



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Social Services

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Permanency Planning Services Track Training

Participant Workbook Day Eight

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222 E. 18th Street, Unit C
Cheyenne, WY 82001
www.pubknow.com

info@pubknow.com
(800) 776-4229

NC Child Welfare Permanency Planning Services Track Training Day 8

This curriculum was developed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, and revised by Public Knowledge® in 2026

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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 in need of 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 later.

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

Course Themes

The central themes of the Permanency Planning Track Training are divided across several course topics.

- Purpose, Practice Standards, and Legal Aspects
- Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services
- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA)
- Communicating
- Family Engagement
- Assessing in Permanency Planning Services
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Permanency Plans and Concurrent Planning
- Attachment
- Family Engagement: Family Time and Shared Parenting
- Working with Relatives
- Partners in the Permanency Planning Process
- Permanency Planning with the Family
- Permanency Planning Family Case Plan
- Child and Family Team Meetings
- Authentically Engaging Children and Youth
- Family-Centered Permanency Planning
- Quality Contacts
- Preparing for Permanency
- Engaging Relatives
- Placement
- Placement with Relatives
- Monitoring the Permanency Planning Family Case Plan
- Achieving Permanency
- Termination of Parental Rights
- Adoption
- Documentation
- 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 will be late. 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 Permanency Planning Track Training in the form of online e-Learning modules. Completion of the eLearnings is required prior to attendance at the classroom-based training. The following are the online e-Learning modules:

1. North Carolina Worker Practice Standards
2. Safety Organized Practice
3. Understanding and Assessing Safety and Risk
4. Understanding and Screening for Trauma

Transfer of Learning (TOL) Tool

The Permanency Planning Track Training Transfer of Learning (ToL) tool is a comprehensive, collaborative activity for workers and supervisors to identify worker goals, knowledge gains, and priorities for further development throughout the training process. In four distinct steps, the worker and supervisor will highlight their goals and action plan for participating in training, reflect on lessons and outstanding questions, and create an action plan to support the worker's growth. The tool should be started prior to beginning the Permanency Planning Track Training and re-visited on an ongoing basis to assess growth and re-prioritize actions for development.

- Part A: Training Preparation: Prior to completing any eLearning and in-person Track Training sessions, the worker and supervisor should meet to complete Part A: Training Preparation. In this step, the worker and supervisor will discuss their goals for participating in training and develop a plan to meet those goals through pre-work, other learning opportunities, and support to address anticipated barriers.
- Part B: Worker Reflections During Training: There is space in each topic for workers to record their notes. For many slides, questions prompt workers to reflect on why the materials matter and how they will apply them in their practice. Some, but not all, of these questions may be asked by the training facilitator during the training. Each section includes a "Reflections & Check-In" at the end, where the worker will document their thoughts, takeaways, and outstanding questions. This level of reflection serves two purposes. First, the practice of distilling down a full section of training into three takeaways and three remaining questions requires the worker to actively engage with the material, subsequently forming cognitive cues related to the information for future use in case practice. Second, prioritizing takeaways and questions by section allows workers to continually review information to determine if questions are answered in future sessions and supports the development of an action plan by requiring workers to highlight the questions they find most important.

- Part C: Planning for Post-Training Debrief with Supervisor: The worker considers the takeaways and questions they identified in each section and creates a framework to transfer those takeaways and questions into an action plan.
- Part D: Post-Training Debrief with Supervisor: Provides an opportunity for the supervisor and worker to determine a specific plan of action to answer outstanding questions and to further support worker training.

While this ToL is specific to the Track Training in North Carolina, workers and supervisors can review the takeaways and questions highlighted by the worker in each section of training on an ongoing basis, revising action steps when prior actions are completed, and celebrating worker growth and success along the way.

Training Evaluations

At the conclusion of each training session, learners will complete a training evaluation tool to assess satisfaction with the training content and methods. The training evaluation tool is required to complete the training course. Training evaluations will be used 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.

Day Eight Agenda

Permanency Planning Services Track Training

- I. Welcome and Check-In

Termination of Parental Rights

- II. Termination of Parental Rights

Adoption

- III. Adoption Overview

BREAK

- IV. The Adoption Process

Achieving Permanency Learning Lab

- V. Achieving Permanency Learning Lab

LUNCH

- VI. Achieving Permanency Learning Lab, continued

Documentation

- VII. Communication in Documentation

BREAK

Worker Safety

- VIII. Defining Worker Safety

- IX. Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Trauma

- X. Considerations for Worker Safety

- XI. Worker Wellness and Self-Care

Closing and Training Wrap-Up

- XII. End-of-Day Values Reflection

- XIII. Self-Reflection Training Wrap-Up

Day Eight Learning Objectives

Adoption	
•	Learners will be able to describe when it is appropriate to pursue adoption as the permanency option for a child.
•	Learners will be able to describe the policy and practice requirements for TPR, including service provision and documentation requirements.
•	Learners will be able to describe the process for TPR.
•	Learners will be able to identify and clearly document behavioral indicators to support adoption decisions.
•	Learners will be able to describe required policies and practices associated with adoption in North Carolina.
•	Learners will be able to develop plans to transition to adoption that highlight the support needs of the child(ren), parents, and other important case participants.
•	Learners will be able to define dissolution and disruption and describe risks associated with each.
Documentation	
•	The learner will be able to explain the importance of clear, concise, and accurate documentation.
•	The learner will be able to demonstrate the components of court-ready documentation.
Worker Safety	
•	Learners will be able to share and discuss examples of vicarious traumatization and STS.
•	Learners will be able to identify at least three risk factors associated with STS.
•	Learners will be able to identify the impacts of STS on emotional, physical, and psychological health and decision-making of child welfare professionals and for themselves.
•	Learners will be able to recognize and discuss burnout and compassion fatigue.
•	Learners will apply strategies to promote their physical, psychological, and emotional safety and well-being

• Learners will be able to explain the importance of their safety while performing their role.
• Learners will be able to discuss strategies that promote their physical, psychological, and emotional safety.
• Learners will recognize and describe at least three signs of danger and at least three methods of avoiding or mitigating danger when conducting home visits and after-hours or on-call tasks.
• Learners will develop and utilize a safety plan that describes methods of preventive, environmentally and situationally aware, and responsive behavior.
• Learners will be able to describe skills to de-escalation, calm, and verbally intervene to diffuse tense and potentially violent outbursts.
• Learners will be able to explain the importance of their safety while performing their role.
• Learners will be able to discuss strategies that promote their physical, psychological, and emotional safety.
• Learners will recognize at least three signs of danger and at least three methods of avoiding or mitigating danger when conducting after-hours or on-call tasks.
• Learners will develop and utilize a safety plan that describes methods of preventive, environmentally and situationally aware, and responsive behavior.
• Learners will be able to discuss strategies that promote their physical, psychological, and emotional safety.
• Learners will be able to incorporate safety, threat and risk identification and mitigation into their self-care plan.
• Learners will identify, discuss, and apply strategies to promote their physical, psychological, and emotional safety and well-being.

