



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Social Services

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals

Module One: Overview of STEP UP

Participant Workbook

June 2026



**PUBLIC
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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 module of training. Have this workbook readily available as you go through each module to create a long-lasting resource you can reference in the future.

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

Training Overview

STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals is designed to strengthen and refine the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of child welfare professionals through structured, practice-focused learning.

Training sessions are intentionally designed to support active engagement, reflection, and application. Each module includes a combination of lecture, guided discussion, individual practical application, and collaborative debrief. This structure allows participants to connect new learning to their existing experience and apply concepts directly to their daily practice.

Attendance and participation are essential to the learning experience. If an emergency prevents attendance, participants are responsible for notifying the trainer and their supervisor as soon as possible and developing a plan to address missed content.

Learning Expectations

STEP Up builds on prior experience in child welfare practice. Participants are expected to:

- Engage actively in discussions and activities
- Reflect on their current practice and identify areas for growth
- Apply learning to real-world scenarios
- Collaborate with peers to strengthen practice and shared understanding

Transfer of Learning

A core component of STEP Up is the application of learning to practice. Throughout the training, participants will engage in structured reflection and practical application activities designed to support transfer of learning.

Participants will:

- Reflect on how new concepts align with their current work
- Identify specific actions to strengthen their practice
- Apply learning between sessions, when applicable

- Engage in peer discussion and collaborative problem-solving
- Supervisors and ongoing professional supports play a critical role in reinforcing learning and supporting continued development in the workplace.

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

STEP Up Module One Learning Objectives

Module 1
Overview of the STEP Up Curriculum
Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to: • Explain their “why” for working in child welfare. • Demonstrate an understanding of the responsibilities of child welfare agencies, workers, and cross-system partners in promoting child safety, permanency, and well-being. • Apply North Carolina social work values and principles as well as relevant federal, state, and local laws, policies, and best practices to guide ethical and effective child welfare practice.

Module One Agenda

Module One: Overview of STEP Up

Module Timing: 180 Minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Section 1: STEP Up Course Overview

Section 2: Remembering Our “Why”

Section 3: North Carolina Child Welfare Updates

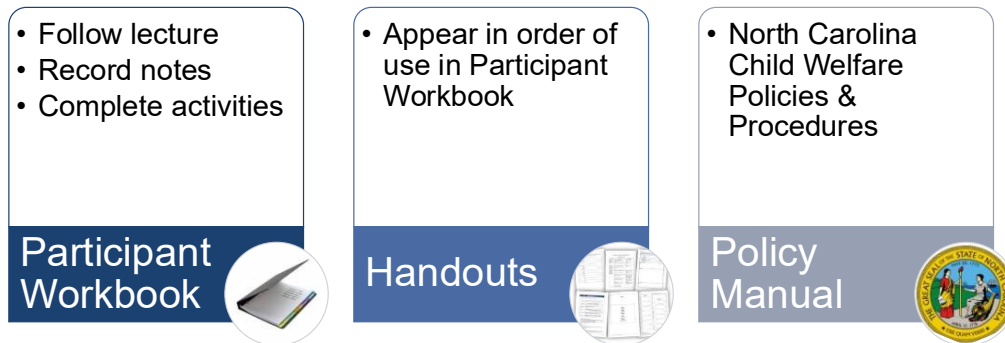
Section 4: Establishing Communities of Practice

Section 5: Individual Practice and Application

Section 6: Debrief and Collaborative Practice

STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals. Module One: Overview of STEP Up

Training Resources

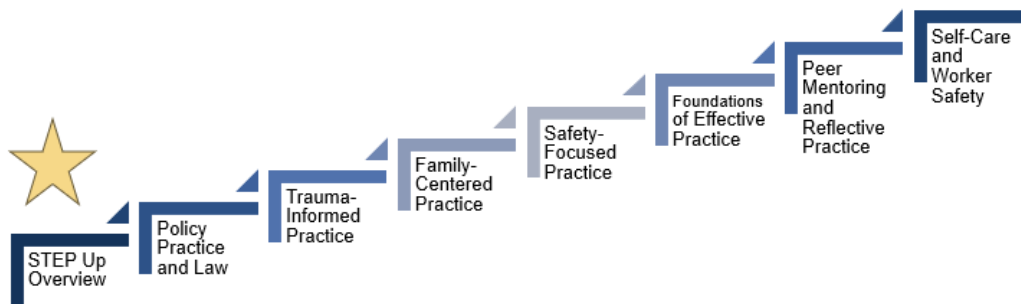


The Participant Workbook can be used electronically or printed. It is designed to help you follow in-class learning, offer activity instructions, and record notes. Whenever we have interactive exercises, like group discussions or activities, you will find directions for the activity and space to complete activity tasks in your workbooks.

