



Continuing and  
Professional Education | Human Services

# Developing Working Partnerships

**Participant Guide**  
*Revised Jan. 2019*



Continuing and  
Professional Education | Human Services

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# Agenda

- 8:00 – 8:30 a.m.      Welcome and Introductions**
- 8:30 – 9:00 a.m.      Who Are My Partners and What Ways Do We Work Together?**
- 9:00 – 9:45 a.m.      Understanding Your Partners’ Roles, Responsibilities and Method of Intervention**
- 9:45-10:00 a.m.      Break**
- 10:00 – 10:45 p.m.    Common Rifts and Conflicts Among Partner Agencies and Their Effect on Families**
- 10:45 – 11:45 a.m.    Collaboration and Conflict Resolution**
- 11:45 – 12:00 p.m.    Summary,      Action      Plan,      and      Evaluation**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Worksheet

## What Do I Bring to My Professional Team?

**Instructions:** Take about five minutes to consider what personal attributes, knowledge, skills, values and experience you bring to your professional team that enhance your team's effectiveness.

**Personal Attributes/Perspective:**

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**Special Knowledge:**

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**Special Skills:**

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**Beliefs/Values:**

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**Experiences:**

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# Essential Partnerships in Child Welfare Services

The lives of the children and families we work with are complex and multi-faceted. Families connect to multiple systems such as schools, law enforcement and probation or parole, public and private health providers, mental health providers, churches and community organizations.

Even within our own agencies, the families we work with may be accessing a variety of programs and services. An example of this might be a parent who is receiving CalWORKS, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal benefits as well as mandated child welfare services.

In the past, families had to juggle the often different expectations and requirements of each of these programs, having to choose and prioritize which requirements they would comply with while meeting other demands of their lives, such as working, maintaining a household and tending to children and elders.

Coordination between programs within our own agency (more common in the early days of providing public social services when one social worker provided for all the services the family needed) has gradually decreased due to the program expertise necessary to administer the complex requirements of federal and state programs. Conflicts and divisions have developed between workers in different programs as a result of assumptions about the workload, attitude, training, education and qualifications of others and misunderstanding of the goals of these programs.

Due to the high-risk, complex and fast-paced nature of child welfare work, the way that child welfare staff are perceived by others within their own agency and the community creates extra challenges in establishing effective partnerships. In addition, child welfare staff, who are frequently the focus of criticism from many partners in the community, tend to isolate themselves from partners in order to protect themselves from the additional stressors of criticism.

When the need to coordinate services extends beyond the social services agency to partner agencies or community organizations, the challenges of integrating services multiply. These challenges are often the result of contradictory and changing laws and regulations related to privacy and confidentiality, long-standing power and turf issues between agencies, differing methods of intervention and mission, and varying program regulations and funding capacities.

Families and children who face multiple challenges in their lives may become confused, overwhelmed and frustrated by the lack of coordinated services between agencies and programs.

As the child welfare services practice evolves from a segregated, law enforcement focus to a family-centered, integrated focus, our best efforts to partner with other program and agency staff in coordinating and streamlining services for families are essential to effective outcomes.

According to Christopher M. Avery in *Teamwork is an Individual Skill*, a team or partnership can be defined as “a group of individuals responding successfully to the opportunity presented by shared responsibility. Each individual within the team takes responsibility for ensuring that the group rises to the occasion, and in the process, makes sure his own work gets done well.”

Avery cites five behavioral themes that must be present within a partnership or team in order for the partnership to be successful:

- Each individual takes personal responsibility for a productive relationship;
- The partnership or team creates a powerful partnership by promoting an environment of productive exchange, expansion and integrity
- Partners align around a shared purpose while speaking freely about individual interests
- Partners are able to trust appropriately as a result of their ability to respond to other partners
- Partners develop a collaborative mindset

Also according to Avery, “your ability to create high quality productive partnerships is the most important factor in your own success. Further, people who approach every work relationship with the intention that they are going to take one hundred percent responsibility for the quality and productivity of that relationship actually get more done with less effort.”

# Crossing the Abyss Between “Them” and “Us”

## Compete or cooperate

Collaboration is a process of working together on a mutually beneficial undertaking, sometimes in partnership with entities previously seen as “the enemy” or at odds with fundamental intervention strategy, mission, or authority.

## Why even think about crossing the abyss?

- Shared expertise and resources result in creation of “something new and better”
- Allows agencies to evolve the way that people and institutes think, behave and use resources to affect change
- Opportunity to provide a family-centered comprehensive and full range of services
- Proactive and preventative
- Family partnership -- family centered
- Integrated, flexible and outcomes oriented

## What are our values?

- What do we believe about the families we work with? What are our common values?
- Who are our partners? How are they the same or different from our own agency?
- What are our current realities inside and outside our own agency? How are we doing on our own?
- What are our expected goals and outcomes?
- What is our operational plan to move forward?
- Are we ready to make a change?

