

**CHESTERFIELD/COLONIAL HEIGHTS
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT GUIDANCE
STANDARDS FOR PRACTICE
For all Agencies**

Defining Family Engagement

Family engagement is the foundation of good casework practice that promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families. Family engagement is a family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes.

It is founded on the principle of communicating openly and honestly with families in a way that supports disclosure of culture, family dynamics, and personal experiences in order to meet the individual needs of every family and every child. Engagement goes beyond simple involvement by “motivating and empowering families to recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in working toward change” (Steib, 2004).

Benefits of Family Engagement

Key to building a productive caseworker-family relationship, family engagement is the foundation from which change occurs. It is important throughout the life of a child welfare case—from screening and assessment; through case planning and decision-making; to service delivery, case reviews, and ultimately case closure. To build on a family’s resources and kinship connections, family engagement activities focus not only on the immediate family but also on the active involvement of parents, extended family, and the family’s natural support systems.

- Positive relationships with families will increase chances for successful interventions
- Families are more likely to be invested and involved in service planning when included in the decision making process
- The team approach with families increases support and service options for children
- Partnering with families increases the quality of services through open and regular communication.
- Families become stronger when involved in strength based decision making processes which can ultimately benefit their children.

What does “Family Engagement practice” look like?

Meaningful family engagement would mean families receiving services from any community agency (or contract provider) were asked the following questions and would answer yes to the following:

Say “Yes!”

- Does your worker treat your family with respect?
- Is your worker accessible to you and/or return phone calls in a timely manner?
- Does your worker meet with your family in a timely manner and flexible to the family’s schedule?
- Does your worker assist your family if there were child care needs conflicting with meetings?
- Does your worker assist your family if there are transportation needs?
- Does your worker collaborate with you to identify your family strengths and needs?
- Does your worker assist with actively seeking out other family members and/or people for support?
- Does your worker take time to identify individuals who are part of the family with you?
- Did the worker make every effort to contact identified individuals to participate with the service plan?
- Do you feel like you can trust your worker?
- Do you think your worker actively seeks out a positive relationship with your family?

Being a Family Engaged Community

There are many ways we can be a Family Engaged Community, we all have a part to play in this!

Leadership:

- Adopt Family Engagement Policy and Procedures that establishes clear expectations for family centered and strength approach values and philosophy that promote a positive organizational culture through a shared commitment across all agencies.
- Support agencies in their efforts for family engagement practices.
- Discover ways that family engagement activities can be measured through agency outcomes.

Supervisors:

- Provide guidance and opportunities for training/coaching on family engagements skills and best practices for continuous improvement for case workers.
- Celebrate success and learn from mistakes through ongoing feedback regarding staff performance in family engagement.
- Promote the shared values and philosophy in supervision.
- Listen to and support case workers daily.

Case workers:

- Have clear, open, honest, and respectful communication with families and other community partners.
- Determine how to be flexible and make exceptions if needed to help a family.
 - If talking on the phone is a challenge due to scheduling, then make an appointment with the family to take the phone call at a set time.
 - If allowed, use email to communicate
- Be aware and assess cultural differences to prevent service barriers for families.
- Have a positive customer friendly attitude, ask questions like “How can I help?” and “Is there any thing else I can assist you with today?”
 - You may not be able to provide the family with answers to all of their questions or concerns, but you can try to assist them information and resources that are accessible to you.
 - Remember “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” ~ Benjamin Franklin
 - Ask the extra questions to help; do not be afraid to go the extra mile despite what your agency’s mandates- it well worth it in the end results.
- Commit to family centered practice though actively involving families in all aspects of the service planning (development to completion).
 - Use strength based approach/motivational interviewing techniques when working with families
 - Make the service plan individualized, creative and unique to the families’ strengths and needs.
 - Consider religious/spiritual/cultural influences and connections
 - Ask families to start the service planning with their thoughts and ideas
 - Develop the service plan with the family during your meeting – not alone in your office.
 - Meet with the family when and where it suitable for them such as their work’s break room.
 - Consider the environment of meetings; it is inviting, comfortable, and private?
 - Attend to younger children’s needs to encourage parents’ participation, such as coloring books, toys, snacks, etc.
 - Include families in decision making processes (from small to larger decisions).
 - Act like you really want to establish a positive relationship and that you want to help.
 - Involve all individuals in services planning that the family identifies as family and supports.
 - Kevin Campbell’s Connect gram technique
 - Genogram/ Eco-gram

- Pretend that you are planning a family reunion-ask the family who they would invite.
 - Take note of all meetings (school, court, therapy, etc) that families are requested/required to attend and actively work to streamline meetings to improve efficiency.
- Utilize Team Decision Meetings (TDM) as a resource.
- Assure (by asking the questions) that families' basic and immediate needs are being met (food, shelter, safety, transportation, health, child care, etc) if not, then assist family with proper linkages.
 - Look up a number and make the call with the family.
 - Follow up with family a week or so afterwards to check in and offer any additional assistance

SAMPLE FAMJLY CENTERD QUESTJONS

How long have you lived in your home? / How do you like it? / What is your favorite thing about your home?

Like your neighborhood? / Do you feel safe?

How are your neighbors? / Do you socialize with them?

Which neighbor would you trust the most to look after your home if you are away?

What do you do (or used to) for a living? How long have been in that position? /Do you like your work? / Who do you socialize with at work?

What are your career goals? / What accomplishment have you been recognized for at work?

How would your boss/co-workers describe you?

What is your favorite thing to cook? / Who cooks the family meals? /Tell me about typical daily family meals.

How do you take care of your health for you and your family? /Who do you see when a family member needs medical attention?

How often is that needed? How is the health insurance for the family?

What are your health goals for you /family?

What does your family do for fun together? How often does the family spend quality time together? /What is your favorite memory of a family activity?

What fun goals do you have for your family? (I.e. camping, picnic, game night, etc.)

How would your family describe you?

What culture/religion do you associate yourself with? /What active connections do you have with that group?