

Worksheet | **Identifying Frontline Practice Skills for a Family-Centered Practice Model**

Adopting a family-centered practice model leads to a change in approach that is likely to require new roles, behaviors and skills for many frontline workers. In transitioning from a traditional problem-focused approach to strengths-based practice, it is important to describe specifically the skills workers will need to implement the six core intervention components (family engagement, teaming, assessing, service planning, intervening, and tracking/adjusting/closure).

The skills are presented for consideration by agencies that are developing child welfare practice models. Whether an agency selects these skills or different ones, it is important to be aware of the clinical skills needed to implement the practice model; put into place strategies to ensure staff will have the skills necessary to implement the new model (e.g., pre-service and in-service training, supervision, coaching); and incorporate these skills in staff recruitment efforts and staff performance evaluations.

When using this tool to discuss and make decisions about the necessary skills, be sure to involve multiple stakeholders (internal, external, including families and youth); focus on how your agency and community believe social workers should approach their practice with children, youth and families; and be guided by the principles you have selected for the practice model.

Identifying Skills

Define skills for

- setting goals with children, youth and families
- facilitating team meetings
- conducting assessments
- developing service plans
- engaging in purposeful interventions

1. What skills should social workers have to help them set goals with children, youth and families?

Skills to consider:

Social workers honor the principles of family engagement when they join with the family to set mutually acceptable goals, for example, by:

- developing an initial working agreement with families about the issues to be addressed;
- asking about the family's goals before insisting on the agency's goals;
- ensuring that the goals are free of jargon; and
- identifying with the family what success will look like, so the family will know what is expected of them and when they have achieved the goals.

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2. What skills should social workers have to help them facilitate and participate in family team meetings?

Skills to consider:

Effective facilitation is key to a team-based process. Facilitators must have specific skills that reflect the value base of family engagement and teaming in order to implement the activities listed below.

- Preparing for the team meeting
 - Engage families and build trust with them.
 - Prepare families in person, in advance of their first team meeting.
 - Ask families to identify who they want to participate on the team.
- Facilitating (not directing) the team meeting
 - Understand the structure and process of family team meetings.
 - Engage the family in the assessment process.
 - Engage the family in creating a comprehensive and effective plan for the child/youth/family that is tailored to the family's expressed needs.
 - Recognize, support and build the family group's capacity to protect and care for the child/youth.
 - Identify with the team family-specific natural supports.
 - Address power imbalances between family groups and child protection personnel.
 - Ensure that children, youth and families are respected and heard during the meeting.
- Ensuring follow-up
 - Partner with the family in the follow-up of their plan.
 - Be aware of wide array of services and supports and their effectiveness.
- Collaborating
 - Engage and organize the informal and professional supports and service providers in the families' lives to be part of the family's plan.

Team members, other than the facilitator, must capably perform their roles on the team as well. They need to have the skills to listen, contribute to the meetings, participate collaboratively, and offer follow-up assistance with families.

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3. What skills should social workers have to help them conduct assessments, develop service plans and engage in purposeful interventions with children, youth and families?

Skills to consider:

To conduct comprehensive, strengths-based family assessments, develop individualized service plans, and intervene effectively, social workers will need strong skills in interviewing, analyzing, documenting, collaboration and follow-up. The skills they need will vary greatly from one family to the next and from one situation to the next. For example, they may range from finding housing to changing a deeply embedded, multigenerational pattern of thinking and behaving.

- Interviewing skills
 - Engage the family in a trust-based relationship and shared decision-making.
 - Ask questions in a strengths-based, non-threatening manner.
 - Welcome extended family input and participation.
 - Involve the family in the assessment of their cultural beliefs, values and practices that bear upon strengths, needs and resources.
 - Listen well and hear the underlying conditions, as well as the immediate issues.
 - Make visits with families and children purposeful. Stay focused on the family's goals. Provide the opportunity for children, youth and families to share their concerns.
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Critical thinking and knowledge of practice help families and children reframe their issues and translate problems into needs and wants.
 - Incorporate information from multiple assessments such as intake, safety, and risk assessments, as well as mental health, substance abuse, education and other assessments. Use these assessments to provide a broad and deep picture of family issues.
 - Make decisions with families, based on the comprehensive family assessment, as to what has to change to achieve outcomes.
 - Service planning goes beyond identifying needs to matching those needs to individualized services.
- Documentation/Writing Skills
 - Transmit to writing the information obtained during the assessment process. Document what is learned in a cogent, clear and concise assessment report.
 - Create assessments that are unique and individualized and are NOT interchangeable. Do not prescribe similar sets of services and supports to multiple families.
 - Avoid the use of general terms such as: "Mom is resistant" or "Mom is cooperative."
 - Describe feelings, behaviors, and events as specific strengths or needs.

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ⁱ *Engaging Families, Making Visits Matter: A Field Guide*, New Jersey Department of Children and Families, Division of Youth and Family Services, n.d., <http://www.nrcoi.org/PMNetworkDocs/CPM%20Field%20Guide.pdf>

- Collaborative skills
 - Accept the family's definition of the problem, the behavioral changes that must take place and practical solutions.
 - Share the assessment information and your understanding of the family with the family, the team and other professionals involved with the family.
 - Refer to other agencies for specialized assessments and services.
 - Workers must have a good understanding of the services available in the community and be willing to advocate with families for appropriate services.
- Follow-up
 - Conduct re-assessments at particular points in the casework process.
 - Evaluate family progress continuously.
 - Agency workers may be required to identify and even help create services, when appropriate ones are not immediately available.

4. What other skills should social workers have to help them implement the child welfare practice model?

REFERENCES

Some of the skills identified in this worksheet are from an unpublished self-assessment tool that the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group uses to operationalize values and principles and answer the question of what it looks like to engage in family-centered practice.

The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group. *What Does Family Centered Practice Look Like?*
<http://www.childwelfaregroup.org/>

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