



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Social Services

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core

Participant Workbook Week Three

December 2025



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Instructions

This course was designed to guide child welfare professionals through the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to engage with families needing child protection services. The workbook is structured to help you engage in the lesson through reflection and analysis throughout each week of training. Have this workbook readily available as you go through each session to create a long-lasting resource you can reference in the future.

If you use this workbook electronically, the pages have text boxes for you to add notes and reflections. Due to formatting, blank lines will be “pushed” forward onto the next page if you are typing in these boxes. To correct this, when you are done typing in the text box, you may use the delete key to remove extra lines.

Course Themes

Core Training Themes

- Pre-Work e-Learning
- Child Welfare Overview, Roles, and Responsibilities
- North Carolina Practice Model
- Essential Function: Communicating
- Core Value: Safety-Focused
- Safety, Risk, and Protective Factors
- Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect
- Legal Authority and Responsibilities, Mandatory Reporting
- Essential Function: Engaging
- Core Value: Family-Centered Practice
- Introductory Learning Lab (Communicating and Engaging)
- Essential Function: Assessing
- Safety-Organized Practice (SOP) and Structured Decision Making (SDM)
- Assessing Learning Lab
- Core Value: Trauma-Informed Practice
- Trauma-Informed Practice Learning Lab
- Essential Function: Planning
- Considerations for Child Welfare Practice and Family Engagement
- Essential Function: Implementing
- Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Engaging Families Through Family-Centered Practice
- Narrative Interviewing with Learning Lab
- Crucial Conversations
- Engaging Families with Core Values and Essential Functions
- Involving Fathers, Non-Resident Parents, and Relatives with Learning Lab
- Collateral Contacts
- Using Family-Centered Practice to Engage Families Learning Lab

NC Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core Week Three

- Harm and Worry Statements
- Child and Family Teams (CFT) and CFT Meetings
- Child and Family Team Meeting Learning Lab
- SMART Goals with SMART Goals Learning Lab
- Quality Contacts with Learning Lab
- Ambivalence, the Change Process, and Conflict Management
- Overview of Child Welfare Processes: Intake and CPS Assessments
- Intake and CPS Assessments Learning Lab
- Overview of Child Welfare Processes: In-Home Services
- In-Home Services Learning
- Overview of Child Welfare Processes: Permanency Planning Services
- Permanency Planning Services Learning Lab
- Key Factors Impacting Families and Engaging Communities
- Documentation
- Documentation Learning Lab
- Caseworker Well-Being, Self-Care, Self-Awareness, and Worker Safety

Training Overview

Training begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. If a holiday falls on the Monday of training, the training will begin on Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. This schedule is subject to change if a holiday falls during the training week or other circumstances occur. The time for ending training on Fridays may vary and trainees need to be prepared to stay the entire day.

Attendance is mandatory. If there is an emergency, the trainee must contact the classroom trainer and their supervisor as soon as they realize they will not be able to attend training or if they will be late to training. If a trainee must miss training time in the classroom, it is the trainee's responsibility to develop a plan to make up missed material.

Pre-Work Online e-Learning Modules

There is required pre-work for the North Carolina Child Welfare Pre-Service Training in the form of online e-Learning modules. Completion of the e-Learnings is required prior to attendance at the classroom-based training. The following are the online e-Learning modules:

1. Introduction to North Carolina Child Welfare Script
2. Child Welfare Process Overview
3. Introduction to Human Development
4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
5. History of Social Work and Child Welfare Legislation
6. North Carolina Worker Practice Standards

Foundation Training

Foundation Training is instructor-led training for child welfare new hires who do not have a social work or child welfare-related degree. Staff with prior experience in child welfare or a social work degree are exempt from Foundation Training. The purpose of this training is to provide a foundation and introduction to social work and child welfare. After completing Foundation training, new hires will continue their training and job preparation with Core Training. Foundation Training is 28 hours (4 days) in length.

Core Training

Core Training is required for all new child welfare staff, regardless of degree or experience. This course will provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of a child welfare caseworker in North Carolina, including working with families throughout their involvement with the child welfare system. It will also provide opportunities for skills-based learning labs. Core Training includes 126 hours (18 days) of classroom-based training, completed over six consecutive weeks.

Throughout the Pre-Service Training, learners may be required to complete homework assignments within prescribed timeframes.

NC Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core Week Three

In addition to classroom-based learning, learners will receive on-the-job training at their DSS agencies. During this training, supervisors will support new hires by completing an observation tool, coaching, and supervisory consultation.

Transfer of Learning

Transfer of learning means that learners apply the knowledge and skills they learned during the training back to their daily child welfare work at their DSS agencies. During the Pre-Service Training, learners will complete a transfer of learning tool at various points:

- Pre-training
- During training
- Post-training

The transfer of learning tool will enable learners to create a specific action plan they can use to implement the training content on the job. A key component of successful child welfare practice is the involvement of supervisors in the reinforcement of new knowledge and skills. Supervisors will assist new workers in the completion and review of their transfer of learning tool and will support workers to apply what they have learned in training to their child welfare roles and responsibilities through action planning. Completion of the transfer of learning tool is required to complete the training course.

Training Evaluations

At the conclusion of each week of training, learners will complete a training evaluation tool to measure satisfaction with training content and methods. The training evaluation tool is required to complete the training course. Training evaluations will be evaluated and assessed to determine the need for revisions to the training curriculum.

All matters as stated above are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances, and with approval.

Pre-Service Training: Core Topic Schedule

Week 1:

- Child Welfare Overview
- North Carolina Practice Model
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Safety, Risk, and Protective Factors
- Introductory Learning Lab
- Assessing Learning Lab
- Safety-Organized Practice (SOP)
- Structured Decision Making (SDM)
- Trauma-Informed Practice

Week 2:

- Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services
- Considerations for Special Populations
- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Family Engagement
- Narrative Interviewing
- Quality Contacts
- Structured Decision-Making (SDM)
- Safety Organized Practice (SOP)

Week 3:

- Developing Goals with Families
- Interviewing Skills
- Family Engagement
- Discord
- Crucial Conversations

Week 4:

- Intake
- CPS Assessments
- SDM Safety Assessment
- SDM Family Risk Assessment
- SDM Family Strengths and Needs Assessment

Week 5:

- In-Home Services
- Permanency

Week 6:

- Permanency
- Key Factors Impacting Families
- Documentation
- Self-Care and Worker Safety

Pre-Service Training: Core Week 3 Day 1 Agenda

Child Welfare in North Carolina Pre-Service Training: Core

Welcome and Introductions

Developing Goals with Families

Developing Goals with Families

SMART Goals

Writing SMART Goals Learning Lab

BREAK

Interviewing Skills

Interviewing Skills: Questions

Interviewing Skills: Understanding Ambivalence

LUNCH

Interviewing Skills, continued

Stages of Change

Interviewing Skills: Understanding the Change Process

BREAK

Putting It All Together: Interviewing a Caretaker

Self-Reflection

Mindfulness

Pre-Service Training: Core Week 3 Day 1 Learning Objectives

Week 3 Day 1
Developing Goals with Families
• Define the difference between a goal and an objective • Explain the importance of developing goals with the child and family • Describe what it means to write a SMART goal • Be able to write SMART goals effectively

Core Week 3 Day 1

Pre-Service Training: Child Welfare in North Carolina Observation Worksheet

Instructions

Observation of skilled caseworkers and supervisors is an essential component of your professional development. By observing experienced staff, you gain practical insight into effective techniques, communication styles, and decision-making processes that go beyond what is taught in the classroom.

To observe behaviors effectively:

- Pay close attention to both verbal and nonverbal actions during interactions with clients and colleagues.
- Take notes on approaches, strategies, and responses that you find effective or unique.
- Reflect on how these observed behaviors align with core values and consider how you can incorporate them into your own work.

By actively observing and reflecting, you will be better prepared to apply classroom knowledge to real-life situations.

Date of observation	
Location of observation	
Name of the individual who will be observed	

What was observed? Check all that apply.

☐ CFT meeting	☐ Case transfer	☐ SDM tool completion
☐ Interview	☐ Family time session	☐ Case staffing
☐ Home visit	☐ Shared parenting meeting	☐ Other:

The North Carolina Core Values of trauma-informed, family-centered, and safety-focused guide every step of the Practice Standard behaviors so that families receive compassionate and effective support. These values shape how professionals communicate, engage, assess, plan, and implement child welfare services.

Use the space below to describe behaviors you observe associated with the Core Values and Practice Standards.

Trauma-Informed	
	Describe behavior observed:

NC Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core Week Three

Family-Centered	
	Describe behavior observed:

Safety-Focused	
	Describe behavior observed:

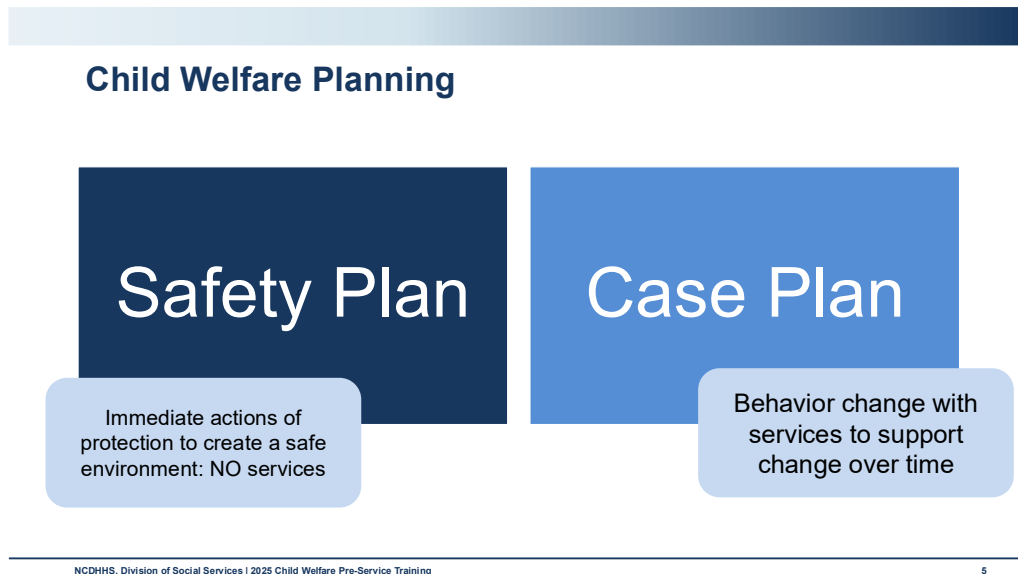
Practice Standard Essential Functions: Communicating, Assessing, Engaging, Planning, Implementing	
	Describe behavior observed:

Wrap Up	
2	Two things I learned:
1	One question I still have:

The observation day of Pre-Service Training needs to be completed by the end of Pre-Service Training Week Three. Once the observation is complete, mark the appropriate column on the week four sign-in sheet and be ready to discuss your observations during week four of Pre-Service Training.

Developing Goals with Families

Child Welfare Planning



The primary way caseworkers address safety concerns is through the use of structured planning tools, specifically, safety plans and case plans. These tools aren't just paperwork; they're collaborative strategies developed with families to mitigate risks and build protective factors. There are many ways that caseworkers plan with families. The primary way in which planning to address safety and risk concerns occurs is in safety and case plans:

- Throughout the child welfare process, caseworkers utilize the safety plan, part E of the SDM Safety Assessment to plan for child safety
- Safety plans are not designed to create long-term change in caregiver behavior. They're built to immediately change the child's environment to protect them from identified danger while the underlying issues are still being assessed
- In In-Home and Permanency Planning Services, caseworkers utilize the family services agreement documents to create plans to address underlying safety concerns identified in the SDM Family Strengths and Needs Assessment

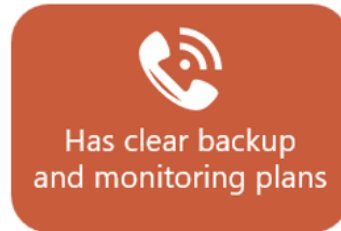
Both safety and case plans are behaviorally specific and provide goal setting for families to address safety and risk.

NC Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core Week Three

Safety Plan	Case Plan
Temporary changes to how the child will be cared for and by whom	Describes the daily and weekly actions parents and network will likely take to ensure child's long-term safety and well-being
<u>Not about behavior change!</u>	<u>All about behavior change to achieve the goal statement</u>
Immediate or short term	Long-term
Begins to involve a network (at least one additional person who could not have caused the harm)	Identifies who will be involved as part of the network and their role in maintaining and reviewing the plan
Identifies how the Immediate Safety Plan will be monitored (daily to begin) and what will happen if it is not followed	Identifies how CPS (and others) will monitor the plan and describes what will happen if the plan is not working
Date the plan will be reviewed	Updated when progress is made or new issues arise, especially if new immediate safety plan is needed

Notes

Safety Plans



EVIDENT
CHANGE

Safety plans:

- Are utilized in CPS-Assessments and Family In-Home Services to address immediate safety threats and danger indicators
- State what action each person will take to support child safety immediately
- Are directly correlated to danger indicators identified in the SDM Safety Assessment
- Are immediate and short-term

Backup and monitoring plans are part of safety plans, including designating clear time for review. Safety plans do not address behavior change over time and do not include services.

