learn a variety of strategies for engaging fathers in the case planning process.
10. Review and practice safety assessment and planning.
11. Identify the goals of case planning.
12. Correctly formulate objectives and activities to address the case plan goal.
13. Understand the fundamental concepts regarding concurrent planning.
14. Understand the caseworker's dual roles as case manager and direct service provider in meeting case goals and objectives.
15. Understand the importance of regular case reviews to monitor progress and modify case assessment, goals, objectives, and activities as needed.
16. Understand their roles and responsibilities in the case review process.
17. Know the factors to consider for appropriate case closures

Case Planning in Child Welfare



Case Planning is a Continuous Process

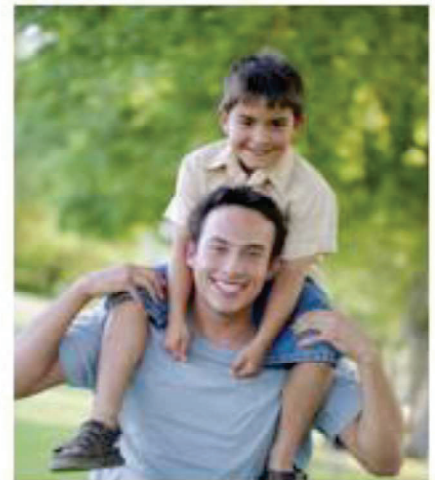
Everyone plans – even when they are not conscious of planning. In child welfare, careful planning is essential. The planning process is dynamic and occurs throughout the life of a case – no plan should be static. Case planning helps identify, organize, and monitor activities and services to families needed to achieve case outcomes. These formal “action plans” are based on family assessments that identify high need areas and help determine service objectives. Family assessments and developing case plans are always completed jointly with family members.

Six-Step Process for Case Planning

1. Identify the problem
2. Engage the family in collaborative partnership
3. Assess the nature of the problem and its contributors, and identify family strengths and resources available to address the problem
4. Form goals and objectives for what needs to be achieved
5. Identify the best actions to achieve the case goals and objectives; assign responsibility to the agency, to family members, and to other providers; and set realistic time frames for completion
6. Review the case and evaluate whether the actions were successful in achieving the desired outcomes

Principal System Goals of Child Welfare Practice

- Identify children at risk of maltreatment
- Assure children's safety and prevent future maltreatment
- Enhance families' ability to care for and nurture children in their own homes, communities, and culture
- Provide least restrictive placement with child's extended family, or as close to child's home as possible
- Reunify as quickly as possible
- Provide alternative, permanent placement when reunification is not possible



Permanency for all children is a central goal of child welfare.

Involving Families

Case planning requires collaboration between the caseworker and the family -both immediate and extended. Involving families improves outcomes in the following ways:

- It facilitates engagement, because the family's thoughts, feelings, and experiences have been heard, considered, and respected
- It increases the family's commitment to working on the plan, since they have had input in its development
- It empowers the family to take action to change behaviors and conditions that contributed to the risk of maltreatment
- It ensures that everyone is working toward the same end

For more information on involving fathers go to: www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPSummer02.pdf



Case planning is a collaborative effort between families, caseworkers, and other service providers

Goals (comprehensive outcomes), Objectives (specific outcomes), and Activities

Case planning includes goals, objectives, and activities

Goals-Goals are comprehensive statements of the desired outcome toward which all case activities are directed.

Goals:

- Address the overall goals of child safety, child permanence, child and family well-being
- Common and clearly stated goals promote coordination of many activities by multiple players to help address multiple needs and problems
- Goals may change during the life of a case (For example, if a child cannot be reunited with his or her family, the goal may change from reunification to adoption.)

Objectives-Objectives are statements of specific desired outcomes that must be met to reduce risk to children and to achieve case goals.

Objectives:

- Address the high priority problems and needs identified during the family assessment
- Address the enhancement of family strengths that can lessen the risk
- Must be observable, written in behavioral terms, and measurable to allow agreement on when objectives have been met
- Should be mutually agreed upon by the family and the caseworker

Activities-Activities are a step-by-step listing of tasks, services, participants, and time frames that guide service delivery. They are mutually agreed upon, and should be consistent with the family's culture and preference when possible.

