Family-Centered Practice Model

Core Values, Guiding Principles

Core Values

Children should, first and foremost, be protected from abuse and neglect. There is an intrinsic value and human worth in every child and family. Children should live with their families, and when that cannot be achieved through supports and services, should live near their home, maintaining family connections, and in particular, sibling relationships, while also preserving their cultural heritage. A child’s home should be safe, stable and permanent. A child should achieve success in school and their medical, emotional, behavioral, developmental and educational needs must be met. Families and individual members are most likely to resolve issues of concern by involving them in the change process and building on their strengths.

Guiding Principles

- Child safety must always be promoted while actively assisting the preservation of families and family connections.
- The first and greatest investment of public resources should be made in the care and treatment of children in their own homes and communities.
- Every child deserves to live in a family which provides basic safety, nurturing and a commitment to permanent caretaking.
- The cultural and ethnic roots of the child/family are a valuable part of its identity. In order to understand and communicate with the child/family, cultural sensitivity must be a primary feature of service delivery.
- Children’s need for safe and permanent family caretaking can be met by providing appropriate and adequate resources in a timely and effective manner.
- Our approach to working with children and families should be child-centered and family focused with the needs of the child and family dictating the types and mix of services provided.
- Services to children and families shall be individualized based on their unique strengths and needs and should be delivered pursuant to an individualized plan, constructed with the family and their team.
- Services developed through the individualized teaming and planning process should be delivered with sufficient intensity to address presenting and underlying needs and should be well-coordinated.
- Practice is always local: Our work with children and families should be community based, and the focus of services as well as child welfare system management and decision-making responsibility, should rest at the community level.
- Family-centered approaches facilitate planned, appropriate placement when necessary, based on sound information about the needs of the child.
- Family-centered services offer the best hope of breaking the cycle of hopelessness and helplessness that engulfs many families. Services should be supported and encouraged to access services.
- Intervention into the life of children and families should ideally offer as much service as necessary to achieve intended goals, and no more.
- The rights to privacy and confidentiality must be treated with respect when assisting children and families.

Florida Department of Children and Families
Family-Centered Practice Model for Child Protection and Child Welfare Services

Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a high level definition of family-centered practice, its values and principles and to provide descriptive information to assist investigators, caseworkers, and supervisors implement these practices with the children and families they serve. Pages 2 and 3 of the document provide content to help front line staff integrate family-centered approaches into their routine practice with children and families. It is important for managers and front line staff to assess their agencies and their individual work with children and families to determine how this way of work can be integrated or improved at the local level.

Section 39.001, Florida Statutes, provides authority and rationale for implementing family-centered practice as described in this paper.

Family-centered practice is a way of working with families in Florida’s child welfare system across service systems to enhance their capacity to care for and protect their children. It focuses on the needs and welfare of children within the context of their families and communities. Family-centered practice recognizes the strengths of family relationships and builds on these strengths to achieve optimal outcomes.

- Family-centered practices focus on the family as a whole, and not just the individual child, and sees the family in the context of their own culture, networks and community. Families are seen as partners in the change process, helping to define problems and identifying solutions through the strengths in their own stories.
- Children and their families are actively engaged and involved in the assessment, planning, delivery and coordination of services when it is safe and in the best interest of the child for his/her family to do so.

In family-centered practice, staff strive to be understanding of differing cultures and ensure that services provided to children and families are respectful of, and compatible with, their cultural strengths and needs. Culturally competent agencies and practitioners are able to view a family’s strengths and needs within a cultural context and integrate culturally relevant information in helping the family develop a meaningful plan of action. Cultural competence is a skill learned by the individual and the organization, fostered by a commitment to provide services that are culturally appropriate and that make a positive difference for children and families.

Local strategies for practice activities should include but not be limited to advocating for improved conditions for families, supporting them, stabilizing those in crisis, reunitifying those who are separated, building new families, and connecting families to the resources that will sustain them in the future.

Children and their families must be encouraged and supported to access services. The Department or sub-contracted community based care providers must develop and implement strategies to promote the utilization of formal and informal services to children and families. Strategies and services must support children safely in their homes with their families. The child, when age appropriate and the family must be actively involved as team members in the case planning process.
Family-centered assessment: Assessment forms the foundation of effective practice with children and families. Family-centered assessment focuses on the whole family, values family participation and experience, and respects the family’s culture and ethnicity. Family-centered assessment helps families identify their strengths, needs, and resources and develop a service plan that assists them in achieving and maintaining safety, permanency, and well-being. There are many phases and types of family-centered assessment, including screening and initial assessment, safety and risk assessment, and comprehensive family assessment. Assessment in child welfare is intended to provide a big-picture understanding of families’ strengths and underlying needs and should be across the service team. Assessment is always ongoing.

Family-centered case planning: Family-centered case planning ensures the involvement and participation of family and other needed team members in all aspects of case planning, so services are tailored to best address the family’s needs and strengths. It includes the family members’ recommendations regarding the types of services that will be most helpful to them, timelines for achieving the plan, and expected outcomes for the child and family. Case planning requires frequent updates based on the caseworker and family’s assessment of progress toward goals. Case plans should be well thought out, focused on outcomes, and offer logical strategies, that if implemented with adequate intensity, will drive the change process towards achieving outcomes for children and families. Case plans may include formal services, such as counseling, parenting classes or service for substance abuse or mental health issues. Case planning may also include assisting families with meeting practical needs, such as assisting the family with needs such as food, housing, transportation, employment, income support, providing information on child development, and helping build and daily living skills.

Family-centered case management and monitoring and modifying service delivery: Through frequent, planned contact, the family-centered practitioner assists the family in achieving the goals and objectives of the service plan. This includes helping families access a range of supports and services and creating opportunities for them to learn and practice new skills. Family-centered case management includes communication and planning with multiple service systems to ensure provision of appropriate services and assess service effectiveness and client progress. Families are encouraged to use their skills to access resources, fully participate in services, and evaluate their progress toward desired goals and outcomes. When interventions are not working, the case manager, working in collaboration with the team, must adjust strategies and services in order to continue to achieve the family and child’s goals.

Working with community resources: Family-centered practitioners view all family members, including maternal and paternal relatives, fictive kin, and informal helpers, as important resources and sources of support for the family. They are skilled in engaging informal community resources by involving them, as appropriate, in family assessment and case planning and in providing ongoing support to families before, during, and after services are ended by the formal child welfare agency and other community agencies. Elements of effective service planning with families include engaging families and youth; providing direct assistance with challenges the family is facing, including counseling, parent coaching, and modeling; and continuing to assess with the family their strengths, needs, and progress.

Advocating for families: Caseworkers advocate for services for individual families and help families learn to advocate for themselves and negotiate with service systems to obtain needed help. Caseworkers can also play a prominent role in empowering and advocating for families to become independent members of the community. Family advocacy focuses on the principles of family development, communication skills for workers, and promoting the participation of community residents and families in the design of services.

In summary, these core practice functions provide a foundational framework for child welfare practice. Family-centered practice is the result of this core welfare professionals completing their case activities associated with these core practice functions in accordance with, and guided by, the values, goals and principles of the family-centered model of practice.