



National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family Connections
at the Hunter College School of Social Work



*A Service of the Children's Bureau
& A Member of the T/TA Network*

Engaging Families and Embracing Change:

What does it mean to engage families in the child welfare system?

Practice Issues in Child Welfare (Dr. Mallon)

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Hunter College School of Social Work

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Overview of the Material

- ➔ Getting Engaged (with each other and the material)
- ➔ What do we mean by ‘meaningful’ family engagement?
- ➔ Shifting the paradigm in child welfare
- ➔ Strategies to get there



!!! SnapShot !!!

Take a look around and select someone, you don't know, don't know well, or you've never spoken to in class.

Take a few minutes and both answer the following questions:

1. Some say social work with children and families is the toughest job you'll ever love. What are your greatest concerns about being, or becoming a social worker, in NYC in 2014?
2. Re-read the words meaningful family engagement. What do those words evoke for you? What would you expect or hope to take away today as a result?

Be prepared to provide a brief report out on the discussion you have with the large group.



Engaging Families *Beyond* the Case Plan

- ➔ Meaningful family engagement...
 - Means seeing families, particularly birth parents, as viable partners within the child welfare system...*not just as consumers of services*
 - Offers systemic, collaborative, and authentic inclusion of family voice and perspective in the functioning of the child welfare system.



Meaningful Family Engagement in Child Welfare Systems

- ➔ **System-level involvement** – Birth parents sit on collaborative committees and workgroups; provide and participate in social worker training.
- ➔ **Peer-level involvement** – Birth parents help other parents successfully engage and navigate the child welfare system.
- ➔ **Case-level involvement** – Agencies utilize strength-based, solution-focused, family-centered practices, e.g., Family Group Conferences, Team Decision Making, Child Safety Teams, etc.



New Roles & Opportunities for Parents in Child Welfare

- ➔ Washington (ST) – Invited ‘veteran parents’ and youth to serve on a statewide advisory committee responsible for creating a plan for privatization of child welfare services.
- ➔ Illinois – Create a parent partnership initiative to allow families served by child welfare direct influence over how the system works with parents.
- ➔ New York City – Most recently, NYC ACS has created a senior level advocacy position within ACS with a focus on parent advocates throughout ACS and its partners agencies.



Parent Engagement in the Child and Family Services Review

➔ *Family-Centered Practice*

Strengthen and empower families to protect and nurture their children

➔ *Community-Based Practice*

Support the needs of children within the context of their families and communities

➔ *Individualizing Services*

Tailor interventions to meet specific needs of children & families served

➔ *Strengthening Parental Capacity*

Promote parent strengths and self-esteem by emphasizing partnership with service providers



Meaningful Family Engagement: What We're Learning


- ➔ Services are better delivered, more cost effective, and culturally sensitive.
- ➔ Customer satisfaction is improved.
- ➔ Early evidence of improved child welfare outcomes, namely reduction in lengths of stay and re-entry rates.
- ➔ The system becomes more responsive.
- ➔ Families build skills and model these skills within their own families and communities.



“Meaningful Family Engagement” as a Systemic Framework

“...The task is not to bring families into an arena that they’ve not previously belonged to. The task is to fully recognize and honor the membership they already have — a membership that is absolutely central to the life of the child. Once this membership is acknowledged, the task is simplified. In short, it consists of creating linkages between all the members of the system - between the professionals and the families.” (Adams, Biss, Mohammed, Myers, & Slaton, 2000:3).

Adams, J., Biss, C., Burrell Mohammad, V., Meyers, J., & Slaton, E. (2000). *Family- professional relationships: Moving forward together*. Alexandria, VA: National Peer Technical Assistance Network’s Partnership for Children’s Mental Health.




Foundational Principles of Birth Parent Engagement

- ➔ Mutual respect
- ➔ Dignity
- ➔ Inclusion
- ➔ Appreciation
- ➔ Dignity
- ➔ Partnership
- ➔ Opportunity



Meaningful Family Engagement: Making It Happen

The value of meaningful family engagement in child welfare is clear, but how do we make it a reality?



Making Way for Improved Engagement Practice with Parents in Child Welfare

- Engagement doesn't happen in a vacuum, i.e., the practice model, agency policies, or the dyad relationship between worker-parent.
- The synergy among these elements in the larger context of collaboration as a guiding principle supports empowering engagement practice.



