

Safety Organized Practice Teaming: Leading Family Meetings

Workbook Materials

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Handout #1 Working Agreements

Working Agreements provide a sense of safety for meeting participants and provide a mechanism for holding meeting participants accountable to a standard of behavior for interactions. They also aid the team leader in helping the group move through disagreements or places where conversation becomes difficult. Typical working agreements include things like:

- ✓ Be aware of air time (how much time any one individual spends talking vs. listening)
- ✓ Be respectful of others (no interrupting, no putting down another's ideas)
- ✓ Listen for understanding, and *then* respond (there is a difference between listening for understanding and waiting to talk)
- ✓ Start and end the meeting on time
- ✓ Shared responsibility for success – we agree to hold each other accountable to the agreements.

When the group participants have varying levels of positional power and varying ways that they self-identify (by race, culture, gender, etc.) which might impact *how* they participate, the following agreements* can be helpful and should be suggested by the team leader:

- ✓ “Try on” the perspective of the person speaking
- ✓ It's okay to disagree, but not okay to shame, blame, or attack self or others
- ✓ Practice self-focus (use “I” statements)
- ✓ Practice “both/and” thinking (avoid “either/or” thinking)
- ✓ Consider process, relationship and content
- ✓ Be aware of both intent and impact (of statements and the process)

Finally, because child protection cases frequently involve domestic violence or other forms of family violence, it is necessary to introduce a **Safety Agreement: All CPS meetings are a place of physical and emotional safety for all who participate.** This can be explained as follows:

“This meeting needs to be a place of physical and emotional safety for all who participate, and we want that safety to continue after we complete the meeting. Examples of how we ensure safety are that we respect restraining orders and other court orders prohibiting contact between people, we give permission for each person to keep themselves safe during the meeting and after, and I might suggest a time-out, that we take a break, or that we move into separate meetings if I believe that someone is feeling unsafe. We adhere to “Nothing about us without us” except when there is a safety concern for a participant.”