Permanency Planning Services Track Training Day 8

Activity: Biggest Takeaway

What is your biggest takeaway from this training so far?

What are you most excited to put into practice when you return to the office?

Termination of Parental Rights

Activity: Knowledge Check Termination of Parental Rights

- When adoption is the primary permanent plan, termination of parental rights is required to legally end the parent–child relationship and free the child for adoption
- Termination of parental rights is a serious and typically permanent legal action that may be necessary to achieve long-term safety, stability, and permanency for children
- Post-Adoption Mediated Contact Agreement is a voluntary court-approved mediation agreement between the parents and prospective adoptive parents that allows post-adoption contact as determined in the agreement and approved by the court

Circle or mark your response to each statement.

True	False	TPR can be voluntary or involuntary.
True	False	The parental rights of both parents must be terminated for adoption to occur.
True	False	Parents can relinquish their parental rights without a full understanding of the adoption process or its impact on their child.
True	False	A petition for TPR must be filed within 45 calendar days of a hearing that determines the primary permanent plan as adoption.
True	False	The involuntary TPR process occurs in a juvenile court with a jury.
True	False	Involuntary TPR occurs in two phases. 1-Adjudication in which the court decides if TPR is in the child's best interest and 2- Disposition in which legal grounds for TPR are decided.

Notes

Family-Centered Practice Through Permanency Changes

- Permanency planning often requires children, families, relatives, kin, and professionals to redefine roles, responsibilities, and relationships as legal permanency plans evolve
- Family reorientation occurs across all permanency outcomes, not only adoption
- Changes in legal relationships do not eliminate the importance of relational and identity permanence
- Caseworkers must intentionally support children in maintaining meaningful connections to family, community, and important relationships, regardless of the legal permanency outcome
- Family-centered practice requires ongoing attention to how children and families experience loss, grief, belonging, and connection during permanency transitions
- Post-adoption mediated contact agreements are an opportunity to preserve relational and identity permanence and to provide clear boundaries between families



Across the different permanency outcomes, how might a child's definition of "family" shift or expand?

What can caseworkers do to support relational and identity permanence, regardless of the legal permanency outcome selected?

How can Child and Family Team meetings, safety networks, genograms, and ecomaps help children maintain important connections during permanency transitions?

What are the risks when we focus only on legal permanence and fail to support relational and identity permanence?

How might preparation for permanency look different for reunification, guardianship, custody, APPLA, and adoption?

Communicating with Children and Youth when Termination of Parental Rights Happens

What is changing?

What is staying the same?

Who is still here for me?

- Children need honest, developmentally appropriate information
- TPR can bring grief, confusion, fear, relief, hope, or mixed emotions
- Children often ask what will happen next and who will remain in their lives
- Avoid making promises about future permanency outcomes
- Help children understand:
 - What is changing
 - What is staying the same
 - Who is still here for me
- TPR changes a legal relationship but does not erase identity, ethnicity, history, or important relationships
- Support legal, relational, and identity permanence throughout permanency transitions

What questions might children have when termination of parental rights occurs?

How can we communicate honestly with children when we do not yet know what the final permanency outcome will be?

How can we support children who feel loyalty conflicts between their birth family and potential permanency caregivers?

What can caseworkers do to strengthen identity and relational permanence for children during the TPR process?

How might these conversations differ for younger children, older children, and youth?

Adoption

Adoption Overview

Adoption

“Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by birth, with the same mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birth parent.”

- Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by birth, with the same mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birth parent.
 - Ensure timely permanence for children through legal adoption
 - Ensure that each child, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or abilities, has an opportunity for placement in a permanent family
 - Prepare and assist children in their transition to an adoptive family
 - Support and strengthen the adoptive family
 - Provide services to all members of the adoption triad
 - Provide post-adoption services to optimize family functioning and to prevent dissolution of adoption

Notes

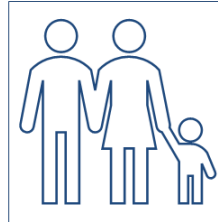
Termination of Parental Rights

Activity: Competing Demands of Permanency Planning Services



Termination of Parental Rights

Adoption



- TPR is a legal process, not a permanency outcome
- Adoption may become the permanent plan when reunification is no longer appropriate
- Permanency decisions should reflect safety, relationships, identity, and long-term well-being
- Statutory TPR timelines require timely permanency planning and assessment
- Concurrent planning helps agencies evaluate multiple paths to permanence before critical deadlines
- Every child deserves permanency regardless of age, behavior, disability, or placement setting
- Legal permanence works best when relational and identity permanence are also supported

North Carolina policy requires that when a child has been in DSS custody or placement for 12 of the most recent 22 months and has been placed outside the home, DSS must initiate proceedings to terminate the parents' parental rights.

Notes

Activity Worksheet: TPR and Adoption

What are three circumstances where TPR is not required before Adoption?

1.

2.

3.

Is it possible to arrive at the 12 of the most recent 22 months without fully assessing relatives for guardianship or custody, or the true appropriateness of adoption as a permanent plan?

When adoption is being considered as a permanent plan, satisfactory answers to the following questions should be considered:

- Have all relative placement options been considered and eliminated?
- Have the child's ethnic and cultural needs been considered and addressed?
- Has the best interest of the child been considered and documented?
- Are the parents willing to relinquish their rights, or is the agency ready to proceed with the termination of parental rights?
- Do legal grounds for termination of parental rights exist?
- Is the child already living with caretakers who are willing to adopt?
- How soon can the child be placed in an adoptive home?
- How long will the court process take?
- Who will help the child through the placement process?
- Has a pool of potential adoptive families been recruited, or is the agency willing to commit to child-specific recruitment?
- Have the child's specific needs and strengths been thoroughly assessed and evaluated?
- Has a placement option that will be able to meet the child's needs been identified?
- What is the child's relationship with siblings?
- Should the child be placed with siblings and if so, can this be accomplished?
- Is the child able to accept "parenting"?

