

SOCIAL WORKER GUIDE

TO CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE BEHAVIORS



1 FOUNDATION

Be open, honest, clear and respectful in your communication.

- Use language and body language that demonstrate an accepting approach to understanding the family.
- Ask people how they prefer to be addressed, and address individuals by the name or title they request in person and in writing.
- Show deference to Tribal leadership and their titles in written and verbal communication.
- Be open and honest about the safety threats and circumstances that brought the family to the attention of the agency, what information can be shared among team members, and what information will be included in court reports.
- Be transparent about the role of the court and the child welfare agency.
- Ask family members what method of communication they prefer, use age-appropriate language that everyone can understand, and confirm with family members that your communication meets their language and literacy needs.

Be accountable.

- Model accountability and trust by doing what you say you're going to do, be responsive (including returning calls, texts, and emails within 24 business hours), be on time (including submitting reports on time and being on time for appointments), and follow ICWA and other federal and state laws.
- Be aware of and take responsibility for your own biases, missteps, and mistakes.

2 ENGAGEMENT

Listen to the child, youth, young adult, and family, and demonstrate that you care about their thoughts and experiences.

- Listen attentively and use language and concepts that the family has used.
- Use a trauma-informed approach to acknowledge and validate venting, expressions of anger, and feelings of grief and loss.
- Reflect what you heard so the child, youth, young adult, and family can see that you understood.

Demonstrate an interest in connecting with the child, youth, young adult, and family, and help them identify and meet their goals.

- Express the belief that all families have the capacity to safely care for children and youth.

- Use positive motivation, encouragement, and recognition of strengths to connect with youth and express the belief that they have the capacity to become successful adults.
- Reach out to children and families in ways that are welcoming, appropriate, and comfortable for them, and make a special effort to engage fathers and paternal relatives to build connections and engage them as family members and team members.
- Affirm the unique strengths, needs, life experience and self-identified goals of each child, youth, young adult, and family.
- Show your interest in learning about the family and their culture, community, and tribes.
- Ask global questions followed by more descriptive questions that encourage exchange.
- Honor the role of important cultural, community, and tribal leaders the child, youth, young adult, and family have identified.

Identify and engage family members and others who are important to the child, youth, young adult, and family.

- Ask questions about relationships and significant others early and often.
- Search for all family members, including fathers, mothers, and paternal and maternal relatives through inquiry, early and ongoing Internet search, and review of records.
- Work quickly to establish paternity and facilitate the child or youth's connection with paternal relationships.
- Contact family, cultural, community, and tribal connections as placement options, team members, and sources of support.

Support and facilitate the family's capacity to advocate for themselves.

- Coordinate with the family's formal and informal advocates to help the family find solutions and provide ongoing support.
- Promote self-advocacy by providing opportunities for children, youth, young adults, and families to actively share perspectives and goals.
- Incorporate the family's strengths, resources, cultural perspectives, and solutions in all casework.

3 ASSESSMENT

From the beginning and throughout all work with the child, youth, young adult, family, and their team, engage in initial and ongoing safety and risk assessment and permanency planning.

- Explain the assessment process to the child, youth, young adult, and family so they know what to expect, and check in early and often to be sure they understand.

- Explore the child, youth, young adult, and family's expressed and underlying needs by engaging them in communicating their experiences and identifying their strengths, needs, and safety concerns.
- Talk to children, youth, and young adults about their worries, wishes, where they feel safe, where they want to live, and their ideas about permanency, and incorporate their perspective.
- Use tools and approaches that amplify the voices of children and youth.
- Ask the family what is working well and what they see as the solution to the circumstances that brought them to the attention of the child welfare agency.
- Apply information to the assessment process using the family's cultural lens.

4 TEAMING

Work with the family to build a supportive team.

- With the family's permission, contact family, cultural, community, and Tribal connections, and ask them to serve as team members as early as possible.
- Ask initially and throughout the family's involvement if they would like a support person or peer advocate on their team.
- Explore with the family how culture might affect the development of the team and the teaming process.
- Facilitate early and frequent sharing of information and coordination between parents and caregivers.
- Facilitate development of a mutually supportive relationship between the parents and caregivers.

Facilitate the team process and engage the team in planning and decision-making with and in support of the child, youth, young adult, and family.

- Make sure team members have the information they need.
- Facilitate critical thinking, discussion, mutual exploration of issues, and consensus building toward the goal of shared decision-making.
- Help the team recognize that differences will occur and assist them to work through conflicts.
- Develop a shared understanding about safety, permanency, and well-being issues to be addressed with the team.
- Ensure that all team members understand that legal, regulatory, and policy constraints may limit shared decision making options available to address the family members' needs, including placement options, reunification, and service options.
- Build connections to identified services and supports by designating a team member to follow-up with that referral.

Work with the team to address the evolving needs of the child, youth, young adult, and family.

- Facilitate dialogue about how supports and visitation plans are working.
- Explore with team members what roles they can play over time to strengthen child safety and support the family.
- Help the team adapt to changing team member roles.

Work collaboratively with community partners to create better ways for children, youth, young adults, and families to access services.

5 SERVICE PLANNING & DELIVERY

Work with the family and their team to build a plan that will focus on changing behaviors that led to the circumstances that brought the family to the attention of the child welfare agency and assist the child, youth, young adult, and family with safety, trauma, healing, and permanency.

- Describe how family strengths, safety threats, and priority needs will be addressed in the plan.
- Describe strengths in functional terms that can support the family members in completing their plan.
- Share information about agency programs, providers, resources, and supports.
- Encourage and support the participation of children, youth, young adults, family, Tribe, and team in identifying culturally sensitive services, supports, visitation activities, and traditions that address family members' unique underlying needs even if this means accepting practices that may be unfamiliar to the social worker.
- Ask the family members if they need help meeting basic needs for food, shelter, and medication so they can focus on addressing the problems underlying their involvement with the child welfare agency.
- Advocate for, link the family to, and help family members access the services, supports, and visitation activities identified in the plan.
- Ensure the family receives needed information, preparation, guidance, and support.
- Adapt services and supports to meet changing family needs based on ongoing assessment, progress toward goals, and decisions made by the family and their team.

6 TRANSITION

Work with the family to prepare for change in advance and provide tools for managing placement changes, social worker changes, and other significant transitions.

- Reduce the role of child welfare and professional services over time and facilitate an increased role for the family's network and natural supports to help the family build an ongoing support system.
- Coordinate with the family's formal and informal advocates to help the family find solutions and provide ongoing support after the child welfare agency is no longer involved.