## The real benefits of crossing the abyss

- The families receive coordinated services and a consistent message from partnering organizations
- Shared information and resources improve service delivery
- More efficient and effective use of limited resources
- Compatible service goals promote trust and credibility of partnering agencies
- Two heads are better than one: Creative solutions derived from multi-agency focus
- Reduces isolation of agency staff in working with high-risk families

# What Gets in the Way of Effective Partnerships?

## Achieving the same end with different means

All professionals within the child welfare services environment are involved in achieving the same goals: safety and permanency for children and supporting the self-sufficiency and functioning of families. Roles, tasks, perceptions, responsibilities and intervention methods may be quite different, particularly when working with professionals from other agencies such as probation or mental health services. For example, a probation officer may intervene with a family member by arresting and disciplining through incarceration, while the mental health professional will be focusing on working therapeutically with the family system.

Within the agency, professionals perform direct and indirect service delivery depending upon their job assignment. Challenges to partnership with others within the child welfare service agency include failing to maintain a wide enough perspective about the common goals of the agency; isolating from workers in other parts of the program; comparisons about the value, difficulty, amount of work assignments; failing to attend to the partner service needs of other workers; and failure of workers to take responsibility for their role in the partnership.

When engaged in partnerships in other parts of the larger social services system, professionals must work together to provide an integrated approach to providing services to families and the community while operating from very different intervention means and goals for families. Challenges to these partnerships include conflicts in mission, values, philosophy and goals between agencies; differences in rules, requirements and funding; and lack of a workable decision making and communication process.

A common example of a challenge in working with partners in other agencies involves the joint development of a suitability study and recommendations under Welfare and Institutions Code 241.1 regarding whether a child is better served with child welfare or probation acting as lead agency. When the study is ordered, delays occur in communicating the order and timeframes for assessment and report writing are frequently different in each agency. Child welfare service uses CWS/CMS to prepare the report while probation uses a different computer system and format. When the probation officer and child welfare workers examine the family's situation, they approach their assessments using very different legal criteria. Disagreement about recommendations and failure to provide timely notice of the order to conduct this assessment are often frustrating challenges to this process.



Here are some examples of how different program professionals in our own and other agencies may approach work with families using different intervention means seeking different goals and outcomes:

<b>Agency/Program</b>	<b>Intervention Method</b>	<b>Goal</b>
<b>Child Welfare</b>	Protection	Safety/Permanence
<b>CalWORKS</b>	Education	Employment/Self-Sufficiency
<b>Probation</b>	Correction	Community Safety and Law and Order
<b>Public Health</b>	Treatment (medical)	Health
<b>Mental Health</b>	Treatment (psychological)	Clear Thinking and Functioning
<b>Substance Abuse Services</b>	Treatment	Clear Thinking
<b>Housing Authority</b>	Subsidy	Housing

## **The complexity of confidentiality**

The right of parents and children to keep their family matters private is of considerable concern to the government and the community. Each agency and program have their own rules and laws to follow regarding what information can be shared and which professionals may obtain information.

For example, even though child welfare and CalWORKS programs are administered by the same department, the ability to share information between workers about a family they are both working with is limited. On the other hand, law enforcement agencies may have full access to information that child welfare possesses regarding a family situation.

Human services professionals must balance the family's right to privacy with efforts to coordinate needed services to support family functioning in all essential areas.

Frequently, family members must consent in writing for professionals to share information, except where safety concerns are involved.

Mental health and substance abuse treatment professionals must abide by strict federal privacy laws that differ from the requirements imposed on child welfare and probation agencies, making communication with mental health and substance abuse treatment providers all the more difficult.

Factors that influence information sharing between professionals include differences in laws relating to profession, the manner in which the information will be used, and whether imminent personal or community safety concerns exist.

## **Decision making, power and authority**

When more than one program or organization is working together to provide services to families, the question of how decisions are made in a coordinated fashion becomes an issue. In many public agencies, decisions are made based upon the hierarchical relationships that exist and power and authority is based upon direct reporting structures. When professionals from different agencies work together, decisions must be made in a collaborative fashion based upon the integrity and quality of the relationships rather than based upon direct reporting structures.

Unless explicit efforts are made to structure how decisions will be made and how power and leadership are shared, challenges may emerge. Depending on how financial and material resources are shared, power issues can often emerge around shared resources.