Handouts or job aids will appear in the Participant Workbook in the order used. For example, if we are discussing North Carolina regulations, a handout of definitions and examples would appear directly after the page containing the slide image, followed by space for note-taking. Throughout the training, we will also direct you to the link for the North Carolina Child Welfare Policy Manual [<https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/divisional-n-z/social-services/child-welfare-services/>].

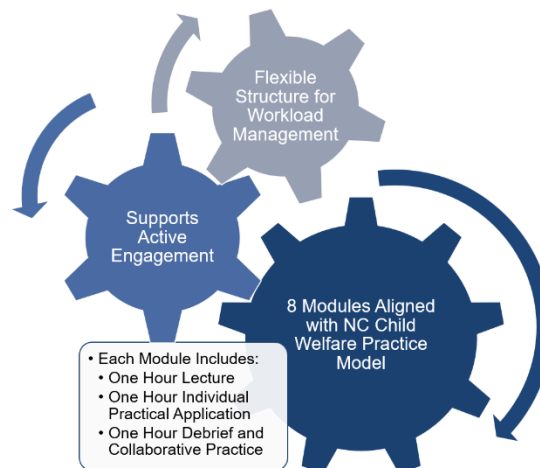
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STEP Up Course Series Outline and Structure



Section 1: STEP Up Course Overview

What to Expect in STEP Up

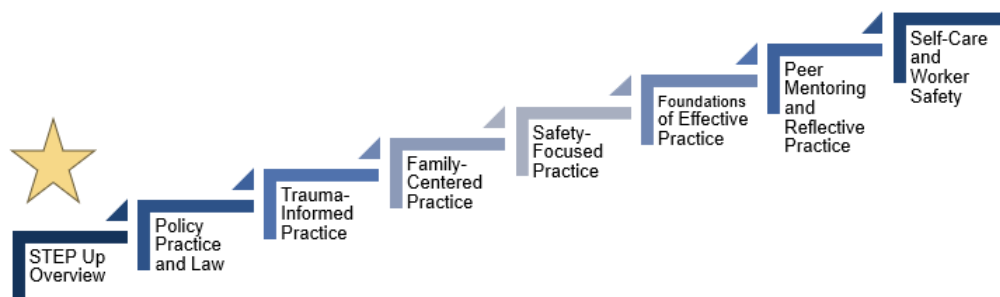


STEP Up is designed as an orientation to current practice. Each module follows a three-part learning cycle:

- One hour lecture introducing core concepts and frameworks
- One hour practical application of hands-on learning, case studies, and collaboration
- One hour debrief and collective practice promoting critical thinking and integration

The STEP Up course modules are designed to support multiple learning styles and active engagement.

STEP Up Course Series Outline and Structure



In this training, learners will progress through eight thoughtfully designed modules, each building on the last to enhance child welfare practice across North Carolina.

Module One: Overview of STEP Up introduces the curriculum and reconnects learners with their personal “why”. Explores the North Carolina Child Welfare Practice Model and builds communities of practice.

Notes

Module Two: Policy, Practice, and Law covers legal foundations, ethical dilemmas, and court preparedness. Strengthens decision-making and documentation skills.

Notes

Module Three: Trauma-Informed Practice Examines the Impact of Trauma on Families and Practice. Promotes empathy, awareness of bias, and trauma-responsive engagement.

Notes

Module Four: Family-Centered Practice Builds trust and collaboration with families. Navigates resistance and empowers family voice in planning.

Notes

Module Five: Safety-Focused Practice Differentiates safety vs. risk and addresses poverty-related neglect. Utilizes structured tools to collaborate with families on safety.

Notes

Module Six: Essential Functions in Practice Encourages humility and reflective engagement. Supports respectful, identity-affirming relationships.

