



Worker Practice Standards Desk Guide

Practice Standards are essential behaviors in working with agencies, staff, and families that apply to all members of the child welfare system, including leaders, supervisors, and workers. For workers, Practice Standards describe how they should interact with children, youth, and families from the beginning to the end of child welfare services. Each essential function has accompanying core activities, which embody that function, and practice standards, or desired behaviors that staff at all levels should be saying and doing to practice in accordance with the Practice Model and to help achieve positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.



North Carolina's Practice Model Pyramid



What is a Practice Model?

Practice Models provide a framework or organizing principles to guide the agency to achieve their mission and values. (Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group. Adopting a Child Welfare Practice Framework)

What is a Practice Standard?

Practice Standards provide guidance to workers on the concrete actions and behaviors they should be demonstrating to carry out the agency's Practice Model. (Metz, A., Bartley, L., Blase, K. & Fixsen, D. (2011). A guide for creating practice profiles. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network, FPG, Child Development Institute, UNC.)



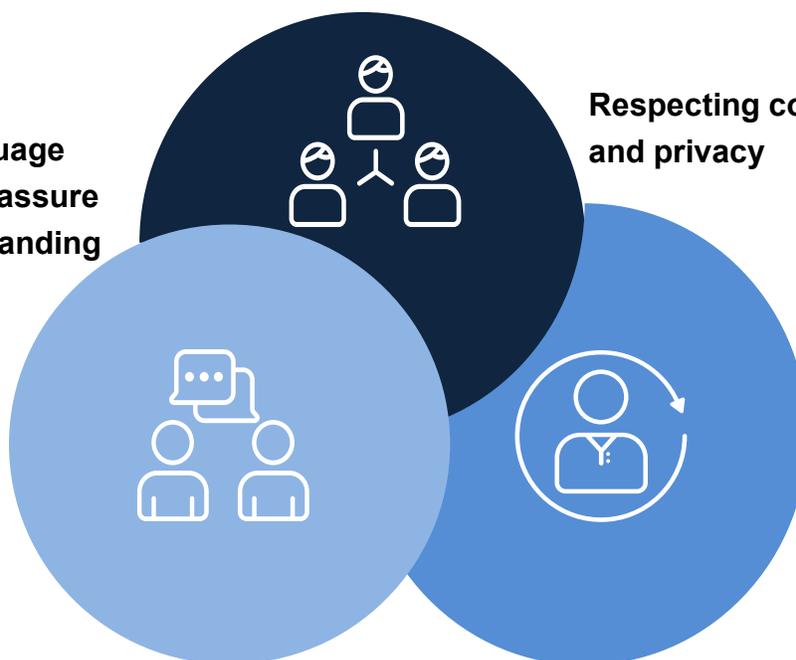
Key Behaviors and Core Activities

Communicating: *Timely and consistent sharing of spoken and written information so that meaning, and intent are understood in the same way by all parties involved. Open and honest communication underpins successful performance of all essential functions in child welfare.*^{5j}

#1	Ensure clarity when communicating.
#2	Adapt communication to family needs and preferences and provide consistent information to all family members who need it.
#3	Allow time to enhance two-way communication with the family through questions and checks for understanding.
#4	Speak with the family and youth in a non-judgmental, respectful manner.
#5	Clearly and openly express to youth and the family what is expected from them and what they can expect from child welfare.
#6	Always tell the truth, including during difficult conversations, in a manner that promotes dialogue.
#7	Diligently respect confidentiality while sharing information when necessary and appropriate.