When working with partners within the agency to whom you do not report directly, efforts must be made to define roles and responsibilities and to engage in personal responsibility for the success of the cooperative working relationship.

## **“Them” versus “Us” mentality**

Consider the fact that publicly funded child welfare services has only been in existence since 1974 and real efforts aimed at protection of children are less than 100 years old. As a result of the lessons we learn each day in our efforts to provide safety and permanency for children, our practice changes rapidly over time.

Human beings naturally group themselves into affiliations based upon interests and needs. This tendency toward grouping originates in the manner in which the brain develops and as a result of early human behavior related to clans. Whenever we establish a partnership, we tend to compare and contrast others outside of the

partnership in a manner that differentiates between “them” and “us.” This human behavior trait can pose challenges within the rapidly changing human services profession, where individuals who were formerly “them” or “us” may change roles and functions, posing relational challenges.

The “them” versus “us” mentality is frequently used in organizations as an expedient way to develop rapid motivation of partners to engage in actions that are designed to win over competition or “them.” A more productive approach is to develop shared sustainable goals that stretch performance and can expand the partnership’s capacity.

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Note. From *Concepts Regarding Mission and Means* by Todd Sosna, Ph.D., 1999.

# Internal and External Partners

Child welfare services, like any organization, has partners. These partners may be the children, parents and family members who are the direct recipients of services or any other organization or person who comes in contact with the organization. A broad definition of “partner” in child welfare services includes any user of the agency’s products and services. This means that your partners may work with you in your organization as well as with partners from outside the organization.

External partners are professionals, family members and community members who have contact with or receive services from your agency. Internal partners are professionals within your agency who depend upon your work or services to assist them in getting their own work done. These internal partners come from all levels of your organization, including the county board of supervisors and the administrative officer. When we are in the position of providing support in the form of “backroom” tasks, we are providing indirect, yet critical, contributions that affect the quality of service of the overall agency.

When considering the concept of internal partners, recognize that you are an internal partner as well within your organization and the process of providing service is reciprocal.

# Defining Our Partners Worksheet

## Instructions

Identify the internal and external partners that you work with in your agency and the community. Choose at least one internal partner and one external partner and create statements that these partners might say about you.

**Our internal partners are:**

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**Our external partners are:**

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**Our selected internal partner might say about us:**

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**Our selected external partner might say about us:**

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# Roles and Responsibilities of Your Partners

Building effective partnerships in human services depends upon mutual understanding of the goals, roles, responsibilities, methods of intervention, scope of authority, deadlines, and information sharing requirements between workers. While we work side by side with colleagues in the same or different programs within our larger agency and interact with agency professionals and the community on a daily basis, we may not have a clear understanding of how these programs and roles interact.

Agency/Program	Role	Responsibility
Child Welfare Services	Protection	Safety/Permanence for Children
Units of Responsibility		Special Issues/Challenges
Hotline-Centralized Intake	Workers receive document, screen and determine response time of child abuse reports.	Must maintain availability for incoming calls and faxes regarding child abuse reports, timely and accurate data entry of report information into CWS/CMS, background checks of historical and demographic information, screening and response determination, triaging emergencies with Emergency Response and other units.
Emergency Response/Investigations	Workers investigate child abuse reports and provide emergency services to reduce risk of further abuse and neglect.	Investigates within strict and often brief timeframes; must be available to respond immediately; engages in complex and high-risk

		decision making and crisis intervention; puts services and documentation in place within very limited time frames.
Voluntary Services	Workers provide voluntary services to families who are at risk of abusing or neglecting children in order to prevent formal court action.	Must make frequent contact with clients in order to monitor safety and provide services; coordinates multiple case plan activities and services that may require lots of support; must be able to work cooperatively with clients in an informal alliance.
Court Intake	Workers write, file and present petitions and reports to commence Juvenile Court action on behalf of abused and neglected children.	Must prepare and file complex reports and petitions on very short timeframes, coordinates short term services and placements for children prior to disposition; requests for assistance may be sudden and high priority, must interact with various parties within the court; works in an extremely adversarial setting.
Ongoing/Placement	Workers provide court-ordered services to children and families. Children may be in out-of-home care or require formal in-home supervision. Children and parents may be working toward	Must make frequent contact with clients in order to monitor safety and provide services; coordinates multiple case plan activities and services that may require lots of support; must write and file progress