What are the consequences of not adequately assessing all these factors within the required timeframes?

What can we do to avoid ending up in this place where TPR must occur based on required timeframes, and adoption is not identified as the right path to take for the child?

How should information gathered through family engagement, relative search efforts, genograms, ecomaps, and Child and Family Team meetings inform decisions about adoption?

How can we continue supporting relational and identity permanence if adoption becomes the primary permanent plan?

Adoption as a Permanent Plan

Activity: Adoption as a Permanent Plan



Permanency
Plan



Concurrent
Plan

- Adoption may be identified as either a primary or concurrent permanent plan, with the same core tasks required regardless of plan designation
- The tasks and activities for adoption are the same, regardless of whether adoption is the primary or concurrent
 - The circumstances of these tasks and activities are different depending on the stage in the permanency planning process
- Legal risk placement is a critical adoption strategy used when adoption is believed to be in the child's best interest, but legal clearance has not yet been achieved
- Permanency planning tasks are interconnected, with adoption-related activities often supporting multiple permanency outcomes, including reunification, guardianship, and legal permanence
- When adoption shifts from a concurrent to a primary plan, statutory timeframes are triggered, including the initiation of the termination of parental rights process

What differences exist in case planning activities for adoption when the plan is primary versus concurrent?

When it is decided that adoption is an appropriate permanent plan, it is crucial that tasks and activities to promote adoption occur. What are some of these tasks?

What might be a reason that legal risk placement would NOT be considered in a child's best interest?

What is some adoption-related tasks that are supportive of other permanency outcomes?

Handout: Legal Risk Placements

A legal risk placement is a placement that occurs when the agency believes that adoption is in the best interests of the child, that the child is placed in an approved adoptive home, and that the agency intends to approve this placement for adoption if the child becomes legally free for adoption. When making a legal risk placement, the agency does not yet have the authority to consent to the child's adoption, as parental rights to the birth parents are still in effect. The purpose of legal risk placement is to move the child into a permanent home as soon as possible, without jeopardizing the child's legal or social well-being.

A child may be placed in a legal risk placement when one or more of the following is true:

- The child is the subject of a Termination of Parental Rights Order that is under appeal
- There is an approval of legal risk placement by the Adoption Committee
- One parent has consented to adoption, and the other parent's identity and/or whereabouts are not known
- The birth family abandoned the child.
-

To receive a legal risk placement, the prospective adoptive parent:

- Is licensed as a foster home or approved by court order to provide placement
- Has an approved preplacement assessment
- Meets foster care licensure standards or has court approval for placement with legal risk parents
- Has been informed of the legal status of the child and understands that the child is currently not free for adoption, and there is a risk that the child may not become free for adoption
- Has signed the Information Sharing Acknowledgment (DSS-5246)
- Agrees to sign and abide by the conditions of the Legal Risk Placement Agreement. (DSS5304)

The following information should be shared with the placement provider regarding legal risk placement:

- The child is not and may not become free for adoption
- The home must meet the standards for foster care licensure
- The Agency will pay applicable foster care rates for the child's care
- The Agency is mandated and responsible for working, as appropriate, and if the biological family is identified during the case, or up until the time the child is legally freed for adoption
- There are legal risks involved in this placement
- The Agency, as the legal guardian, reserves the right to move the child from the Legal Risk Adoptive Parent(s) home at any time, if in the judgment or by order of the court, that the removal is in the best interest of the child

The Adoption Process

Activity: Adoption Services Matching Game

What to do:

- Each group will receive an envelope with cards or pieces of paper with adoption process tasks and activities
- When the trainer tells you to begin, match the required task or activity to the correct person

What did this activity help you notice about how adoption services must support multiple people at the same time: the child, birth parent, or legal guardian, and adoptive resource?

Which task or responsibility was hardest to place with only one person, and what does that tell us about the relational nature of adoption work?

How can organizing adoption tasks by participant help you plan more clearly, communicate more effectively, and avoid missing critical supports in practice?

Dynamic Aspects of Adoption

Types of Adoption:

- Foster-to-adopt in which a licensed foster family provides care to a child while in foster care and at the point where the child becomes legally free, the foster parents move forward with adoption. In these cases, the child has an established relationship with the adoption resource through placement provision before the decision to adopt is explored.
- Relative adoption in which a relative or kin moves forward with adoption. In relative adoption cases, the relative could have been providing placement throughout the foster care experience or could be identified as an adoption resource after the child is legally free for adoption.
- Waiting family adoption in which a family is identified who has no previous relationship with the child specifically for the purpose of providing permanency through adoption. In these cases, placement may occur as a legal risk before the adoption is finalized or post-TPR when a child is legally free.

Activity: Dynamic Aspects of Adoption

What to do:

- Each group will be assigned a type of adoption:
 - Foster-to-adopt
 - Relative adoption
 - Waiting for family adoption
- Each group will create a poster that explores:
 - Preparation for placement activities and crucial conversations
 - Identity and relational permanence considerations
 - Ideas for working to transition the new definition of family
 - Barriers that may exist
 - Post-permanency supports
- Use the “Dynamics Aspects of adoption” activity worksheet to develop your poster
- When time is up, walk around the room to review each group’s poster

Notes

Activity Worksheet: Dynamic Aspects of Adoption

Preparation for placement activities and crucial conversations

Identity and relational permanence considerations

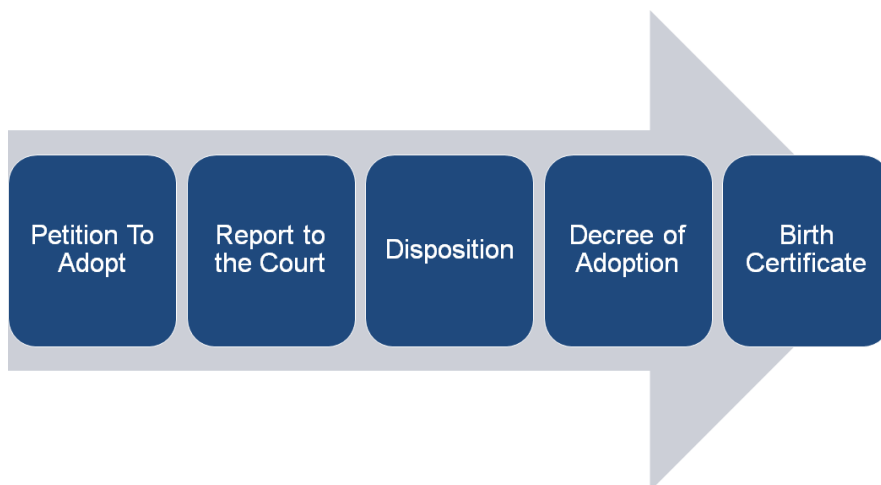
Ideas for working to transition the new definition of family