A safety plan responds to clearly identified danger indicators. The safety plan clearly states the danger indicator in a behaviorally descriptive way through harm and/or worry statements. The plan also incorporates the “caretaker, behavior, and impact on the child” formula and states each involved person’s immediate next steps to control or mitigate the danger.

Notes

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Case Plans

Describes to the family in simple, straightforward terms what needs to change for children to be safe, move towards permanency, and enhance their well-being

Focuses on behavior change

Services are a means, not an end

Clearly and concisely describe the end goal

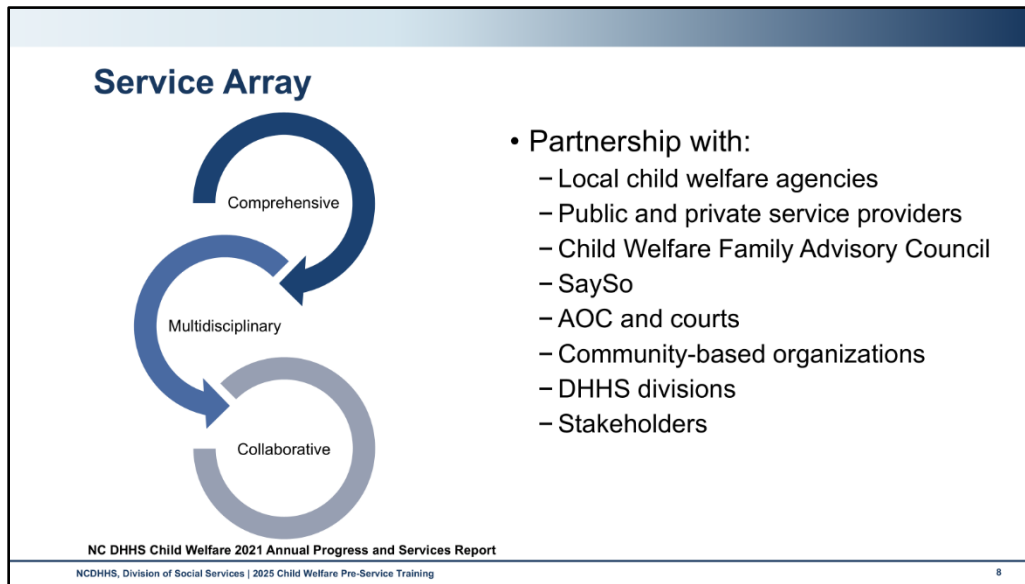
Case plans are utilized in Family In-Home and Permanency Planning Services to address the underlying needs that create safety concerns and increase risk for future maltreatment.

Case plans must be behaviorally based:

- Describe to the family in simple, straightforward terms what needs to change for children to be safe, move towards permanency, and enhance their well-being.
- Focuses on behavior change. Services are an avenue for that change
- Clearly and concisely describe the end goal for child welfare involvement.

Notes

Service Array



Every child welfare system must offer a range of services to meet the various needs of children and families. States face challenges in ensuring statewide consistency and accessibility of services.

The Six Principles of Partnership in Family-Centered Practice:

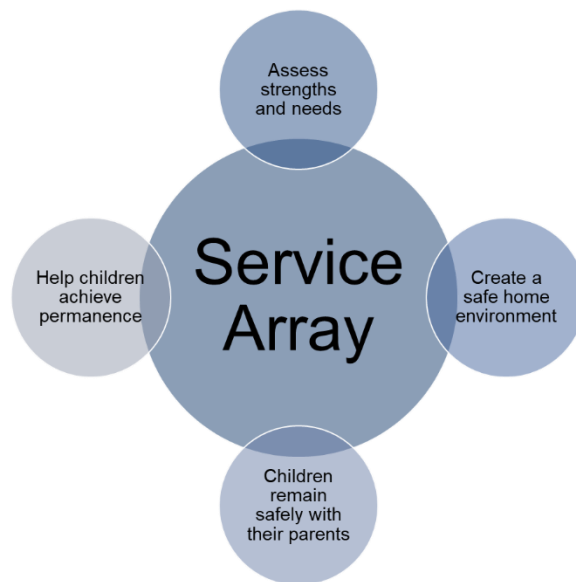
- Everyone desires respect
- Everyone needs to be heard
- Everyone has strengths
- Judgments can wait
- Partners share power
- Partnership is a process

Principles of Partnerships are used at both the system level (such as DSS and stakeholders) and direct practice level (caseworkers with families). Principles of Partnership aim to build trusting, collaborative relationships to support families effectively. NCDHHS addresses child maltreatment through a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and collaborative approach. Partners include:

- Local child welfare agencies
- Public and private service providers
- Child Welfare Family Advisory Council
- SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out)
- Administrative Office of the Courts
- Community-based organizations
- Other DHHS divisions and stakeholders

Caseworkers collaborate with families to identify needs, provide resources and services, and offer tailored supports based on each family's situation.

Why do you think we need all these partners to provide services to children and families?

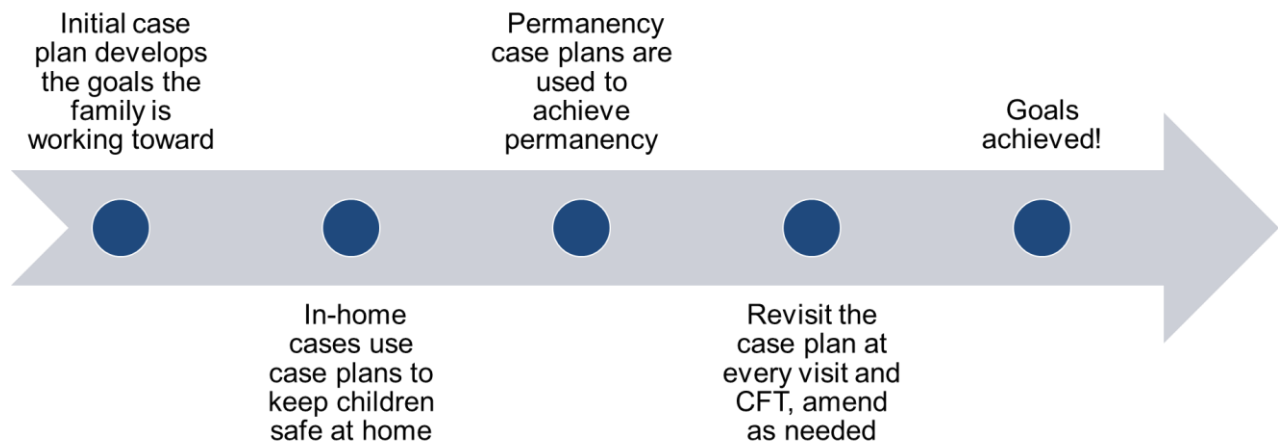


NC DHHS's service array and resource development system:

- Assesses strengths and needs of children and families to guide service planning
- Supports safe home environments for families
- Promotes family preservation by helping children remain safely with parents when possible
- Achieves permanence for children in foster and adoptive placements

Notes

The Case Plan: Throughout the Life of a Case



The initial case plan develops goals with the family. In-home case plans are utilized to keep children safe at home. Permanency Planning case plans are utilized to support permanency for children in foster care. Case plans must be revisited at every visit and CFT meeting. Case plans evolve over the course of the child welfare process.

Notes

Connecting Goal Statement to Safety Plan and Case Plan



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Both safety plans and case plans utilize goal statements. Goal statements add clarity to safety plans and case plans by making the expected outcome clear. Goal statements can support a delineation between safety and services.

Notes

How Can Network Members Help?



How can network members help?

EVIDENT
CHANGE

Safety and support network involvement is critical for both safety plans and case plans. Safety plans must be developed with active participation from the family's safety and support network, whose involvement helps identify concerns, strengths, and practical ways to support the family throughout the case planning process.

At the point of case planning, it can be helpful to ask family members to invite people from their safety and support network to participate in developing the case plan. For child and family teams developing case plans, safety and support network members contribute significantly to idea generation and often have tasks and activities as part of the case plan itself. Network members contribute resources, such as financial support, transportation, and childcare, which often make or break the success of behavior change efforts for families involved in the child welfare process.

Notes

SMART Goals

What Will You See as a Result of Your Efforts?

Goal Statements: A clear, simple statement about what the caretaker will DO to demonstrate to everyone that the child is safe now and will be safe in the future.



What changes will you expect?



Who or what will be changed?



How can you determine if a change is occurring?



How much change will occur? By when?



How will you know if you are being successful in obtaining your goal?

Goals should be clearly connected to the reasons for child welfare involvement. Safety plan goals focusing on addressing safety threats and danger indicators. Case plans, reducing risk and improving the well-being of children and families. Caseworkers and families should define expected changes together, identifying who or what will change, how change will be measured, and when it should occur.

Goal achievement is best supported through collaborative planning, with clear expectations, shared accountability, and ongoing review to ensure goals remain relevant and attainable.

Goal setting isn't just about writing down goals. It's about collaborative planning. Caseworkers and families should work together to define the expected changes. This means asking:

- What changes will you expect?
- Who or what will be changed?
- How can you determine if a change is occurring?
- How much change will occur—and by when?
- How will you know if you are being successful in obtaining your goal?

Notes

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SMART Goals



Behavior change goals in case plans should follow the SMART format—they must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-limited. This ensures goals are clear, realistic, and focused on observable changes that support safety, permanency, and well-being. SMART goals are most effective when developed collaboratively during child and family team meetings. These meetings foster engagement, shared understanding, and tailored planning that reflects the family's strengths and needs.

Specific: The behavior change needs to be focused on one thing at a time. Based on the need you have selected, pick one specific behavior of the caretaker or child that needs to shift to see more safety, permanence, or well-being. It's OK if this single behavior does not solve everything—in fact, that's usually going to be the case. The goal is to piece together a change process that allows child protection involvement to end.

Measurable: The behavior change needs to be something you can measure, something you can see. Will the caretaker use different disciplinary techniques? Will they ask for help when they need it? Whatever the behavior change goal is, it needs to be concrete, measurable, and observable.

Achievable: The behavior change needs to be something the child or caretaker can do. Sometimes, it is tempting to set goals for behavior change that would be great even though they are not realistic or achievable for the family. This is where your collaboration will be crucial. Ask the family and network if they can do this. What would be required to make it achievable?

Relevant: The behavior change needs to be connected to the priority need you have identified, which is preferably one that the family agrees with. It's a behavior change that would make a difference and address a need.

Time Limited: Pick a behavior change that can be achieved in the 90 days before the next case plan is due. It would be even better if it could be achieved before then. Small steps can lead to momentum for more significant change. Start with changes that the family could complete in the time allowed.

SMART Goals: Real-World Example

SMART Goals: Real-World Example



SMART goals evolve through reflection and refinement. As each component is considered—specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance, and time-bound structure—goals become more realistic and focused, helping individuals better define and pursue desired outcomes.

Achieving goals is a gradual process that requires sustained attention and planning. It involves monitoring progress, adjusting as needed, and maintaining focus over time to stay on track and achieve meaningful results.

Notes

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Strategies for Developing Effective Goals

Desired Effect	Specific Outcome	CFT Meetings
• Increase • Decrease • Maintain • Reduce • Improve • Enable	• Ability to • Skills for • Knowledge of • Confidence in • Likelihood • Incidence of understanding of	• Best practice • Trust-based relationships • Planned event • Decision-making • Family engagement • Promotes unity • Shared understanding • Develop plans • Non-negotiables • Next steps

Effective goal writing in child welfare requires clarity and realism. Caseworkers should use action-oriented terms, like increase, reduce, or improve, to define the desired effect, and avoid vague or unrealistic language such as ensure.

SMART goals should reflect specific outcomes that are meaningful to the family, using terms like skills for, knowledge of, or confidence in to describe what the family aims to achieve.

Child and family team meetings are the ideal setting for developing goals. These meetings foster collaboration, build trust, promote shared understanding, and ensure that plans are tailored to the family's strengths and needs while addressing non-negotiables early in the process.

Notes

Two Key Activities

“People support what they have had a hand in creating.”
-Margaret Wheatley



Planning with families includes content and process:

- Content: what goes into the plan
- Process: how we get there

The five essential functions of the practice model are key to supporting process and content: communicating, engaging, assessing, planning, and implementing.

First, we should have a solid understanding of the why behind creating child welfare plans.

- The process starts with communication. Avoid using acronyms and jargon during safety assessments and case planning to ensure clear communication with families. Explain the process and have honest discussions with the family regarding expectations for everyone involved.
- Focus on engagement with the family. Be fully present while speaking and treat the family as the expert. Through crucial conversations, you should acknowledge any struggles, fears, or worries the family may have.
- Open the conversation to assess. Ask open-ended, strength-based, solution-focused questions while being transparent and share the purpose of gathering and assessing information.