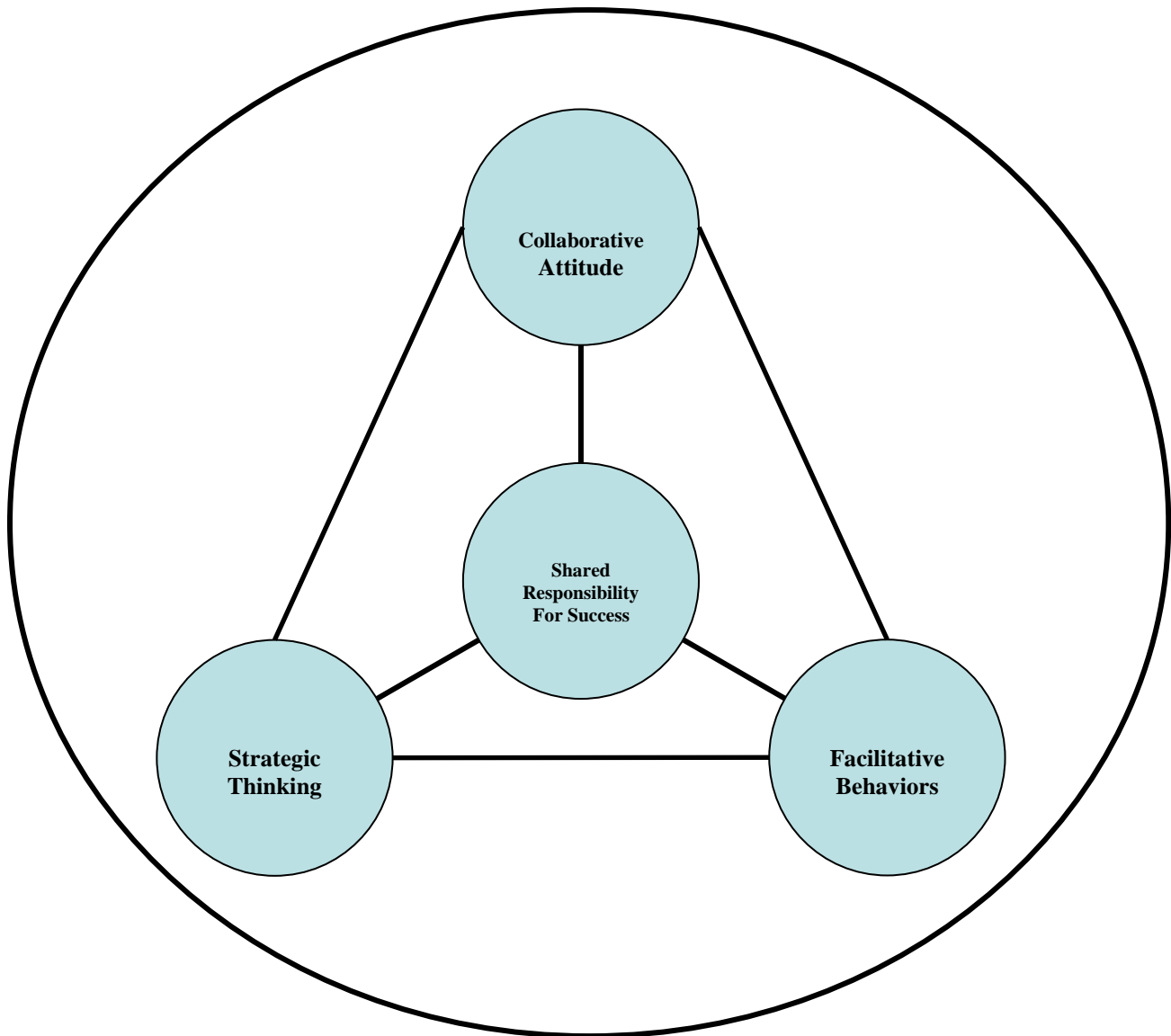


Working Agreements/Group Norms/Group Agreements Examples

- Be honest
- Active listening and “try on” the experience of others
- One person speaks at a time or share your idea only when someone else has finished sharing their idea
- Share air time
- Start and end on time
- Respect differences & stay engaged in conversation
- Professionally present the work of this group
- What is said in this room stays in this room
- Communicate needs & take good care of yourself
- Judge the message not the messenger
- Be open to questions & feedback
- Make commitment to minimize distractions
- When there are unresolved difficult conversations or unfinished business, we agree to make a plan to address it
- Make level of decision making transparent
- Use Gradients of Agreement to help reach consensus

Handout # 2

The Interaction Method



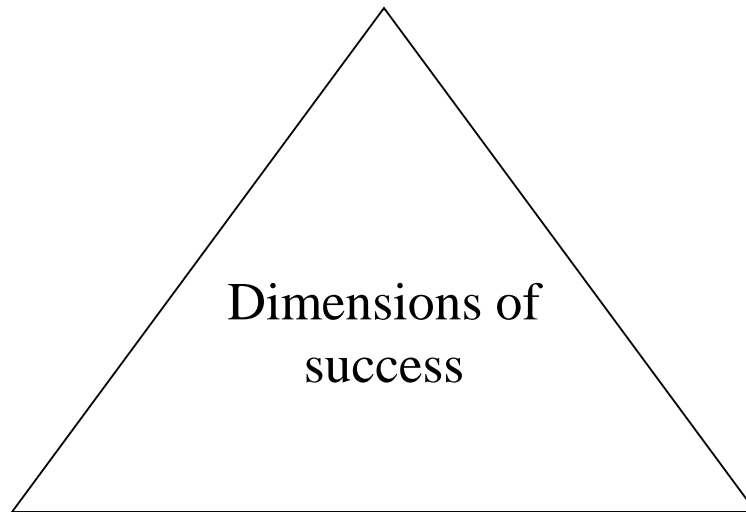
Adapted from Interaction Associates, LLC

