

FAMILY INTERACTION:

Making it Happen for Parents and Children

Presenters:

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The Family Interaction Initiative

Public/private partnership

Cooperative process with

The Department of Human Services

Private Providers/Foster parent support

Children's Justice

Assessing Readiness

- ▶ It was important that all parties clearly understood the Family Interaction Philosophy. Before the implementation of the Family Interaction Philosophy, each service area in Iowa completed a readiness survey, this included DHS staff, providers and Resource Parents. We felt it was very important that there was an understanding of how the service areas were anticipating this change.

People often resist change for many reasons

- ▶ Too many initiatives are happening at once
- ▶ There are negative discussions about the change
- ▶ There have been problems with past initiatives
- ▶ Experience has taught that, if you keep your head down, then you don't have to change
- ▶ This particular change is not really necessary, beneficial, or supported by top officials
- ▶ Key individuals or groups are opposed

- ▶ The readiness survey was designed to identify obstacles to change before they interfere with the success of this change effort. It also demonstrated that this initiative was important, and public and private partnership support was essential to success.

The readiness survey helped explore

- ▶ Whether people understood the Family Interaction Philosophy.
- ▶ Perceived obstacles to changing how we work with families.
- ▶ Why people supported or opposed the change.
- ▶ The level of logistical support for the Family Interaction Plan.

What did we find?

- ▶ The surveys clearly showed that there was system wide agreement that parents and children should spend as much time together as possible, across the board, regardless of job role there was 95 - 99 % agreement with our fundamental philosophical statement.

Getting started

- ▶ 6-8 practice champions were identified in each of the 8 service areas in Iowa.
- ▶ Practice Champions were DHS staff, provider staff, resource parents, GAL's, parent partners and foster parent liaison or support staff
- ▶ A training curriculum for the practice champions was developed.
- ▶ The practice champions then set up 16-20 trainings in each area to train DHS, Providers, Resource Parents, GAL's, parent's attorneys, county attorneys, anyone who would be a partner in implementing Family Interaction.

FAMILY INTERACTION PHILOSOPHY

The Family Interaction Philosophy is a different way of thinking about how children who have been removed from the home continue to have meaningful interactions with the people who care about them in the least traumatic way possible.

We believe:

Parents and Children have a right to spend time together.

GOALS OF FAMILY INTERACTION PLANNING

Family Interaction is the time to enhance:

- ▶ The parent's ability to adequately and appropriately care for and relate to the child.
- ▶ Establish or maintain a secure-based attachment with the child.

- ▶ Identify and resolve problems before the child is returned to the parent's care.
- ▶ Develop and practice new parenting behaviors and patterns of interaction.
- ▶ Maintain relationships with siblings, parents, and other individuals.

- ▶ Provide opportunity to assess caregiver needs:
 1. Parenting Behavior
 2. Community resources/referral
 3. Concrete supports
- ▶ Maintain meaningful contact consistent with the development and/or special needs of the child that will further progress toward achieving permanency for the child(ren).
- ▶ Instills hope that the parent will make the necessary changes to reunify with their children

WHAT IS FAMILY INTERACTION PLANNING?

- Family Interactions should be a planned intervention central to the reunification process.
- Family interactions should take place in the least restrictive, most homelike setting appropriate to meet the child's needs for safety and well-being.
- Family interactions should minimize the harmful effects of family separation, as well as nurture and enhance reunification.

Interactions should be guided by a collaborative family interaction plan that encourages progressive increase in parent's responsibility, is premised on the case goals and on an assessment of family functioning and of risk to the child.

Family interaction should never be used as a threat or form of discipline for the child or to control or punish the parent.

FAMILY INTERACTION PLANNING GUIDELINES

- ▶ Interactions should occur in the least restrictive and most homelike environment that allows for natural interaction and provides for the child's safety. Generally, the parental, relative, or foster family home will provide the best environment.
- ▶ When safety is an issue, a more secure setting should be chosen and a safety plan developed for the interactions to continue.
- ▶ Interactions must endeavor to involve the parents in routine activities of parenting and provide opportunities to enhance their parenting skills.
- ▶ Family interactions will be guided by the development of a family interaction plan which will outline all aspects of contact between family members.

PHASES OF FAMILY INTERACTIONS

- ▶ The phases of family interaction should be considered when developing or revising family interaction plans. If a plan is not progressing along generally accepted guidelines, the family team should be addressing why interactions are not able to move to the next phase and develop a plan to address the barriers that are present.