Action plans include:

- The correct sequence of activities to achieve the desired outcome
- Assignment of responsibility for each activity to a family member, the caseworker, and/or a community provider
- Where each activity is to occur
- Timeframes for beginning and completing each activity (average timeframe should be three to six months)



Safety Planning

If the initial assessment indicates a child is at high risk of imminent harm, the caseworker must develop an action plan to assure that the child is protected, preferably at home using family-centered strategies that minimize trauma. Strategies include mobilizing protective factors in the immediate and extended family, intensive home-based or home-maker services, protective day care, respite care, removal of the perpetrator, or assigning child care to a responsible adult. If placement is necessary, extended family, family friends, and other people the child knows should be explored before considering foster care.

Services Planning

Case service plans document the outcomes for each family and child, and the action plan to achieve those outcomes. Federal regulations require that case plans describe how child safety and permanency will be achieved. If placement is necessary, case plans outline how this occurs in the least restrictive, most family-like setting in close proximity to the child's parents. Case plans for court-involved families are legal documents journalized in Juvenile Court and reviewed every six months in Semi-Annual Administrative Reviews.

Outcomes That Promote Permanency

- Child will remain with his/her own family
- Child will be returned to his/her own family
- Child will be placed in permanent home with a relative
- Child will be legally adopted
- Child will be placed in a family that will assume legal guardianship
- Child will remain in a foster home under Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement
- Youth will be emancipated to independent living

Case planning takes many forms including:

- Safety planning
- Services planning
- Concurrent planning
- Reunification planning
- Semi-annual reviews
- Case conferences or staffing

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent case planning is a process of working toward family reunification while, at the same time, developing an alternative permanency plan. When children are not in safe and stable homes, the child welfare system has an obligation to quickly plan and provide services to ensure safety and permanency. By achieving timely permanency, children experience fewer attachment-related difficulties than children who linger in foster care. Concurrent case planning provides caseworkers with a structured approach to move children quickly from foster care to the stability of a permanent family home.

Reunification Planning

Reunification planning involves outlining the conditions necessary for a child's safe return home. A properly formulated case plan regularly reviewed and amended when necessary, is the most legitimate means of determining when a child can be safely reunified with his family. The reunification plan outlines the specific steps to guide the reunification process and to identify services to support the family to promote placement stability. Completion of the reunification, when combined with risk assessment that documents risk reduction, underpins the decision to close a case.

Semi-Annual Administrative Reviews

Semi-Annual Administrative Reviews are held to determine whether the case plan is being properly and adequately followed, and whether progress has been made. For court-involved families, the review is approved by the court and should set a target date for the child's return home, adoption, or other permanent placement.

Case Conferencing/Case Staffing

During these staffing, caseworkers and other participants formally review a case, assess progress, identify barriers to achieve outcomes, and revise the case plan accordingly.

THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

(Reprinted from *Family Engagement*, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau/ACYF, June 2010. Available online at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fam_engagement/)

Family engagement is a family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes. It is founded on the principle of communicating openly and honestly with families in a way that supports disclosure of culture, family dynamics, and personal experiences in order to meet the individual needs of every family and every child. More and more evidence suggests that family engagement has many benefits, including:

- **Enhancing the helping relationship.** A family's belief that all its members are respected and that their feelings and concerns are heard strengthens their relationship with their case worker. This positive relationship, in turn, can increase the chances for successful intervention.
- **Promoting family "buy-in."** When families are part of the decision-making process and have a say in developing plans that affect them and their children, they are more likely to be invested in the plans and more likely to commit to achieving objectives and complying with treatment that meets their individual needs. A qualitative analysis of findings from the three top-performing metro sites in the 2007-2008 Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) found that child and family involvement in case planning was correlated with (1) active engagement of noncustodial and incarcerated parents, (2) family-centered and strength-based approaches (e.g., team meetings, mediation) effective in building working relationships, and (3) strong rapport developed between workers and parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2009).
- **Expanding options.** Inclusion of family members—including fathers and extended family—early in a case provides a greater opportunity to explore the use of relatives as a placement/permanency option for children.
- **Improving the quality and focus of visits.** The partnership developed between the family and social worker through family engagement strategies strengthens the assessment process and leads to more appropriate service provision.
- **Increasing placement stability.** The CFSRs found that States with high ratings for developing case plans jointly with parents and youth also had high percentages of children with permanency and stability in their living situations (HHS, 2004). Research on family group decision-making (FGDM) also points to improvements in creating stability and maintaining family continuity (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2003).