Northern California Training Academy
Teaming: Leading Family Meetings



Handout #3 Dimensions of Success

Results/Outcome



Process

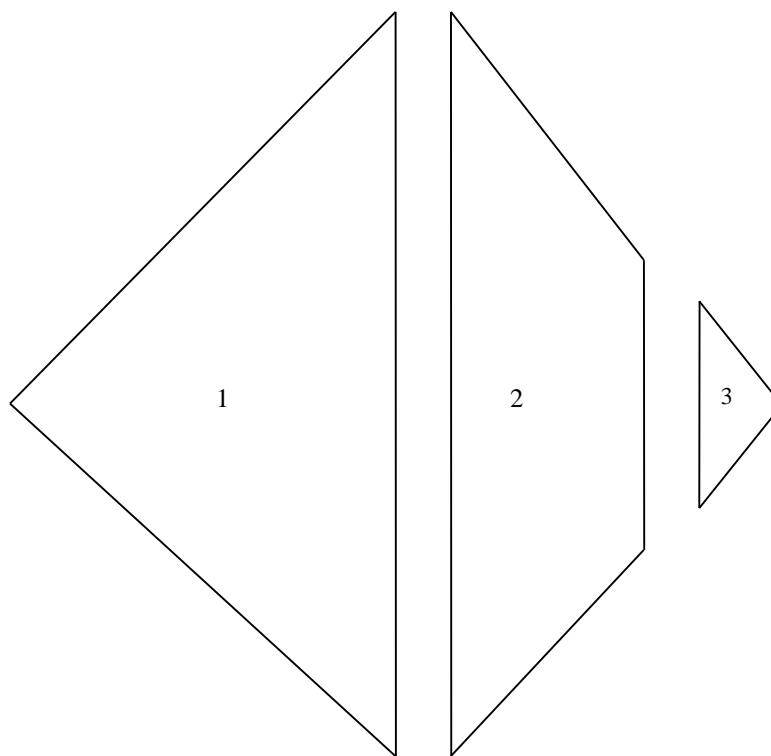
Relationship

Results	Process	Relationship
Did the meeting result in:	Did the process used in the meeting:	Were the interpersonal relationships characterized by:
<input type="checkbox"/> Informed decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage participation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Openness and honesty?
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear understanding of who is responsible for which follow-up tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage information exchange and decision making?	<input type="checkbox"/> Respect and courtesy?



Handout #4

Stages of a Meeting



Stage 1:
OPEN

Gather
information

Stage 2:
NARROW

Organize the
information

Stage 3:
CLOSE

Select best approach
and Reach agreement

For more information and alternative Gradients of Agreement models, see Sam Kaner's [Facilitator's Guide to Participative Decision-Making](http://www.communityatwork.com). (www.communityatwork.com)

Process

OPEN: Open consideration of a topic through open-ended activities. Make sure to first clarify the content and scope of the topic (using outcomes and specificity).

Examples:

- o Brainstorm
- o List
- o Survey
- o Hear from every participant
- o Free-roaming discussion

NARROW. Use some kind of given process to narrow the information and considerations.

Examples:

- o Material, time, resource constraints
- o Polling or Prioritizing Technique
- o Eliminate duplicates
- o Voting
- o Consensus process (if agreed on as decision-making approach)

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CLOSE. Reach closure or transition (e.g. next steps for process).

Examples:

- o Negative poll
- o Decision from Prioritizing Technique or voting
- o Combine and build agreement until goal is reached
- o Define next steps for decision (e.g. "Okay we have three possibilities to research – let's come back next week with the information and we'll decide based on that")

Through each part of the process, it's important that you continue to clarify the process.

Teaming involves moving a group forward using a series of small content and process agreements made along the way.

Examples:

	<i>Open</i>	<i>Narrow</i>	<i>Close</i>
Process agreement	Are we ready to brainstorm?"	Are we ready to organize the information?"	Are we ready to make a decision?"
Content Agreement	Is this the complete record of all of the groups' responses?"	Are these the right categories?"	Is this our final list of recommendations to take to the board?"



Open Techniques

- **Three guidelines:** Always review the guidelines, inviting participants to generate them if they know them: 1) quantity not quality; 2) no put downs, comments, or discussion; 3) repeats are okay
- **Use a recorder (or two):** it makes paying attention to the group's behavior much easier.
- **Write topic at the top.** Write your topic/question on the paper, board, or whatever so that everyone can see it. Check for clarification.
- **Use two colors on flip charts, alternating them for better readability.**
- **Don't crowd items.**
- **Enforce the guidelines/ground rules.**
- **Affirm and encourage participants:** with statements that show you're listening (but not evaluating!) like "Got that." "Keep them coming" "We're jamming!"
- **Wrap it up:** by signaling you're going to end, "Okay, I'll take three more."
- **Add ideas:** Yes, you and recorders may add ideas at the end; note that you are stepping out of your role.
- **Once around:** Often, the best way to include everyone, especially if you have quiet participants, is just to use a focused question and have each person contribute their response to that question. Have a recorder note those responses up front.
- **Free association:** If your group is stuck with old ideas, you may want to interject a structure that promotes creativity. One way is to use some kind of toy or silly object and have people generate a response to the topic that is somehow a free association with it. Another is to use articles, quotes, or other materials.



Narrow Techniques

- **Check for clarification.** Often people throw up an idea or word that other people don't understand or don't interpret in the same way. Ask the group, "Is there anything up there that anyone wants clarification of?" and allow for the person who said the item to explain briefly.
- **Eliminate duplicates.** Literally cross them off the list, asking the group for help and permission in eliminating the items. You have to get the group's agreement for eliminating synonyms (e.g. know that in fact something means the same thing to members of the group).
- **Delete low interest items.** You can use Negative Polling (see below).
- **Combine.** This is often the hard part, but it requires synthesizing the items into categories or areas that the group agrees to.
- **N/3 :** Often, groups get stuck in discussing items that aren't even of top interest to most of the members. The Prioritizing Technique is a strategy for eliminating this. Here's how it works:

After a brainstorm or list has been generated, number and count the items. Then, explain that the group will go about prioritizing the items that they want to explore more. This isn't a vote, although it has similar elements. Rather, it is a way for participants to indicate their interest in "keeping the item alive" for discussion, research, consideration, etc. Count the number of items and divide by 3 (if there are less than 10) or 4 (if there are more than 10). For example, with 9 items, everyone gets to prioritize 3. With 20 items, everyone gets to prioritize 5. Since this is not a vote, people can place all of their "priority dots" or checkmarks on one item or spread them however they wish. Use sticky dots, colored markers, or other tools to do this visually, with everyone participating.
- **NEGATIVE POLLING:** This involves removing items from consideration, usually after an N/3 or other polling. You ask the group, "This didn't get much attention/any dots. Is it okay with everyone if we take it off our list?"

