



ND Child Welfare Supervision

CHANGE AND THE ROLES PEOPLE PLAY

The past 12 months certainly has been a time of many changes in North Dakota Child Welfare. The one thing that we could count on has been that there would be change. Whether it was moving from Counties to Zones, to the new Safety Framework Practice Model, and new policies and procedures that will determine our work with families, change has been inevitable. Leading through this ongoing change can be daunting and overwhelming to say the least. When managing change, a supervisor's knowledge of their worker's relationships and experiences, can be beneficial. The more you, as the supervisor, know your workers and their reactions to change, the more effective you can be.

Some staff may have been on board right away with the changes, rolling with the punches and entering each day with some determination and optimism. Early Adopters tend to be engaged from the very beginning, easily transferring what they learned in training to their practice. Early Adopters tend to be open to new ideas and are inquisitive about how the new method or policies will impact practice. This group may need very little from you as a supervisor for ongoing guidance. Creating a safe environment within your agency for learning, knowing that accomplishing all that is at hand will take time, will encourage others to try new skills and concepts. Supervisors can create this type of environment by stating up front that perfection is not expected, focusing on the positive steps towards adaptation and what has worked well, and encouraging others to take the work at step further so that additional gains can be made.

Middle Adopters tend to take up about 30% of our workforce. For Middle Adopters, change takes a little more time. They do however respond well to success stories and will need additional time for practice or to observe someone else actively using the new skill. Opportunities to see others at work through shadowing or sharing success stories during staffing meetings can make a positive impact on Middle Adopters. Hands on engagement is the key!

Late Adopters tend to be more skeptical of change and will sometimes wait to see if the policy will really stick around before they commit. This approach can be healthy in child welfare to slow things down in a crisis but it can also slow down or stop the process of change entirely, which in the bigger scheme of things is not necessarily healthy. This group may need to know from administration that the change is not going away and that their participation is necessary. Engaging these workers to lead the group, and focusing on their ability to be leaders with their peers can create a pathway towards the transformation that you are seeking.

Resistors are those that are persistently reluctant to adopt the new practice. They may state "it will never work" or "we've tried this before". We don't want to ignore or criticize this group as they may hold information that is critical to all that are involved. Allow them to express their ambivalence. Listen to their objections with respect and together come up with methods to troubleshoot where barriers and challenges lie. Ambivalence is normal during a time of change, by linking the proposed change to the worker's existing skills and values, acceptance is more likely.

"WORKING IN CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS" By Katherine Cahn & David Berns from "Child Welfare Supervision: A Practical Guide for Supervisors, Manager and Administrators (2009)

HOW TO SUPPORT CHANGE



Approach Change with Empathy

Change brings uncertainty to many of us. We must first understand the emotions each worker is experiencing as employees' emotions will range from fear to relief, and even excitement. Change is personal and the degree of resistance is determined by how each worker expects that change's impact will have on them. Create some safe space in a staff meeting or in individual staffing to talk through the emotions and what concerns or fears they may have. Working remotely can make it difficult to gauge the emotions of others, try to connect face to face when possible.

Create a Compelling "Why" for Every Change

Communicating an honest, positive and compelling reason for the change can engage your employees from the start. By celebrating past successes in the work they have done, showing them that they are appreciated, and talking about how they have overcome obstacles in the past, will empower your employees and is the best way to gain buy-in. Use this to build confidence and encourage them to take on the next challenge. Talk about the pros and the cons of the changes, allowing employees to be heard and to uncover possible roadblocks and challenges. Talk about the outcomes we are looking for and how the changes will improve the work that is done for children and families.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

Not only is it imperative to communicate what you know and to be transparent about the changes that are to come, you must communicate in different ways due to different learning and reception styles. This is the same

for teaching and coaching, doing so in different styles to meet the needs of how the employee learns best and receives information is important. Positively approach the changes and updates in weekly emails or at weekly staffing meetings to address any confusion, answer questions, etc. Break down the changes into small steps as change takes time and small successes can create confidence. Ask early adopters what could be done to gain more buy in from others. What was their "aha" moment and how can we replicate that?

Focus On What You do Know and What You Can Do.

Clarity is the antidote for uncertainty. You don't have to know everything. Focus on what you do know, on the next steps, on what needs to happen next and proceed forward. You may not know what will happen or what the decisions tomorrow will be but you can be 100% clear on what you do know and what you can do in the moment.

Communicate Your Confidence

Your belief in your people becomes their confidence in themselves. As a leader, you are like a flight attendant during turbulence. When the plan shakes in the air, everyone looks at that flight attendant. If they're joking or reading on their phone, everyone relaxes. If they're upset, everyone panics. Your job today is to be that calm flight attendant for your team. Find successes-no matter how small-and celebrate as a group, and acknowledge achievements by others, encouraging workers to do the same. Peer support and relationships within the child welfare workforce is critical to positive job performance, job satisfaction, and retention.

Ensure that Staff are Taking Care of Themselves

Change is not always easy and making huge changes in how we determine safety for children and families may be causing a great deal of stress and anxiety for workers and supervisors alike. Creating a culture of wellness within your agency or department that encourages workers to be mindful about how they care for themselves is imperative. The surge in stress-related hormones can disrupt our sleep, appetite, and productivity. Encourage staff to take care of themselves by encouraging regular breaks, exercising, etc. For more ideas for yourself and staff: click on [self care strategies](#) and [self care resources](#).

Adapted from: Lead through Rapid Change with Calm and Clarity, Karin Hurt & David Dye Posted March 12, 2020 and "Helping Employees Deal with Change in the Workplace" posted March 12, 2019

Reminders from the CFSTC Crew:

The Children and Family Services Training Center continues to work with David Conrad through the Secondary Trauma Education, Prevention & Support Project for the Child Welfare System in North Dakota. David provides both individual/group consultation and has done a great deal of work with secondary traumatic stress training seminars focused on preparing staff for coping with the work on an ongoing basis. If you or your agency are interested in the services available through the project, please feel free to contact David by email: david.conrad@cuanschultz.edu

Upcoming Safety Framework Booster Sessions:

- [August 18th](#) "When is Enough Information Enough" (click on each date to register)
- [September 21st](#)
- [October 20th](#)
- [November 10th](#)

Do you have ideas on training that you want for Supervisors or direct line workers? Do you need more Safety Framework hard cards? Contact Rachel by email: rachel.behm@und.edu