Barriers that may exist

Post-permanency supports

The Adoption Process

Finalizing the Adoption



- Adoption finalization is a legal process managed through the court
- The process generally includes:
 - Petition to Adopt
 - Report to the Court
 - Court Review and Disposition
 - Decree of Adoption
 - New Birth Certificate
- DSS, legal professionals, and adoptive families each play a role in the process
- The court determines whether the adoption serves the child's best interests
- A finalized adoption establishes a permanent legal parent-child relationship
- Adoption records become confidential and are protected by law

Notes

Handout: Finalizing the Adoption: The Process

Petition to Adopt: A petition is a formal request to the Clerk of Superior Court for approval for an adoption and is presented to the Court for the purpose of legally establishing a parent-child relationship. The signing and filing of the petition by the adoptive parents with the Clerk of Superior Court initiates legal adoption proceedings. In addition to the petition, other documents must be filed, and notifications/notices must be given to the appropriate parties.

Report to the Court: Whenever a petition for adoption of a child is filed, the court will order a report to the court made to assist the court in determining if the proposed adoption of the minor by the petitioner is in the child's best interest. Preparation of the report requires personal interviews with each petitioner at their residence and at least one additional interview with each petitioner and the adoptee. The relationship between the adoptee and the petitioners must be considered in the preparation of the report. The report is then prepared in writing and provides an overview of information for the court to consider regarding child's physical, mental, and emotional state, any updates about the adoptive family status since pre-placement assessment, adoption related expenses, any statements known that raise concern about whether adoptions are contrary to the best interest of the child, findings of suitability of the adoptive family and home, and recommendation concerning the granting of the petition.

Disposition: At the hearing on the disposition of a petition to adopt a minor, the court shall grant the petition upon a finding by a preponderance of the evidence that the adoption will serve the adoptee's best interests. The disposition occurs between 90 days and 6 months after the petition is filed, unless the court alters this timeline for cause. If the petition is uncontested, the court may dispose of it without a formal hearing.

Decree of Adoption: When the court grants the petition, a Decree of Adoption is provided. The legal effect of the Decree of Adoption is to establish the parent-child relationship between the petitioner and the adoptee; the previous name or the birth parents are not included in the decree. When a decree of adoption becomes final, the adoptee's name shall be the name designated in the decree.

Birth Certificate: The NCGS adoption statutes provide for changing a child's name and preparing a new birth certificate in the adoptive name. The original birth certificate is sealed, and a new one is issued by the Office of Vital Records in the state where the child was born. This is done upon the receipt of the Court's report that the Decree of Adoption has been issued, and the change of name is authorized. This report, which is an order issued by the Court of Adoptions, is made to Vital Records. The Clerk of Court signs the report and forwards it to the Division of Social Services at the time the Decree of Adoption is sent. The new birth certificate makes no reference to adoption, and the names of the adoptive parents are shown as though they were the birth parents of the child.

Achieving Permanency Learning Lab

Talking with Children about Reunification

Activity: Talking with Children about Reunification

What to do:

- Trainer will have you count off by 2's (1-2)
- Find a partner so that you are paired 1's with 2's
- Each partner will interview one of the Lewis children, taking turns:
 - Round 1: Person 1 does the interview and Person 2 acts as Van
 - Round 2: Person 2 does the interview and Person 1 acts as Raymond
- You will practice child-centered, trauma-informed interviewing skills while exploring the child's perspective on reunification with their father
- Gathering information about:
 - Safety
 - Relationships
 - Readiness to reunify
 - Worries
 - Hopes
 - Support needs
- Interview for 7 minutes, then spend 2 minutes on feedback
- When time is up, switch roles and repeat the interview practice

Feedback Notes

What questions helped the child share meaningful information?

Which questions felt leading or closed-ended?

How effectively did the interviewer explore both worries and strengths?

How well did the interviewer remain neutral regarding reunification?

What additional questions might have helped?

What did you learn from Raymond or Van that might not have been captured in case notes, reports, or assessments?

What signs of both hope and hesitation did you hear, and why is it important to explore both when considering reunification?

How did the child's perspective support, challenge, or add nuance to the adults' views about reunification?

How can caseworkers ensure children's voices inform reunification decisions without placing responsibility for the decision on the child?

Talking with Children when Reunification is No Longer Possible

Activity: Talking with Children when Reunification is No Longer Possible

What to do:

- You will stay with the same partner for this activity
- In this exercise, you will now explore a situation where reunification is no longer possible for the Lewis family
- Each partner will again interview one of the Lewis children, switching roles from the last activity:
 - Round 1: Person 1 does the interview and Person 2 acts as Raymond
 - Round 2: Person 2 does the interview and Person 1 acts as Van
- You will practice child-centered, trauma-informed interviewing skills while exploring the child's perspective on reunification with their father
- Gathering information about:
 - Safety
 - Relationships
 - Readiness to reunify
 - Worries
 - Hopes
 - Support needs
- Interview for 7 minutes, then spend 2 minutes on feedback
- When time is up, switch roles and repeat the interview practice

Feedback Notes

What questions helped the child share meaningful information?

Which questions felt leading or closed-ended?

How effectively did the interviewer explore both worries and strengths?

How well did the interviewer remain neutral regarding reunification?

What additional questions might have helped?

Activity Discussion Questions

What questions, worries, or needs did you hear from the children that adults should address during permanency planning?

How did Raymond's and Van's perspectives differ, and what does that tell us about tailoring our approach to each child?

What did you hear that reflected concerns about identity permanence, relational permanence, or belonging?

How can caseworkers help children understand when reunification is not possible without asking them to carry responsibility for permanency decisions?

Documentation

Communication in Documentation

Case Record in Documentation



- All documentation for Permanency Planning services must be entered into PATH NC to include:
 - The dates and content of the county child welfare worker's face-to-face and telephone contacts with the child, the parents, the foster parents or other caregivers, and collaterals
 - Progress the county child welfare worker is making in providing the services reflected in the Permanency Planning Family Case Plan, PPFCP
 - This documentation is important to show reasonable efforts toward reunification or another identified permanent plan are being made
 - When reunification is the plan, documentation must reflect the progress or lack of progress the parent is making toward the goals and objectives identified in the PPFCP
- Documentation should assist in tracking progress toward the case goal, guiding service delivery and decision-making, and pointing out when the case goal may need revision
- Documentation is required in PATH NC and must be documented within seven calendar days

Why is documentation important?