Communicating Core Activities

Using clear language
and checking to assure
two-way understanding



Respecting confidentiality
and privacy

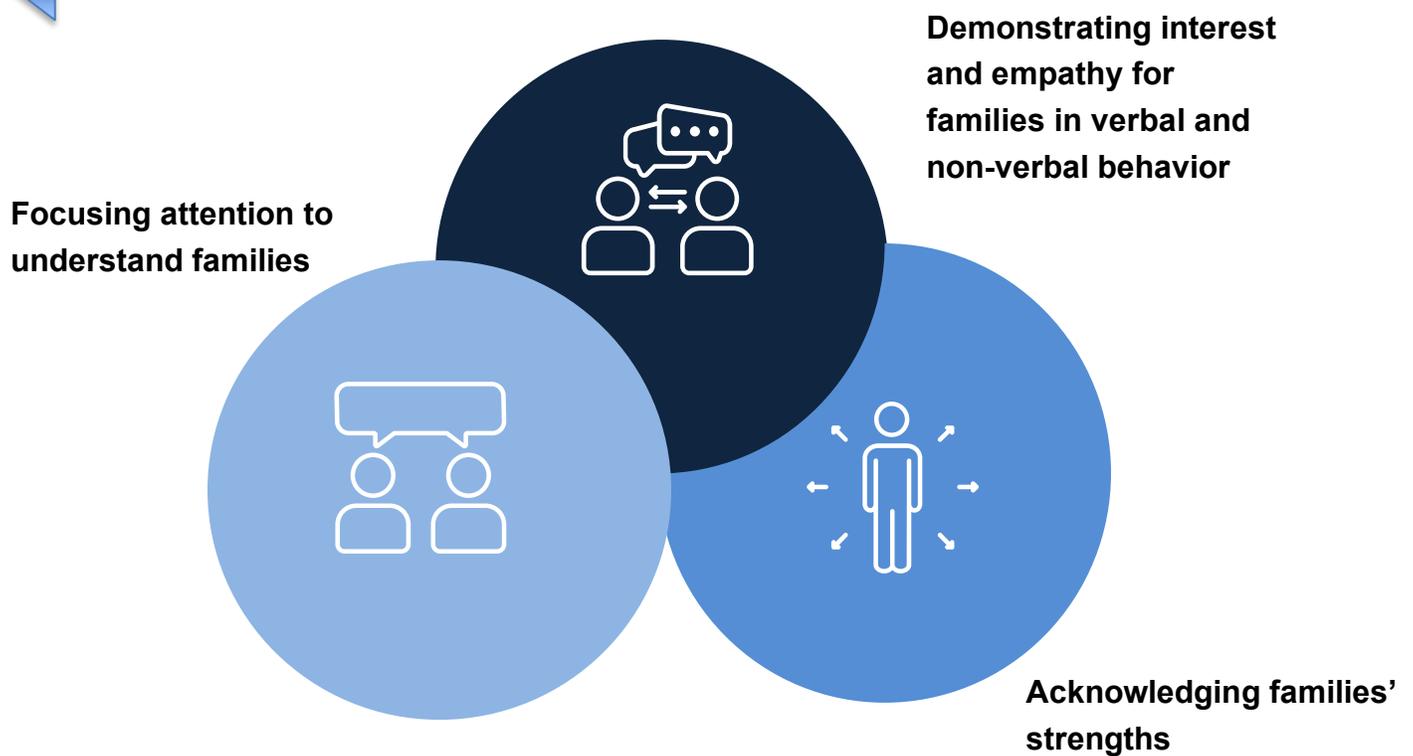
Operating with
transparency and
honesty



Engaging: *Empowering and motivating families to actively participate with child welfare in the functions of assessing, planning, and implementing by communicating openly and honestly with the family, demonstrating respect, and valuing the family's input and preferences. Engagement begins upon first meeting and continues throughout child welfare services.*

#1	Be fully present when meeting with the family.
#2	Prepare in advance to be able to connect with the family.
#3	Consider the family's perspective in all exchanges and actions.
#4	Recognize the family's perspectives and desires.
#5	Use body language to convey interest in the family.
#6	Acknowledge and celebrate strengths and successes.