Handout # 5

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT SCALE

Endorsement	Endorsement with a Minor Point of Contention	Agreement with reservations	Abstain	Stand Aside	Formal Disagreement, but Willing to Go with Majority	Formal Disagreement, With Request to be Absolved of Responsibility for Implementation	Block
<i>"I like it."</i>	<i>"Basically I like it."</i>	<i>"I can live with it."</i>	<i>"I have no opinion."</i>	<i>"I don't like this, but I don't want to hold up the group."</i>	<i>"I want my disagreement noted in writing, but I'll support the decision."</i>	<i>"I don't want to stop anyone else, but I don't want to be involved in implementing it."</i>	<i>"I veto this proposal."</i>

1. Endorse - I love it!
2. Agree with reservation - I like it.
3. Abstain – Genuinely don't care either way.
4. Stand aside – Not comfortable, but won't stand in the way of the plan.
5. Serious objection – No way, no how!



Handout #6 PREVENTIONS & INTERVENTIONS

GET AGREEMENT ON DESIRED OUTCOMES, AGENDA, ROLES, DECISION-MAKING METHOD, GROUP AGREEMENTS.

Reviewing and checking for agreement on important meeting start-up items.

Leader or Facilitator:

"Before we get into our agenda for today, I'd like to make sure we all agree on how we're going to work together."

Group Member:

"I'm not sure what that desired outcome means. Can we spend a moment to clarify?"

MAKE A PROCESS SUGGESTION.

Suggesting a way for the group to proceed.

Leader or Facilitator:

"I'd suggest looking at criteria before trying to evaluate options."

Group Member:

"I think we're jumping around too much here. I'd like to suggest that we list the problems first, and then go to solutions."

GET A PROCESS AGREEMENT.

Checking for agreement on a process that has been suggested.

Leader or Facilitator:

"Is everyone willing to identify criteria first?"

Group Member:

"I think I heard Carl propose an alternative suggestion. Carl, do you think we should identify criteria first?"

EDUCATE THE GROUP (PROCESS COMMERCIALS).

Heightening the group's process awareness through education.

Leader or Facilitator:

"There's no one right way to solve a problem. Which way do you want to start?"

Group Member:

"Remember we said that the success of this entire project will depend on building a series of small agreements?"

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO GENERATE PARTICIPATION.

Asking a question that has many possible answers.

Leader or Facilitator:

"What would you do in this situation if you were in Jack's position?"

Group Member:

"What else did you find out about the system we have for tracking errors?"

REQUEST THAT PEOPLE RESERVE JUDGMENT.

Holding back on opinions so that information can be freely generated.

Leader or Facilitator:

"I'd suggest we hold off evaluating these ideas until we've finished brainstorming."

Group Member:

"I'd like to hear more information before reaching any conclusions on the subject."



INTERVENTIONS

BOOMERANG

Returning a question to the person who asked it or to the group so that the leader or facilitator does not take all the responsibility for answering questions or resolving problems.

Leader or Facilitator:

"Katherine, you wanted to know why we're going to a second shift. Can anyone describe the rationale for that decision to Katherine?"

REGAIN FOCUS

Making sure everyone is working on the same content, using the same process, at the same time.

Leader or Facilitator:

"Just a moment, one person at a time. Joe, you were first, then Don."

Group Member:

"Jerry, you're bringing up an entirely new issue here. I don't think we've quite finished dealing with this one yet. Could we stay focused on the first issue and get to your question next?"

ASK/SAY WHAT'S GOING ON

Naming something that isn't working and getting it out in the open so the group can deal with it.

Leader or Facilitator:

"It's very quiet here. What does the silence mean? What's going on?"

Group Member:

"My sense is that not everyone agrees with the way we're going about making this decision. Does anyone else have that feeling?"

RE-ENFORCING PROCESS AGREEMENTS

Reminding the group of a previous agreement or ground rule when the discussion starts going off focus.

Leader or Facilitator:

"We agreed to brainstorm and you're starting to evaluate the ideas. Would you mind holding onto that idea for now?"

Group Member:

"Barry, we said we'd only spend 10 minutes on this agenda item and it's already been 20. I suggest we move on now."