	reunification or workers may be support a child's progress toward alternative permanence.	reports to the court on a periodic basis well in advance of court hearing. May experience stress related to placement disruptions.
Adoptions/Concurrent Planning	Workers support the placement needs of children while processing complex paperwork to finalize adoptions. Workers engage in planning for permanency during early stages of the case.	Must make frequent contact with clients in order to monitor safety and provide services; coordinates multiple case plan activities and services that may require lots of support; must write and file progress reports to the court on a periodic basis well in advance of court hearing. Workers frequently must deal with grief and loss in children and parents, work with adoptive families to adjust and transition to permanency. Workers must prepare in-depth and comprehensive assessment of potential adoptions and complete detailed court and state paperwork.
Licensing/Relative Approvals	Workers assess the health, safety and appropriateness of relative and non-relative foster home, complete paperwork and processes for licensing foster homes, investigate complaints in foster homes.	Workers focus on the placement home, rather than on the child. Workers must work in coordination with child welfare workers in completing their work. Workers have no role in the actual placement of the child in the home.



Placement Resource Unit	Workers identify potential placements for children in care and assess the appropriateness of these placements in meeting the needs of the child.	Workers must work under strict timeframes when dealing with placement disruption. Workers produce large packets of information that need reproduction and transmittal. Workers must coordinate with large numbers of professionals outside the agency.
<b>Child Welfare Services Work Classifications</b>	Clerical Support	Telephone reception, data entry, photocopying, errands, forms, etc.
	Legal Clerk	Formatting and editing court documents for filing.
	Foster Care Eligibility	Processes eligibility for foster care.
	Community Services Aides	Provides support functions for social worker such as transporting clients, supervising visitation, translating and errands.
	Social Workers (various levels)	Assigned to coordinate case management and investigations activities.
	Supervisors	Oversee the work of various classifications of staff as organized into independent units. Performance evaluation of staff and assigning and managing workflow.

	Managers	Regional and program development and oversight, personnel and staffing issues, budget development and monitoring, building community relationships.
	Executive Managers	Coordinating programs within the agency, budget and staff planning, interpretation and implementation of emerging regulatory changes.
<b>Other Social Services Agency Programs</b>		
<b>CalWORKS Eligibility</b>	Cash assistance for needy families.	Workers must abide by strict regulations for issuing funds.
<b>Medi-Cal</b>	Health and dental coverage for needy families.	Workers must abide by strict regulations for determining eligibility.
<b>CalFresh</b>	Benefits for obtaining sufficient food.	Workers must abide by strict regulations for determining eligibility.
<b>General Relief</b>	Cash assistance for needy individuals without children.	Workers must abide by strict regulations for determining eligibility. Clients are frequently difficult to serve due to multiple disabilities.
<b>Adult Protective Services</b>	Investigate allegations of elder abuse and neglect. Provide case management services	Workers must obtain client permission to intervene. Limited resources are available to assist the

	for elderly.	elderly.
<b>In-Home Supportive Services</b>	Determines eligibility for funding services provided in the home for the disabled.	Workers frequently caught in the middle between providers and disabled clients.
<b>Probation</b>	<b>Correction</b>	<b>Community Safety and Law and Order</b>
Adult Programs Juvenile Programs Probation Officers Clerical Juvenile Institutions staff	Supervises adults and children who have been convicted of community offenses.	Community safety focus differs significantly from the protection focus of child welfare services.
<b>Public Health</b>	<b>Treatment (medical)</b>	<b>Health</b>
PHNs for Foster Care Public Health Nurses Community Health Clinics Doctors Nurses Clerical Fiscal	Health education, treatment of disease posing a threat to the community, assuring health needs of children, providing indigent medical care.	Focus on maintaining health and treating medical issues may pose conflicts with child welfare services minimum sufficient level of care standard for intervention.
<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>Treatment (psychological)</b>	<b>Clear Thinking and Functioning</b>
Adult Services Children's Services  Clerical Psychologists Psychiatrists Counselors -- licensed Case Managers Patient Rights Advocates Fiscal Therapeutic Behavioral Services	Treatment of children and adults for defined mental health condition; case management for mentally ill individuals needs support in the community; medication of mentally ill clients meeting eligibility criteria; coordination and funding of hospital stays for mentally ill	Strict confidentiality and privacy laws impact the ability to share information.  Lack of sufficient resources and services to meet the needs of the target population often results in delays in obtaining services.

individuals.

**Substance Abuse Services**

Adult Services  
Juvenile Services

Community-based  
In-patient, residential

**Treatment (Abuse and Addiction)**

Treatment and education regarding abuse and addiction of alcohol and drugs.

Drug and alcohol testing.

**Clear Thinking**

Strict confidentiality and privacy laws impact the ability to share information.

**Housing Authority**

Federal  
State

**Subsidy**

Provides funding for needy families to obtain housing.