Through these first three steps of the process, you will gain information on what needs to be addressed with the plan. Next, move into the planning and implementation stage to think through the content idea.

Key Takeaways

Goals should be clearly connected to the reasons for child welfare involvement

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound

Effective goal writing in child welfare requires clarity and realism

Planning with families includes content and process

Notes

Writing SMART Goals Learning Lab

Skills Practice: Writing SMART Goals

Activity: Writing SMART Goals

In this skills practice you will learn how to transform broad intentions into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-limited goals.

What to Do: Your group will be assigned a number. Your assigned number indicates for which scenario you will write SMART goals:

Scenario 1:

Gabriel, age 4, was walking on the side of the busy street alone. His mother is unsure of how to make sure he doesn't wander outside without an adult.

Scenario 2:

Sarah has spanked Toby, age 5, and left a mark on his buttocks. She says she doesn't know how to discipline him any other way.

Scenario 3:

The resource parents for Marcus, age 15, have had a hard time responding to backtalk and eye rolling without yelling. They are unsure of how to handle this behavior differently.

Pay attention to the SMART acronym as you write the goal.

Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant – Time-bound

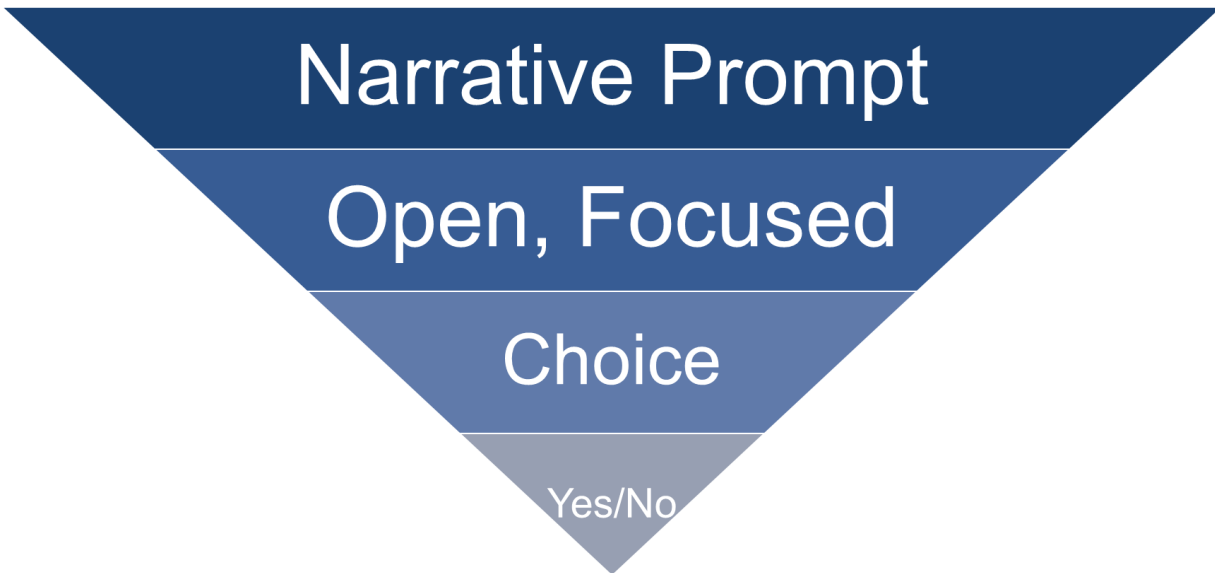
What difference will SMART goals make for families who have a safety plan?

What difference will SMART goals make for families who have a case plan?

Interviewing Skills

Interviewing Skills: Questions

Funneling



Funneling encourages a free narrative. Funneling refers to a technique of interviewing that begins with open-ended questions and offering less.

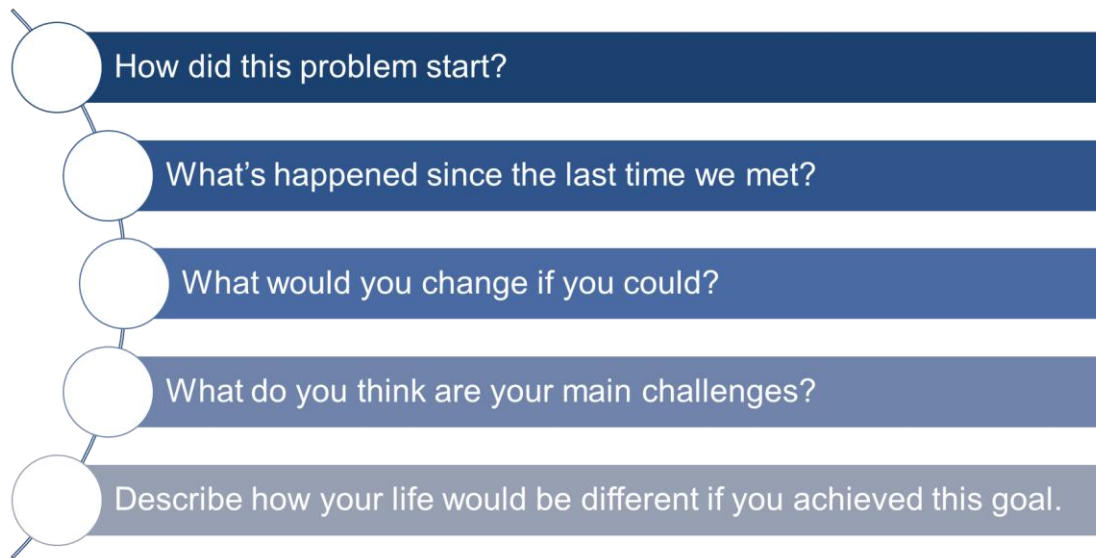
Always start with a Narrative Prompt and follow up with open, focused questions. Only ask a direct question after you have tried an open one, and even then, only if you must.

Do not ask “why” when using open-ended questions, as why can be judgmental, place blame, or put people on the defensive. When you find yourself at the bottom of the funnel, use the recycling technique to go back to the top of the funnel and ask a narrative prompt.

Notes

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Open-Ended Questions



Open-ended questions are those that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" but instead require elaboration, reflection, or explanation. As an interviewing tool, open-ended questions are used to encourage others to explore thoughts, feelings, and motivations in depth, fostering engagement and self-discovery. They enable us to meet people where they are, allowing them to articulate their own reasons for change, take ownership of their decisions, and share their experiences without judgment. By allowing people to share their experiences in their own words, we support storytelling and reflective thinking, which helps uncover underlying motivations and barriers to change.

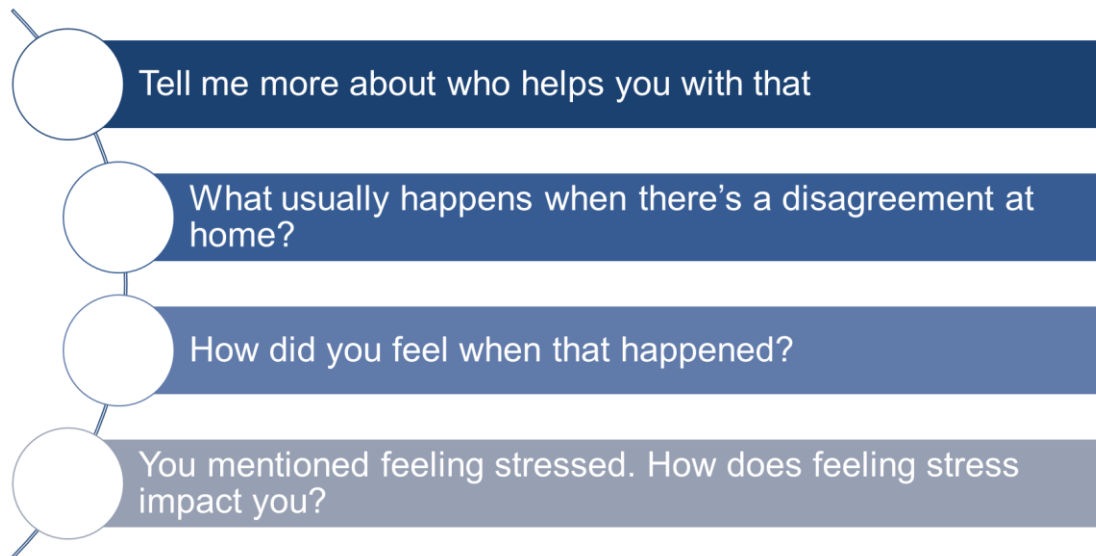
Open-ended questions:

- Facilitate self-reflection
- Support exploration of personal motivation
- Encourage others to elaborate
- Support collaboration and understanding without imposing solutions

Notes

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Focused Questions: Probing Questions



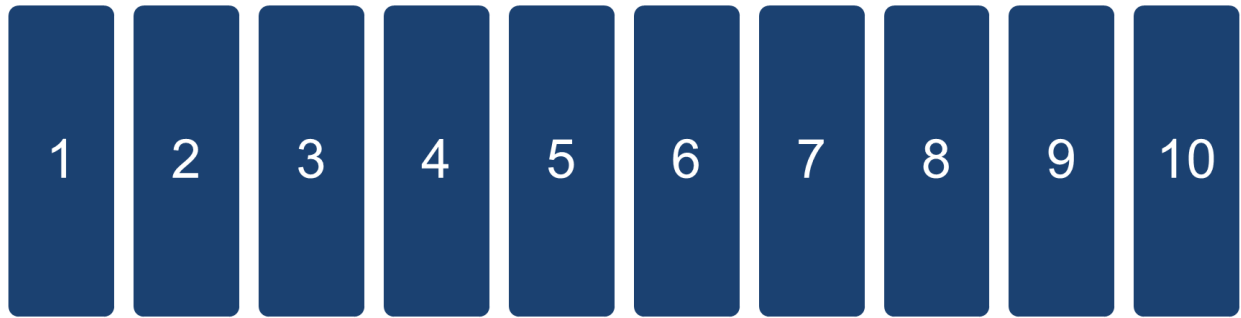
Probing questions are open-ended, carefully timed, and context-sensitive questions designed to elicit more detailed responses than initial or surface-level questions. In child welfare, these questions help caseworkers uncover important information about family dynamics, daily routines, relationships, or potential abuse or neglect that may not be provided in initial statements or basic screening questions. They are gentle, non-threatening questions that encourage honest disclosure. Probing questions can be used to clarify ambiguous responses, encourage elaboration, detect inconsistencies, explore daily routines and caregiving, and understand feelings, reactions, and interactions.

Probing questions allow the interviewee to guide the conversation. When you ask questions about their responses, you demonstrate that you are listening and genuinely interested in learning more about their experiences or perspectives. Using probing questions in child welfare enables caseworkers to gather more in-depth information, clarify uncertainties, support children's communication, and inform decision-making to ensure more effective protection and care. They help you gain detailed and more nuanced information about a child's circumstances or a family's situation. By asking follow-up or clarifying questions, practitioners can uncover underlying issues, motivations, or risks that may not emerge through general or closed-ended questions. This thorough understanding is critical for assessing potential harm and planning appropriate interventions.

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Scaling Questions



Scaling questions invite individuals to rate their experiences, feelings, or progress on a numerical scale, typically ranging from 1 to 10, to measure current states, track progress toward goals, and foster change. They can measure the intensity of emotions, levels of confidence, motivation, and commitment, helping both parents and caseworkers understand the current state clearly. By rating themselves on a scale, people reflect on their feelings and behaviors, recognizing areas of strength and challenge. This encourages awareness and insight into personal growth or obstacles.

Scaling questions are versatile and powerful tools in assessments, monitoring progress, and problem-solving. They quantify subjective experiences, facilitate goal setting, track progress, enhance self-reflection, and create structured conversations that promote positive change.

Scaling questions support conversations by illustrating that the problem or feeling is not absolute and that improvement is possible. They create opportunities to explore exceptions or moments of success even within ongoing challenges. An example of a scaling question might be, "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you feel completely hopeless and 10 means you feel fully confident, where do you feel you are right now regarding managing your stress?" Follow-up questions could explore what makes the client a 4 instead of a 2 (highlighting strengths) and what small steps could move them closer to a 5 or 6, which builds actionable insight and motivation.

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Focused Questions: Direct Questions



Direct questions are inquiries posed straightforwardly, usually expecting a clear and immediate answer, often marked by a question word or a subject-verb inversion. A direct question is a sentence that asks for specific information in a clear, explicit manner. It typically employs a standard question structure, often beginning with question words such as who, what, when, where, or why. Direct questions are designed to be easily understood and responded to by the listener. An example is, “Where did you go on vacation?” Unlike indirect questions, which are embedded in statements and often more polite or formal (I wonder where you went on vacation), direct questions are explicit and seek immediate feedback.