Engaging Core Activities

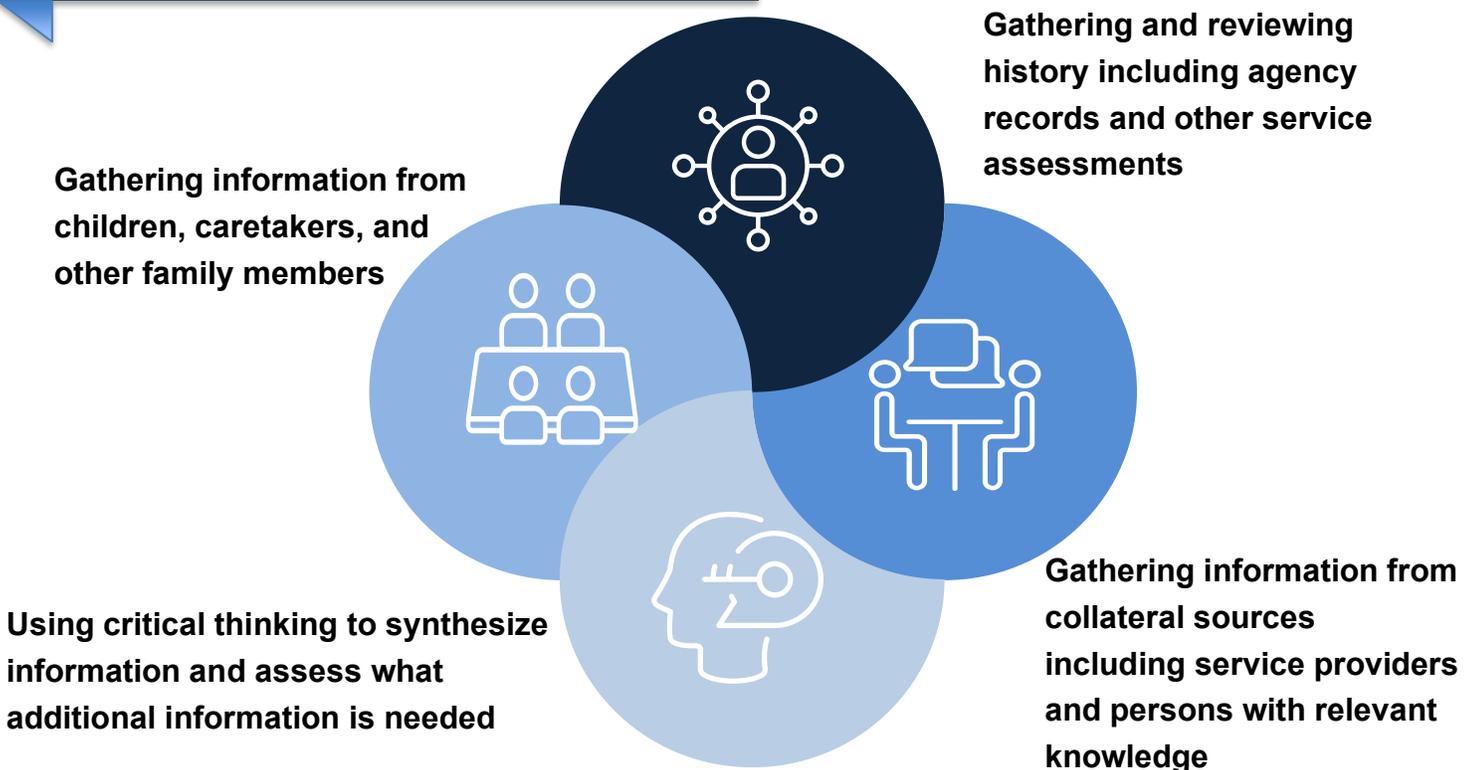




Assessing: *Gathering and synthesizing information from children, families, support systems, agency records, and persons with knowledge to determine the need for child protective services and to inform planning for safety, permanency, and well-being. Assessing occurs throughout child welfare services and includes learning from families about their strengths and preferences.*

#1	Differentiate between information and positions.
#2	Take time to get to know the family and explain the assessment process.
#3	Ask questions based on information needed and at ease asking uncomfortable questions.
#4	Stay open to different explanations of events in the record, keeping biases in check.
#5	Balance what is read in the record and what the family shares.
#6	Obtain all sides if there are differing positions among collaterals, engaging the family in the process.
#7	Synthesize information and consider sources, relevance, and timelines.
#8	Remain non-judgmental when processing information.

Assessing Core Activities





Planning: *Respectfully and meaningfully collaborating with families, communities, tribes, and other identified team members to set goals and develop strategies based on the continuous assessment of safety, risk, family strengths, and needs through a child and family team process. Plans should be revisited regularly by the team to determine progress towards meeting goals and changes made when needed.*

#1	Engage the family in understanding assessment and history, focusing on strengths to customize the plan.
#2	Discover root causes and underlying reasons for the family's involvement.
#3	Believe and practice the importance of preparation both for self and for the family for teaming and planning.
#4	Actively engage the family in identifying their team.
#5	Promote the family's voice as the cornerstone of the meeting.
#6	Facilitate and engage participants throughout, acknowledging and managing conflict.
#7	Revisit case plan regularly, willing to modify or update as needed, but at a minimum per policy.