**Housing**

Limited resources and large demand for housing assistance results in frustration due to long wait for resources and complicated bureaucratic processes.

**Juvenile Court**

Judge/Commissioner  
Clerks  
Court Reporter  
Attorneys  
Court-Appointed Special Advocates

**Judicial Decision Making**

Provides a setting for families and agencies to have issues related to child and community safety decided based upon legal information and processes.

**Protection of Children and the Community**

Due to overwhelming paperwork, clerks may require special handling of reports and other documents.

Adversarial setting results in frequent conflict and disagreement.

CASA workers are volunteers.

**Foster Parents and Kin Care Providers**

**Out of Home Care**

**Direct care and supervision of children.**

	Provides care and supervision for children removed from parent custody, either temporarily or on a long-term basis, under agency supervision.	<p>Care providers face difficult behaviors and emotions in abused and neglected children and require a high level of support.</p> <p>Care providers are frequently caring for more than one child and may require support in coordinating care needs.</p> <p>Care providers may have challenging relationships with the agency and with the parents of the children they care that require special coordination and support.</p>
<b>Group Home Staff</b>	<b>Out of Home Care</b>	<b>Direct care, treatment and supervision of children with special behavioral needs.</b>
	Provides care and supervision for children with special behavioral needs who are removed from parent custody, either temporarily or on a long-term basis, under agency supervision.	<p>Group homes may be geographically located far from the agency.</p> <p>Placement disruptions and notification of need to remove children from facilities can provoke case management crisis.</p>
<b>Contract Service Providers</b>	<b>Service Delivery</b>	<b>Direct treatment of issues related to child welfare services intervention.</b>
	Counseling, parenting education, household teaching, childcare and other services for	Demand for services frequently outpaces the

	families at risk.	resources available.
		Funding coordination and authorization may result in partnership conflict.
<b>Homeless Services</b>	<b>Subsidy/Housing</b>	<b>Temporary Housing for Homeless</b>
Community-Based Non-Profit	Provides short-term housing via shelter or hotel subsidy for needy families. Provides support for acquiring permanent housing.	Demand for services frequently outpaces the resources available.
<b>Domestic Violence Shelter services</b>	<b>Sanctuary/Protection</b>	<b>Protection of Women and Children from Family Violence</b>
	Provides short-term safe house shelter for women and children fleeing family violence. Counseling and educational support as well as practical support for long-term protection.	Demand for services frequently outpaces the resources available.
		Clients are often ambivalent about accessing services.
<b>Schools</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Administration of free and appropriate education for all children.</b>
	Provides age- and need-appropriate instruction for children.	Tolerance of challenging behaviors in the learning environment is limited.
		Limited resources for special education can make accessing special education services difficult.
<b>Regional Centers</b>	<b>Facilitation</b>	<b>Supporting the</b>

Regional Center staff provide services and support for individuals with eligible developmental disabilities.

**functioning of children and adults with developmental disabilities.**

Client services are voluntary and some clients may not cooperate with services.

High caseloads and few resources make worker contact and coordination challenging.

# Tips for Partnering

When engaging in partnership, your best result comes after taking personal responsibility for the success of the partnership. Additionally, effective partnerships require you to assume that your partners are trying as hard as you are, care as much as you do, are as competent as you are, and believe that joint efforts result in effective solutions. Many disagreements and conflicts can be avoided by better understanding the world of your co-worker.

Starting with these foundations of assuming positive intent, consider the following tips for partnering in different roles within your workplace.

## **Partnering with co-workers in different roles and classifications**

- Make an effort to understand how your work impacts and interacts with the work of other staff in your unit or program.
- Develop clear processes for communication regarding coordinating tasks. Develop a support network within your group for emergencies.
- Learn to be as responsive to the partner service needs of your co-workers as you are with clients and the community.
- Use common workplace courtesies with your program co-workers.
- Spend time discussing your group's shared goals and desired outcomes and how each staff member can support each other in these efforts.
- Educate yourself about the work that others in your group do and consider ways that you can provide mutual support in completing assigned tasks.
- Treat all staff members with respect and dignity as professionals and discourage isolation or elitism by classification or other differences. These behaviors create the chronic divisions and turf issues we are all familiar with in public agencies.



## **Partnering with colleagues in different programs within the agency**

- Make the effort to educate these colleagues about the work you do and your program.
- Learn about the programs and services offered within your agency that may be a resource for the clients you work with.
- Understand the parameters of information sharing and confidentiality based upon program differences.
- Go out of your way to be collaborative and inclusive, especially during employee functions and new program planning.
- Look for shared goals and purpose with regard to the families you are working with. Encourage family members to inform all assigned workers within your agency of the different programs they are involved with.
- Understand the deadlines, requirements and limits of authority that your colleagues face in their work. Know when pressing deadlines might interfere with effective communication and time your contacts and requests accordingly.