What are the implications of not documenting timely or accurately?

What do you need to do to ensure you document in a timely and accurate manner?

Communication in Documentation

Characteristics of Quality Documentation

Accurate

Clear

Concise

Relevant

Timely

Complete

Objective

- Documentation is a professional form of communication and must be clear and concise
- Remain non-judgmental and respectful, citing reasons for conclusions
- Documentation should be accurate, clear, concise, relevant, timely, complete, and objective.
- Objective writing avoids personal opinions, feelings, or beliefs
 - Objective documentation is based on facts
 - Personal feelings, opinions, or representations of the facts do not influence it
 - We often think we're being objective, but there may be subjective influences at play
- Subjective writing is based on perspective, emotion, or opinion and should be avoided
Use behaviorally specific language to minimize bias

Notes

Objective vs. Subjective

Activity: Objective vs. Subjective

Review the statements to identify if they are objective or subjective. If you identify that the statement is subjective, use the space below to re-write the statement using more objective language.

1. Mom prefers abusing drugs and alcohol over spending her time looking for gainful employment.	
☐ Objective Statement	☐ Subjective Statement
2. Dad whupped Son leaving marks and bruises on his arm, lower back, and buttocks.	
☐ Objective Statement	☐ Subjective Statement
3. Son is prescribed Adderall to treat ADHD symptoms.	
☐ Objective Statement	☐ Subjective Statement
4. Foster mom is not an appropriate adoptive resource.	
☐ Objective Statement	☐ Subjective Statement
5. Grandma is crazy and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.	
☐ Objective Statement	☐ Subjective Statement

How difficult was it to rewrite the subjective statements?

What made this difficult?

How could you imagine subjective language biasing the information receiver, either positively or negatively?

How could a subjective statement harm a family during an assessment?

Caseworker Vernacular

Family Accessible

Case Record Documentation

Court Ready

- Communication in permanency planning requires consistent accuracy, clarity, objectivity, and timeliness, while adapting language and expression to fit different audiences
- Family-accessible language is essential for family-centered, trauma-informed, professionally curious practice, supporting families' understanding of safety concerns, expectations, and available supports
- Proficient documentation connects practice to child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes and is critical for accountability measures such as the federal Child and Family Services Review
- Translating information across family-accessible, casework, and court-ready language ensures objectivity, supports fair judicial decision-making, and strengthens effective advocacy for families

Consider communication in writing about safety and risk. How do we communicate safety and risk in written form to families in a way that is accessible?

How do we adjust our documentation and communication for court reports or testimony on the stand?

Activity: Switching Vernaculars**Activity Scenario:**

George completed his parenting classes five months ago. He continues to attend the follow-up drop-in group monthly which is a facilitated group of fathers who have completed the same parenting class.

The group facilitator reports that George actively participates in discussions and frequently reflects on ways to strengthen his relationship with Raymond. George has acknowledged that he can become frustrated when Raymond is distracted or forgetful and has shared that he is working to better understand Raymond's needs and respond more patiently. The facilitator reports that George has been receptive to feedback and has discussed specific strategies he is using to remain calm, provide reminders in a supportive manner, and focus on Raymond's strengths.

George continues to have visits with the children. Visits are unsupervised at the discretion of the CFT. At this time, visits occur twice a week for up to eight hours at a time depending on work schedules and Van's basketball games.

Michelle reports that George is consistent and on time for visits, and the children appear comfortable going with him. George typically comes to the door to pick up the children and has maintained regular contact regarding scheduling. Michelle reports that both children continue to attend visits without resistance. While Raymond is sometimes quieter and struggles to sleep, leading to the visit, he is full of energy and excited when he returns. Michelle reports that there have been no concerns regarding safety or inappropriate discipline during contact with George.

During interviews with the children, Raymond reports that he enjoys spending time with his father and has noticed that his dad is trying harder to be patient with him. Raymond says that he still worries about disappointing his father when he forgets things or needs reminders, but he recognizes that his dad is "good kind of different." Raymond reports that there have been no incidents of physical discipline and says that visits sometimes go well and feel enjoyable.

Van reports that her father appears to be making an effort to build a stronger relationship with both children. Van notes that George has been more encouraging during visits and has tried to recognize positive things that Raymond does. While Van believes their father and Raymond still have challenges to work through, they have observed improvements in their interactions over the past several months. Van says that she looks forward to time with her dad. Van says that she knows that the plan is to move back to her dad's at some point, and that part of her really wants this but part of her really enjoys living with Aunt Michelle.

George reports that parenting Raymond continues to be challenging at times, particularly when Raymond becomes distracted or has difficulty completing tasks. However, George acknowledges that Raymond's behaviors are not intentional and reports that he is learning strategies to better support him. George states that he has been practicing techniques from parenting classes and the fathers' group to manage his frustration, communicate more effectively, and focus on relationship building rather than compliance. George reports feeling encouraged by his progress and believes he can successfully implement the safety plan the team is developing. He expresses a commitment to

continuing to learn and make changes that support reunification and help both children feel safe and connected during visits.

You are preparing for a CFT meeting to discuss safety planning as you move toward the trial home visit and the next court report.

Part One

In your triad, decide the audience for each member:

- Person 1 summarizes for the Parent
- Person 2 summarizes for their Supervisor
- Person 3 summarizes for Case decision documentation

Working independently, summarize the scenario for documentation to your audience.

Your assigned audience:

Scenario Summary:

Part Two

Share your summary with your trio.

Notice the following:

- Did you highlight the same elements of the scenario?
- Do you notice a different feeling or quality of the documentation for different audiences?
- Why do you think you did or did not have differences in what is highlighted or the feeling of the documentation?

Small Group Discussion Questions

How are your summaries similar?

How are your summaries different?

Why are there differences in how you communicated the same information to different audiences?

Activity Discussion Questions

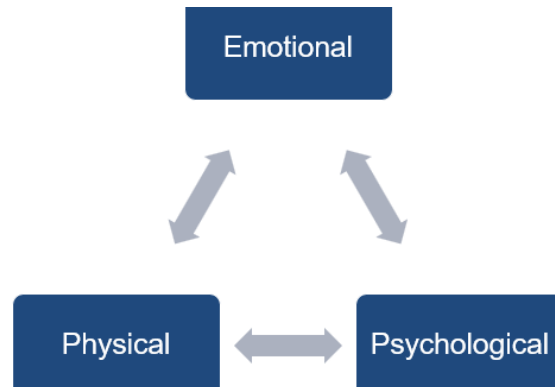
How did your message change as you adapted the same information for different audiences, and what influenced those decisions?

