

Practice Model

Our foundation for effective child welfare practice



DC Child and Family Services Agency
400 6th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024-2753
202.442.6000
www.cfsa.dc.gov

February 2006



Primary Goals

CFSA's mission is to improve the safety, permanence, and well being of abused and neglected children and to strengthen troubled families in the District of Columbia. Our child welfare practice strives to achieve **four principal outcomes**.

Children are safe.

Safety of children is our paramount concern, and we address it in every intervention, every plan, and every contact. We assess risk factors and engage birth, foster, and adoptive families in keeping children safe.

Families are strengthened.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in child welfare is balancing the goals of (1) preserving birth families while (2) ensuring children's safety within their development need for permanence. The importance of family and significance of a child's attachment to parents are immeasurable. We make every effort to engage and support birth families to prevent child placement. When we must place children for their safety, foster care is a short-term intervention. We make every effort to assist parents in overcoming difficulties through services, to strengthen ties between children and parents, and to achieve reunification. When reunification is not possible within 15 months, we achieve permanence for children through guardianship or adoption.

Children and teens have permanence.

All children need a stable, nurturing family to grow and develop to their full potential. When birth families cannot or will not ensure the safety and well being of their children, we locate a family to which the child can belong. We find permanent families quickly for every child, teen, and young adult and finalize guardianships and adoptions within 27 months. When young adults age out of foster care, they have a permanence family or enduring connection to a caring adult committed to serving in a parental capacity and to a network of mentors and friends in the community.

Child and teen developmental needs are met.

Children and youth require assistance to achieve healthy physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development. We identify needs consistent with different stages of a child's development and coordinate resources to meet them. We prepare young people for self-sufficiency, including developing their abilities to meet their basic needs, communicate, form relationships, make decisions, solve problems, and resolve conflicts. We recognize permanence as an essential component of child and adolescent well being. ■





Core Principles and Values

Child welfare social workers use a professional helping relationship as the vehicle for achieving desired outcomes for children. They assess, respond to, and influence family decisionmaking, behaviors, and circumstances. They take the lead in promoting urgency about permanence based on a child's sense of time. Program Operations supervisors and managers set standards, communicate expectations, monitor performance, coach and model effective behavior, provide developmental feedback, and show concern for how workers are experiencing their job. All other CFSA functions and employees support social workers, supervisors, and managers in serving abused and neglected children and families.



Children First

Child safety, permanence, and well being are our top priorities.

Family

Families are the focus of child welfare: preserving families, supporting foster families, building new adoptive families, and ensuring child and teen attachment to families. We recognize that all families have strengths and deserve a voice in decisions about their children. We serve families from diverse cultural backgrounds in a responsive manner.

Respect

All clients are worthy of **respect**. We inform them of their rights and responsibilities. We safeguard confidentiality and ensure due process.

Urgency



A child's sense of time and the **urgency of permanence** drive our practice. We aim to effect change so that children achieve outcomes within time frames that meet their need for permanence, as embodied in the Adoption and Safe Families Act. All parties cooperate and remain accountable to the child.

Leadership

We assume **primary responsibility** for ensuring child safety, influencing family change, leading the drive to permanence, and promoting teamwork among all parties in the best interests of the child.

Assessment



We identify behaviors and conditions that place children at risk of abuse or neglect or of not achieving permanence. We focus our actions and resources on **what drives problem behaviors and conditions** rather than on symptoms or trigger incidents. We recognize that poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, and other severe difficulties strongly influence behavior, and we factor them into assessments and intervention/change strategies.

Intervention

The social worker relationship with clients is **proactive, focused, and time limited**. We influence underlying factors that create or sustain problem behaviors and conditions. We use a **professional helping relationship** to encourage family change that leads to positive outcomes for children. We regularly monitor children at home and in out-of-home care to ensure their safety and well being. We modify intervention/change strategies and case plans as child and family needs change.

Authority

We have a legal obligation to protect children and to engage families in taking action. We use **child welfare and court authority** when necessary and appropriate to ensure child safety while maintaining a helping relationship with the family. We fully disclose to parents the consequences of and time frames for their behavior. We do meaningful, timely concurrent planning.

