

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE OF CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

We are pleased to present you with the Child Welfare Manual. This manual is the result of the Children's Division's (CD) effort to combine all child welfare components into a continuous child welfare practice that recognizes families for their individuality and their strengths.

The Missouri Children's Division (CD) has statutory responsibility and authority for accepting and investigating all reports of child abuse and/or neglect of children under the age 18. That authority comes to CD under RSMo. Chapter 210. Other statutes (RSMo. 207 and RSMo. 211) charge CD with the responsibility of serving the needs of Missouri's children by providing remedial treatment services and, where needed, alternative placement outside the service home when such placement is in the best interest of protecting the child.

CD recognizes the family as the primary social welfare institution. Because families are irreplaceable, Division policies and practice must serve to strengthen and empower families. Toward this goal, the Division has adopted "Family-Centered Services" as its preferred service methodology.

The "Family-Centered Services" approach is founded on the principle that the first and greatest investments, time and resources, should be made in the care and treatment of children in their own homes. This means that resources, which have traditionally been expended on one family member, are more wisely invested in treating and strengthening the entire family. Therefore, our foremost obligation is to provide families with the services and support necessary to preserve and strengthen the family and prevent out-of-home placement. However, if the child cannot safely remain in their own home, immediate steps must be taken to facilitate timely reunification and assure that other legally permanent plans occur when reunification is not possible.

The preservation of family and community ties is essential to the safety, well-being and permanency for a child. CD recognizes and supports the preservation of family and community connections. Children's Service Workers shall strive to preserve and maintain family and community connections for all children and families served by the Children's Division. For children in out-of-home care, diligent efforts shall be made to place the child and/or sibling group with other relatives or the same placement provider, and maintain the child and/or sibling group in their own schools and communities. The Children's Division believes that families can best be supported by one another and their own communities, when preserving connections efforts are made to:

- Connect a child to his/her heritage, tribe and community;
- Maintain a child in his/her own home;
- Ensure close proximity to his/her parents;
- Ensure sibling groups are placed together;
- Pursue placement of a child and/or sibling group with relatives or with the same placement provider;

- Allows for frequent visitation;
- Maintain a child in his/her current school;
- Pursue recruitment of community families to provide a foster placement for children in out-of-home care; and
- Involve communities in assuring the safety, well-being and permanency of children in their own communities.

The preservation of family and community connections can have a positive impact on keeping a child safe, placement stability, assuring well-being for the child, and timely reunification or another concurrent plan for the child.

The Strengthening Families approach concentrates on using protective factors for families in their homes and communities. This begins by shifting the focus from family risks and deficits to family strengths and resiliency. This is done by embedding effective prevention strategies into existing systems.

The five protective factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families approach. A focus on protective factors does not ignore the relevance of risk factors, instead it gives parents what they need to parent effectively, even under stress. The five protective factors are: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Support in Time of Need, and Social and Emotional Development of children.

Parental Resilience - The ability to cope with everyday stressors and recover from challenges. Parents who are emotionally resilient are able to maintain a positive attitude, creatively solve problems, and effectively rise to challenges in their lives, and are less likely to direct anger and frustration at their children. We are able to build Parental Resilience by completing the CD-14, FCS Family Assessment Tool, and discussing with the family past solutions/treatment which the family has identified/obtained to address concerns; what did or did not help, and why.

Social Connections – Family, friends, neighbors, and other members of the community who provide emotional support to parents by offering encouragement and assistance in facing the daily challenges of raising a family. We form social connections when children are placed out of the home by exploring natural family helpers/advocates, i.e., friends, neighbors, kinships, child care providers, clergy, etc. who may be available to assist the family in resolving the issues that led to placement.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development – Parents who understand how children grow and develop can provide an environment where children can live up to their full potential. This protective factor is demonstrated in our STARS curriculum. One of the five competencies is meeting developmental needs and addressing developmental delays. Connecting parents to high quality child care programs and programs such as Parents as Teachers, Nurses for Newborns, Early Head Start/Head Start or similar community-based programs can provide ongoing support to families.