- ▶ **Initial Phase:**

(Generally 4-8 weeks)

Family interaction is initially supervised but should occur in the most homelike setting possible. Family interaction should focus on allowing the most natural parent-child interactions, such as cooking and eating a meal, reading stories, cleaning a room, playing a game, bath time, naptime, or bedtime routines. The focus is on maintaining ties between the parent and child, assessing the parent's capacity to care for the child, and goal planning.

▶ **Central Phase:**

(Usually occurs during the 2-6 month point in a case)

Interactions are moving to semi or partially supervised, moving to overnights. Family interaction should focus on allowing the parent to learn and practice new skills and behaviors. Interactions typically occur more frequently, for longer periods, in a greater variety of settings.

▶ **Reunification/Transition Phase:**

Emphasis is on a smooth transition home. Interactions should provide maximum opportunities for parent-child interactions.

DEVELOPING A FAMILY INTERACTION PLAN

- ▶ Carefully planned family interaction is a powerful family reunification intervention tool.
- ▶ Family interaction can help implement many essential family reunification goals, including maintaining the parent/child/sibling relationships, learning and practicing parenting skills, helping family members confront reality, and documenting progress towards reunification goals.

- ▶ A concrete written family interaction plan is the best way to ensure consistent family interaction occurs in a way that meets the needs of the child, parent, and the court.
- ▶ The most effective way of developing a family interaction plan is during a family team meeting.
- ▶ Family members should be actively involved in developing family interaction plans that increase the probability that family members understand and will comply with the plan. It also takes into account the family members' needs, resources and concerns. Involving the family in the development of the family interaction plan will ensure the family's culture and rituals are respected.

- ▶ Department of Human Services (DHS) should develop a preliminary written family interaction plan. When possible, the plan should be developed with input from parents, children and other involved parties, such as relatives, foster parents, and any provider of services contracted with the DHS to address their role in the family interaction plan, and to be able to address progress and the needs of the child.
- ▶ Family interaction plans will be revised as the child's and the family's situations change. Family interaction may be limited or denied only if such limitation or denial is necessary to protect the child's health, safety or well-being, i.e. parental incarceration, parental institutionalization, domestic violence, sexual abuse, termination of parental rights, etc.

▶ **In all family interaction situations there are certain responsibilities for which a parent should be held accountable.**

- Parents will ensure the emotional and physical safety and well-being of his or her child; provide their own transportation if possible;
- Call at least 24 hours in advance to cancel interactions so a child may be less likely to feel rejection or disappointment from a no-show interaction;
- Plan developmentally appropriate activities to participate in with the child during the interactions;
- Take the parental role during interaction with his or her child;
- Expect and respond to direction from the interaction supervisor when interactions are supervised;
- Follow the pre-established guidelines and rules in the written family interaction plan.

- ▶ Foster parents or other legal custodians will agree, for each child placed in her/his home, to permit and support interactions between child and the child's parents and/or siblings as recommended in the family interaction plan, both within and outside the caregiver's family home.

- ▶ This includes, but is not limited to:
 - having the child ready for each contact;
 - providing transportation or a place to interact as agreed to in the family interaction plan;
 - helping the child accept each separation from his parent following contact;
 - reporting the child's reaction after contacts with his family to the caseworker;
 - notifying DHS of any unauthorized contacts between the child and the parent.

THINGS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING THE FAMILY INTERACTION PLAN

- ▶ Threats of Harm
- ▶ Child Vulnerability
- ▶ Protective Capacities

HOW ARRANGEMENTS MIGHT BE MADE, INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is key for interactions to be successful.

- Foster parents and other relative caregivers should be encouraged to transport children at least one way.
- Parents and extended family members should be expected to arrange their own transportation, though they may be given temporary support when necessary to ensure there is not a gap in family interaction; however this will likely be accomplished by public transportation.
- Children in placement may have to be transported by agency staff, one or both ways to interactions.

WHO WILL BE PRESENT AND/OR PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERACTIONS?

- ▶ Any person may be present during the interaction unless they are specifically not allowed by DHS and clearly identified in the family interaction plan. Generally, during the initial phase of family interaction only parents, extended family, and siblings would be allowed to be present.

IF AND HOW ARE INTERACTIONS TO BE SUPERVISED (SUPERVISED ONLY IN ORDER TO PROTECT CHILDREN, ASSESS INTERACTIONS OR TEACH PARENTING SKILLS)?

