

The Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model

Values and Principles in Child Welfare Supervision



September 2011

Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) developed the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model with county, tribal, university and community partners in 2009. The practice model identifies a set of desired outcomes for children, youth and families. It describes the values, principles and skills necessary for public child welfare professionals to work effectively with clients, community partners and each other. The department recognizes the important role county and tribal child welfare supervisors play in creating a work environment where the practice model values, principles and skills are consistently applied in the work conducted by agency staff.

In early 2010, the department collaborated with a diverse group of county and tribal supervisors and participated in a strategic planning process facilitated by federal consultants. This planning process focused on identifying strengths and needs within Minnesota's county and tribal system of child welfare supervision. A comprehensive strategic plan was developed in late 2010. One of the plan's key recommendations involved developing a supervisor's guide for child welfare supervision grounded in the values, principles and skills found in Minnesota's Child Welfare Practice Model.

The supervisor's guide identifies a few, primary supervisory practices related to each of the 11 values and principles identified in the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model. Additionally, the guide lists a set of "markers of effectiveness" for each of the value and principle areas. These "markers of effectiveness" outline what agency child welfare actions and behaviors clients might expect to observe if these supervisory skills are consistently implemented.

The guide seeks to promote a value-driven, results-oriented model of child welfare supervisory practice. The purpose is to stimulate, within agencies and geographic regions, meaningful dialogues about how supervision can more effectively support strength-based, family-focused child welfare practice across Minnesota.

Department staff also acknowledges the important role child welfare supervisors played in developing the supervisor's guide. Their practical and useful input is reflected throughout the guide.

Safety: Child safety is paramount and best achieved by supporting parents within their community

Supervisor's Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Review with social workers in regularly scheduled individual and/or group consultation the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child safety plans • Maltreatment concerns • Family protective factors • Worker's efforts to support custodial, non-custodial and non-resident parents and caregivers in safely caring for the children and youth in their care. <p>Approve safety and case plans only after:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough on-going review • Carefully scanning for good practice and related efforts • Ensuring that concerted efforts were made to partner with families and appropriate community partners to meet the safety needs of children <p>Regularly review Social Service Information System (SSIS). Time to First Contact Reports to ensure children are initially seen in a time frame consistent with statutory guidelines.</p> <p>Review case documentation in all cases at case closing to ensure child safety was a key value, and the primary basis for making case-related decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In child protection reports accepted for assessment, children and families are seen within statutory guidelines. • Safety plans are completed at the first contact and documented in SSIS within three days of first contact. • Worker's documentation clearly identifies underlying safety concerns and rationale for safety decisions that were made. • Workers can articulate to their supervisors how family and household members, including children and youth, were involved in providing safety-related information and developing the safety and case plans. • When describing a family, workers routinely reference families' protective capacities to keep their children safe, and are knowledgeable about related community and/or tribal safety resources. • Workers are able to articulate to their supervisor, at any time, the safety issues, protective capacities, how safety is demonstrated over time within the family, and related plans for every child on their caseload. • Workers monitor safety plans at every contact with a family and adjust plans based on information gathered. • Safety is consistently assessed by workers utilizing safety tools (for example, Structured Decision Making (SDM) and safety scales) for all family members, not just a single identified child.

Permanency: Children and youth need and have the right to lifelong nurturing and secure relationships that are provided by families who can meet their specific needs. Efforts to identify and secure permanency for children are continuous and integrated into all stages of involvement with children and families.

Supervisor's Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Consistently reinforce that permanency goals and time frames are established and met for all children and youth served through the local child welfare agency.</p> <p>Monitor progress on permanency goals at each supervisory session, carefully examining with caseworkers progress and challenges faced by children and youth in achieving timely permanency.</p> <p>Ensure appropriate concurrent permanency planning services are provided for all children and youth.</p> <p>Advocate for and actively promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement of all children with their siblings and in the home of relatives, unless there is evidence that it is not in their best interest • Preserve connections for children and youth placed in non-relative homes with kin and significant persons, and also community resources • Timely completion of individualized child and youth placement plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers consistently seek family and community connections on behalf of children and youth, as part of their practice. • Families are respectfully engaged in the planning process with the opportunity to contribute to a child's permanency plan options and goals. Concurrent plans are developed in a timely manner with the family with efforts towards reunification remaining the primary goal, unless the court relieves the agency of this responsibility. • Family visits occur frequently for children in out-of-home care, and are viewed by workers as necessary to maintain a strong relationship between children and their family. • Transition services for youth are designed to promote healthy independence, while also establishing connections to caring adults who will commit to a supportive and lasting relationship. • Resource families receive consistent support throughout a child's placement in their home. These children have more stable placement experiences. • Workers consistently document their efforts to diligently search for non-custodial fathers and other relatives as placement options, and stable connections for children on their caseload.