What risks might occur when we fail to adjust our language for the audience while still maintaining accuracy and objectivity?

Thinking about your current practice, where do you find it most challenging to translate information between family-accessible language, case documentation, and court-ready communication, and what strategies could help?

Worker Safety

Defining Worker Safety



- Worker safety is essential to effective child protection practice; accurate safety and risk assessment is only possible when caseworkers are safe in the field
- Child welfare work exposes caseworkers to emotionally charged and potentially dangerous situations, requiring preparation and attention to multiple dimensions of safety
- Worker safety includes emotional, psychological, and physical safety, all of which are interconnected and equally critical to professional functioning
- An environment of worker safety requires intentional alignment of policy and practice to address emotional, psychological, and physical safety consistently

Use this space to define each aspect of worker safety:

Emotional
Psychological
Physical

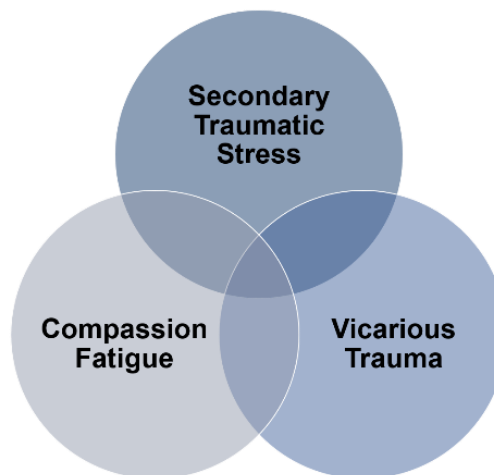
Worker Safety Begins with You

Video: Impacts of Secondary Traumatic Stress on the Child Welfare Workforce

<https://www.qic-wd.org/impact-secondary-traumatic-stress-child-welfare-workforce>

Notes

Indirect Trauma



- Child welfare’s mission is to promote the safety, well-being, permanency, and family integrity for children and families through the family-based, trauma-informed, and professionally curious practice of assessing safety and risk
- Every day on the job, you are exposed to many traumatic events
- This type of stress is called “Indirect Trauma”
 - There are three types of indirect trauma: Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), Vicarious Trauma (VT), and Compassion Fatigue (CF)
- Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Vicarious Trauma are common among child welfare workers
- Conditions within child welfare create an environment where indirect trauma is likely to occur

Handout: Indirect Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress, or STS, is emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. It is indirect exposure to threatening events that can result in the presence of post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Compassion fatigue is the physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by those who care for others who are in distress. It is a less clinical and less stigmatizing term and is often used interchangeably with Secondary Traumatic Stress.

Vicarious trauma occurs after empathic engagement with a traumatized client and changes the inner experience of a practitioner. This term focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person’s trauma. The symptoms of vicarious trauma are disturbances in the cognitive frame of reference in the areas of trust, safety, control, esteem, and intimacy.

Notes

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Decontextualized Trauma

"Trauma, decontextualized in a person, looks like personality."

Trauma, decontextualized in a family, looks like family dynamics.

Trauma, decontextualized in a people, can look like culture."
-Resmaa Menakem

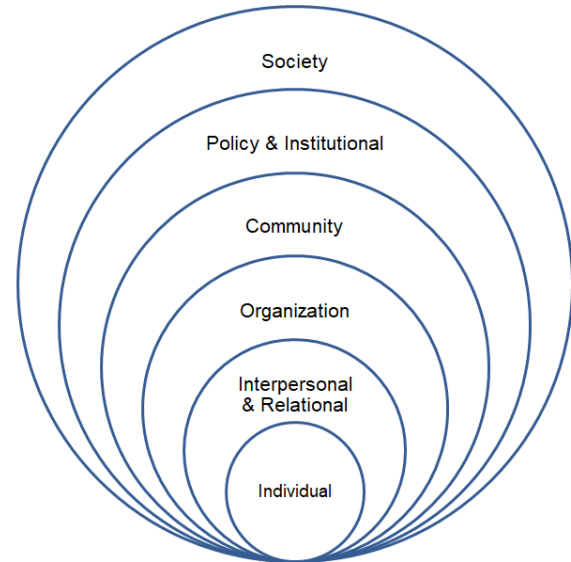
- Indirect trauma is common in child welfare work
- Trauma responses can become normalized over time
- Decontextualized trauma changes how we view behavior
- Workplace culture can reflect collective stress responses
- Awareness is the first step toward resilience
- Healthy support systems promote worker well-being

What does this tell us about the intersection of trauma and child welfare?

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Traumatization

Socioecological Model

- Worker well-being is influenced by more than individual choices
- Multiple systems affect caseworker safety and resilience
- Factors exist at the individual, relational, organizational, community, policy, and societal levels
- Some stressors are within our control, and others are not
- Understanding context helps us respond more effectively to workplace stress
- Worker safety requires both personal and organizational supports



Looking at the different levels of the socio-ecological model, which factors currently have the greatest impact on child welfare worker safety and well-being in your experience? Why?

What stressors identified during this activity are within your influence, and which require support from supervisors, organizations, or broader systems?

How does viewing worker safety through a socio-ecological lens change the way you think about self-care, resilience, and professional responsibility?

Considerations for Worker Safety

Worker Safety

- Worker safety is multi-dimensional
 - Quality fieldwork requires attention to emotional, psychological, and physical safety
- Home visits can be both taxing and meaningful
 - Caseworkers may experience stress, emotional weight, or fatigue during difficult visits, as well as moments of genuine connection and fulfillment; both experiences impact well-being and deserve reflection
 - Reflecting on experiences and identifying practical strategies to support personal safety helps caseworkers remain effective, grounded

Activity: Worker Safety

What to do:

- With your group, identify how safety might be compromised while working in the field and in family homes
- Record your list on flipchart paper as you brainstorm

How my safety might be compromised while working in child welfare services:

Skills Practice: Worker Safety

The best way to avoid violence and danger is to prevent it in the first place

Activity: Skills Practice: Safety Concerns

What to do:

- The trainer will circle several ways that caseworker safety might be compromised from the list your group created
- Strategize ways to avoid violence or danger before those specific situations arise
- Consider all three dimensions of safety: emotional, psychological, and physical
- Create a new flipchart paper for each situation and list prevention strategies and interventions to increase caseworker safety
- When time is up, walk around the room to review each group's prevention strategies and intervention ideas

Notes

How might these strategies shape your approach to visits in the field?