ACCEPT/LEGITIMIZE/DEAL WITH OR DEFER

A positive method for dealing with difficult people or situations that might get a meeting off track. Accept the idea without agreeing or disagreeing. Legitimize it by writing it on the "group memory." Then, decide as a group if the issue/idea is more appropriately dealt with here or deferred to another time. Record ideas or issues that are deferred and agree on when they will be addressed.

Leader or Facilitator:

"You're not convinced we're getting anywhere? That's okay, you may be right. Would you be willing to hang on for 10 more minutes and see what happens?"

Group Member:

"Marybeth, I hear what you're saying about using these preliminary numbers as the basis for a decision. I'm not sure we have enough information yet to solve the problem. Would you be willing to wait until we analyze this month's report before we make our final decision?"

USE BODY LANGUAGE

Reinforce words with congruent body language.

Leader or Facilitator:

Regain focus by standing up and moving to the middle of the room.

Encourage participation by asking for ideas with palms open.

Group Member:

Lean forward to convey interest. Use eye contact to acknowledge people's ideas.

USE HUMOR

Make a joke to relieve the tension. Be sensitive not to joke at someone else's expense.

Break

Call a break. Have a stretch. Play an icebreaker.

Parking Lot

If participants are reacting to material not on the meetings' agenda, suggest "parking the issue" while completing the current item(s). Address this/these new topics after the speaker or the agenda topic discussion ends.



FIVE MOST COMMON SITUATIONS REQUIRING INTERVENTION

Process Intervention and Desired Outcomes

1. To keep the process on track and moving forward with all participants engaged, making best use of time and resources.
2. Balance participation with the meeting results.

TOPIC	SITUATION	INTERVENTION
Side Bar Conversations	A member of the group is having sidebar conversations with other participants throughout Sam's presentation.	(1) A friendly reminder: "Just a reminder, we agreed to 'one conversation at a time' in our group agreements for today."
		(2) Direct the reminder: Make eye contact (with Susan) and restate, "One conversation at a time please."
		(3) Personalize it: "Susan, do you have a clarification question for Sam?" or "Susan, I can see that you have something to contribute. When Sam has finished we'll hear from you."
		(4) Make direct request: "Susan, please hold your comments until Sam has finished."
	If Susan is the only one interrupting or having side conversations.	(5)(a) Talk to her at break, one-on-one.
	If there are many people interrupting or having side conversations.	(5)(b) Put the process on hold and ask the group: "Do we need to take a break?"

TOPIC	SITUATION	INTERVENTION
Staying on Time	The group has a lot to cover in their agenda, but they seem to go down rabbit holes and may veer off into other topics.	(1) Invoke the “keep focused” ground rule: Suggest the use of a <i>Parking Lot</i> to capture items that need to be pursued, but are not the focal points for this meeting.
		(2) Specifically re-focus on the particular topic/agenda item: “I’d just like to remind you that we are discussing Item 4, team budget. Please hold discussion on other topics until we get to them.”
	The discussion has continued for some time, and you are running out of time for the item.	(3) Attempt closure of item: “Team, we have 10 minutes remaining for this item. We need to re-focus. What do we still need to discuss to conclude this item?” We are almost out of time for this item. There appears to be more discussion required. Is that true?” Follow-up a yes response with, “What do you need in order to close on this item?” or “Why are we unable to close on this item?”
	The item is truly important and just wasn’t given sufficient time for the necessary discussion and action.	(4) Give participants a choice on how they spend their meeting time: “Is this item more important than the remaining items on the agenda, and if so, when will you address the other items?” <i>Note:</i> The answer should <i>not</i> be to keep going until all the items are completed.
Never-Ending Discussion	Information Barriers Sometimes a discussion will not come to closure, usually because of information that is insufficient, inaccurate or unreliable. Sometimes a topic leads to significant emotional reactions.	Follow the same guidelines under “Staying on Time”. It may be that there is insufficient valid information to progress, in which case the team should park the item for another meeting. If the remainder of the meeting is dependent on the completion of this item, then reschedule the meeting with action items to ensure that participants bring whatever is required next time.