Notes

Questions Skills Activity

Activity: Question Types

What to Do: When it is your group's turn, roll the die.

Provide an example of the question indicated by the number you roll.

1. Open-ended
2. Probing
3. Scaling
4. Direct (WWWW)
5. Open-ended
6. Closed or Yes/No

Which of these question types might invite family members to share their stories?

Is it necessary that you always find the perfect question?

How might you recover if you ask a question that gets a response you did not expect?

Key Takeaways

Different types of questions allow interviewing flexibility

Open-ended and Probing questions are other-focused

There is no “perfect” question

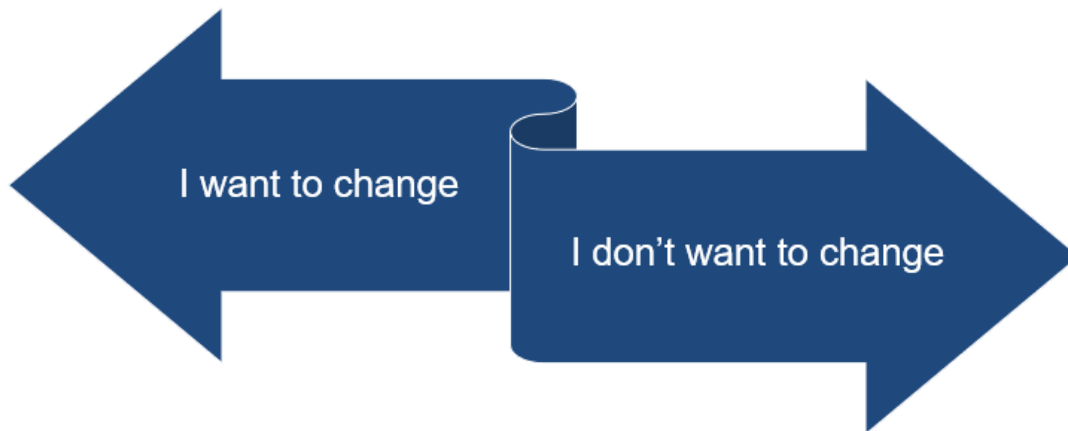
Even the wrong question can help you learn something

Probing questions show you are genuinely interested

Notes

Interviewing Skills: Understanding Ambivalence

Ambivalence



Having feelings of *wanting to change* and *not wanting to change* at the same time.

Ambivalence is feeling both "I want to, and I don't want to" at the same time.

What are some examples of ambivalence you have seen?

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Why do you think we struggle to change?

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Examples of Ambivalence

Setting a date to quit smoking, then continuing to smoke

Deciding to eat healthy, then eating junk foods

Deciding to quit drinking alcohol, then buying more beer

Buying a gym membership, then never going to the gym

Deciding to get more sleep, then staying up late scrolling social media

Many people spend a great deal of time, often years, struggling to change, even after they recognize the need for change. Ambivalence is what keeps a person stuck. People who are struggling with substance abuse or other problematic or harmful behaviors understand the risks and the pain associated with the problem.

Ambivalence is predictable and natural; it's an emotional reaction to feeling forced to change or when facing complex issues. Ambivalence occurs as a response to feeling vulnerable, out of control, and threatened. When people feel ambivalent, it is as if two parts of the same mind are at odds, with one side wanting to change and the other part not allowing it. Or when you feel that someone wants you to change, you find yourself doing the opposite without knowing exactly why, even if you didn't really care to begin with. When there is no pressure, there is less ambivalence. Ambivalence is highest when you realize there is a problem.

For families, when might ambivalence be the highest?

Exploring Ambivalence in Families

Activity: Exploring Ambivalence in Families

In this activity you will explore a family's perspective on planning and intervention.

What do you think the families can experience during planning and interventions?

What might be some of the emotions you will encounter with families that demonstrate they are ambivalent?

What specifically might people say and do?

What might be your emotions when you encounter ambivalence

List ways to manage your emotions when you encounter ambivalence.

Recognizing Ambivalent Behaviors

Avoidance	Passivity	Anger/Hostility
• Physical • Flooding with details • False • Compliance • Flight to health • Pressing for Solutions	• Silence • Excuses • Rationalization • Denial • Blame	• Threats • Aggression • Blaming

Ambivalence occurs when someone simultaneously experiences contradictory emotions, attitudes, or desires toward the same person, object, or situation. Individuals may feel frustrated or threatened by this unresolved tension, which can manifest as hostile or aggressive responses toward others, particularly when another person is perceived as a source of conflict or an obstacle to resolving that tension.

Ambivalence can lead to avoidance of emotionally charged interactions, as individuals try to sidestep confronting complex feelings. When ambivalence is coupled with stressors, unresolved internal conflict may lower thresholds for aggression. The internal turmoil creates a sense of unpredictability, prompting defensive or aggressive behavior as an attempt to regain psychological control or assert clarity. People's brains go "offline."

It's important to remember that your presence as Child Welfare is often perceived as stressful. Fear of the unknown or uncertainty amplifies ambivalent tension. Competing needs or desires, including prior experiences of hurt, betrayal, or conflicting goals, can intensify aggression or withdrawal. When parents have high ACEs scores, the likelihood of earlier experiences of hurt increases.

How frequently do you think you will encounter ambivalence in the field?

When you encounter ambivalence with a family, what will you do?

Key Takeaways

Ambivalence is having feelings of wanting to change and not wanting to change at the same time

Ambivalence is what keeps a person stuck in between changing and not changing

Ambivalence generates mental discomfort that arises from holding incompatible beliefs or desires

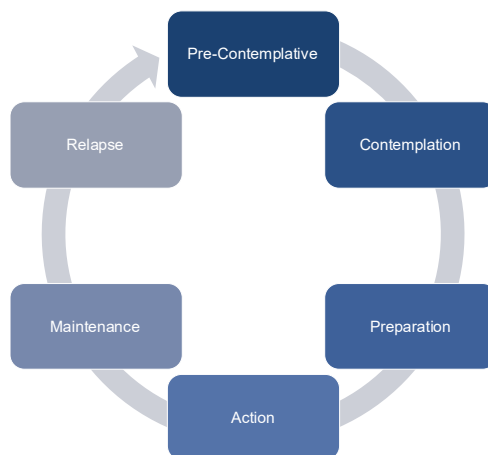
Mixed emotions complicate decision -making since no single action satisfies both opposing desires

Fear of the unknown or uncertainty amplifies ambivalent tension

Notes

Stages of Change

Stages of Change



Precontemplation: In this initial stage, individuals are not considering change and may be unaware of any issues with their behavior. They often deny that their behavior is problematic and may avoid information about the need for change. This stage is marked by denial or ignorance of the problem. Someone in this stage has not considered changing because they haven't seen the behavior as a problem or do not understand their behavior is damaging.

Contemplation: At this stage, people begin to recognize that there is a problem and start thinking about making a change. They weigh the pros and cons of changing their behavior and may feel ambivalent about the decision. This stage is marked by conflicting emotions and thoughts. People in this stage may have begun to weigh the pros and cons of changing their behaviors or identified the barriers they face in changing.

Preparation: Individuals in this stage are ready to take action and start making plans for change. They may gather information, set goals, and prepare for the steps they need to take to implement the change. People in the preparation stage may begin experimenting with small changes and make motivating statements about their desired change.

Action: This stage involves actively modifying behavior and implementing the changes. Individuals may face challenges and temptations but are committed to making the change. People in the action stage are motivated to move toward their goal and will often seek out social support. They are motivated by rewards for their successes.

Maintenance: In this stage, individuals work to sustain the changes they have made and prevent relapse. They develop coping strategies to deal with potential triggers and temptations. People who are maintaining their behavioral changes try to avoid temptations to revert to old behaviors. It is important to reward success in this stage. You can support people in the maintenance stage by helping them develop coping strategies for temptations.

Relapse: Relapses are common and to be expected, as behavioral change is hard. The greatest predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Relapse may leave someone feeling frustrated, disappointed, or like they have failed. The best solution to relapse is to examine the triggers for relapse and to build a plan to deal with temptation, knowing that they can begin again with preparation, action, and maintenance of change. You can support someone in relapse by helping them assess their resources and strategies for change, affirming their commitment to the goals they set, and talking about how relapse is a normal part of the behavioral change process.

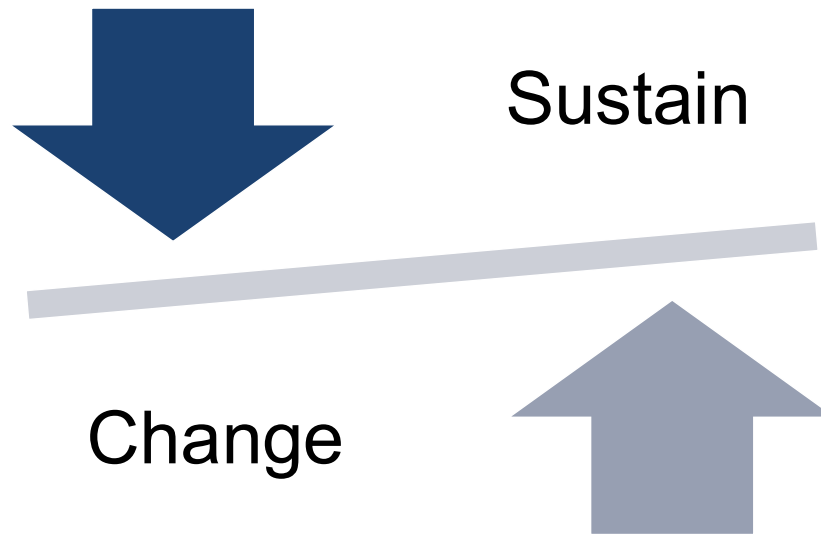
Eventually, someone who maintains a behavioral change reaches a point of termination, when they have fully integrated the changes into their lives and no longer feel tempted to revert to their old behaviors. They have achieved a stable state of change.

To support someone who is in the change process, it's important to understand the three elements of changing behaviors:

- Readiness to change: Does the person have the resources and knowledge to make the change, be successful, and maintain the change?
- Barriers to change: What might keep them from changing?
- Likelihood of relapse: What might cause the person to fall back into old behavior patterns?

Notes

Sustain Talk Versus Change Talk



You can begin to recognize someone's stage of change by the words that they use to describe the problem and how they feel about it. We describe these ways of speaking as "sustain talk" and "change talk."

Sustain talk resists or denies change.

Change talk encourages or supports behavioral change.

To support change, you want to reinforce change talk and soften sustain talk.

Techniques for responding to sustain talk include reflective listening, summarizing, and affirming past successes. You must remain nonjudgmental.

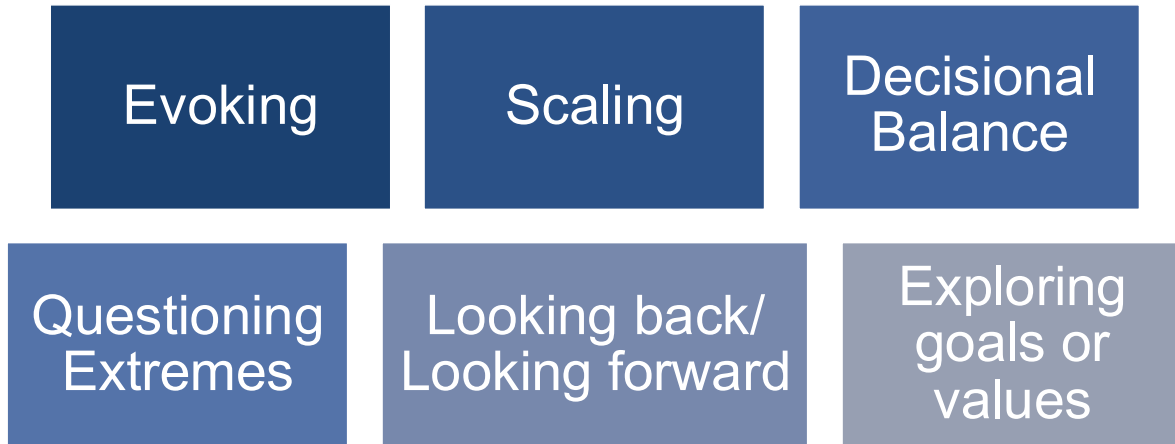
Someone who is ambivalent will speak with a mixture of sustain and change talk. Your goal with ambivalence is not to suppress sustain talk, but to guide the conversation to build up the change talk and help them to resolve their ambivalence by strengthening their reasons to change.

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Interviewing Skills: Understanding the Change Process

Interviewing Strategies for Ambivalence and the Stages of Change



Evoking: Drawing out the person’s own motivations, emotions, and options for change, rather than imposing what they “should” or “shouldn’t” do.

Scaling Question: Elicits responses to identify the level of commitment, importance, and/or urgency. It can also lead the parent to develop their own evidence of making a change.

Decisional Balance: Method of representing the pros and cons of different options to help make decisions in certain circumstances.