Well-being: Children’s well-being is dependent on strong families and communities to meet their physical, mental and behavioral health, as well as educational and cultural needs.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Regularly examine worker’s efforts to promote positive well-being outcomes for children and youth. This includes addressing physical, mental and behavioral health, as well as educational needs of a child and youth.</p> <p>Ensure workers complete children’s mental health screenings and well-being assessments grounded in specific and observable facts, supported with proper professional or expert consultation, as needed.</p> <p>Assist workers in locating community resources that effectively address the well-being needs of children and youth.</p> <p>Promote a unit culture where workers support each other through peer consultation, including sharing existing resources and identifying resource gaps for children, youth and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and youth are visited by caseworkers at least monthly, and well-being is continually assessed and adequately addressed. • Throughout the life of a case, workers make concerted efforts to ensure that the physical, mental, and behavioral health needs of all children are assessed and addressed. This knowledge is also demonstrated through case documentation. • Other service providers connected to the family, such as a child’s school or family doctor, are engaged in child well-being planning and family support. • Appropriate information is shared with key persons involved in delivering services, while respecting client confidentiality. • Each case plan is thoughtfully developed and implemented based on the capacity of the family to achieve goals, the resources available to the family, and the ongoing safety and well-being needs of children.

Respectful Engagement: Children, youth and families are best served when public child welfare staff actively listen to them and invite participation in decision making. Respectful engagement includes understanding and honoring the family’s history, culture and traditions, as well as empowering them to meet their unique and individual needs through utilization of family strengths, and educating them regarding the child welfare process.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Model through action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening skills • Transparent, honest and strength-based communication • Respectful engagement of staff, agency colleagues, community partners, children, youth and families • Participatory decision making • Skillful use of authority. <p>Show respect for the individual uniqueness of each worker, and create an environment in which cultural and other differences are appreciated.</p> <p>Assess staff’s respectful engagement skills by participating in their face-to-face meetings with children, youth and families.</p> <p>Support caseworkers in accessing training that builds necessary clinical skills for providing strength-based, collaborative practice with families and community stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with workers and case documentation reflect that workers made concerted efforts to engage children, youth and families in the case planning process using active listening and open, two-way communication skills. • Children, youth and families actively participate in the case planning process. Plans are appropriately matched to the individual needs of families, their ability to use services effectively, and reflect a range of supports and community services. • Case plans are developed in the cultural context of a family and demonstrate worker’s respect for the family’s culture and language. Family traditions are honored, while child safety is maintained. • Worker’s documentation and discussion typically reflects that families acknowledge the purpose of the case plan and demonstrate a willingness to participate. Workers skillfully engage families through strength-based, family inquiry and discussions. • Workers feel respected, supported and trusted within their unit. This is demonstrated through open communication with their peers and supervisors that is constructive and solution-focused.

Fostering Connections: As youth transition to adulthood, they benefit from services that promote healthy development, academic success and safe living conditions, as well as established connections to caring adults who will commit to lasting supportive relationships.

Supervisor's Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Support workers and youth in developing and implementing case plans that promote safe living environments, healthy development and academic success.</p> <p>Ensure workers make concerted efforts towards developing at least one lifelong supportive adult relationship for every youth.</p> <p>Encourage workers to develop plans with providers and caregivers using a team approach to support youth as they transition to adulthood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth participation in decision making and planning is demonstrated through worker's case documentation, including current, individualized case plans signed by youth. • Workers demonstrate concerted efforts to maintain family connections through ever increasing visitation. If immediate family connections are not available for a youth, the worker seeks other appropriate adults for a youth to spend time with in visitation. • Workers support youth by helping them to learn skills to communicate with and live adaptively with their birth family. • Workers seek supervisory guidance in thinking "out of the box" to meet a child's unique needs as they transition to adulthood. • Workers initiate actions to secure or enhance a needed service or resource for an older youth that is lacking in a community or out-of-home setting.

Family Focus: Families are primary providers for children’s needs. The safety and well-being of children is dependent upon the safety and well-being of all family members.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Regularly review caseworker’s practice and client case plans. Ensure that worker’s practice and case plans are designed to enhance parents’ capacity to successfully care for their children.</p> <p>Support staff in creating “family-based teams” to develop and implement creative, individualized solutions that build on the strengths of families to meet their needs.</p> <p>Frequently ask workers about the strengths and protective factors within the family, and how the family has contributed to the assessment and case planning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The needs of all family members are carefully considered in developing viable case plans. • Family members participate in decisions relating to their plans, services, and providers while maintaining safety as “paramount.” • Services provided to a family are accessible, available, and appropriately matched to a family’s ability to use the resource effectively. • Family strengths, protective factors, and community and tribal resources are considered during assessments and throughout the case planning process. • Family members, along with other professionals involved with a family (the support “team,”) are clear on the concerns, tasks, and progress towards goals as plans are implemented. • Case plans are individualized for families, and reflect a range of family supports and community services.

Partnerships: Families, communities, and the child welfare system are primary and essential partners in creating and supporting meaningful connections in a safe and nurturing environment for children and youth.

Supervisor's Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Promote a shift in child welfare practice from expert intervention and monitoring to collaborative efforts with families, leveraging the strengths of all partners.</p> <p>Mentoring, coaching and authority are used skillfully to support workers in developing client and community partnerships</p> <p>Promote a cohesive system of care dedicated to supporting internal agency staff, and achieving the positive outcomes specific for each child, youth and family.</p> <p>Model a team approach for doing work within the unit, and help to create an agency wide atmosphere where opinions are valued and respect is shared.</p> <p>Promote the sharing of resources to assist in establishing strategic relationships with community providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When multiple service systems are involved with a family, workers link and coordinate systems to minimize duplication of activities. Service delivery, both formal and informal, is coordinated and integrated. Whenever possible, partnerships are formed among service providers on behalf of a child, youth or family. • Workers collaborate with community resources or internal staff/leadership to obtain or develop a needed resource. • Workers actively involve family members in making community connections out of respect for client privacy and confidentiality. • Community providers (the education system or the medical field) look to the child welfare agency as a mutual partner and participate in two-way communication regarding services for children, youth and families.

Organizational Competence: Minnesota’s public child welfare agencies will perform as high-quality organizations, guided by a clear mission with defined priorities and strategic resource allocation. Agencies will be staffed by committed, qualified, trained and skilled professionals and providers applying evidence-informed practice.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Understand the mission, desired outcomes, and organizational priorities, and support their application in child welfare practice in the agency.</p> <p>Perform in their position with an understanding of the needs of the organization as a whole, not simply their individual unit or responsibilities.</p> <p>Support workers in understanding the mission and their role within the larger organization. Develop opportunities and pathways for workers to understand and engage with the organization as a whole.</p> <p>Emphasize with management and workers the importance of understanding and implementing evidence-based practices. When indicated, advocate for the necessary resources to successfully support those practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers consider the agency’s mission and desired outcomes, and reference them as factors in decision making. • Workers communicate desired outcomes of practice when planning their work with children, youth and families. • Workers develop positive, supportive relationships and consult with other staff members for input, shared decision making, and completion of tasks. Effective case collaboration is the norm. • Transitions are handled smoothly as work is respectfully passed from one unit to the next. Responsibilities are completed in a timely manner and communicated effectively to the receiving worker. • Workers frequently use evidence-based practices, supported by the agency as a “first choice” for services, when appropriately matched to a family’s needs.

Professional Competence: The professional competence of Minnesota’s public child welfare system will be demonstrated by a workforce that: proactively responds to the evolving needs of communities; is knowledgeable of the historical context within which the child welfare system operates; provides respectful treatment to families; and continually strives for professional excellence through critical self examination.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Assess personal professional development needs. Identify personal supervisory strengths and challenges, and develop a plan with agency management to prioritize and address knowledge and/or performance gaps.</p> <p>Engage staff in on-going professional development and connect them to relevant resources and opportunities.</p> <p>When conducting performance appraisals, use the child welfare practice model values and skills as a guide for exploring staff performance expectations and development needs.</p> <p>Develop methods for obtaining ongoing, balanced feedback from clients and other professionals regarding a worker’s performance. Use that feedback constructively to reinforce and improve worker interaction with clients, staff and the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers seek input on their performance out of respect for the supervisor’s ability to help them improve, and are responsive to supervisor feedback. • Workers communicate a clear understanding of expectations as they relate to client outcomes. • Individual performance plans are seen as growth opportunities, not a negative experience. • Supervisors are able to rely on staff input into work plans based on demonstrated staff knowledge, skills and abilities. • The community and system partners consider the agency as professional when interacting with workers or providing services to children, youth and families. This opinion is shared with agency leadership or with others in the community. • There are no gaps in service delivery, including agency contact with children, youth, or a family during staff transfers, illness or vacations.

Cultural Competence: Cultural competence is achieved through understanding and serving children, youth and families within a context of each unique family and community. This includes, but is not limited to, families’ beliefs, values, race, ethnicity, history, tribe, culture, religion and language.