Notes

Module Seven: Peer Mentoring and Reflective Practice Develops mentoring skills and reflective habits: Fosters team support and continuous learning.

Notes

Module Eight: Self-Care and Worker Safety Identifies stress indicators and coping strategies. Builds personal safety plans and promotes wellness.

Notes

Section 2: Remembering our "Why"

The Goals of Child Welfare System



Safety, permanency, and well-being are outcomes that local DSS agencies, the state, and the federal government measure to ensure our work is effective in supporting families.

Notes

Handout: Goals of the Child Welfare System

Safety is the absence of an imminent or immediate threat of moderate-to-serious harm to a child.

Safety outcomes:

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever appropriate and possible.

Permanency is a legal, permanent family relationship for every child and youth.

Permanency outcomes:

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships is preserved for children.
- Permanency is a legal, permanent family relationship for every child and youth.

Well-being is when the educational, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of children and their families are being met.

Well-being outcomes:

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Defining Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being

Safety

Absence of an imminent or immediate threat of moderate-to-serious harm to a child.

Permanency

Legal, permanent family relationship for every child and youth.

Well-Being

Educational, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of children and their families.

Notes

Handout: Child and Family Services Review (CSFR)

CSFR Quick Reference Items List

OUTCOMES

Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Item 1: Were the agency's responses to all **accepted child maltreatment reports initiated**, and **face-to-face contact** with the child(ren) made, within time frames established by agency policies or state statutes?

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Item 2: Did the agency make concerted efforts to provide services to the family to **prevent** children's **entry into foster care or re-entry** after reunification?

Item 3: Did the agency make concerted efforts to **assess and address the risk and safety** concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care?

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Item 4: Is the child in foster care in a **stable placement** and were any changes in the child's placement in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s)?

Item 5: Did the agency establish **appropriate permanency goals** for the child in a **timely manner**?

Item 6: Did the agency make concerted efforts to **achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement** for the child?

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Item 7: Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that **siblings in foster care are placed together** unless separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings?

Item 8: Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that **visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings** was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child's relationships with these close family members?

Item 9: Did the agency make concerted efforts to **preserve the child's connections** to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends?

Item 10: Did the agency make concerted efforts to **place the child with relatives** when appropriate?

Item 11: Did the agency make concerted efforts to promote, support, and/or maintain **positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her**

mother and father or other primary caregivers from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation?

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

- Item 12: Did the agency make concerted efforts to **assess the needs** of and **provide services to children, parents, and foster parents** to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency's involvement with the family?
- Item 13: Did the agency make concerted efforts to involve the **parents and children** (if developmentally appropriate) **in the case planning** process on an ongoing basis?
- Item 14: Were the **frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and child(ren)** sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?
- Item 15: Were the **frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers** of the child(ren) sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

- Item 16: Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess **children's educational needs** and appropriately address identified needs in case planning and case management activities?

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

- Item 17: Did the agency address the **physical health needs** of children, including dental health needs?
- Item 18: Did the agency address the **mental/behavioral health needs** of children?

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

- Item 19: How well is the **statewide information system** functioning statewide to ensure that, at a minimum, the state can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care?

Case Review System

- Item 20: How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that each child has a **written case plan** that is developed jointly with the child's parent(s) and includes the required provisions?

- Item 21: How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that a **periodic review** for each child occurs no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review?
- Item 22: How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that, for each child, a **permanency hearing** in a qualified court or administrative body occurs no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?
- Item 23: How well is the case review system functioning to ensure that the filing of **termination of parental rights (TPR)** proceedings occurs in accordance with required provisions?
- Item 24: How well is the case review system functioning to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are **notified of, and have a right to be heard** in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?

Quality Assurance System

- Item 25: How well is the **quality assurance system** functioning statewide to ensure that it is (1) operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, (2) has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety), (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates implemented program improvement measures?

Staff and Provider Training

- Item 26: How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that **initial training** is provided to all staff who deliver services pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions?
- Item 27: How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that **ongoing training** is provided for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP?
- Item 28: How well is the staff and provider training system functioning to ensure that **training** is occurring statewide for current or prospective **foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff** of state licensed or approved facilities (that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E) that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

Service Array and Resource Development

- Item 29: How well is the service array and resource development system functioning to ensure that the following array of services is **accessible** in all political jurisdictions covered by the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)?
1. Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs

2. Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment
3. Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable
4. Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency

Item 30: How well is the service array and resource development system functioning statewide to ensure that the services in item 29 can be **individualized** to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Item 31: How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that, in implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and developing related Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs), the state engages in **ongoing consultation** with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?