Questioning Extremes: Elicits change talk by asking the client to talk about both the worst and best aspects of their circumstances or changes.

Looking Back/Looking Forward: Can be helpful to have the client think about a time before problems existed, perhaps when things were going well. Looking forward can be helpful to see possibilities of how their situation could be better in the future.

Exploring Goals and Values: Used to discuss discrepancies between the parent’s values/goals and their behavior.

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Activity: Question Matching

What to Do: Match the questions with the question types.

Question Types:

- Decisional Balance
- Evoking
- Exploring goals and Values
- Looking back/Looking forward
- Questioning Extremes
- Scaling Question

Complete the table below by matching the types of questions to the examples.

Question Type	Question
	On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being unimportant and 10 being extremely important, where would you say this change is currently in terms of your priorities?
	What do you like about your present situation? What concerns you about it?
	How would you like things to be different one year from now?
	What would you like to do differently next time?
	What in your life is most important to you right now?
	What is the worst thing that could happen if you change? What is the best thing?

Which matches were most difficult? What led to that?

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When used in circumstances when a family member is ambivalent, what might these questions do?

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Sustain Talk: When There Is No Change Talk

Disadvantages of the Status Quo	
Advantages to Changing	
Scaling for Optimism to Change	
Intention to Change	

When the change is difficult, it can be hard to see how a situation can improve. Asking questions will help you understand their thinking about a change. This is often referred to as Evoking Change. We will want to use our questioning skills to explore change with the caretaker. Ask questions to help you understand their thinking about the change. When Change Talk is absent, we want to “evoke” it.

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NC Child Welfare Pre-Service Training: Core Week Three

Strengths Activity

Activity: Identifying Strengths

List at least 15 of your strengths

Small Group Debrief Questions

If you found yourself in crisis, which strengths would help you overcome?

If you needed to make significant changes in your life to provide for your family's needs, which strengths would help you make the changes?

When you need to set and accomplish a goal, what strengths help keep you going? (This can be tied to well-being like education, health, and mental health.)

Which of these strengths might a family member also have?

Think about the crises you identified and the strengths of the family. What is the relationship between strengths and safety, permanency, and well-being?

What is one way that you integrate strengths into your engagement with a family?

Questions to Evoke Strengths

Past	Present	Future
• When you have had difficulty paying your bills in the past, what did you do?	• What do you do every day to cope with this situation?	• If you could do anything you wanted to solve this problem, what would it be?

The best way to integrate strengths in engagement is to ask questions that provide a more comprehensive view of the situation, rather than focusing solely on problems or risks. Let's learn how to use specific questions to help us evoke and integrate our strengths.

When we discuss strengths, it does not detract from our understanding of the risks or threats to safety. Of course, you will need to ask questions to explore these issues during your interviews. However, by acknowledging strengths, we can better assess safety, improve engagement, and take the critical first steps toward change.

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Past, Present, and Future Questions to Evoke Strengths

Activity: Past, Present, and Future Worksheet

Past Questions

Past Questions are questions that explore previous success and help families (and you) identify moments from the past where they were able to overcome adversity, or when problems were not as severe. When we identify past success, we are helping the family see that they have the capacity to make positive changes.

Example: “When you have had difficulty paying your bills in the past, what did you do?”

Present Questions

Present Questions are questions that help people identify their current strengths and positive steps in their lives. Problems tend to vary in intensity and frequency during the day-to-day lives of families. By looking at the small positive steps in the present, we can encourage families to think about ways to build the strengths that they are already using.

Example: “What do you do every day to cope with this situation?”

Future Questions

Future Questions are part of a creative process where we ask a question to help someone envision a world where problems are reduced or solved. By seeing the future, a family can be motivated to change and can begin to clarify what is most important in their lives.

Example: “If you could do anything you wanted to solve this problem, what would it be?”

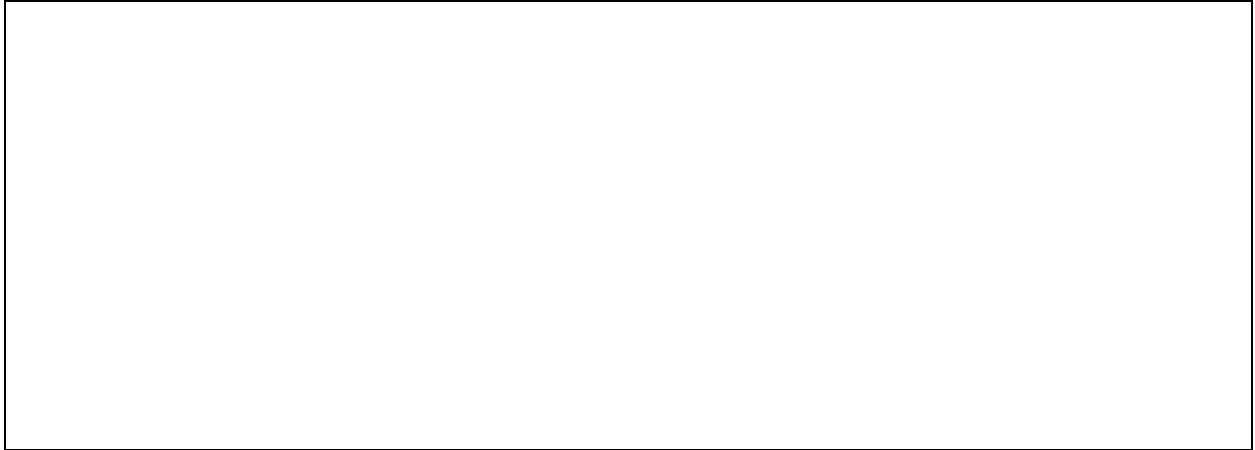
What to Do: With your group, craft three questions to ask Janice and write them on your flip chart paper. Write a past question, a present question, and a future question designed to uncover the strengths of the foster caregiver/mom, Janice

Scenario

You are interviewing a foster mom, Janice, who is having difficulty with her 14-year-old foster son, Joey, who has been a member of her family for the past 6 months. Joey is defying the rules by sneaking out at night and has just been suspended from school for fighting. Janice has tried unsuccessfully to discipline him.

Janice has two grown children who do not live in the home. One is married with two children and works as a pharmacist, while the other is a recently married real estate agent.

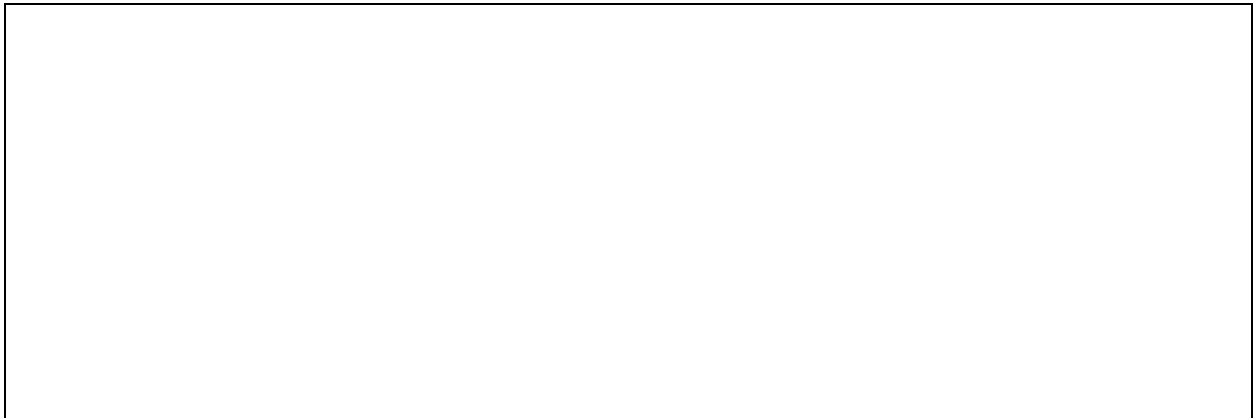
Past Question



Present Question



Future Question



Creating Questions for Change Talk

Activity: Creating Questions for Change Talk

When Change Talk is Present but Commitment is Not

- Evocation questions
- Scaling Questions
- Exploring Decisional Balance
- Questioning Extremes
- Looking Back/Looking Forward
- Exploring goals and values

When Change Talk is Not Present

- Disadvantages of the Status Quo
- Advantages to Changing
- Scaling for Optimism to Change
- Intention to Change

What to Do: With your group, create 3-5 questions for the caretaker in your assigned scenario to overcome ambivalence or evoke change talk. You can use the summary list of question types, but you don't need to create a question for every question type.

Scenario 1:

Robert's twin three-year-olds have been removed from his home. The children were found on a busy street alone in poor weather conditions while under the care of Robert's live-in girlfriend, Tessa, who has a substance abuse problem. Tessa is still abusing prescription medication with no signs of change. Robert loves his children very much and wants them to come home. He agrees that he needs to find alternative care for them while he is out of town on his trucking route. Although he has talked about it, he has not taken any action.

Questions for Robert:

Scenario 2:

Gloria's 12-year-old son Jordan, who has autism, is not attending school. Georgia does not get home from her night job in time to take Jordan to school. The school provides services consistent with Jordan's needs. Without the services, Jordan has fallen behind developmentally. Gloria has considered homeschooling Jordan but cannot provide the specialized services he receives at school. Gloria has not indicated that she needs to make changes to get Jordan to school.

Questions for Gloria

What are your favorite questions of the ones we've created?

How can that question be used to help determine someone's level of commitment?

How will you integrate these questions into your toolbox?

Key Takeaways

The Stages of Change

Questions to Evoke Change Talk

Questions to Soften Sustain Talk

The Stages of Change are:

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Relapse

Questions to Evoke Change Talk:

- Evoking
- Scaling
- Decisional Balance
- Questioning Extremes
- Looking back/ Looking forward
- Exploring goals or values

Questions to Soften Sustain Talk:

- Disadvantages of the Status Quo
- Advantages to Changing
- Scaling for Optimism to Change
- Intention to Change

Notes

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Putting It All Together: Interviewing a Caretaker

Skills Practice: Interviewing a Caretaker

Activity: Skills Practice: Interviewing a Caretaker

Scenario

Mother: Dora Allen, age 42, White

Father: Andrew Allen, age 45, White

Children: Andy Allen, age 17, White

Joy Allen, age 14, White

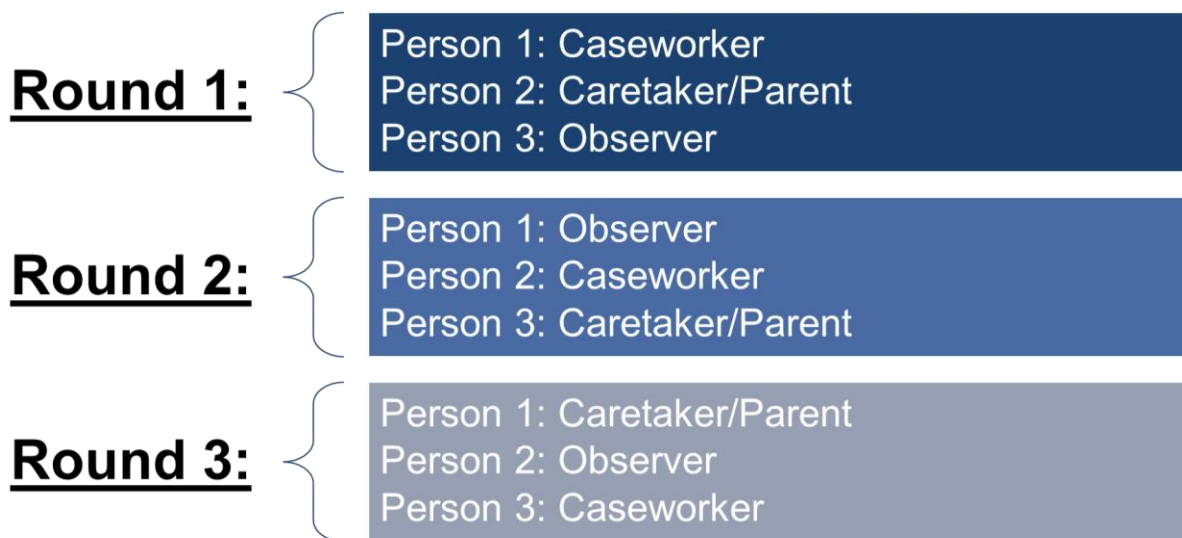
You have been working with the family for two weeks. This is a new report on an open CPS Assessment case with “Unsafe Discipline” maltreatment allegations against mom, Dora, for repeatedly slapping Joy on the arms and shoulders. You met with Dora, Andy, and Joy a week ago to discuss allegations of “Unsafe Discipline” when a new report was received alleging a new incident of the same allegations. Both calls reported that Dora hit Joy several times on her arms and shoulders. Joy denied having any marks. All three family members state that Dora hits the children as a form of discipline.