Handout: Considerations for Worker Safety

What does policy say about caseworker safety in the field? <https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/appendix-6-best-practice-for-social-worker-well-being.pdf>

What procedures do you use to inform others of where you will be, when, and why?

- Update calendar, send text messages/emails to supervisor or colleagues when in the field, share location on phone.

Name four reasons why you would not enter a home.

- Aggressive animals that are not restrained, household members displaying signs of severe mental health issues that could result in violent or unpredictable behavior, presence of mice or other vermin, lack of consent/permission from parent or caregiver, residents have made threats of harm, knowledge that weapons are accessible/loaded guns in the home, belief that substances are being manufactured in the home

Name two reasons you would request law enforcement assistance in the field.

- Immediate threats of violence, someone in the vicinity demonstrating hostile and aggressive behavior, if there is suspected criminal behavior that creates safety threats for children and families, concerns that a situation is escalating, and further action is required to ensure safety

Where should you keep your personal items during a home visit?

- The trunk of your car

How might you make your field work safer?

- Perform a complete history search before visiting a home
- Familiarize yourself with the neighborhood or part of the town or county where the home is located
- Inform others of where you are going, who you will see, and when you will return
- Speak calmly and clearly and engage children and caregivers in family-centered discussions
- Remain aware of your surroundings at all times
- Do not accept food or drinks.

What should you carry with you in your vehicle (as a roadside safety kit)?

- Tire iron/jack/spare tire OR sealing inflation tool, water, blanket, jumper cables or battery instant-charger, extra cell phone battery, or battery pack, emergency flares, first aid kit, paper map of your jurisdiction.

Once you have been invited inside and have entered the home, what are three ways to assess your safety?

- Ask who else is in the home at that moment, ask for a tour of the home as soon as possible, remain aware of your surroundings, sit where you are close to exits, and be able to see who is entering and leaving the room.

How much personal information is okay to share with children and families?

- Be limited and general while being honest and genuine.
- Make your social media settings private and do not connect with clients (not children, caregivers, or foster care providers) on your personal social media platforms.

Handout: Steps to Reduce Risk of Violence for Child Welfare Workers

Child welfare workers can take several steps to make themselves safer during home visits with children and families. It is important to emphasize once more that violence or the threat of violence against most child welfare workers is rare. These steps are precautions workers can take in those rare times that they need to do so.

The first set of actions child welfare workers can take concerns their responses to threats of violence, which can reduce their level of stress. These have been shown to reduce fear of violence, as well as to promote clear-headed thinking when faced with the threat of violence (Family to Family, 2002) and include:

- Keeping calm.
- Using deep breathing techniques.
- Holding reasonable expectations for themselves and acknowledging that no one is perfect.
- Working to keep a positive attitude even in a difficult situation.
- Building an effective personal and professional support system.
- Relying on coworkers and teammates.
- Parking in a well-lit area that does not block the driveway or face into a cul-de-sac or dead end.
- Cultivating a positive relationship with their supervisor.

A second set of actions concerns assessing the potential for violence before going on a home visit. This process assumes that any concerns that arise in existing In-Home, Permanency Planning, and Foster Care cases will be reported to Intake as a new safety concern/CPS Report. Many of these are questions that will be asked during the child welfare intake process and answers can be read in the initial referral to CPS for assessment or found described in conditions of the Family Service Agreement for In-Home and Permanency Planning cases.

Screening or investigation/assessment workers should collect information from the referring person in order to prepare for the home visit, including asking the following questions:

- Have there been reports of violence related to this family?
- If yes, when and what type?
- Can you describe the neighborhood?
- Are you aware of any weapons the family might have on the premises?
- What are the family's attitudes toward violent behavior?
- Does the family use physical punishment for their children?
- What is the family's attitude toward child welfare workers?
- What is the family's attitude toward the referral and upcoming visit?

After Hours and On-Call



- In some counties, permanency planning caseworkers cover on-call and after-hours shifts in addition to their typical job responsibilities
 - Due to the nature of DSS duties, policy mandates, and required timeframes, DSS requires around-the-clock staffing
 - The staffing and resource structure of your county DSS dictates who responds to these essential duties after business hours
 - For many counties, on-call and after-hours are extended duties for caseworkers in addition to their typical job responsibilities
 - When daytime staff cover on-call or after-hours duties, the responsibilities that fall to workers can vary based on county discretion
 - When covering on-call or after-hours duties, caseworkers may provide functions across all divisions, including Intake and CPS Assessments
 - This may involve taking and screening reports, initiating assessments, supporting foster care placements, or managing crises for families both known and unknown to child welfare
 - It is the worker's responsibility to take actions that promote their safety
- After-hours duties are different than responding to daytime responsibilities

Notes

When you think about worker safety as emotional, psychological, and physical safety, which part feels easiest to plan for, and which part is most often overlooked in fieldwork or after-hours situations?

What early warning signs might tell you that an emotionally charged interaction is becoming a safety concern, and what prevention strategies could you use before the situation escalates?

How can two-level decision-making and supervisor consultation help you decide whether an after-hours response is needed, what supports should be in place, and how to protect worker safety?

Worker Wellness and Self-Care

Planning for Self-Care

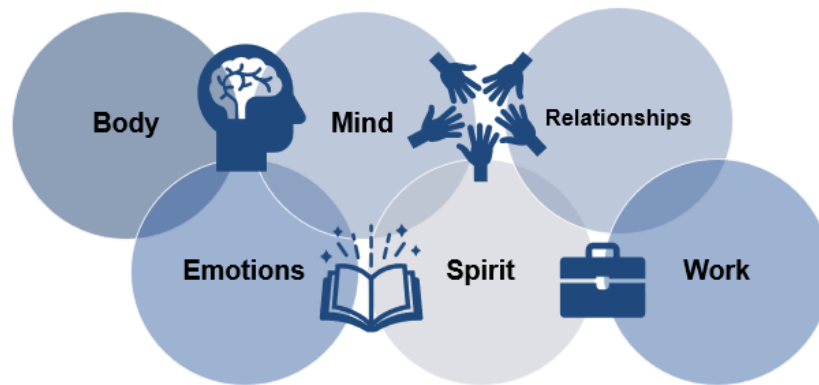
Self-care planning is a tool for claiming our ability to prevent and intervene in impact stress and building support in the areas where we have control.