TOPIC	SITUATION	INTERVENTION
	<p>Personal Agenda or “Hobby Horse”</p> <p>Whenever a topic comes up, an individual may begin to recount the same war stories, etc. You can often tell by reading the faces of the other participants (look for rolling eyes). The individual, often oblivious of the reactions of others, settles into the story.</p>	<p>(1) Gentle interruption: Once you’ve determined that an individual is in a familiar story mode, and what’s being said does not appear to contribute to the item under discussion, gently interrupt him to ask, “Bob, excuse my interruption, but I’m not sure how this fits with our topic. Can you clarify for me?”</p>
		<p>(2) Direct the inquiry: Make eye contact with Bob and ask, “This sounds to me like familiar turf. Is this a recurring theme?” Then make eye contact with the other participants. At this point, Bob will usually “fess up” that this is either a war story that everyone has heard or a favorite “complaint.” Acknowledge him, ask what key piece of the discussion he would like captured, and then move on.</p>
		<p>(3) Personalize the request: “Bob we agreed that this item would remain parked (or off-topic). Has anything changed its status?”</p>
	<p>It is unlikely that a person will continue raising the issue. In the event that he does.</p>	<p>(4) Firmly restate the request: You can restate the intervention comments under either 2 or 3, and that should allow the group to continue forward without using up valuable time.</p>
	<p>In the rare case where the individual cannot let go.</p>	<p>(5) Talk to him privately at break: Give feedback (gently) about the effect his behavior is having on the group and the session. Ask for his help in keeping the session moving forward.</p>

TOPIC	SITUATION	INTERVENTION
Conflict: Personal Attacks	Individual Attacked A group member takes “pot shots” at other team members. For the example, Bill is taking “shots” at Joe.	(1) Apply gentle humor: If you don’t know this team or the individuals, observe Joe’s reaction and Bill’s demeanor and body language. Say nothing the first time unless you are sure that it was intentional or make light of the first occurrence: “I hope that comment isn’t an indication that we need armor for this meeting.”
	Bill takes another shot.	(2) Restate the group agreements: Make eye contact with Bill and say, “Our group agreements clearly state that . . . We welcome all ideas, comments that build or clarify ideas, etc., but not negativity.”
	Once again, Bill aims another sarcastic or belittling remark at Joe.	(3) Confront Bill directly: firm words, supportive tone and stance. “Bill, this is not the first time that you have targeted Joe with your remarks. Please stop.” Then redirect him with “What is the concern you have with the issue/idea? How would you modify it to improve it?”
	Bill persists with comments aimed at Joe.	(4) Gentle, public reprimand: In a gentle tone say, “Bill, despite my reminders, you continue to make critical comments towards Joe’s ideas. If there is a personal disagreement between the two of you, it is inappropriate to play it out here. Can you participate in this meeting productively or is there another issue which needs to be addressed before the team can continue?” (This gives Bill the opportunity to bow out of the meeting. If he chooses to leave, ask the team if they can continue without him.) The same intervention could be made one-on-one with Bill at break.

TOPIC	SITUATION	INTERVENTION
	Group Attacked Bill is taking potshots at everyone.	(1) Apply gentle humor: If you don't know this team or the individuals, observe their reactions and Bill's demeanor and body language. Say nothing the first time unless you are sure that it was intentional, or make light of the first occurrence: "I hope that comment isn't an indication that we need armor for this meeting."
	Bill takes another shot	(2) Restate the group agreements: Make eye contact with Bill and say, "Our group agreements clearly state that . . . We welcome all ideas, comments that build or clarify ideas, etc., but not negativity."
	Bill continues. At this point, he has made several remarks to various group members and you have redirected his comments and reminded him of the group agreements.	(3) Address problem directly: "Bill you have made several negative comments to group members. Is there something else going on that is interfering with your ability to participate here today?" Or throw it to the team: "Team, how do you feel when Bill makes this type of comment?"
		(4) Personal confrontation: If the attacks continue and the group is reluctant to say anything to Bill when discussed as in 3 above, then speak to Bill at break as in Step 4 above.
Returning from Breaks	Team members are late returning from breaks.	(1) Light reminder: "Remember, you agreed to return from breaks on time because it helps you finish on time; it's one of your group agreements." Just before the next break, remind the team to be back on time, and advise them of when that is. You may want to lighten the tone by suggesting that you all synchronize your watches while whistling the tune of Mission Impossible.

Handout #7

Safety Mapping Dialogue Structure

PRIOR TO THE MEETING		
Preparation with the family	Prepare the family for the meeting: What is the purpose of this meeting? Who can they invite to the meeting? Can they exclude providers if desired? When and where will the meeting be held for their convenience? How long will it last? What happens if they decide not participate? What decisions will be made?	How to do this: Provide written materials on SM and decision-making. Provider written Purpose of the Meeting. Allow the family time to consider who they want to be present. If safety is a concern, plan separate meetings for family members and use care in explaining the need for separate meetings.
Pre-meeting safety check-in (privately, with each individual family participant) Plan in advance.	Ask: 1) Are there any court orders in place that prohibit contact between you and anyone else who is here for the meeting? 2) Is there anything we need to be aware of related to your personal safety in the meeting? (If yes) 3) How can we proceed safely? Separate meetings? Avoid certain topics? (If no) 4) Do we need to have a signal that you can use to let me know you need a break because you're worried about your safety or the children's safety?	Why: Maximize the chances that the meeting will be held safely, without placing anyone at risk of harm as a result of their full participation. Also increase the likelihood that whatever decision or plan comes out of the meeting will promote safety and well-being, and be sustainable.