After working with the family, it was determined that a Child and Family Team Meeting would support decision-making. Father Andrew has been disengaged since he and Dora split up two years ago. Andrew doesn’t see the children due to animosity between the parents, as the break-up was ugly and emotional. You have reached out to Andrew by letter, although you have not yet received a response from him.

You are meeting Dora at her home to talk about the new allegations that she struck Joy several times with an open hand on her upper arms and shoulders. You also want to discuss scheduling a Child and Family Team Meeting and explain what it is.

To prepare, write a few questions that you want to ask Dora:

Skills Practice: Interviewing a Caretaker



Decide which of you will be person 1, 2, and 3. Each member of your group will assume a different role for each round of interview practice: the caseworker, parent (Dora), and observer. You are interviewing Dora Allen at her home.

Caseworker will build rapport and engage the caretaker/parent for seven minutes using narrative interviewing and various question types.

Parent (Dora) will reflect what they were told and respond with ambivalence, sustain talk, or change talk.

Observer will listen and keep time (7 minutes for the interview, 2 minutes for feedback), making note of what types of questions the caseworker uses.

During feedback, the caseworker will begin by noting what they did well, then the parent actor will offer strengths-based feedback, then the observer

The observer will time feedback to 2 minutes

Groups will rotate, allowing each participant an opportunity to practice each role

Observation Notes

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Self-Reflection

Reflecting on What You Have Learned



Think for a moment about your interview practice just now and all that you have learned, discussed, and practiced over the past seven days of Core training. On a scale from 1-10, where one is no confidence at all, and ten is fully confident, rank your level of confidence with the interviewing skills that you have learned so far, and write it down.

Notes

Pre-Service Training: Core Week 3 Day 2 Agenda

Child Welfare in North Carolina Pre-Service Training: Core

Welcome and Introductions

Discord

Ambivalence and Discord

Crucial Conversations

Full Disclosure

BREAK

Crucial Conversations, continued

Crucial Conversations

LUNCH

Family-Centered Practice, continued

Preparing the Child and Family for Court

Child and Family Team Meetings

BREAK

Child and Family Team Meetings Learning Lab

Self-Reflection

Reflection on Learning

Pre-Service Training: Core Week 3 Day 2 Learning Objectives

Day 2
Discord
• Identify the signs of discord and prepare for anticipated conflict • Understand how a person's history impacts how they express discord, interpret conflict, and respond to proposed solutions • Explain how managing your own emotions, behaviors, and reactions during discord impacts the outcome • Explain why it is important to pay attention to the feelings being expressed, as well as the words, during discord and conflict • Identify different strategies to problem-solve and identify solutions during discord and conflict
Preparing the Child and Family for Court
• Describe and provide examples of strategies to prepare the child and family for court • Explain the importance of debriefing with families after court hearings

Core Week 3 Day 2

Discord

Ambivalence and Discord

When Change Talk Never Comes: Discord

A conflict is more than just a disagreement: It is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat (whether the threat is real or not).

Discord continues to fester when ignored: Because conflicts involve perceived threats to our well-being and survival, they stay with us until we face and resolve them.

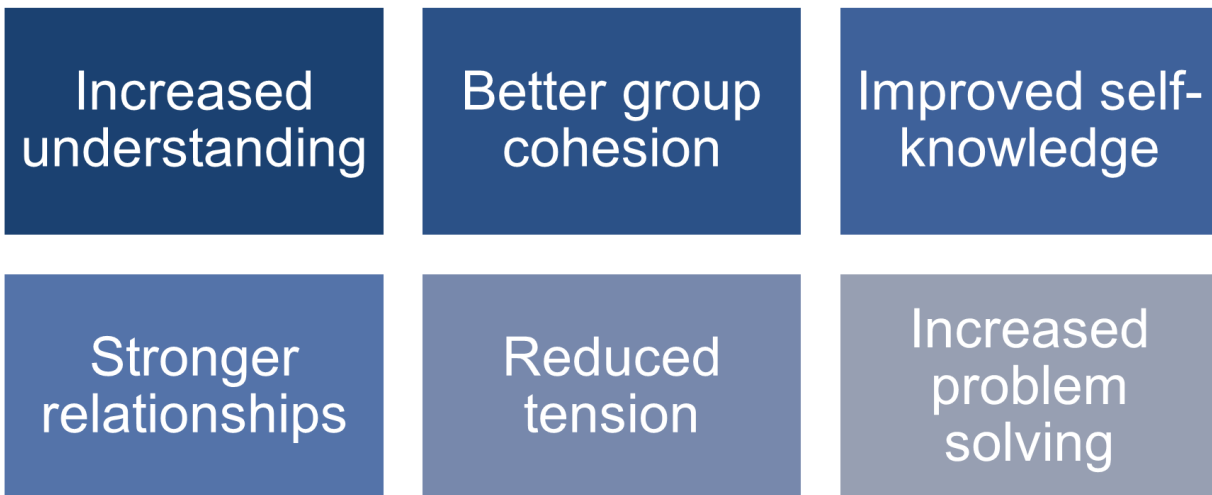
We respond to discord and conflicts based on our perceptions of the situation, not necessarily to an objective review of the facts. Our perceptions are influenced by our life experiences, beliefs, and values.

Conflicts trigger strong emotions: If you aren't comfortable with your emotions or able to manage them in times of stress, you won't be able to resolve conflict successfully.

Discord is an opportunity for growth: When you're able to resolve conflict in a relationship, it builds trust. You can feel secure knowing your relationship can survive challenges and disagreements.

What are possible reasons for discord?

Benefits of Managing and Resolving Discord



Increased understanding: The discussion needed to resolve conflict expands people's awareness of the situation, giving them insight into how they can achieve their own goals without undermining those of other people.

Increased group cohesion: When conflict is resolved effectively, family members and caseworkers can develop stronger mutual respect and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.

Improved self-knowledge: Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in close detail, helping them understand the things that are most important to them, sharpening their focus, and enhancing their effectiveness.

Stronger Relationships: Poorly managed conflict often causes friction and can damage relationships. By learning how to resolve conflicts in a professional, respectful manner, relationships can be strengthened.

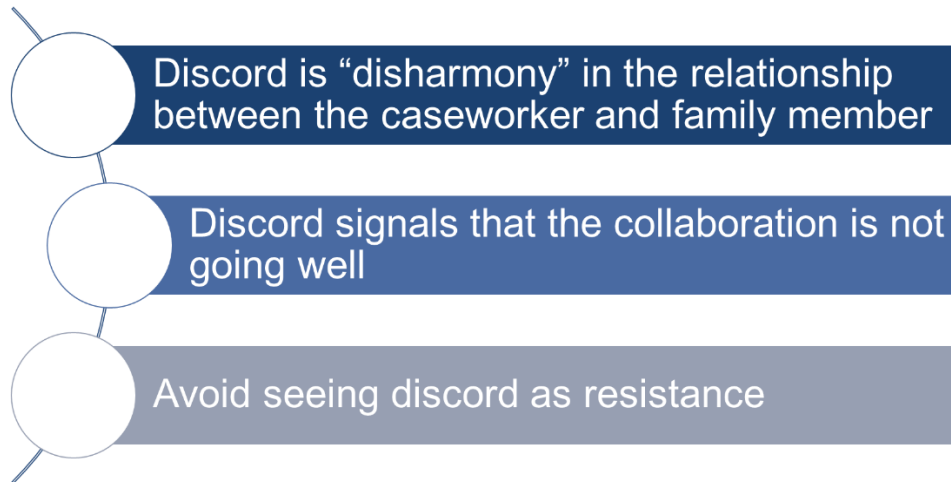
Reduced Tension: Conflict can cause tension if you don't know how to handle the situation. A disagreement that stays unresolved causes tension to build and often spreads to other people who weren't originally involved. This can result in people choosing sides and pitting themselves against one another.

Problem Solving: When caseworkers demonstrate skills that manage and resolve conflict, family members learn that problems can be solved in healthy ways and are more likely to engage in problem-solving rather than blaming or denying the situation.

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Discord: How do I feel about this relationship?



Ask yourself about your relationship with the family:

- Have you emphasized autonomy?
- Have you considered the Practice Standards, using trauma-informed and family-centered practices?
- Have you been affirming and working to identify strengths?
- How do you feel about the family? Do you find yourself avoiding appointments or phone calls with them? Do they seem to be avoiding you?

How might the family act if discord is present?

What do you think would signal that discord exists in your relationship with the family?

How might a child welfare caseworker have contributed to the discord?

Responding to Discord



How you respond to the discord is essential. Work to identify your own emotions. Be aware of your nonverbal messages and your tone of voice. Remind yourself that ambivalence is a normal part of the change process.

There is no one way to identify and resolve discord. For some, when they have a feeling of discord, they may shut down, withdraw, give up, or become confrontational. Engagement skills are the key to repairing discord.

Apologize: Acknowledge when your words or actions may have caused offense or discomfort. A sincere apology can repair trust and demonstrate professionalism and empathy.

Affirm: Use affirmations to validate the family member's perspective and show respect. This helps create space for healing and connection.

Shift Focus: If a topic is too emotionally charged, redirect the conversation to a less contentious subject while still maintaining the goal of support.

Be self-aware: Monitor your own emotions, tone, and body language. These nonverbal cues can either escalate or ease discord.

How might you respond to discord to help resolve it?

Responding to Discord and Conflict

Activity: Responding to Discord and Conflict

The purpose of this activity is to practice responding to opportunities where defensiveness may arise and discord and conflict occur.

What to Do: In your group, create a response to repair or otherwise re-establish engagement with the caretaker and resolve the discord in your assigned scenario.

Scenarios:

1. While discussing family economics, a parent takes offense to your question, "What is your monthly income?"
2. While discussing the lack of supervision, a parent becomes visibly agitated when you ask, "Do you understand the importance of supervising your children?" The parent responds, "OF COURSE, I UNDERSTAND THAT!! Who do you take me for???"
3. While discussing discipline, a parent says to you, "I have the right to spank my kids. You're not telling me I can't spank my kids."
4. While discussing alcohol use, a caretaker says to you, "How much I drink is none of your business."
5. The caretaker continues to "no show" at scheduled appointment times with you; you find yourself cancelling appointments with the family and not working as hard to find the time to reschedule. You are reluctantly beginning a meeting.

My group was assigned #_____. Our response:

What was challenging about addressing discord and conflict?

When you can reduce discord, what might be the result for your families?

For you, what is most important when addressing discord with a caretaker?

Key Takeaways

Common causes of conflict include communication problems, lack of autonomy, failed engagement, lack of trust

We respond to discord and conflict based on our perceptions

Learning how to resolve conflicts in a professional, respectful manner can strengthen relationships

Manage yourself first

Strategies for managing and resolving discord include: Apologizing, Listening and reflecting, Affirming, and Shifting Focus

Notes

Crucial Conversations

Full Disclosure

Activity: Full Disclosure

The purpose of this activity is:

- To obtain an understanding of what full disclosure looks like throughout the child welfare continuum, from investigative and family assessments to in-home services to permanency
- To begin identifying differences between full disclosure during the child welfare continuum

What to Do: Working with your partner, identify the differences in full disclosure between CWS roles.

Handout: Full Disclosure

CPS-Assessments: Investigative and Family Assessments

Explaining:

- That child safety is paramount
- The agency wants to keep children with their families if the child can remain safely in the home
- The specific allegations made against them

Providing information about:

- The parents' rights and responsibilities
- participation in the investigative process
- participation in the case planning process
- the importance of searching for, and consideration of, relatives who may provide information and/or a safe home

Discussing:

- the child safety and risk concerns
- the support services available to help the family
- the urgency to make necessary changes to provide for the safety of the child and to reduce risk

Informing the parents about:

- The consequences of not making changes to keep their children safe and following through with the Safety Plan

In-Home Services

Explaining that:

- The purpose of in-home services is to maintain children in their own home safely.
- mitigating safety and reducing future risk of harm is the ultimate goal.