Concrete Support in Times of Need – Parents need financial security and basic resources such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, child care, mental health care, and medical care. The CD-14C, Formal/Informal Service Provider Contact Sheet, is used to provide Concrete Support in Times of Need by having an ongoing review of the family's current situation and identifying resources for the treatment plan development.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children – Social and emotional development is highly dependent on the quality of a young child's primary relationship. A child's ability to interact positively and communicate emotions effectively has an impact on the child's understanding of both themselves and others. In families with multiple challenges, often a child care provider is the most consistent relationship in a child's life and can be a strong partner in ensuring a child's well being. We are able to evaluate and build Social and Emotional Competence of Children by completing the 14A, Family Functioning Assessment/Re-assessment. The CD14A addresses family functioning under general domains (example: basic needs, caregiver ability, educational/vocational, physical health, mental health, substance use, family interaction, criminal/legal and child well-being). Sub-factors are addressed under each domain. The worker rates each sub-factor according to the positive or negative impact on the family's overall functioning.

Utilizing the five protective factors in the Strengthening Families approach promotes healthy child development and reduces the incidence of child abuse and neglect. A primary philosophy of Strengthening Families is referring people to people, not people to services – *know your community*.

The family-centered approach is in compliance with and facilitates the “reasonable efforts” policies of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, P. L. 96-272. It emphasizes placement prevention and family reunification and encourages services in the least restrictive environment. The family-centered approach places greater responsibility on, and confidence in, families and local communities.

Children's Service Workers will use family-centered techniques with the families with whom they work. Recognition is given to the fact that families are more likely to change when they are invested in a plan for change, rather than being asked to comply with the mandates of others. Also, this process must focus on the family as a system, rather than on any individual within the family. Therefore, parents and children will be given the opportunity for full inclusion in all phases of the assessment and service planning process. Full inclusion includes giving parents and children an equal and active voice in identifying the issues, which will result in safety and permanence.

The Children's Service Worker initiates the family-centered practice by establishing rapport with the family. Rapport begins with honesty of the worker and respect for the family. In addition to explaining that the worker is there to help the family help itself, the worker will also explain fully and openly, the purpose of the Division for contacting the family. The social work process should be fully explained. The Children's Service Worker shall clarify his or her role as well as the expectations that exist for the family. The Children's Service Worker should also explain that the Division's involvement is time-limited. The agency's involvement will be completed when the family is meeting each child's need for safety and permanence.

Service plans will be developed from a strengths-based assessment, which focuses on the strengths and needs of the family rather than on their problems. Goals and tasks will

be relevant to the issues of child safety and permanence. Identification of resources shall be driven by the unique and individual needs of the family, not only by what is available. Therefore, the use of natural resources and helpers within the family and their community is expected. Creativity in community-based resource development is encouraged. Flexible funding is provided to facilitate meeting the needs of families, when they cannot otherwise be obtained. Overall, family-centered practice should empower the family and encourage self-sufficiency, while meeting the children's needs for safety and permanence.

In order to embark on successful Child Welfare Practice the following principals are useful:

- All children and youth have great potential for growth when their basic developmental needs are met, including the need for safety, protection, love, nurturing, a spiritual and moral foundation, stability, a sense of belonging, and a hope for the future;
- No parent deliberately sets out to fail, whatever the outcome. There is probably no greater sense of failure than when one fails as a parent. Conversely, when families succeed because of our efforts to strengthen and empower them, everyone wins;
- Family problems are symptoms of their family system and send legitimate messages on how family members have attempted to cope. Therefore, the Children's Service Worker should approach family situations from a positive perspective seeking to learn what is or has gone well for the family;
- All service needs identified with families should be addressed as quickly and effectively as possible by CD, the community and the family through the use of Family Support Team meetings. Family Support Team Meetings are meetings in which the family, CD, the court, the family's natural helper and the community meet to develop a treatment plan for the family; and
- Each Children's Service Worker should ask themselves, how they would want to be treated, by service providers, if the worker was in the same situation as the family they are serving. The Children's Service Worker should then use that respectful and professional attitude with families and children.

MEMORANDA HISTORY: [CD06-41](#), CD08-81