- **Improving timeliness of permanency decisions.** Research also suggests that parental involvement is linked to quicker reunification and other forms of permanency (Tam & Ho, 1996; Merkel-Holguin, et al., 2003).
- **Building family decision-making skills.** By being involved in strength-based decision-making processes and having appropriate problem-solving approaches modeled, families are more comfortable communicating their own problem-solving strategies and exploring new strategies that may benefit themselves and their children.
- **Enhancing the fit between family needs and services.** Working collaboratively, caseworkers and families are better able to identify a family's unique needs and develop relevant and culturally appropriate service plans that address underlying needs, build on family strengths, and draw from community supports. A better fit in services often leads to a more effective use of limited resources (Doolan, 2005).

Specific Strategies that Reflect Family Engagement

Family engagement strategies build on the foundation of agency commitment and caseworker skills. Family engagement strategies include but are not limited to:

- **Frequent and substantive caseworker visits.** Workers must have frequent and meaningful contact with families in order to engage them in the work that needs to be done to protect children, promote permanency, and ensure child well-being. Frequent visits with parents also are positively associated with better client-worker relationships; better outcomes in discipline and emotional care of children; timely establishment of permanency goals; timely filing for termination of parental rights; and reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives (Lee & Ayon, 2004; HHS, 2004).
- **Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM), Family Partnership Meeting, Family Team Meeting.** This is an effective and increasingly popular case-level strategy for engagement in the United States and around the world. FGDM is an umbrella term for various processes in which families are brought together with agency personnel and other interested parties to make decisions about and develop plans for the care of their children and needed services. FGDM strategies differ in meeting format, the stage during case meetings when they are held, the extent of family preparation, the extent of family privacy time, and other characteristics. The models are known by a variety of names and include: Family group conferences, Family team conferences, Family team meetings, Family unity meetings, and in Virginia, Family Partnership Meetings.
- **Motivational Interviewing.** This is a directive counseling method for enhancing intrinsic motivation and promoting behavior change by helping families explore and resolve ambivalence. This technique, which relies heavily on listening reflectively and asking directive questions, has shown positive results in working with child welfare populations with substance abuse issues (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare).
- **Parent and youth involvement in agency councils and boards.** This proactive way for State and county agencies to gather and use parent and youth input in program and policy development, service design, and program evaluation.

- **Collaborative strategies.** Working in partnership with families in a strength-based way to support achievement of case goals and objectives. Examples include Collaborative Helping (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mOAZV/is_200903/ai_n32319390/)(Madsen, 2009), the Signs of Safety approach (www.signsofsafety.net/signsofsafety) (Turnell & Edwards, 1999), and solution-focused practice (Berg & De Jong, 2004; Antle, Barbee, Christensen, & Martin, 2008).
- **An active and meaningful role for families.** This can be achieved by involving them in case planning and checking in with them during visits about their understanding of and progress toward the plan. Involvement of the family in case planning is correlated with greater engagement noncustodial and incarcerated parents, family-centered/strength-based approaches, and stronger rapport between workers and families (HHS, 2009).
- **Father involvement.** It is important to recognize the importance of fathers to the healthy development of children. Agencies are increasingly reaching out to fathers and working to enhance their positive involvement with their children. Fatherhood programs vary greatly. Some are outreach efforts to include fathers in assessment and case planning processes; others help fathers address stressors or behaviors that affect their ability to support their children.
- **Family search and engagement.** This encourages broad-based participation in family decision-making to leverage kinship connections and increase placement/permanency options.
- **Mediation.** This strategy adopted by many agencies and courts, allows agency representatives and families to work with a neutral facilitator to arrive at a mutually acceptable plan.
- **Parent Partner Programs.** This engages parents who were once involved with the child welfare system to serve as mentors to currently involved parents, providing support, advocacy, and help navigating the system. Parent Partner Programs also use the birth parent experience to influence changes in policy and protocol, encourage shared decision-making, strengthen individualized plans, and educate the community.
- **Foster family-birth family meetings.** This encourages birth families and foster families to share information, help model parenting skills, and support participation of foster families in placement conferences that contribute to reunification efforts.