Providing and sharing information about:

- the parents' rights and responsibilities
- sharing information about the child's needs
- the importance of involving family members to provide support to the family

Providing and sharing information about:

- Participation in the Family Services Agreement process and possible involvement of the court system if the family is not cooperating with DSS
- What changes in the family are necessary to keep the children safe

Discussing:

- the support services available to help the child and parents.
- the urgency to make changes so that children can remain at home

Informing:

- The parents about the consequences of not following through with the Family Services Agreement/Case Plan that could lead to out-of-home care

Full Disclosure: Permanency

Explaining that:

- Foster care is temporary, and it is not good for children to grow up without permanent parent(s)
- Developmental and emotional harm can result from a child placed in foster care

Providing and sharing information about:

- The parents' rights and responsibilities
- Sharing information about the child's needs
- A search for, and consideration of, relatives who may be able to care for the child

Providing and sharing information about

- About participation in the case planning process and involvement of the court system
- About the goals of concurrent planning, time frames, and permanency options

Discussing:

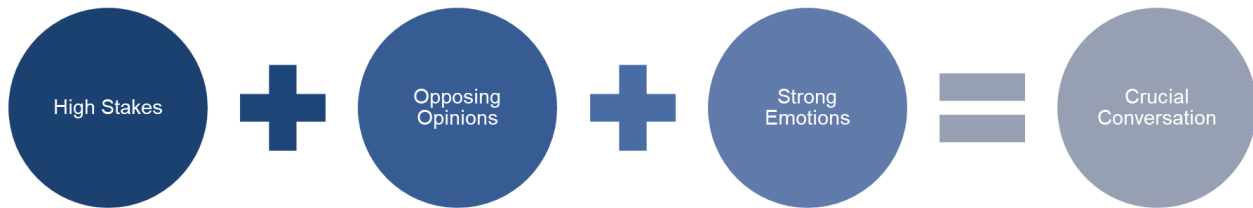
- The support services available to help the child's parents
- The urgency to get the child out of foster care, either through reunification with the parent(s) or into a legally permanent home

Informing:

- The parents about the consequences of not following through with the case plan

Crucial Conversations

What is a Crucial Conversation?



Crucial conversations are high-stakes conversations that have opposing opinions and involve strong emotions. When we realize that we are engaging in a crucial conversation, we need to do the following things:

- Stop the conversation and prepare to have a crucial conversation
- Be mindful of the tools you have and need to continue the conversation
- Be conscious and thoughtful

As a child welfare caseworker, you will engage in these conversations more because they are critical to the very fabric of your families' lives. Our conversations can be very consequential, and we should always keep the gravity of our crucial conversations in mind when we need to come to a resolution on important issues. This is why we need to recognize when we are entering into crucial conversations.

With the crucial conversations model, it is essential to consider our options for engagement and the impact of silence and violence in crucial conversations. The authors believe that we also need to be mindful of our own response habits, like the fight-flight-freeze responses to conflict that we have learned to engage with.

Thinking back through our previous activities and scenarios, which conversations would be crucial?

Seven Elements of Crucial Conversations



Remember the goal is to get unstuck. We must remember the goal of our conversation. Focus on the outcome. As you begin a crucial conversation, clarify the goal. Focus on what you want for yourself, others, and the relationship. Keep the outcome in mind to avoid getting sidetracked.

Start with Heart: Begin from a place of genuine intent and care. Approach the conversation gently and respectfully.

Learn to Look: Watch for signs of emotional escalation or conflict. Notice when safety is at risk and manage your own reactions (such as masking or withdrawing).

Make It Safe: Create and maintain psychological safety. Step out of the conversation when needed to restore safety. Use mutual purpose and respect to re-engage when stepping out isn't possible.

Master Your Stories: Identify and challenge assumptions or biases. Separate facts from interpretations to avoid misjudging others.

STATE Your Path: Use the STATE model to express concerns clearly:

- Share your facts
- Tell your story
- Ask for others' paths
- Talk tentatively
- Encourage testing

Explore Others' Perspectives: Practice active listening and empathy. Validate feelings while keeping the conversation goal in focus.

Move to Action: Turn dialogue into decisions and commitments. Clarify who will do what by when, and how follow-up will happen.

Recall a recent crucial conversation. How did you manage it, and what would you have done differently?

Crucial Conversations

Activity: Crucial Conversations

Visit each station, participate in the activity, and take notes below:

Station	Activity	Notes
Start with the Heart	Think of a crucial conversation you need to have. Reflect on what you really want—for yourself, the other person, and the relationship. Discuss how to stay focused on mutual purpose, even when emotions run high.	
Learn to Look	Discuss: What are the signs that a conversation is becoming crucial? What physical, emotional, or behavioral cues do you notice in yourself or others? How do you recognize when safety is at risk and respond? Add responses to sticky notes and place them on the wall.	
Make it Safe	Explore psychological safety. What makes people feel safe or unsafe in conversation? Brainstorm ways to restore safety. Practice sharing safety-building phrases with your group.	

Station	Activity	Notes
Master Your Stories	Separate facts from interpretations. Rewrite an emotionally charged statement using only observable facts. Reflect: What story might I be telling myself? What are the actual facts? How can I reframe the story to reduce blame and increase understanding?	
STATE Your Path:	Use the STATE model to write and practice a short script for a crucial conversation. Use the handout to plan this part of the conversation. <u>S</u>hare your facts <u>T</u>ell your story <u>A</u>sk for others' paths <u>T</u>alk tentatively <u>E</u>ncourage testing	
Explore Others' Perspectives	Practice listening with curiosity. Ask open-ended questions and reflect back what you hear. How can you show genuine interest in their story?	
Move to Action	Discuss how to move from dialogue to results. How do you ensure the conversation leads to action? Clarify commitments and follow through.	

Key Takeaways

The goal of crucial conversations is to get unstuck

Focus on the outcome

Start with the heart

Learn to look

Make it safe

STATE your path

Explore other's perspectives

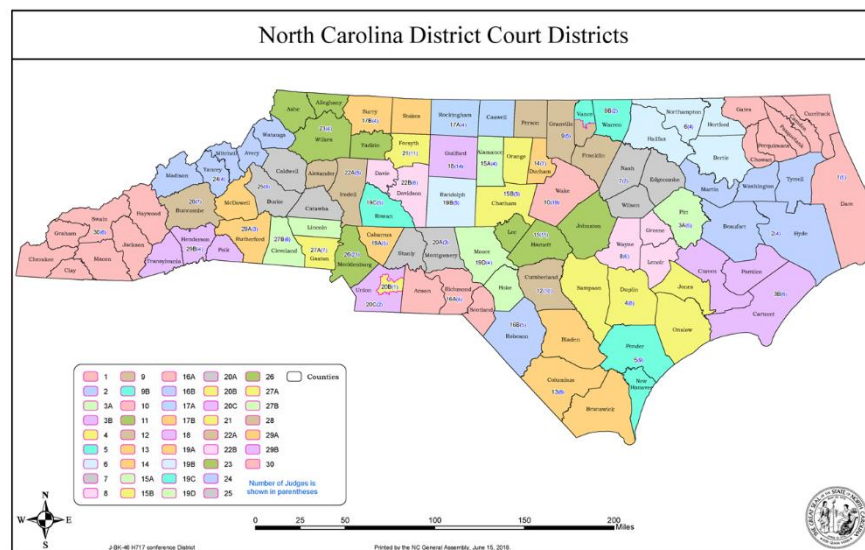
Move to action

Notes

Family-Centered Practice, continued

Preparing the Child and Family for Court

The Juvenile Court System in North Carolina



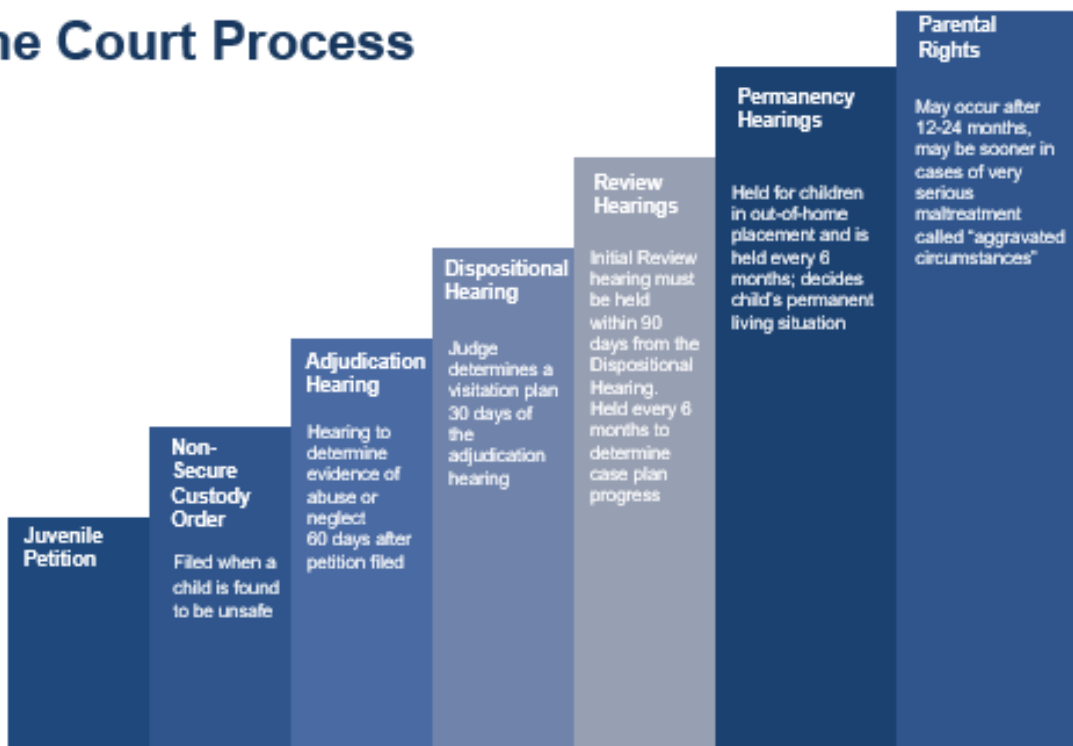
There are 42 District Courts that serve North Carolina's 100 counties. In North Carolina, if a case requires court involvement, it will be heard by the juvenile court. The one exception to this is children with American Indian/Alaskan heritage. Children with American Indian/Alaskan heritage are treated separately and come under the jurisdiction of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

The juvenile court is a branch of the district court whose primary function is the hearing, evaluation, and disposition of cases involving children alleged to be delinquent, abused, neglected, and/or dependent. We meet the goal of empowering and motivating families to participate in the child welfare process by engaging them.

Courts and child welfare agencies must work in tandem to achieve positive safety and permanency outcomes, including reunification, for children and their families. Protecting the safety, well-being, and permanence of children is not only the role of the agency, but also that of the community, including the court system. Although the juvenile court process can be adversarial in nature, county child welfare agencies must employ family-centered practice principles to guide every interaction with every person they encounter throughout the court process. This includes the judge, the family and the child, the agency's attorney, the parent's attorney, the Guardian ad Litem volunteer, the attorney advocate, the bailiff or sheriff's deputy, and any other court personnel. Specifically, maintaining professional relationships with parents' attorneys and attorney advocates in this process models for families and demonstrates to the court that partnerships are valued despite differences each group may have. Although only a small part of the equation, these interactions can become an integral part of the teaching process to help families successfully navigate the child welfare system.

The Court Process

The Court Process



Legal action can occur in any phase of the child welfare process. The primary role of a juvenile court in child welfare cases is to protect children and help their parents provide a safe environment.

A general overview of court process includes:

- Juvenile Petition filed and Nonsecure Custody Order filed: This is considered day zero (0)
- Initial hearing, also called the non-secure custody hearing, to determine need for continued non-secure custody: This must occur within 7 days of the child's placement in out-of-home care
- Adjudication Hearing: This must occur within 60 days
- Dispositional hearing: This hearing should take place immediately following adjudication. If not, it must be concluded within 30 days of the adjudication hearing
- Review hearings for children placed in out-of-home care: Must be held within 90 days of the initial dispositional hearing and then must be at least every six months thereafter
- Permanency hearings for children placed in out-of-home care: Required every 6 months
- Termination of parental rights hearing: May occur after 12-24 months, may be sooner in cases of severe maltreatment called "aggravated circumstances"

Handout: Glossary of Court and Legal Terms

Filing the Petition

Your agency must make reasonable efforts to protect children in their own homes and to prevent placement. Your agency must file a petition requesting adjudication of abuse, neglect, and/or dependency:

- When safety-related circumstances necessitate the need for immediate removal
- Due to the family's unwillingness to accept critically needed services and those services are necessary to keep the family intact
- When despite agency efforts to provide services, the family has made no progress toward providing adequate care for the child and those services are necessary to keep the family intact

A child protection proceeding is initiated by filing a petition. The decision to file a child maltreatment petition is made by the social worker and their supervisor, often in consultation with the agency's lawyer. The decision to file should always be based on safety considerations and not on how likely it is that the case can or cannot be won in court. As a result, child maltreatment petitions tend to concern children who are exposed to serious threats to their safety.

Initial Hearing/Non-Secure Custody Hearing

When a child is removed from their home, a nonsecure custody hearing must occur within seven days. As long as a child remains placed outside the home, nonsecure custody hearings must continue to be held until the disposition hearing is finished, unless the child's parent and their attorney agree to waive them. The initial hearing is the most critical stage in the child abuse and neglect court process. Many important decisions are made, and actions are taken that chart the course for the remainder of the proceedings. At this hearing, the relationships between those involved in the process also are established, and the tone is set for their ongoing interactions. The main purpose of the initial hearing is to determine whether the child should be placed in substitute care or remain with or be returned to the parents pending further proceedings. The critical issue is whether in-home services or other measures can be put in place to ensure the child's safety.