Placement



Removal from home is traumatic for children, even when it safeguards their welfare. We place children in out-of-home care **only when they cannot be safe in their birth homes**. When we must place children, they deserve to:

- Know why they are entering foster care.
- Be safe from further abuse or neglect in our care.
- Be placed with their siblings.
- Be placed with kin whenever possible.
- Have a stable, nurturing foster care setting that meets their needs.
- Be in foster care only as a short-term, interim step to permanence.

Team Work

A system of partnerships among preventive, foster care, legal, service, and other resources is essential to achieve safety, permanence, and well being for children. We **assemble, coordinate, and lead** appropriate and inclusive multidisciplinary teams in providing prompt, effective, quality services to children and families. ■



Leadership Principles

for Social Work Supervisors and Managers

Focus



- **Get results through others.** Do not merely delegate but provide leadership, direction, education, and support that achieve results. Link tasks and outcomes to the agency mission and primary goals.
- **Use power and influence.** Be comfortable gaining staff commitment and compliance and shaping their behavior toward necessary outcomes.
- **Be visible.** Achieve agency goals along with responding to staff needs. Stay constantly visible to those above and below in making difficult decisions.
- **Manage conflict.** Communicate expectations clearly and directly and give negative feedback effectively, when necessary. Allow for conflict of ideas in support of positive change.

Production

Focus on results and emphasize the urgency of achieving them. Set high standards of quality and excellence. Model excellence.

Communication of Expectation

Articulate expectations of the job. Have clear practice standards and communicate them effectively. Ensure clarity of work assignments. Engage staff in setting goals and objectives that reflect the underlying values of their work.

Coaching

Emphasize practice protocol, set developmental goals with staff, and provide regular counseling to them to improve performance. Observe worker performance and provide feedback to enhance existing skills. Model effective behavior and decisionmaking.

Control

Systematically monitor performance against expectations. Track case activity and progress on delegated assignments.

Feedback

Give frequent positive, negative, and developmental feedback that is very specific. Compare results against expectations to clarify performance issues.

People

Demonstrate concern for how workers experience the job. Listen to work concerns. Be genuine with staff. Build trust. ■



Practice Protocol for Social Work

Respond and Engage

Accept and investigate reports of child abuse and neglect wherever they may occur in the city. Build rapport with parents, children, extended family members, and other supporters through respect, honesty, and professionalism. Balance the mission and desire to help with the need to protect and authority to intervene.

Assess

Identify the current situation and underlying factors. Understand family strengths, needs, and wishes. Listen and observe. Assess child safety and degree of risk. Justify and document findings.

Plan

Partner with parents, children (when appropriate), extended family, and other supporters to select interventions, supports, and services that build on strengths while addressing underlying factors, needs, and wishes. Establish a goal of reunification within 15 months or guardianship/adoption within 27 months. Communicate directly about desirable outcomes, requirements for case closure, time frames, rights, and responsibilities. Develop a comprehensive case plan promptly (and in advance of initial court activity when the court is involved).

Coordinate and Lead

Assemble internal resources, other agencies, and community service providers to support the case plan. Coordinate service team activities. Lead the drive to meet child and family goals. Advocate for the child and family with the service team, as needed.

Serve

Ensure prompt, effective delivery of services to fulfill case plan requirements and meet the child's goal within mandated time frames. Encourage and support parents, the child, and others in engaging (not merely participating) in services.

Monitor and Evaluate

Visit regularly to check child safety, child-family engagement in services, and effectiveness of services in stimulating positive change. Communicate directly about achievements and areas in need of improvement. Reassess child safety and risk throughout the life of the case. Ensure steady progress toward the child's goal. Document findings from every visit.

Adjust

Adapt requirements and services to address changing circumstances. Update the case plan. If necessary, change the child's goal.

Reassess and Close

Achieve permanence for every child, teen, and young adult through reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other lifelong connections. Ensure safety and stability for children and teen/young adult mastery of self-support skills. Arrange for appropriate, time-limited aftercare and post-permanency services. Document results of the final assessment and overall outcomes. Close the case. ■