Item 32: How well is the agency's responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that the state's services under the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are **coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs** serving the same population?

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Item 33: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that **state standards** are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?

Item 34: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that the state complies with federal requirements for **criminal background clearances** as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?

Item 35: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the **diligent recruitment** of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide?

Item 36: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of **cross-jurisdictional resources** to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide?

Defining Your Why

Activity: Defining Our Why



Purpose: To foster self-reflection and build a sense of shared commitment among participants by visually representing their motivations for working in child welfare.

Consider your “why” in child welfare practice.

- What brought you to child welfare work?
- What motivates you to continue?
- In what ways have you experienced success in your profession?

Notes

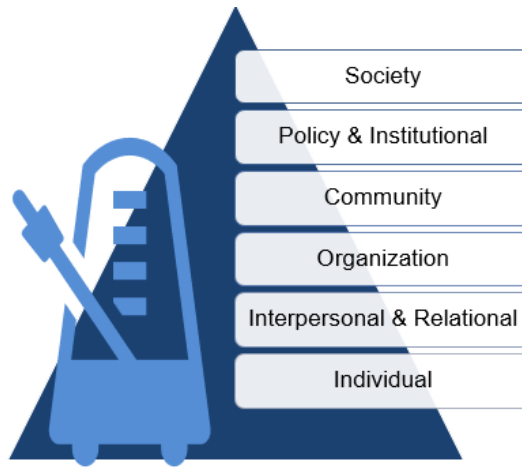
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What are one or two words that summarize your “why?”

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Section 3: North Carolina Child Welfare Updates

Child Welfare Shifting Landscapes

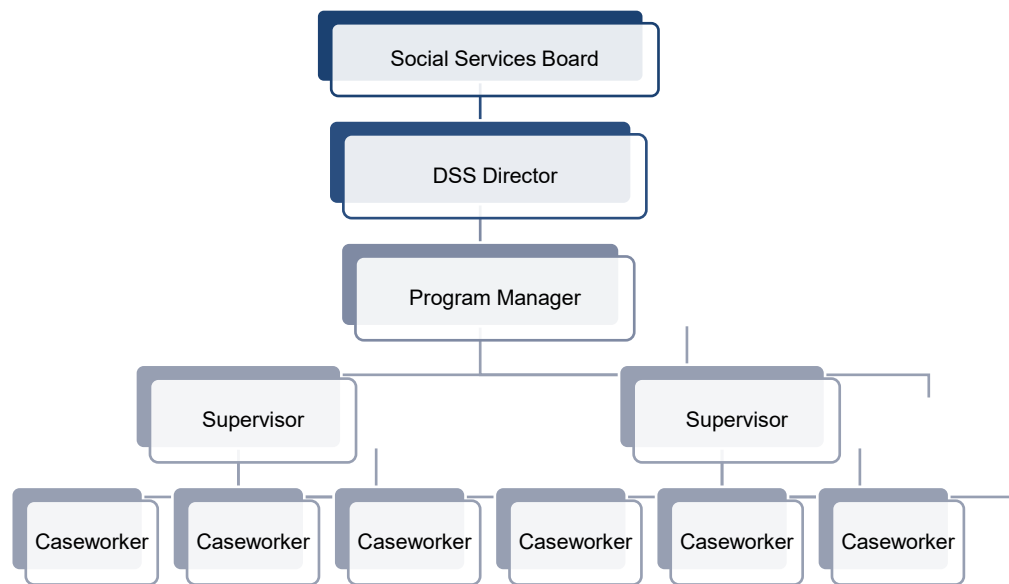


The child welfare landscape exists within a larger context, which can be better understood by exploring the layers that contribute to the field. We can look to the socio-ecological model to better understand this.