- Having a trauma-informed, family-centered approach prevents violence and conflict, secondary traumatic stress, helps recognize and mitigate indirect trauma, and builds hope and resilience for families
- Workers' self-care planning is critical to prevent and intervene in the impact of stress
- Caseworkers should plan proactively during calm periods, not in crisis moments
- Self-care is harder to implement in fast-paced, emotionally charged, crisis-driven, non-9-to-5 environments
- Feeling competent and purposeful in your role mitigates stress

Notes

Dimensions of Well-Being



Dimensions of Well-Being:

- Body
- Emotions
- Mind
- Spirit
- Relationships
- Work

Prevention techniques:

- Psychoeducation
- Clinical supervision
- Ongoing skills training
- Informal/formal self-report screening
- Workplace self-care groups (for example, yoga or meditation)
- Creation of a balanced caseload
- Flextime scheduling
- Self-care accountability buddy system
- Use of evidence-based practices
- Exercise and good nutrition

Intervention techniques:

- Strategies to evaluate secondary stress
- Cognitive behavioral interventions
- Mindfulness training
- Reflective supervision
- Caseload adjustment
- Informal gatherings following crisis events (to allow for voluntary, spontaneous discussions)
- Change in job assignment or workgroup
- Referrals to Employee Assistance Programs or outside agencies

Activity: Dimensions of Well-Being

With your partner, discuss the following questions:

How well is your self-care plan working for you today?

Where are you successful?

Where do you need support?

What are the barriers?

Activity Worksheet: Self-Care Plan

Self-Care Strategies

MIND

WORK

RELATIONSHIPS

EMOTIONS

SPIRIT

BODY

Name: _____

Date: _____

Accountability Partner: _____

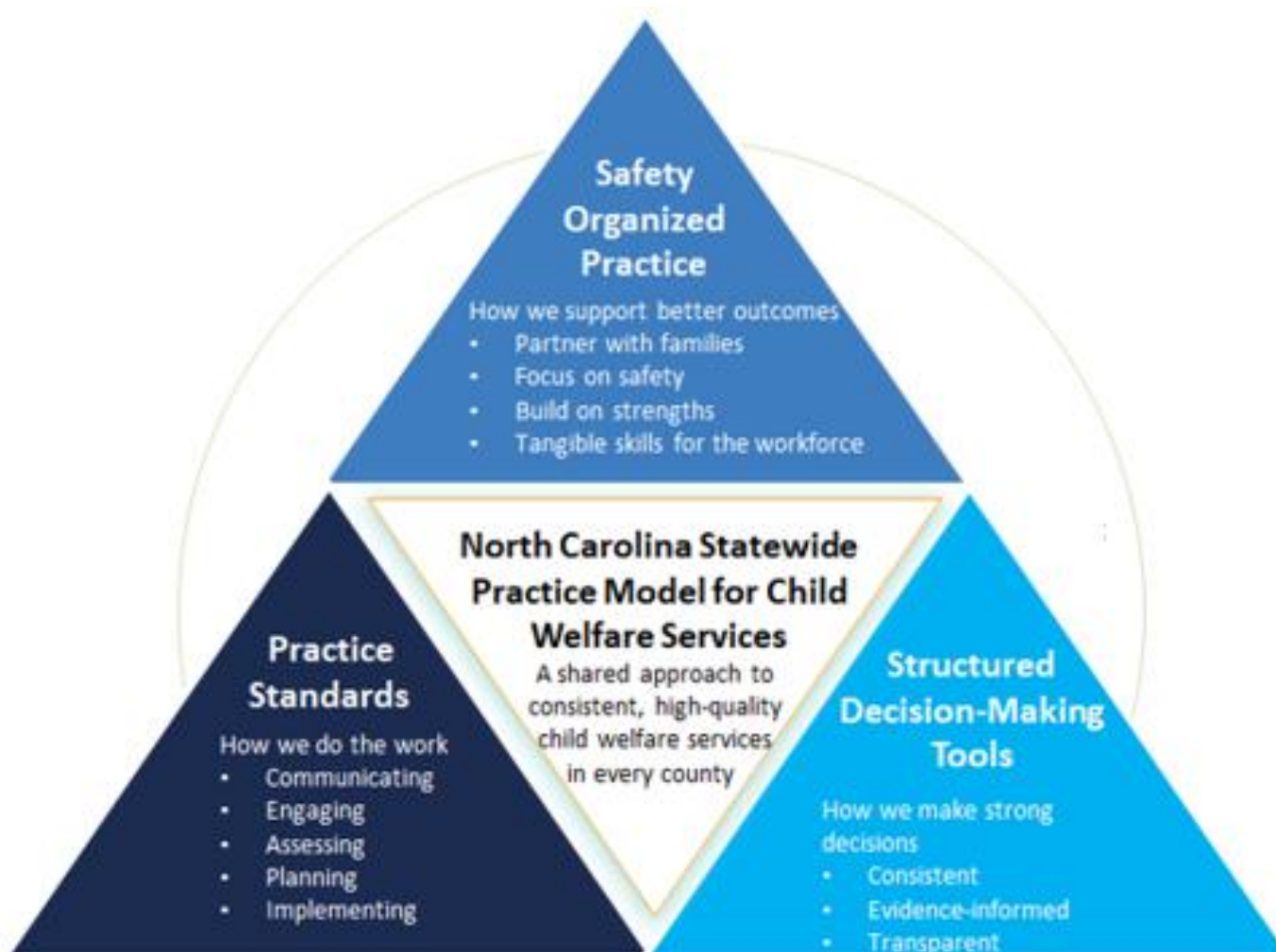
Closing and Training Wrap-Up

End of Day Reflection

- Use the Reflections and Check-In Sheet in the Appendix for this activity

Self-Reflection Training Wrap-Up

North Carolina Child Welfare Practice Model



Activity: Self-Assessment

What to do:

- Complete the Post-training Self-assessment

What new areas of strength did you discover?

What positive feedback did you receive from a peer that you never recognized in yourself.

What did you discover about areas for growth?

What skill did you build that will help you continue to grow in the areas you identified?

List any professional development action steps you would like to take based on this training.

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Appendix

Reflections and Check-In

Reflections and Check-In Sheet		
		
Self-Values Reflection	Reasonable Efforts	Two-Level Decision-Making

Reflections and Check-In Sheet		
		
Self-Values Reflection	Reasonable Efforts	Two-Level Decision-Making