## **Partnering with workers in different agencies**

- Make an effort to educate other professionals about your role, your agency's mission and methods of intervention.
- Attend to developing a structure for working together that assures effective communication about service coordination, clarifying roles, responsibilities and problem solving methods.
- Honor the deadlines and commitments you make with workers in other agencies.
- When conflict or disagreement occurs, discuss how differences in agency mission, intervention and authority may be foundational to the disagreement. Discuss how you will handle disagreements and impasses between agencies.
- Know the parameters of confidentiality and information sharing with each agency you work with.

## **Partnering with community members**

- Model responsible and professional behavior on behalf of your agency.
- Be responsive to contacts from the community, foster parents, and other partners. Follow through on commitments you make.
- Take every opportunity to share with community members information about the work your agency does and the parameters of your agency's authority to act.
- Always adopt a "wheel of response" attitude: when community members make requests not appropriate for your agency and role, offer suggestions that will assist them in getting their needs met rather than just saying "no."

# Developing Trust with Partners

Christopher M. Avery argues that trust is more a product of your own ability to respond to others rather than some behavioral trait in the other person. Learning to trust at the appropriate level, depending on your track record with the other individual, occurs after efforts are made to test the behaviors and intentions of the other person at increasing levels of trust.

When you work as a partner or as part of a team, you engage in a “power with” rather than “power over” attitude. Building trust in a team or partnership is the process of successfully conveying a set of messages among partners that focuses the group on its collective task, aligns the group’s purpose according to individual interests, establishes a code of behavioral conduct, creates processes for setting goals, resolving conflict and creating energy in the group and that honors each individual and their differences.

Partnership trust involves lending your consent to the group’s direction and purpose and an expectation that you and other partners will speak up when you disagree.

In partnerships, establishing trust is necessary so that all members of the integrated team can rely on the commitment of the other to follow through. Also, taking risks by contributing new ideas or building new skills involves knowing you have the respect and support of your colleagues.

Trust is a two-way process that builds gradually over time. It can be erased with one negative incident. Treat your partners with respect and courtesy and demonstrate your appreciation for their time, knowledge, ideas and feelings. Learn to share regarding your self and your perspective, values and beliefs and listen to the experience of others.

Development of trust within a partnership builds creativity and can lead a partnership to high performance and productivity.

# Finding a Common Ground: Focusing on Child and Family Outcomes

Over the course of child welfare services history and policy evolution, legislative and regulatory direction has been shaped by the lessons learned regarding the impact of our actions on the best interests of children.

In 1998, the California Department of Social Services published *Best Practice Guidelines for Assessing Families and Children in Child Welfare Services*. The guidelines focused on principles of a strength-based, family-centered practice organized into four areas: assessment, planning, re-evaluation and permanency.

Regardless of our mission and intervention strategy, the encompassing goal of all partners within the child welfare setting is to support safe, stable permanent homes for children. As partners, we value safety and health for children, the ability to reside with family, learning in school or working, abiding the law and connected with supportive relationships with others.

Principles involving the assessment and service planning and action include:

- Family-professional partnership in assessment and planning
- Family decision making
- Strengths-based
- Unique needs-driven
- Community-based collaboration
- Training
- System supported
- Culturally relevant

When we engage in our professional roles and responsibilities in a manner that promotes the best outcome for children and families, agency conflicts and turf issues often easily dissolve.

# Tips for Overcoming Rifts, Turf Battles and Conflicts

- Keep your commitment, agreements and activities clearly defined.
- Make communication a priority. Communicate with all team members regularly. Address communication one relationship at a time.
- Spend time getting to know and understand your partner. Schedule time to share information about your work and your values.
- Promote positive teamwork with new members.
- Speak up regarding your interests, motivations and expectations and listen purposefully about these issues in others.
- Address hidden agendas and turf issues directly. Encourage discussion and negotiation based upon needs and interests.
- Develop clear roles for members and leaders as well as structures for decision making and problem solving.

## **Rifts, Turf Wars and Other Flare-Ups**

### **Learning Team Worksheet**

**Directions:** As a learning team, develop a list of common rifts, turf wars and other conflicts among partners in the multi-disciplinary setting of Child Welfare Services and the effect on the families served.

**Identify common rifts, turf wars and other conflicts among Child Welfare partners:**

**List the effects these conflicts have on the families we serve:**

# Levels of Agreement

The words *agreement*, *compromise*, *consensus* and *alignment* are frequently used interchangeably but in reality, they have important distinctions in meaning that can be applied to interpersonal interactions in the work place.