- **Society:** Encompasses broad influences like cultural norms, federal government structures, and national trends that shape public attitudes and systemic priorities around child welfare
- **Policy & Institutional:** Refers to laws, regulations, and formal practices within child welfare agencies or other sectors (healthcare, education) that directly or indirectly affect child welfare operations and outcomes.
- **Community:** Includes local environments such as neighborhoods, towns, and schools that influence child welfare through resource availability, community values, and infrastructure supporting families and children.
- **Organization:** Focuses on the internal dynamics of child welfare agencies and partner organizations, including leadership, staffing, service delivery models, and organizational culture that affect how services are provided.
- **Interpersonal & Relational:** Captures the quality and nature of relationships between children, families, caregivers, caseworkers, and other support figures, emphasizing trust, communication, and emotional support.
- **Individual:** Pertains to the personal characteristics, experiences, and needs of the child or family member, such as mental health, trauma history, resilience, and identity.

Each of these layers contributes to the child welfare landscape in an interconnected manner, as the child welfare field responds to changes within the layers.

Overview of DSS Structure and Positions



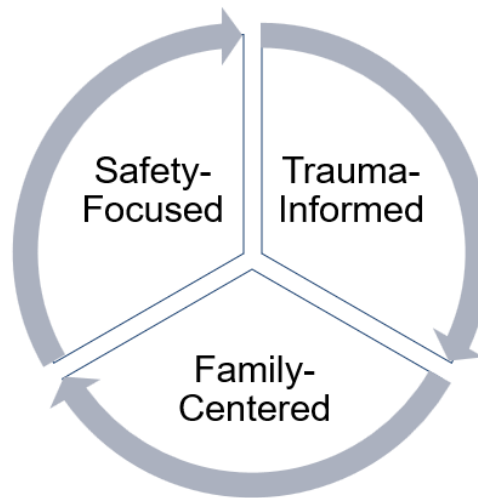
In what ways does your organizational chart match or differ from the chart on the slide?

In what ways do you expect to receive direction from your supervisor?

What are the positions you are currently assigned?

Are there any frontline caseworker positions we haven't mentioned that you have in your county?

Core Values

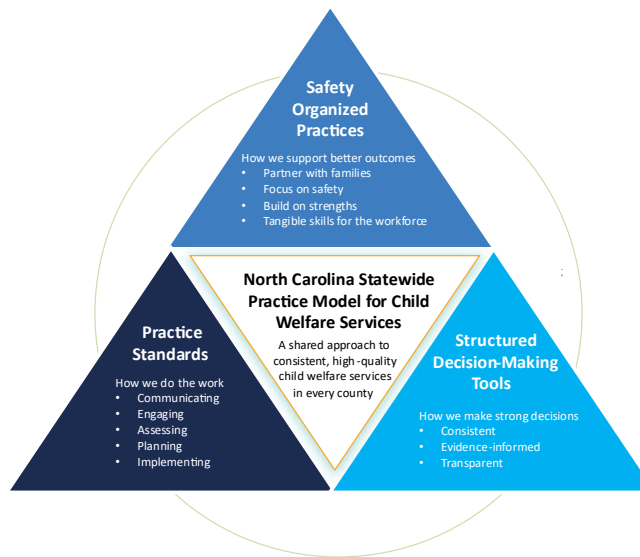


The North Carolina Practice Model is rooted in the Core Values of being safety-focused, trauma-informed, and family-centered. Values are fundamental beliefs or principles that guide and direct all aspects of any practice. Core values serve as a way to define a complex system, offering alignment across all layers of service delivery and guiding our practice.

Which Core Value do you feel most confident in applying?

Which one do you want to grow in?

North Carolina Child Welfare Practice Model



Core Values offer the foundational principles upon which child welfare practice is based in North Carolina. Values can be a challenge to put into practice, as they are often conceptual and not measurable. The practice model brings the core values to life and is comprised of several components: Policy, the NC Practice Model, Structured Decision Making, and Safety Organized Practice.

The NC Practice Standards include five Essential Functions: communicating, engaging, assessing, planning, and implementing. Safety Organized Practice and Structured Decision Making (SDM) Tools support the essential functions and core values. The outcomes for the practice model include the overarching goals of the child welfare system: Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being.

The NC Practice Model offers a foundation for this course. Content will be presented on each component throughout to build a thorough understanding and applicable skills.