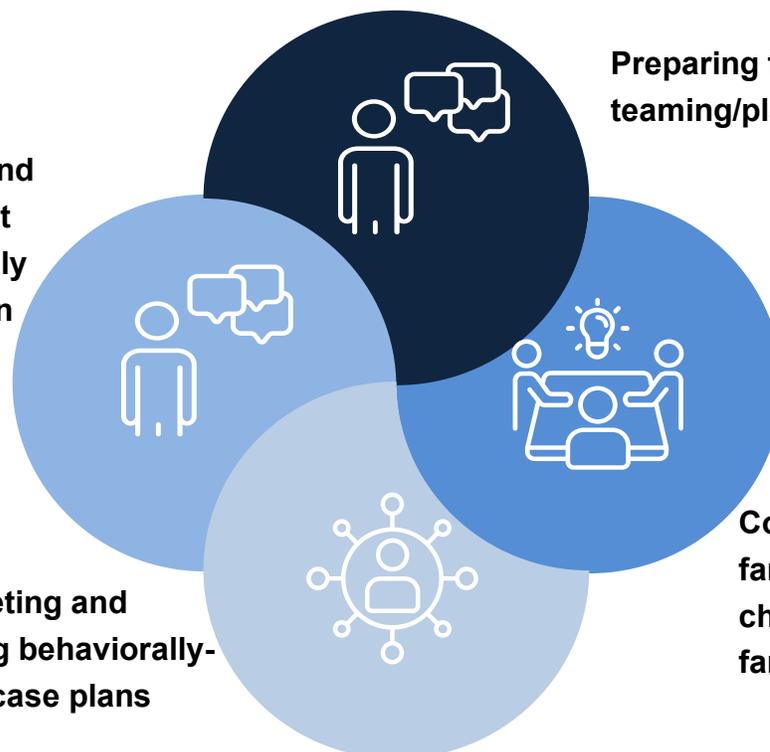
Planning Core Activities

Synthesizing and integrating current and previous assessment information and family history to inform plan

Completing and revising behaviorally-based case plans

Preparing families for the teaming/planning process

Conducting child and family meetings with children, youth, and families



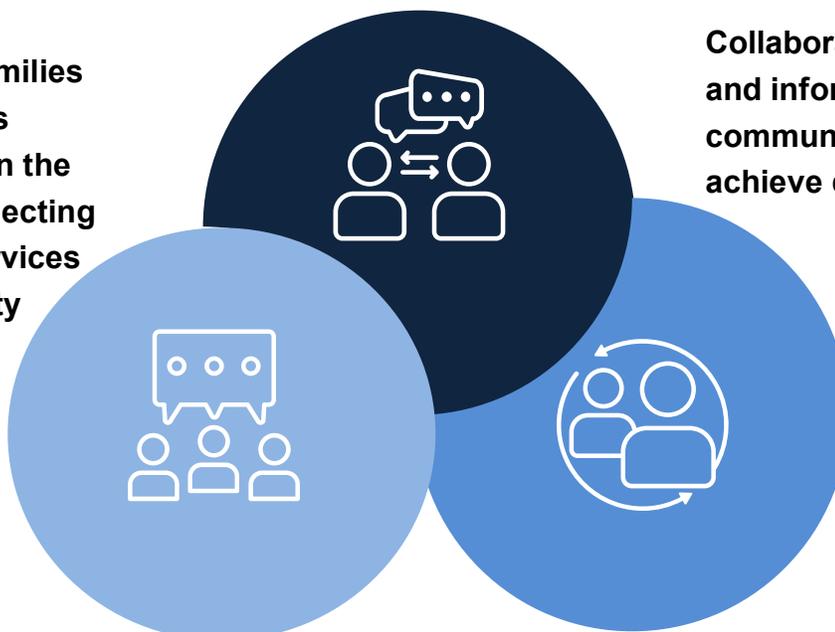


Implementing: *Carrying out plans that have been developed. Implementing includes linking families to services and community supports, supporting families to take actions agreed upon in plans and monitoring to assure plans are being implemented by both families and providers, monitoring progress on behavioral goals, and identifying when plans need to be adapted.*

#1	Support the family to take action.
#2	Work with the family to find solutions to problems.
#3	Explain to the family what services are and what they could do for the family to provide information and informed decisions.
#4	Offer an array of service providers to choose from if there are choices to be had.
#5	Advocate with and for the family with providers regarding what behavioral change is expected to ensure quality service delivery.
#6	Access natural supports in the community to assist the family to achieve their goals.
#7	Check in on an ongoing basis with the family on progress with the Family Services Agreement.
#8	Assess progress in implementing actions of the plan, making adjustments as needed.
#9	Track service delivery for the achievement of safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for the family.