DURING THE MEETING		
Review Purpose and Desired Outcomes	Check for agreement: What will we be doing together? What do we want to walk away with today?	Describe concretely: a plan, a decision. “I’ll be asking each person to talk about their worries and what they think is working well. Then I or others will ask a series of questions to help us understand which of the worries we need to focus on, and how we could feel less worried or help us (achieve our desired outcome).”
Context	Check in: What is happening outside the room that pulls attention away from what we are doing together? What power dynamics/imbbalances are present that need to be made explicit?	Elicit competing priorities and commitments that might be a barrier against the work of the group. Open space for consideration of differences. “Each of us has our own values, backgrounds and life experiences that affect how we see things. For example, as a white woman from a middle class background, with many years working in the field of substance abuse, I have a way of thinking about issues affecting children. You may see things very differently. We can and should all ask questions from those places where we don’t have knowledge. I might feel embarrassed that I don’t know, or I might not know exactly how to ask the question, but I will be asking from a place of wanting to understand how you see this issue.”
Review Purpose and Desired Outcomes	Check for agreement: What will we be doing together? What do we want to walk away with today?	Describe concretely: a plan, a decision. “I’ll be asking each person to talk about their worries and what they think is working well. Then I or others will ask a series of questions to help us understand which of the worries we need to focus on, and how we could feel less worried or help us (achieve our desired outcome).”
Content	Start with: What are the worries? What’s working well?	Process for eliciting content will vary, although all should use the 3 initial questions of SM and certain types of SF questions. Pay attention to non-verbal communication as well, and ask questions as needed. Voice of children can be included through Three Houses or Wizards & Fairies. Develop a DANGER & RISK STATEMENT and a SAFETY STATEMENT. (include sharing SDM Safety Assessment and Risk Assessment factors here)
Next steps	What needs to happen next?	Develop a SAFETY GOAL and a SAFETY PLAN. After a plan is made, assess individual motivation, ability, and willingness to do what is needed for the plan. Use scaling questions. (incorporate FSNA items here) Children’s vision for Future House can be incorporated during this meeting.
+/Δ	What worked about this meeting process for you? What do you thing needs to be changed/different?	Elicit feedback on the meeting process for additional learning and practice improvement. Δ Deltas are upgrades--not necessarily a negative or detracton.

Handout #8

Helpful Types of Questions¹ for Finding Solutions

Type of question	Why it's helpful	Examples	Tips
Open ended questions	Allow the widest range of responses. Answers typically reveal a person's frame of reference, and how they think about their life and situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can you tell me a little about your children (your relationship with your husband, etc.)?</i> • <i>What are you most proud of about your children (your parenting, yourself, etc.)?</i> • <i>Can you say a little bit more about that? I didn't quite understand.</i> 	
Who, what, when, where and how questions	Provides structure and sets up parameters for the information you need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What happened when you decided not to drink?</i> • <i>When you decide to count to 10, what will you do differently?</i> • <i>How do you get yourself out of difficult situations? What helps the most?</i> • <i>How will you make sure your children are safe in the future?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid "why" questions because within a child protection context they tend automatically to make people defensive (i.e. "why did you make that decision?"). Use "how come" instead of "why". • When talking about future changes always ask WHEN rather than IF, because it implies trust that change will occur, and it's just a matter of time.
Coping questions	Conveys understanding of the difficulties s/he is experiencing while recognizing his/her strengths and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How are you doing as well as you are with all the things going on in your life?</i> • <i>Having four children must be stressful. How do you keep going day after day? What helps?</i> • <i>Considering how long you've been drinking and how tough the week has been, it must have been challenging to stay sober for the whole week. How did you do it?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think "How do you do it?" and "How come it's not worse?"

