

Engaging Parents with Dignity: Tips for Caseworkers

Core Guiding Values

- Empathy & Respect
- Being non-judgmental (be aware of value judgments vs. safety and well-being focus)
- Family-focused
- Strengths-based

Core Practice Principles

- Urgency and awareness of child and family's sense of time
- Sensitivity to loss and trauma
- Preserving and building relationships is critical
- All parents and all families have strengths *and* need support

Practice Tips

(1) **Engaging parents means building a relationship with them** based on respect and an assessment of the family's needs that includes strengths and is focused on ensuring the child's needs are met.

Practice tip:

How would you feel if you were in the parent's position? How would you want to be treated?
Are your actions as well as your words conveying respect?

(2) **Child welfare is complex and not obvious.**

Practice tip:

Be mindful of the language you use. Encourage parents to ask questions
Explain terms, the process, various options, key players, and the expectations and consequences, as well as the timeframes

(3) **Parents are at a disadvantage in the child welfare process**—they have the most to lose, are often the only non-“professionals” around the table, and may come to be defined by the allegations.

Practice tip:

What do you know about this family and the parent before and beyond the allegations—
seek a fuller picture (ask parents about strengths, supports, concerns, and resources).

(4) **Build a network of support around every family**-- seek diverse perspectives and utilize available resources and expertise to assist your assessment and decision-making; this includes building a positive relationship between the parent and foster parent that could end up lasting a lifetime.

Practice tip:

Assessing what is in a child's best interest and how to achieve permanency is complex--
collaboration and **communication** are keys tools in this challenging work, and building a **support network around every family** will safeguard children's well-being now and in the future.



Key Strategies for Permanence with Adolescents

- Interview the teen.
- Review the entire record.
- Do an agency wide “historical search”.
- Re-evaluate relatives.
- Re-evaluate birth parents.
- Rule People *in*, instead of ruling people out.
- Work *with* the teen, not for the teen.
- Actively recruit at all times.
- Always be truthful.
- Value birth family connections.
- Make sure all support services are offered and in place.
- **Believe** in every child!
- Keep your life in balance (Stressed out workers cannot find permanent homes for kids!)
- Applaud loudly at the end of any CT Wocat training!

Ten Suggestions for Successful Collaborations

1. Buy in at all levels of each organization and take the time to nurture this.
2. Personal connections, E-mails and voicemails are efficient, but personal connections must be part of the program.
3. Feedback and early intervention when there is conflict
4. Consider having workers from different agencies physically placed with partner agencies.
5. Create a way to communicate team progress toward the ultimate goals of the collaboration (meetings, charts displayed, etc).
6. Manage Stress.
7. Hold each other accountable without pointing fingers.
8. Balance consensus with direction.
9. Anticipate problems and turn them into opportunities.
10. Have fun!! People work best when they are happy.

Please consider the many advantages of building collaborations both within and across various systems that affect children and let's all play nice!



...So that one child can change the world

CT WOCAT is a family focused not for profit organization dedicated to promoting positive change in the child welfare system to improve the lives of children.

We believe everyone can be a “world changer” through our work with children and people who help children. Our board members, benefactors, collaborative partners, consultants, staff and clients, can all make a difference through supporting children’s causes. We know, without a doubt that each of us has the power to change the world one child at a time.

CT WOCAT training and trainers all believe this, too. All training sessions offered are geared towards empowering caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, attorneys, service providers, Judges, policy makers, and others to see themselves as powerful change agents on behalf of children and families. In addition to conveying information and tools on a particular topic, all trainings also incorporate:

- Cultural competency
- Interactive exercises & multiple modes of learning (video, discussion, role play, etc.)
- Real-life, real-world experiences
- A solutions-focus
- Sharing of expertise & networking
- A comprehensive family-focused approach grounded in respect & empathy

Available Training Topics

Child Welfare Best Practices

- ❖ Basics of Casework Practice & Permanency Planning
- ❖ Essentials of Attachment, Separation, Grief, and Loss
- ❖ Family Engagement Strategies
- ❖ Family to Family: The Concept and The Practice
- ❖ Family Visiting: The Heart of Permanency
- ❖ Permanency Planning with Infants in Foster Care
- ❖ Expanded Family Networks: How to Build Them and Why It’s Important
- ❖ Preparing for Family Court
- ❖ Stress Management for Caseworkers and Child Welfare Staff
- ❖ Straight Talk with Kids: How to Speak the Truth about Difficult Issues

Permanency for Teens

- ❖ Engaging and Working with Adolescents in Foster Care
- ❖ Permanency Options for Teens
- ❖ Adoptment™ (Adoption Mentoring): Adoption and Other Options For Teens
- ❖ Adoption Therapy
- ❖ Trans-Racial Adoption

Working with Other Systems

- ❖ Navigating the Criminal Justice System
- ❖ Building Valuable Partnerships: Collaborating with Substance Abuse Treatment Providers
- ❖ Meaningful Family Visiting in Challenging Settings: Jails, Prisons, Treatment Facilities

To arrange a training or to find out more, contact CT WOCAT at 1.888.CTWOCAT (1.888.289.6228)
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Keys To Change

1. Knowledge

2. Motivation

3. Action

4. Time