Notes

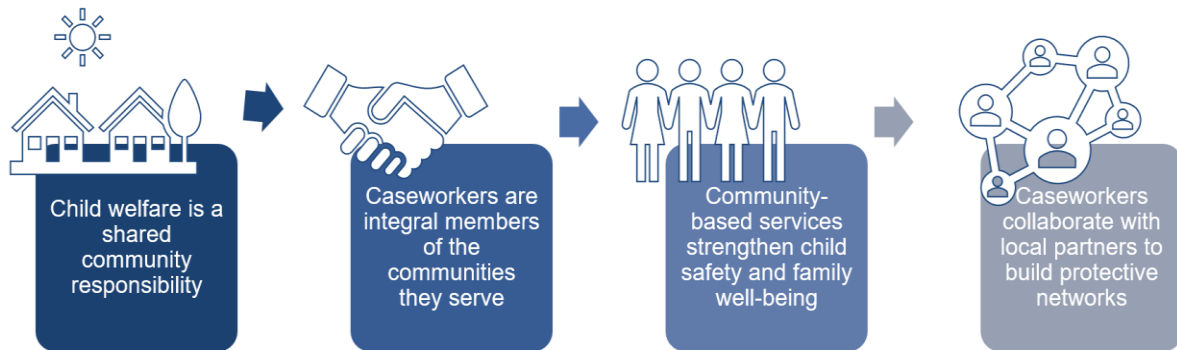
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Roles and Responsibilities: Practice Standards



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Child Welfare and the Community



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Section 4: Establishing Communities of Practice

Growth Mindset

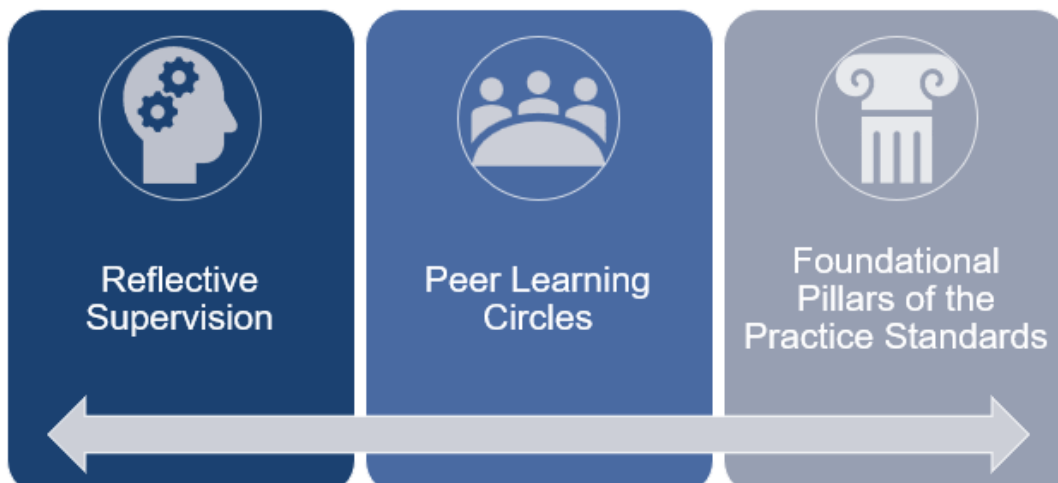


“Instead, as you begin to understand the fixed and growth mindsets, you will see exactly how one thing leads to another—how a belief that your qualities are carved in stone leads to a host of thoughts and actions, and how a belief that your qualities can be cultivated leads to a host of different thoughts and actions, taking you down an entirely different road.”

-Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

Notes

Building Support Systems for Practice



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Section 5: Individual Practice and Application

Individual Practical Application

Purpose: To provide you with dedicated time for self-reflection and application of course concepts to their own practice, fostering deeper learning and personal insight.

- You will have one hour of dedicated time to complete the individual Practice and Application activities
- You will begin by reflecting on your why, the shifting child welfare landscape (socioecological model), complete the Practice Standards Self-Assessment, and create an ecomap of those in your work community;
- The facilitator will remain online for support
- Remain signed in to the training, turn off your camera, and mute your sound as you work individually
- Reconvene on video in one hour.

Activity: Self-Reflection: What is your Why?

Reflect on your journey as a caseworker in the child welfare field. Take a few moments to consider and respond to the following prompts, writing honestly about your experiences. This exercise is intended to deepen your understanding of your motivations, sources of support, challenges, and strategies for sustaining your passion and effectiveness in this important work.