¹ From Berg, I.K. and Kelly, S. (2000) *Building Solutions in Child Protective Services*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Relationship questions	Encourage thinking about how others would describe them or their behavior. Heighten a person's awareness of how their behaviors impact people important to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you think your children would say they like best about when you are sober?</i> • <i>What do you think your son would say he felt when he saw you hitting his mother?</i> • <i>What would your daughter say that it took you to get out of bed this morning?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially helpful with individuals whose behaviors are more harmful to others than to themselves (i.e. verbally and physically abusive parents, people who claim to have no control over their behavior, etc.). • The third example is a type of relationship question that can be particularly helpful when people express that they feel unable to make even a small change (due to depression, hopelessness, etc.).
Exception-seeking questions	Help a person slow down and consider moments when they made a choice not to (hit their child, or take a drink).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tell me about times when your wife didn't have dinner on the table when you came home, but you didn't end up giving her a black eye. How did you decide to respond differently?</i> • <i>You've told me that you hit your daughter because she wouldn't stop crying. Have there been times when she's cried a lot and annoyed you, but you didn't hit her? Can you tell me about that?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers may seem insignificant to you or the other person, but they provide a place from which to build more safety. • If the person can't seem to answer your exception-seeking question, ask "What would your (wife, husband, child, best friend) say about how you managed to walk away rather than striking out?"
Scaling questions	Gauge confidence, hopefulness, safety, willingness to take action, and many other topics that are difficult to describe with words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 stands for "completely confident or certain", and 0 stands for "not sure at all" where would you put yourself in being able to follow through on the safety plan we just developed?</i> • <i>On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is "I'm definitely going to go to the batterer intervention program" and 1 is "I'm not at all sure I'm going to go" where would you put yourself? Why? How could you be more certain that this is what you're going to do? What will it take?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling questions are helpful for "taking the pulse" of a group of people about the level of safety of children they perceive. Go around the room and ask each person where they are on the scale from "Perfectly safe, no worries" to "I think this child is in real danger". Then ask what people would need to see to move one step closer together. • "Clients" tend to give themselves higher ratings than "professionals" do. Ask people (clients and professionals) to provide their thinking or reasoning for the number they gave.

Miracle/ Hoped for future question	Helps people generate descriptions of their dreams, visions, and aspirations for their lives, which then become part of the intervention goals.	<p><i>Most effective way to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You'll be going home later to do the things you need to do, like making dinner, putting the kids to bed, and so on. Imagine that when all of you r family members are sleeping tonight and the house is quiet, in the middle of the night a miracle happens. The miracle is that all of the problems you have with your children (or that other people think you have) are solved. Because this happens while you are sleeping, no one knows that the problems have been solved. So, when you are just waking up, what differences will you notice that make you wonder if there was a miracle overnight? What will it look like?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be difficult for people to respond to initially. Have patience. If the person responds in a way that is blaming of someone else, use other types of questions to generate self-reflection. (I.e. My son would be calm and like a different kid. <i>"Okay, so he'll be calm. What do you suppose he would say about how you will be different tomorrow morning?"</i>)
How is that helpful? How helpful is that? How well does that work?	Implies that the person must be trying to help him/herself. Also interrupts their expectation that they will once again be told that what they are doing is wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>So how is your drinking helpful to you in your life?</i> <i>How well does hitting your son work to get him to stop his annoying behaviors?</i> <i>How helpful is it to your goal of reducing your financial stress for you to prohibit your wife from working at a paid job?</i> 	
How do you know he/she can do this?	Engages a person in a different way of thinking, so interrupts patterns of thought that may have contributed to the problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You know your son well enough to believe that he can learn to be respectful and stop telling you that he hates you. What do you know about him that makes you believe he can do this?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Especially helpful when a parent has unrealistic expectations of a child. Allows opportunity for validation of prior efforts, exploration of how well those efforts have worked, and planning new strategies for encouraging desired behaviors.

What else?	Encourages a person's participation in development of solutions, and enhances self-esteem. Helps person identify their own strengths and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What else did you do to try to keep him away from you? How well did that work? What else?</i> • <i>What else do you need to do to make sure that you can stay sober for the next week?</i> • <i>How else will you make sure you can "hold your tongue" so that your daughter will feel safe with you?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask this frequently and persistently to uncover a full picture of what a person has already done or tried to improve the situation.
Then what did you do? What happened next? How does that usually go?	Helps focus on behaviors and decisions (and patterns in some cases) rather than thinking in generalities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So you said your husband came home drunk and you got angry. What did you say to him? What did he say to you?</i> • <i>You said your son went into his room and blasted his music after you told him to do his homework. What did you do after he went into his room? Then what?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use opportunities that arise in the description of what happened to ask questions such as "What do you think your son would say he was feeling at that point?" or "How do you think your yelling that you were going to kill her sounded to the children?"
What have you thought about doing?	Empowers a person to generate their own solutions, even if they have not taken action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So I hear that you want your relationship with your wife to be better. What have you thought about doing to make that happen?</i> • <i>I know you said that you can't stop yourself from hitting your child when you're angry. What else have you thought about doing?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid telling people what YOU think they should/could do, because they are far more inclined to do the things that THEY come up with themselves. • Ask frequently.
Suppose . . . ?	Helps a person not feel stuck, helps them imagine a different future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Suppose your son had the better attitude that you want him to have. What would change between the two of you?</i> • <i>Suppose your mother doesn't give you the help you need. What else could you do to get that support somewhere?</i> 	