A Working Definition of Collaboration

“It is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties to achieve common goals by ***sharing responsibility, authority and accountability for achieving results.***”

(Chrislip, 2002, p.41)



Purpose of Collaboration

“...to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that ***go beyond the purview of any particular party.***”

(Chrislip, 2002, p. 42)



Skill Building for Cultures of Collaboration

- ➔ Assessment
- ➔ Conflict competency
- ➔ Engagement
- ➔ Empowerment
- ➔ Shared vision/leadership/accountability
- ➔ Opportunity
- ➔ Action
- ➔ Reflective practice
- ➔ Beginner's mind



Assessment

- ➔ Be curious rather than critical.
- ➔ See what's there vs. what we want to be there or have been trained to see.
- ➔ See strengths *and* barriers as growth opportunities.
- ➔ Have humility and humor.



Conflict competency

- ➔ Know your own triggers.
- ➔ Be willing to resolve underlying sources of conflict.
- ➔ Commit the time and energy to working through conflicts and disagreements.
- ➔ Create or look for ways to work through the conflict and points of disagreement.
- ➔ Stay focused on the end goal.




Engagement

- ➔ A both/and orientation vs either/or.
- ➔ Embracing conflict as an asset and opportunity.
- ➔ Empathy.
- ➔ Respectful engagement.
- ➔ Humility, mutual respect, and humor.



Empowerment

- ➔ Distinguishing between ‘bogus’ and authentic empowerment.
- ➔ Willingness and ability to share power.
- ➔ Humility, humor, and persistence.



Shared vision, leadership, and accountability

- ➔ An ability to dream together; to see beyond the current reality.
- ➔ An appreciative orientation - seeing and building on our hidden and obvious strengths.
- ➔ EVERYBODY has a piece of the action that is meaningful to them and moves toward shared vision.
- ➔ Key point: Make it a norm for ALL partners to learn and grow; not just families.
- ➔ Humility and humor.



Opportunity

- ⇒ Engagement without opportunity lacks substance.
- ⇒ Opportunity requires capacity building and learning.
- ⇒ More than the invitation; it's preparation, planning, and honoring the partnership of families.
- ⇒ Humility.



Action

- ➔ Design an agreed upon process to move the work and assess the effectiveness of what's accomplished.
- ➔ Ability to critique the process/outcome rather than criticize each other.
- ➔ Participation from everyone at every level.
- ➔ Discipline to act in accordance with the shared vision and values no matter your role.
- ➔ Humility and humor.



Reflective practice

- ➔ Identify and share lessons learned, good and bad.
- ➔ Slow down to connect personal and professional guiding principles to everyday practice.
- ➔ Strive to maintain work-life balance.
- ➔ Humility and humor.



Perpetual beginnings

- ➔ High tolerance for being a beginner rather than expert; a beginner's mind.
- ➔ Exceptional self-care.
- ➔ Seeing set-backs as openings for progress.
- ➔ Learning to begin again and again is a great skill in this work.
- ➔ Humility and humor.



For your consideration...

- ➔ What opportunities exist for involving parents beyond the case plan in your current role or agency?
- ➔ What additional skills or knowledge do you need to promote meaningful family engagement?
- ➔ What can you do within your sphere of influence to further meaningful family engagement?



Things to keep in mind...

- ⇒ Meaningful family engagement requires...
- ⇒ **trust** and trust takes time.
- ⇒ an **expanded comfort zone**.
- ⇒ **new skills** to be **cultivated in all partners**.
- ⇒ all partners are **equally valued** even when variably empowered.
- ⇒ a **new paradigm** for partnering with families.



Resources

➔ Online Resources:

- <http://www.nrcpfc.org> - The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
 - **Family Engagement Toolkit**
 - **Digital Stories from the Field**



More resources

➔ Additional Resources, con't:

- http://www.parentadvocacy.org/padocs/Final_Report_UC_Berkeley_2009_Evaluation_of_Contra_Costa_Parent_Parners.pdf - Partnering with parents: Promising approaches to improve reunification outcomes for children in foster care
- Berrick, J., Young, E., Cohen, Anthony, E. (2011). 'I am the face of success:' Peer mentors in child welfare. *Child and Family Social Work*, 16, 179-191.
- Frame, L., Conley, A., & Berrick, J. (2006). The real work is what they do together: Peer support and birth parent change. *Families in Society*, 87(4), 509-520.



Resources, con't.

- ➔ <http://aia.berkeley.edu/media/pdf/TheSourceSpring2010.pdf> - National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center. (Spring, 2010). Peer Mentors: Alliances at Work. *The Source*, 20(1). Author: Berkeley.
- ➔ Tobis, D. (2012). *From Pariahs to Partners: How Parents and their Allies Changed New York City's Child Welfare System*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.
- ➔ http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/parent_leader_strategies.pdf - Jennings, J. (2002). *Parent leadership: Successful strategies*.