Why did you choose to become a caseworker in child welfare?**What values, experiences, or moments inspired you to enter this field?****What sustains you in your role?****What relationships, practices, or beliefs help you stay engaged and find meaning in your day-to-day responsibilities.****What worries you most about your work?****How do you stay motivated when the work becomes difficult?**

Activity: Shifting Landscape Exploration: Socio-Ecological Model**Part One: Identifying Shifts in the Landscape**

Identify what has changed within the layers of the socioecological model since you began child welfare practice.

Society: Encompasses broad influences like cultural norms, federal government structures, and national trends that shape public attitudes and systemic priorities around child welfare

Notes

Policy & Institutional: Refers to laws, regulations, and formal practices within child welfare agencies or other sectors (healthcare, education) that directly or indirectly affect child welfare operations and outcomes.

Notes

Community: Includes local environments such as neighborhoods, towns, and schools that influence child welfare through resource availability, community values, and infrastructure supporting families and children.

Notes

Organization: Focuses on the internal dynamics of child welfare agencies and partner organizations, including leadership, staffing, service delivery models, and organizational culture that affect how services are provided.

Notes

Interpersonal & Relational: Captures the quality and nature of relationships between children, families, caregivers, caseworkers, and other support figures, emphasizing trust, communication, and emotional support.

Notes

Individual: Pertains to the personal characteristics, experiences, and needs of the child or family member, such as mental health, trauma history, resilience, and identity.

Notes**Part Two: Reflect on what has changed**

What do you miss about the way things used to be?

What are you most excited about within current shifts in practice?

Activity: Roles and Responsibilities: Essential Functions

Complete the [North Carolina Practice Model Self-Assessment](#) by navigating to the tool.

After completing the assessment, consider the following:

What stands out to you in your self-assessment?

Activity: Community of Practice Eco-Mapping

An Ecomap utilizes basic symbols and lines to visually represent the connection between a person and elements of their life. For this activity, create an Ecomap to visualize your professional support network. Consider the key below as a guide.

Ecomap Key

1. Begin with a central circle representing yourself
2. Add other circles representing elements of your work. Consider the following:
 - Colleagues
 - Team or unit members
 - Supervisor
 - Leadership and administration
 - Community partners
 - Professional organizations and affiliations
 - Other individuals and resources that support your child welfare practice
 - Add relationship lines (See key), considering the following:
 - Identify individuals and resources that support your growth
 - Identify individuals and resources that create professional stress/discomfort
 - Identify people and resources that you go to when struggling with a case
 - Identify people and resources that hold you accountable in a way that feels good

Key:	
Close and strong relationship	—————
Less close or occasional relationship	- - - - -
Difficult or stressful relationship	— / — / —
Equal relationship	↔
One-way relationship	→

Complete Ecomap on the following page.

My Ecomap

Section 6: Debrief and Collaborative Practice

Share your Why



What did you choose to share, and why?

How has your "why" evolved during this course?

How can you stay connected to your "why" in your daily work?

What did you notice about the group's shared motivations?

Activity: Practice Standards Goal Setting

Purpose: Strengthen your professional development by collaborating with a partner to reflect on your Practice Standards and your Community of Practice Ecomap.

- Work in pairs. Each partner will take turns sharing their reflections.
- Using your Practice Standards Self-Assessment, identify two specific areas where you see opportunities for growth in your practice.
- For each area of growth, develop a clear, measurable goal that describes what you will do to improve.
- Review your Community of Practice Ecomap to identify:
 - Supports that can help you achieve your goals.
 - Gaps that may hinder your progress need to be addressed.
- Share your goals and Ecomap analysis with your partner.
- Offer feedback and suggestions to help each other refine your goals and identify additional supports.

Area of Growth from Self-Assessment	
Behaviorally SMART goal to improve this practice area	
Support available to achieve this goal	
Gaps in support that may hinder your progress and ideas to address	

Area of Growth from Self-Assessment	
Behaviorally SMART goal to improve this practice area	
Support available to achieve this goal	
Gaps in support that may hinder your progress and ideas to address	

Key Takeaways

Understanding Your Why

Roles and Responsibilities
in Child Welfare

Applying Values, Laws, and
Best Practices

Notes

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