

ND Child Welfare Supervision

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Engagement is a word that is used freely on a daily basis within the world of social work and while many of us know that engagement is beneficial and leads to positive outcomes with families, could we give a general description of what this looks like on a daily basis? Can we talk to workers about different levels of engagement? Are we prepared to model this within our own unit? Family engagement is a philosophy, an approach to working with families that sees the family members as experts on their unique challenges and seeks to support them in developing solutions that are individualized for them. It begins with our first contact with families, how we talk to them, how we listen and includes building a relationship with them.

Family engagement means expanding on the options available to families and ensuring that families and their voices are heard throughout the process. Engagement means that we are genuine, empathetic and respectful of families and team members. We also are required to have a commitment to families, listening to what the family sees as needs as well as solutions while being knowledgeable about those that we are serving and how they best are served. The challenge is to work at this level daily, with every family, every time. Where do we fall on this continuum and what are things that we can do differently? Are you in need of resources to use with staff? Call me or email me: 701-777-6089, rachel.behm@und.edu



What does engagement look like?



Key Elements to Family Engagement

- Demonstrating respect, genuineness, and empathy for all family members, as defined by the family
- Being aware of one's own biases and prejudices about families
- Providing early outreach to parents
- Establishing the purpose of involvement with each family
- Being consistent, reliable, and honest with families
- Disclosing all information to the families
- Listening actively to each family member
- Developing an understanding of families' past experiences, current situations, concerns, strengths, and potential
- Responding quickly to families' concrete needs
- Validating the significant role of families in planning and making decisions for their children
- Thinking broadly about culture and not using it interchangeably with race or ethnicity
- Honoring the cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious or spiritual backgrounds of children, youth, and families and respecting differences in sexual orientation
- Ensuring that kinship families have a voice and are actively participating in meetings, case planning, etc
- Ongoing efforts to actively work with fathers and paternal family members to ensure that they have are involved in meetings, in making decisions and have equal access to services and resources.
- Supporting older youth in developing decision-making skills and achieving goals, as well as celebrating successes with them

Ways to ensure that our engagement with absent parents meets expectations:

- Involve both father and mother and their extended family in Children and Family Team meetings.
- Acknowledge and share the importance of both father and mother involvement in visitations:
 - Visits maintain family relationships
 - Visiting empowers and informs parents – it is here that parents are reassured about their ability to act as parents and provide at least some care for their child. It also provides parents the opportunity to practice new skills.
 - Visits enhance a child's well being: the trauma of the separation from the parents and feelings of abandonments are decreased
- Require that both parents be identified, located and contacted when the case is opened. Case records should reflect the same type of contact information for fathers as for mothers.
- Provide training to child welfare workers on different styles of communication and parenting of fathers and mothers, the importance of other involvement and skill building in working with fathers.

How does Active Engagement look different than what I am already doing???

Active Engagement

Inconsistent Engagement

Disengagement

Encourages family members to identify and select services and agencies they feel will best meet their individual needs; provide the family members with other known services and agencies that they can consider.

Provide the family with a list of agencies and services to select from and don't inquire to see if the family has any thoughts on services or providers that were not on the list.

Identify a services or provider for the family without any discussion of other options.

Family services plans, case plans and /or safety plans are developed and reviewed with the family, using the family's thoughts and ideas.

Family service plans, case plans and/or safety plans are sometimes developed and reviewed with the family, sometimes the family is asked about their own ideas.

Family service plans, case plans and/or safety plans are created without the family and no input is sought out from the family.

Discusses and documents how services meet outcomes, by the family's demonstration of acquired skills or behaviors and services providers verifying the family's use of newly learned skills.

Confirms the family's participation in services with limited discussion or documentation on how the family is applying the newly acquired skills or behaviors into everyday life.

Gauges family progress solely on the family's completion of service plan goals and fails to demonstrate how the family is applying the new skills or behaviors in everyday life.

Prepares in advance of family meetings and is knowledgeable and ready to advise families about community resources and services. Asks questions related to safety, permanency and well being so that this is fully assessed during each home visit and meeting.

Inconsistently prepares in advance of family meetings and has insufficient knowledge of appropriate services available and/or shares only some information with the family. Some questions are asked but they are superficial and do not pertain to safety, permanency and well being.

Comes to family meetings unprepared to discuss appropriate services and/or does not share information with the family. In addition, little time is spent with individual family members during home visits and information related to safety, permanency and well being are not addressed.

Adopted from Oregon's Differential Response to Family Engagement Toolkit 3/1/14

References: Family Engagement Inventory, Children's Bureau- <https://www.childwelfare.gov/EE/practice-strategies/>; Differential Response Family Engagement Toolkit NICWWI -https://ncwwi.org/files/Community_Context/Differential_Response_Family_Engagement_Toolkit.pdf; Engaging Families Making Visits Matter Field Guide, Dept of Children & Families Division of Youth and Family Services - <http://muhle.wm.maine.edu/helpdocs/PMNetworkDocs/CBAFS28Field20Guide.pdf>; Best Practice for Father –Child Visits in the Child Welfare System, 2012, National Family Preservation Network- https://www.nfpn.org/Portals/0/Documents/father_child_visits.pdf;

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