- ▶ Supervised family interaction should be established if there are threats of harm present that place the children in an unsafe situation during a family interaction because it is in the best interest of the child. Things to consider in determining if interactions should be supervised:

- ▶ The age of the child
- ▶ The severity and chronicity of the abuse
- ▶ The potential for abduction or continued abuse of the child
- ▶ The emotional reactions of the child to contact with the parent
- ▶ The progress of the parent in learning new skills or managing inappropriate behaviors, protective capacities displayed by the parent

TASKS TO ACCOMPLISH DURING INTERACTIONS

**(appropriate to the developmental age of child and
designed to facilitate natural interactions between
parent and child):**

**So;
how are we doing ?**

Mid Iowa Family Therapy Clinic, Inc., has collected preliminary data on the use of Family Interaction Planning to achieve permanency and safety for children who are involved with the Child Welfare System in Iowa.

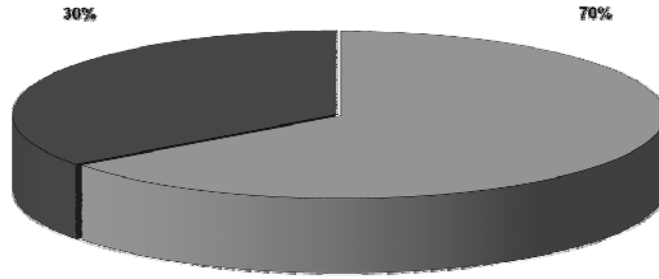
Approximately 104 families were sampled.

Survey data came from staff who provided services with families from the sample.

WHAT DID WE FIND

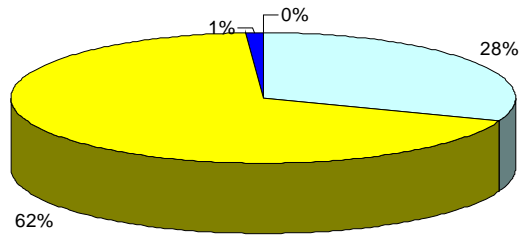
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Family Interaction Planning



- Had family interaction planning.
- Had family interaction planning at family team meeting.

Written Family Interaction Plans



- No written Family Interaction Plans
- 1-5 written Family Interaction Plans
- 6-10 written Family Interaction Plans
- 16-20 written Family Interaction Plans

HOW MANY WENT TO COURT?

- ▶ 4 written plans have been submitted to court.
- ▶ However, a state task team is developing standards for Parent's Attorneys that will be submitted to the Iowa Supreme Court for adoption.
- ▶ These standards will likely include encouraging parent's attorneys to advocate for written family interaction plans if their client's children have been removed from their care.

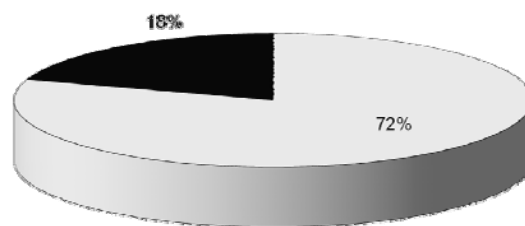
- ▶ When asked how having a written family interaction plan helped families? It appeared, it helped the family and others involved know what to expect with regards to monitoring interactions:

83%

The following responses were also reported:

- *Identified others who could help with monitoring interactions – 14%*
- *Helped the family have more interactions with their children – 21%*
- *Helped the interactions move from more supervised to less supervised – 17%*

DID HAVING A WRITTEN FAMILY INTERACTION PLAN HELP MOVE THE FAMILY TO PERMANENCY FASTER?



- Did help families move toward permanency
- Did not have an impact on permanency.

*When asked how long, on average
did it take to achieve permanency
with the use of family interaction?*

*Survey data indicated it to be 8-12
months.*

Next Steps for Iowa

- ▶ Child and Family Service Review
 - Program Improvement Plan
- ▶ Enhancing Family Team Meetings
- ▶ Working with Children's Justice
 - Enhancing incorporation of Family Interaction with the court

Discussion: How to get started

- ▶ Start small, you can build on a small number of successes.
- ▶ One suggestion: Start with new removals.
- ▶ Identify certain staff or unit to begin using the philosophy.
- ▶ Explore how you can build this into current practice using your family team meetings.
- ▶ Use the champions to coach the process.

- ▶ Begin problem-solving to address barriers by developing creative strategies.
- ▶ Identify key individuals who are opposed or see change as not necessary or beneficial.
- ▶ Include those individuals in the problem-solving discussions.