Implementing Core Activities

Supporting families to take actions agreed upon in the plan and connecting families to services and community support



Collaborating with providers and informal supports in the community to help families achieve desired outcomes

Coaching with families and partnering with providers to assure plans are being implemented, progress is made, and outcomes achieved



Strategies for Applying Practice Standards in Your Everyday Work

Communicating

- Use clear understandable language, both when speaking and writing, avoiding acronyms and jargon.
- Understand the unique communication needs of the family, including communication preferences or language barriers. If barriers exist, ensure that appropriate language services are provided.
- Continually practice active listening, which means asking questions to both understand and show you are listening.
- Through your words and actions, show the family interest, respect, and empathy. Examples include leaning in when they speak, head nodding to show understanding, and being transparent with note taking.
- Make sure you understand and can explain the “why” behind certain requirements and decisions with the family.
- Always respect the family’s right to privacy and be cognizant of who you are sharing information with, what you are sharing, where you are sharing, and why you are sharing.
- Have honest discussions with the family regarding expectations, both yours and theirs. Be sure to follow up and follow through on your conversations.
- Model transparency and honesty, including when information is not known, difficult, or incorrect.

Engaging

- Be fully present by eliminating any potential distractions.
- Review previous notes from meetings with the family and prepare follow-up questions and items to discuss. Demonstrating your preparedness shows the family that you respect your time together.
- Treat the family as the “expert” of their own situation. They know their strengths and struggles best.
- Put the family first in conversations and consider the perspective of the child and family. For example, engaging relatives for placement is important from an agency perspective, but can be extremely meaningful from the family’s perspective.
- Show empathy and acknowledge any struggle experienced by the family when talking through courageous conversations.
- Empower the family to feel confident, encouraging their active involvement in problem solving and planning, and help the family identify their own strengths and successes.
- Engage the family through body language and demonstrate interest, empathy, and understanding when they speak.



Assessing

- Ask open-ended, strengths-based questions.
- Be transparent and share the purpose of gathering and assessing information, and who may be contacted as part of the process.
- Understand that assessing is an ongoing skill and never ends during the life of a case.
- Provide space for reflection on opinions and biases and how they could impact your work. Brainstorm strategies to mitigate bias with your supervisor.
- Prepare ahead and review what is in the record to understand what has worked for the family in the past, while also being cognizant of what the family is communicating with you in the present.
- Know what questions to ask that will elicit the most comprehensive answers and share along the way what is being learned by those questions.
- Gather information and observations from a wide variety of collateral sources, while understanding they may also contain opinions and biases as well.
- Be inquisitive, not judgmental through the assessing process.
- Before contacting collaterals, engage the family in what information is being obtained and when you intend to make contact, when it is possible to do so.

Planning

- Create buy-in for the family by involving them from the beginning, ensuring that their voice is used throughout the plan.
- Fully process information gathered to best inform case planning.
- Dig deep to understand and address the root cause for child welfare involvement, using creative ideas and solutions that are congruent with the needs of the family.
- Check for plan alignment with the root cause of involvement. The family should not be asked to complete tasks that are not directly tied to concerns.
- Prepare yourself for Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs) by thoroughly reviewing the case history, documenting questions, and consulting with your supervisor.
- Prepare the family for CFTs by explaining the purpose, letting them know what to expect, and engaging them in setting the agenda.
- Help the family identify relatives, friends, and others to be involved in the planning process as an advocate and source of support.
- Thoroughly review plans to ensure that the plan's goals and objectives continue to tie back to the family's assessment and reason for involvement.
- Update the plan accordingly when tasks are completed so the family can see and feel progress.



Implementing

- Partner with the family on determining services and service delivery and what will work best for their family.
- Offer to make initial phone calls to assist in navigating a complex service array system.
- Bust barriers to accessing services, such as lack of transportation, lack of a communication device, or lack of funds.
- Help the family fully understand the purpose of each service so that they understand what progress will look like.
- Use a three-step process of: "What is going well?"; "What needs to happen?"; and "What are our next steps?".
- Continuously assess services with the family and adjust as needed. Reassess barriers once services begin to ensure the family can continue to be successful or if changes are needed.
- Always remember the power differential that exists and that the family may be unsure of how to advocate for themselves with providers, therefore you must advocate both for and with them.
- Consider the family's interests, culture, and faith when exploring natural supports that may help them feel confident and supported during the process.
- Celebrate along with the family when progress is made, and goals are achieved.

Resources

North Carolina Worker Practice Standards

Practice Standards Worker Self-Assessment

Transfer of Learning Tools: Self-Assessment, Peer Review, and 360-Degree Evaluation