REMEMBERING PERSONAL CHANGES

Think of a situation in which you made a significant change in your life. Please answer the following questions.

1. What was your initial reaction to this change?

2. Why did you decide to make this change? Was it forced on you?

3. Did your reactions to this process change over time?

4. Who or what helped you make this change?

5. What risks were involved in making this change?

6. Many changes involve loss. What did you lose when you made this change?

FULL DISCLOSURE CONVERSATION REGARDING CONCURRENT PLANNING

Purpose

The purpose of open communication regarding concurrent planning is to inform families about the concurrent planning process and the agency's commitment to permanency for children. This process respects the parents' rights to have information about their children and is consistent with the philosophy of family-centered practice.

The full disclosure conversation should occur fairly early in working with the family. This provides the family with full information about the agency's policies and procedures on this matter. Having the conversation early also allows the worker to gain information about possible relative or kin placement should the family disengage from the casework relationship.

Many agencies have specific policies and procedures regarding concurrent planning, including when to have this conversation with families and what must be discussed. You should learn about and follow your agency's policy and procedures.

Content to be included in the conversation

The conversation with the parent regarding concurrent planning should include the following:

- Inform the parent of the agency's commitment to permanency and safety for all children. Inform the parent that the uncertainty of long term foster care is not good for children. Children need stable, secure, permanent homes in order to develop properly.
- Inform the parent you are committed to reunification and will only seek termination of parental rights if all efforts to reunify fail.
- Inform the parent of federal and state laws requiring child welfare agencies to provide permanent homes for children in a timely manner. Federal law requires that the agency petition for termination of parental rights when the child has been in care 15 of the last 22 months. The only exceptions are if the agency has not been able to provide the services needed by the family to resolve the problems that led to placement, or if it is not in the child's best interest to have parental rights terminated.

- Ask the parent to help you identify the most appropriate permanent home for his/her children. This could be a relative or kin home. The parent should also be asked to identify any relative or kin homes that would be inappropriate for the child. For example, there could be a relative who has a history of maltreating other children.
- Inform the parent of the process you would use to find a permanent home. This would include asking relatives if they could provide a home for the child, conducting home studies of those relatives, etc. This would, of course, include a continued effort to locate and consider a non-custodial parent. Inform the parent that you will consider their recommendations about appropriate relative or kin placements for the child.

Strategies

One of the major challenges for workers is their own anxiety about conducting this conversation. This is a delicate subject to discuss and requires considerable finesse from the worker. The following ideas may help with this conversation:

- Many parents are probably already worried about whether their children will be removed permanently. Openly discussing it may be a relief.
- Most parents, whether or not they are involved with child protection, have thought about designating a guardian for their children (informally or through wills) in case something should happen to them. This is a right and a responsibility and is an integral part of concurrent planning.
- Remind parents that planning for a permanent home for the child demonstrates considerable love, concern, and responsibility for the future well being of the child.
- Remind parents that you will file for termination of parental rights only if they are not able to provide a safe home for the child.

Worker Safety

Carefully consider whether the parent may react violently to this conversation. Discuss this issue with your supervisor. If you believe that your safety may be compromised, make appropriate arrangements. For example, you may need to have this conversation at the office, with a supervisor or security guard available who can handle any problems that may occur.

Please list three things that you will do differently over the next several weeks, as a result of your new knowledge and skills learned in the training session. Consider any possible barriers to implementation.

1. ISSUE:

Possible barrier to implementation:

2. ISSUE:

Possible barrier to implementation:

3. ISSUE:

Possible barrier to implementation:

Related Courses that may be helpful:

CWS1011: Casework Process and Case Planning in Child Welfare

CWS1061: Family Centered Assessment

CWS5011: Case Documentation

CWS5307: Assessing Safety, Risk, and Protective Capacities in Child Welfare

CWS1305: The Helping Interview

CWS3071: Concurrent Permanency Planning

CWS5305: Advanced Interviewing: Motivating Families for Change

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