## Agreement

*Agreement* is defined as “to be in harmony of opinion,” to be of the same opinion and acting together without conflict or inconsistency of position.

## Consensus

*Consensus* means reaching “general” agreement in position that allows each person to support the decision or opinion without substantial losses to their position.

## Compromise

*Compromise* is defined as a settlement in which each side gives up some demands or makes concessions or something midway between two positions.

## Alignment

*Alignment* is defined by bringing all parties into proper coordination and into close cooperation, to fall in line in a coordinated fashion.

In the diverse and complicated environment of a public agency, agreement is a difficult goal to achieve. Efforts to focus on achieving consensus, compromise or alignment are more realistic goals, as they allow for respect for individual differences, but promote a team direction without overt or covert dissention and sabotage.

# The Nature of Human Conflict

Considerable time has been spent studying the impact of values, beliefs, and interpersonal styles in interpersonal dynamics.

- Values and Beliefs
- Roles
- Responsibilities and Tasks
- Resources

Consider a recent conflict you engaged in within your work environment. Which category listed above was your conflict focused on?

Our tendency is to focus our disagreements on categories of use and allocation of resources and tasks within the workplace rather than on roles, values and beliefs.

Frequently, however, disagreements arise as a result of the beliefs and values regarding an issue and the perspective each person brings to the disagreement as a result of his or her role.

In addition, individuals with different interpersonal styles engage in conflict with varying behaviors that may break down communication with someone who possesses a different style.

Self- and other-awareness of personal style and intention focus on establishing consensus and alignment of values, beliefs and goals will quickly resolve conflict in a productive manner.

Conflict within relationships should be viewed as an opportunity to learn. Embrace and recognize and thoroughly explore disagreement. Once fully examined, conflict will likely disappear.

*Conflict itself is neither good nor bad . . . What matters about conflict, in the end, is how we respond to it"*

*The Heart of Conflict*  
by Brian Muldoon



# Developing Alignment and Consensus

Work toward adopting a common focus so that each person sees good reasons to work together. Focus on the interests of each person participating rather than subordinating interests.

Consensus involves a process in which participants offer their sincere consent to move forward with a plan of action. Without consensus, individual team members may act independently to undermine or sabotage the adopted plan of action.

## Steps for developing alignment and consensus

- Make sure that the issues of conflict are clearly defined so that individuals engaged in debate are not discussing different topics. Be sure to attend to both process and content of the discussion.
- Take the time to hear each individual's position, including their interests, feelings, needs and "bottom line."
- Seek comments, ideas and feedback from all stakeholders.
- Engage in a process in which each participant commits to a mutual effort to reach alignment in a manner that attends to each participant's needs.
- Brainstorm and list options for resolution without applying judgments or criticisms.
- Analyze options for areas of agreement and areas of disagreement and how these areas can contribute to alignment.
- Develop a plan with actions and responsible parties clearly stated.
- Ask the question, "How can we alter this plan so that it works for you?" and then listen.

# Offering and Receiving Feedback

Feedback is distinguished from criticism in terms of its focus. Criticism, even well meaning and constructive, labels the receiver as wrong or bad. Feedback involves highlighting the impacts or consequences of the receiver's actions in a truthful, compassionate and constructive way.

## Skills for receiving feedback

- Choose to set aside the inner voice that jumps up and sings in your inner ear: "See I told you that you are wrong, incompetent, bad, etc." while you listen carefully to the feedback.
- Suspend your judgment about whether the feedback is right or wrong until you have some time to process and think about it.
- Take active role in the conversation so that you make sure you understand the feedback being given.
- Express your appreciation for the person taking the time to share their thoughts with you.

## Skills for offering feedback

- Start by telling the recipient why you are offering feedback.
- Be specific in describing your observations and the consequences you see in the actions of the person, not their character.
- Describe and own your reactions to the behavior and adopt a "we" approach to the feedback.
- Stay focused on the present. Leave old resentments and baggage out of the conversation.
- Give the listener time to clarify and respond.
- Be specific with suggestions for change.
- Make sure and affirm your respect for and value of the person.

# Dealing with Strong Emotions in Clients and Co-Workers

Understand that strong emotions are a normal part of life.

According Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen in “Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most,” emotional conversations and disagreements involve three conversations: What Happened, What Are We Feeling and What Does This Say about Our Competency, Worth and Lovability?

All stories about what happened are both true and false in that the information available to us, what we observe from available information, our implicit rules that govern our interpretations and our conclusions (based upon self-interests) vary.