Adjudication Hearing

This hearing must be held no later than **60 days** from the filing of the petition unless the judge decides there is a good reason to delay it. At the adjudication hearing, the court decides whether CPS can prove the allegations in its petition. The child welfare agency's attorney will present evidence through the testimony of the social worker, law enforcement officers, or other witnesses, including any experts. Documents such as medical records or photographs also may be entered into evidence. The attorneys for the parents and the child will have the right to question or cross-examine the witnesses and present evidence. The parents may testify, as may other family members or neighbors who know the facts alleged in the petition or of the care the parents provided their children.

Dispositional Hearing

The dispositional hearing may occur on the same day as the adjudication hearing or may be up to 30 days later. At the dispositional hearing, the judge decides what the best plan is for the child and what services will be ordered. For example, the court may enter an order that mandates counseling and rehabilitative services. The judge will also decide where the child will live, whether any relatives can help take care of the child, and what type of visits the parent will have with their child. The judge may also order each parent to receive certain services, such as substance abuse treatment, parenting classes, or domestic violence counseling. Essentially, the dispositional hearing determines what will be required to resolve the problems that led to CPS intervention.

Review Hearing

The first review hearing must take place within 90 days of the dispositional hearing. After that, there must be a review hearing every 6 months, but often they occur more frequently. In addition, any party can ask for a review hearing at any time, if an attorney files a motion with the court. The review hearing is an opportunity to evaluate the progress that has been made toward completing the case plan and any court orders and to revise the plan as needed. At each review hearing, the judge is given information about what each parent has been doing, how the child is doing, and whether any needs haven't been addressed. The court must decide if the plan that was made during disposition is working and if any changes are needed. Review hearings should guide the case to permanency for the child.

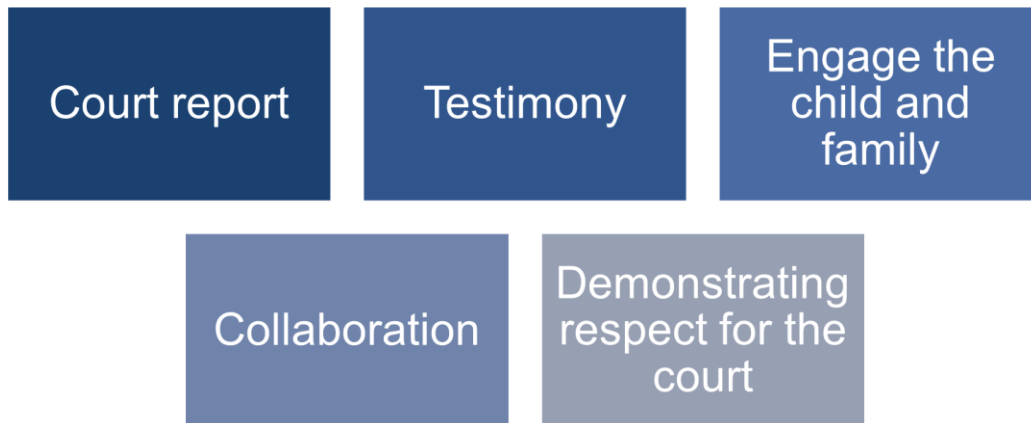
Permanency Hearing

A Permanency Planning hearing is held for children in out-of-home placement. The initial hearing occurs within 90 days of the dispositional hearing and ongoing every six months thereafter. It may be held earlier if the judge decides that efforts to reunify the family are not required or will stop. Permanency hearings must be held at least every 6 months. At a permanency planning hearing, the parties present information to the judge so the judge can order a plan to achieve a safe, permanent home for the child within a reasonable period. The judge will decide whether the plan is to return the child home, to give a suitable person custody or guardianship of the child, to move toward termination of parental rights so the child can be adopted, or to keep more than one of these options open, sometimes referred to as concurrent planning. You will learn more about permanency hearings during the Permanency Planning Services section of this training.

Termination of Parental Rights

A termination of parental rights (TPR) hearing is divided into two stages, adjudication and disposition. At adjudication, the party requesting TPR must prove to the judge by clear and convincing evidence that grounds exist for termination. If the judge decides that grounds do not exist, the judge will dismiss the case. If the judge decides that the grounds do exist, the judge moves to the disposition stage and must decide whether TPR is in the child's best interest.

Caseworker's Role in Court Proceedings



Caseworkers have specific responsibilities in court proceedings:

- Prepare court reports to document the agency's findings, determinations of risk of further harm, plan goals, and activities intended to correct the conditions that led to the request for custody and/or removal, and recommendations to the court for judicial action
- Provide testimony to identify strengths and weaknesses in the case, summarize information that must be presented in court to support the petition, review questions that will be asked under direct examination, identify possible questions that will be posed under cross-examination, and determine whether it is permissible to refer to notes or the case record during the hearing.
- Engage the child and family
- Collaborate with all involved
- Demonstrate respect for the court through appropriate dress and being on time

Remember to engage in anticipatory planning with your supervisor before any court hearing to assess your ability to communicate effectively in court. This type of preparation will help alleviate some of the anxieties you may have going into court. It will also help to ensure that you are fully prepared for the court hearing.

Notes

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Rights and Responsibilities

In child welfare proceedings, parents have the right to:

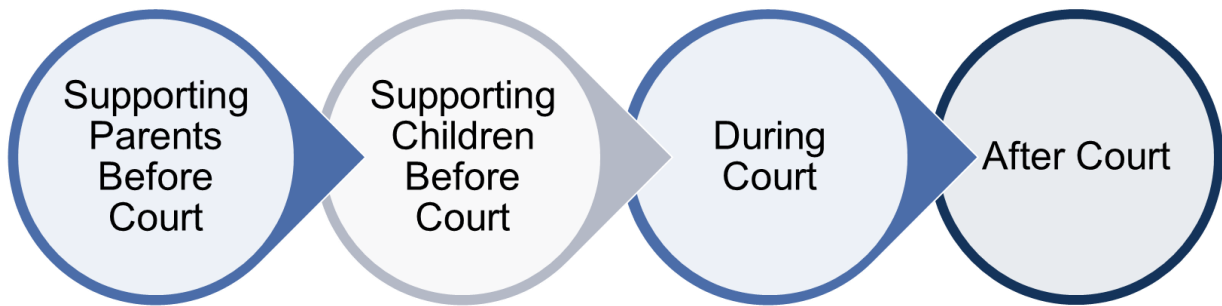
- An attorney
- Admit or deny allegations
- A language interpreter
- Have their attorney ask questions and present evidence
- Know what is in court file
- See their child
- Approve non-emergency surgery, major medical care
- Services and assistance to prevent removal, reunification
- Be given a copy of the judge's written decisions
- Appeal

The North Carolina Juvenile Court: A Handbook for Parents is a great resource in North Carolina that can be used to help prepare parents for court. You should provide this resource to each parent you work with.

Parents are strongly encouraged to attend every hearing and be well-prepared to share their story with the judge and the court.

Notes

Preparing Children and Families



The court process can be nerve-wracking for children, but there are things you can do to help prepare children and calm some of those nerves. You can prepare children for court by first and foremost building a trusting relationship with the child. It is important to be able to provide answers to the questions children have about the court. Children will have many questions, and you should be ready to respond to questions such as:

- What does the courtroom look like?
- Who will be in the courtroom?
- What does each person in the courtroom do?
- Where will I sit? Who will sit next to me?
- What is the purpose of the hearing?
- Will I be expected to speak? What if I don't want to speak? Can another means of communication be used?
- Can I bring quiet toys to court?
- Can I bring a support person or item to court?

If you don't have the answers to all these questions, and you might not, you should work with the child's attorney or your agency's legal representative to find the answers. Even if the child isn't attending the hearing, tell them that a hearing about them is scheduled. This may cause some anxiety, but it is better than a surprise announcement about the court's decision. If the child is not attending court but wishes to write a letter to the judge, make it clear that their letter will be read by all parties at the hearing.

Child and parent participation in court proceedings will promote better outcomes for children and families because their involvement will lead to more accurate fact-finding and informed decision-making.

Notes

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Key Takeaways

Juvenile court assumes responsibility for ordering services and monitors child welfare cases

Courts and child welfare agencies must work hand-in-hand

Each case takes on a certain “life” and follow a prescribed path.

Parents have certain rights and responsibilities

Thorough preparation for court is key

Prepare children and families before, support during, check-in after

Notes

Child and Family Team Meetings Learning Lab

Child and Family Team Meetings

CFT meetings are decision-making meetings that exist for the purpose:

- Reach agreement on which identified child welfare issues will be addressed and how they will be addressed throughout the life of the case
- Develop a safety or case plan that is created using the best ideas of the family, informal, and formal supports that the family believes in, the agency approves of, and lessen risk and heighten safety for the child/youth and family
- Plan for how all participants will take part in, support, and implement the safety or case plan developed by the team

CFT meetings share the following components:

- A clear but open-ended purpose
- An opportunity for the family to be involved in decision-making and planning
- Options for the family to consider and decisions for the family to make
- The family's involvement in the development of specific safety or permanent plans and in the development of services and supports
- The outcome of the meeting will be reflected in the development or revision of a case plan or a safety plan
- Child and Family Team Meetings are grounded in the Three Core Helping Conditions:
 - Genuineness
 - Empathy
 - Respect

Mock Child and Family Teams Meeting

Activity: Mock Child and Family Team Meeting: The Allen Family

The purpose of this activity is for caseworkers to practice skills for participating in child and family team meetings, emphasizing collaboration, active listening, conflict resolution, and family-centered planning.

What to Do: The class will enact a mock CFT Meeting for the Allen family. Each person will act as a member of the Allen family CFT, using a role card distributed by the training facilitator.

Read through your role card and act as your character in the CFT meeting.

This is a CPS Assessment Family Assessment case.

Scenario

Mother: Dora Allen, age 42, White

Father: Andrew Allen, age 45, White

Children: Andy Allen, age 17, White
Joy Allen, age 14, White

The caseworker has been working with this family for two weeks. The report was received due to unsafe discipline allegations that Dora was repeatedly slapping Joy on the face, arms, and shoulders without leaving marks or bruises.

Upon initiation, it was found that Dora repeatedly slapped Joy on the arms and shoulders without leaving marks or bruises. This is an ongoing discipline method. A Safety Assessment was completed with a safety decision of “safe,” as no information received would indicate that the concerns rose to the level of a danger indicator.

At a follow-up quality contact, Dora states that she is “at her breaking point” with Joy’s behavior. The family reports that Joy has become sassier, meaning that she walks away from Dora when Dora is talking, rolls her eyes, and doesn’t follow household rules or complete chores. Dora says that she really doesn’t know what to do, and she doesn’t want things to get worse between her and Joy.

The caseworker is facilitating a Child and Family Team meeting to bring together the safety and support network to brainstorm ways to support the family.

Andrew has been disengaged since he and Dora split up two years ago. Andrew doesn’t see the children due to animosity between the parents, as the break-up was ugly and emotional. The caseworker reached out to Andrew by letter, and he called two days ago, stating that he would be able to attend the CFT Meeting today.

Debrief: Mock CFT Meeting

What communication techniques worked well?

What types of questions did you hear used?

What family-centered or trauma-informed skills did you observe?

How were family voices included or excluded?

What did you observe of discord?

Was discord managed effectively?

What skills do you hear used to manage discord?

How realistic did the meeting feel?

Self-Reflection

Activity: Reflection on Learning

Think about what you've learned during the first 8 days of training. Take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts.

What interviewing techniques or skills have been most helpful to you?

Which ones do you feel confident using already?

Are there any skills you'd like more practice with?

Pre-Work Reminder

To create a meaningful and well-rounded learning experience during Pre-Service Training: Core Week Four, we recommend that participants complete the following observations prior to the session:

- Attend a Child and Family Team Meeting
- Observe an adult interview
- Observe a child interview
- Participate in or observe at least one home visit
- Review the SDM Screening and Response tool policy and procedure manual via the state website: https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/SDM-Screening-and-Response-Instructions-Manual_FINAL-20252-1.pdf

These experiences will help ground the training content in real-world practice and enhance your ability to engage in reflective discussion during the training.

During your observations, please use the “Pre-Service Training: Child Welfare in North Carolina Observation Worksheet” to record your observations.



Appendix

Interviewing Strategies for Ambivalence and the Stages of Change

Activity: Question Matching ANSWER KEY

Question Types:

- Decisional Balance
- Evoking
- Exploring Goals and Values
- Looking back/Looking forward
- Questioning Extremes
- Scaling Question

Complete the table below by matching the types of questions to the examples.

Question Type	Question
Scaling Question	On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being unimportant and 10 being extremely important, where would you say this change is currently in terms of your priorities?
Decisional Balance	What do you like about your present situation? What concerns you about it?
Looking back/ Looking forward	How would you like things to be different one year from now?
Evoking	What would you like to do differently next time?
Exploring Goals and Values	What in your life is most important to you right now?
Questioning Extremes	What is the worst thing that could happen if you change? What is the best thing?

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