Supervisor’s Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Be aware of how personal attitudes and life experiences have impacted interactions with workers, clients and community partners.</p> <p>Show respect for the uniqueness of each individual that they supervise, demonstrating respect during interactions.</p> <p>Model behaviors that they want workers to demonstrate in the field, including demonstrating comfort with initiating discussion about diversity issues.</p> <p>Explore with workers the impact their attitudes and values have on casework practice, including race, sexual orientation, class and gender.</p> <p>Create a climate of understanding of cultural differences within their unit and agency. Strive to eliminate racist or biased actions, including providing on-going support, technical assistance and training for staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members are open about their individual cultural needs (for example, time off for particular holidays), and are willing to share personal traditions with co-workers, as appropriate. • Workers initiate actions to secure or enhance a needed service or resource due to cultural needs of a child or family. • Workers initiate conversations with their supervisors and others when cultural issues seem to create a barrier for effectively engaging with families. • Workers seek resources to ensure communication with children, youth and families is made in the language of a family, and family members clearly understand case plan activities and goals. • Early in the life of a case, workers ask families to help them better understand their cultural beliefs, as they relate to receiving child welfare services. Cultural sensitivity is demonstrated through all phases of involvement with children, youth and families. • Family traditions are honored while child safety is maintained.

Accountability: The child welfare system holds itself accountable to the highest standards of practice. It recognizes its responsibilities to children, youth, families and other stakeholders to assess and manage its performance, self-correct, innovate and enhance its ability to achieve positive outcomes through continuous improvement efforts. The system also recognizes the need for its practices, service delivery and performance to be easily understood, evaluated, and open to feedback from stakeholders.

Supervisor's Actions	Markers of Effectiveness (what the supervisor can see)
<p>Be approachable and seek to create an environment where staff members are engaged in their work, not simply completing minimum compliance requirements.</p> <p>Conduct ongoing evaluations of their unit's quantitative outputs (what can be measured) and client outcomes (how lives are impacted). Use SSIS reports to monitor progress in achieving safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children, youth and families.</p> <p>Seek and use data from internal sources, families, and the community to better understand and evaluate staff performance and client outcomes.</p> <p>Use a framework of continuous quality improvement to regularly evaluate practice and systemic strengths and challenges. Strive to provide supports, technical assistance and training to make needed improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is used to inform supervisors of staff performance. Data is turned into evaluation and action plans to improve performance. • Supervisors work with their administration to ensure performance is meeting overall expectations, and seek support in getting resources to improve performance. • Workers use innovative techniques to achieve outcomes and meet the needs of children, youth and families on their caseload, versus always reaching for the same resources. • Staff seeks input from their supervisor, and are willing to provide feedback regarding how well the supervisor is meeting their needs. • Throughout implementation, case plans are monitored to ensure accountability (did everyone do assigned tasks?), lessons learned (do we need to adjust this plan based on new information?), and impact (is the plan helping us to achieve our goals?). • Monitoring of case plans for effectiveness occurs during every contact workers have with their children, youth and families. Those involved in the plans provide input, and plans are adjusted based on that feedback.

Supervisory Skills and Reflective Thinking Questions

Do I actively use the skills presented in the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model in my day-to-day actions and decisions?

- Am I effective in joining with others to establish common goals? What do I do that is effective? **(engaging)**
- Do I gather information in order to make decisions, or do I make pre-judgments? Do I consider the strengths of those around me when making decisions and gathering information? What strategies do I use to gather information? **(assessing)**
- Am I better at working alone or as part of a team? How can working as part of a team improve the outcomes I am trying to achieve? **(partnering)**
- Do I plan supervisory time proactively or do I simply respond to crisis or information? Am I strategic in outlining tasks and schedules to accomplish goals with those I supervise? How are my actions impacting my workers? **(planning)**
- When implementing plans, do I monitor progress towards goals? Do I consider lessons learned from previous experiences before I begin a new initiative? How do I communicate those lessons **(implementing)**

- Do I monitor commitments I've made and evaluate if I have followed through and completed tasks I'm assigned? How do I evaluate if I have had the impact I was trying to achieve?
(evaluating)
- Do I advocate on behalf of my staff, or the children, youth and families served to decision makers? What do I have to do to be proactive in seeking resources and enhancing services or practice? **(advocacy)**
- Is my communication clear to those receiving the communication? Do I frequently find my messages are misunderstood or not well received? What do others think of my communication? **(communication)**
- Do I demonstrate cultural competence during interactions with my staff as well as the children, youth, families, and communities served? Do I treat each person I come into contact with on the job equitably and with respect for their personal beliefs? How do I know?
(cultural competence)