Expression of feelings is critical in problem solving because unexpressed feelings can expose themselves suddenly or gradually in our interactions and makes it difficult for us to listen. Don't vent your feelings, describe them to the other person.

Start with assurances about the other person's identity and value and then describe the purpose of your discussion. Be specific, factual, keep flexible, make sure your face reflects your feelings, and maintain eye contact.

## **Tips for receiving strong emotions**

- Listen for what the person needs and determine how you can provide it. Understand the underlying need or interest that is producing the emotion. Let the speaker “vent;” allow them to exhaust their emotion.
- Restate the problem so that both you and the caller are assured of understanding.
- Put yourself in the other person's position and adopt their perspective in weighing costs and benefits of a situation.
- Never be rude and don't take expression of emotion personally. Stay calm and be authentic. Apologize and offer empathy.
- Consider complaints as a strength, be grateful for the feedback and an opportunity to learn and improve.
- Offer possible solutions, describe the actions you can take, communicate the immediacy of their concern. Ask for the caller's ideas for solution.
- Describe your intentions and plan for following up.

# Dealing with Anger

## Responding to anger from others

Understand that someone who has given into their anger may say unwise and inappropriate things and may exaggerate accusations.

When anger flares, the angry person may throw in their long-standing list of resentments, complicating the conflict with other hurtful content.

Anger frequently involves failure to attend to an unmet need or violation of a prior wound.

### When faced with someone's inappropriate anger

- Use calm tone, slow words and de-escalating body language.
- Absorb the hostile energy of the person by agreeing with them about something they are saying.
- Redirect the energy back on to the angry person by asking for their solution to their concerns.
- Refocus the energy by acknowledging the attack and then focusing on the subject of discussion.

### How to manage your own anger

- Assume responsibility for your anger and your capacity to control it.
- Know what you are angry about and identify the underlying unmet need.
- Make sure you know all sides of a story before reacting.
- Think about who is best to address your anger with – this is usually the one who sparks your emotion, but sometimes a trusted co-worker or supervisor.
- Describe your concerns objectively and focus on the consequences of the actions rather than using personal attacks.
- Propose a solution for how the individual could behave differently to resolve your concern.
- Following the interaction, conduct a critical reflection of your behavior.

# Collaboration

## What is collaboration?

Collaboration is the development of organizational or inter-organizational structures where resources, power and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished separately.

## Compete or cooperate?

Collaboration is a process of working together on a mutually beneficial undertaking, sometimes in partnership with entities previously seen as “the enemy” or at odds with fundamental intervention strategy, mission or authority.

## Why choose collaboration?

- Shared expertise and resources results in the creation of “something new and better.”
- Allows agencies to revise the way that people and institutes think, behave and use resources to affect change.
- It allows the opportunity to provide comprehensive and full range of services.
- It’s proactive and preventative.
- Collaboration involves family partnership and is more family centered.
- Collaboration supports integrated, flexible and outcomes-oriented services.

## Assessing the need for collaboration

- How are we doing on our own?
- Do we need to change?
- What is the clearly defined issue or problem that collaboration addresses?
- What are the shared outcomes envisioned?

## Questions to ponder when commencing a collaboration

- What do we believe about the families we work with? What are our common values?
- Who are our partners? How are they the same and how are they different from our own agency?
- What are our current realities inside and outside of our own agency? How are we doing on our own?
- What are our expected goals and outcomes?
- What is our plan to move forward?

- Are we ready to make a change?

## **Benefits of creating and sustaining cooperative goals**

- The families we serve receive coordinated services and a consistent message from partnering organizations.
- Shared information and resources improve service delivery.
- More efficient and effective use of limited resources.
- Compatible service goals promote trust and credibility of partnering agencies.
- Two heads are better than one: creative solutions derived from multi-agency attention to common goal.
- Reduces isolation of agency staff in working with high-risk families.
- Collaborative services can be more comprehensive and share common access for families.
- Collaborating around families promotes family partnership and empowerment.
- Common intake, assessment, financial determination and services planning is economical and comprehensive.
- Multi-agency teams have the capacity to respond quickly to family needs.

# Personal and Professional Action Plan



Make notes regarding insights and possible new professional behaviors resulting from information gained in this training.

When working with my professional colleagues to develop partnerships to help families, I will remember:

- 1.
- 2.

I understand the following things about my role in developing partnerships:

- 1.
- 2.

The key concepts I learned about developing working partnerships that I can put to use in my day-to-day work include:

- 1.
- 2.

What is one way I can attend and improve relationships with colleagues?

- 1.

What do I feel is the biggest challenge in establishing trust with child welfare partners?