

CHILD WELFARE BEST PRACTICE DEFINITIONS

The following best practice approaches have been found to be vital to engaging with families in a respectful and ethical way: Cultural Humility, Solution-focused approach, Strength-based approach, Trauma Informed practice, Collaborative practice, and Appreciative Inquiry.

CULTURAL HUMILITY:

Cultural humility involves a humble approach to working with families and demonstrating a belief that families are the experts of their unique qualities and characteristics.

A cultural humility perspective challenges us to learn from the people with whom we interact, reserve judgment, and bridge the cultural divide between our perspectives in order to facilitate well-being and promote improved quality of life. Such a perspective frees the observer from having to possess expert knowledge in order to maintain knowledge-based power, control, and authority over matters about which diverse populations are far more knowledgeable (Tervalon, M., and Murray-Garcia, J., 1998)

Hu-mil-i-ty, noun.

1. The quality or condition of being humble; lack of pride; modesty. 2. The act of modesty or self-abasement; submission (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1973; p. 441)

SOLUTION-FOCUSED, STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH:

A **solution-focused approach** involves collaborating with the client/family to identify his/her ideas of solutions that will work to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being of their child(ren). This approach encourages families to become part of the decision-making process and their strengths and resources are acknowledged. Solution focused interviewing is part of this approach and includes a set of different types of questions that can be used with families.

Types of solution focused interview questions include:

1. The Three Questions (what's working well, what are we worried about, what needs to happen next)
2. Exception questions
3. Scaling Questions
4. Miracle Questions
5. Coping Questions
6. Preferred Future Questions

A **strength-based approach** focuses on identifying and building on strengths, capacities and resources within the family system that could be used to ensure safety and well-being of the child(ren). Strengths may include past and current efforts in protecting children from harm, maintaining loving parent-child

relationships, accessing extended family and other support systems and making efforts to address past and current stress conditions including drug abuse, family violence, mental health issues, unemployment, etc., (The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program, 2015).

Social Workers may utilize this approach in the use of Solution Focused questions, Motivational Interviewing, Use of “What’s working well” and the “Consultation and Information Sharing Framework” to focus on family strengths and completion of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Family Strengths and Needs assessment tool (FSNA).

TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE:

Trauma informed practice involves an awareness of trauma and its impact on behavior and quality of life in the lives of children and adults. This practice involves a recognition of and empathy for the pervasiveness of trauma and seeks to understand the connection between presenting behavior, thoughts, attitudes, coping strategies. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the impact of trauma that may be created by being involved with child welfare and to learn ways to acknowledge and try to reduce this impact.

The utilization of a trauma informed approach may assist a worker with focusing on the behavior of the person and what might be motivating that behavior in the context of how trauma can affect a person’s coping mechanisms. This may further assist the worker in developing ways to interact with children and families in a way that supports engagement, safety, growth and trust.

Core Principles of Trauma Informed Practice:

1. Trauma awareness
2. Empowerment of those we work with
3. Physical and emotional safety
4. Trustworthiness
5. Choice and collaboration
6. Building on strengths and skills

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE:

Collaborative Practice (otherwise known as “Partnership-Based Collaborative Practice”) involves a collaborative team approach known as a best practice in the field of child welfare. This practice encourages the building of shared language, understanding and engagement with families to assist and empower them to build their own supportive network and safety plans.

Partnership-Based Collaborative Practice consists of seven interconnected strategies implemented in Olmstead County, Minnesota by Rob Sawyer and Sue Lohrbach. These seven strategies are shown to improve infrastructure in the child welfare system and include the following:

1. A Differential Response System

2. Front-loading the agency and community (Example: Targeted early intervention programs)
3. Formal risk/safety assessment (SDM)
4. A social work practice model (Safety Organized Practice)
5. Consultation and information sharing framework*
6. Group Supervision and group decision making (Example: RED teams)
7. Facilitated Family meetings (Example: FTM)

*Use of the Consultation and Information Sharing Framework in RED teams, group supervision, case consultation, mapping with families, safety planning utilizing natural supports and community service providers.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY:

Appreciative inquiry involves a collaborative exploration into the “best” of people, their relationships, and the world around them. This practice mostly originates from David Cooperrider’s work with organizations and systems at the Case Western School of Management in Ohio, US. Appreciative inquiry is the opposite of “problem-solving” and seeks to instill hope in families by focusing on what is going right and well in their lives. What we pay attention to grows and by paying attention to what’s working instead of focusing solely on what’s not working, social workers can contribute to positive change in individuals, groups, and organizations.

Social Workers can utilize this practice with families by using a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to help them recognize and build on their strengths and resources. This practice works best when workers support the “parallel process” by focusing and building on what is working well in their individual work and organizations as well. Appreciative inquiry may be used in multiple settings including but not limited to: family meetings and home visits, case consultation between supervisor and worker, group supervision, coaching, training, etc.

From multiple research studies:

The best outcomes for children and families occur when constructive working relationships exist between families and professionals and between professionals themselves. Good working relationships are the best predictor of good outcomes!

"Motivation (for change) may be linked to the degree of hope that change is possible," (US National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect).