



Iowa Children's Justice

Iowa Children's Justice Update

To inform the courts and other interested members of our state community, Iowa Children's Justice will send out periodic information about issues and activities related to Juvenile Court.

October, 2008

October topic: Engagement

The Department of Human Services (DHS) regularly issues 'Practice Bulletins' that review a topic or area of child welfare practice that is covered in the Federal Child & Family Service Review (CFSR). These bulletins ask Social Work Supervisors and Administrators to discuss these topics as part of their monthly staff meeting.

The topic for **October 2008** is **child & family engagement**. DHS is encouraging caseworkers to set a solid tone with families *from the beginning* to let them know that their success is important. Staff have been offered a set of specific engagement strategies to be used with children & families over the next three months and shared with the Juvenile Court. Look for these family engagement practice changes in your court room.

Definition

DHS is using the following statement about **effective engagement** as the basis for a practice change that will occur over the next 3 months:

"Engagement is often synonymous with involvement. Involvement of families in child welfare services is important, but real engagement goes beyond that. Families can be involved and compliant without being engaged. Engagement is about motivating and empowering families to recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in changing things for the better. Engagement is what keeps families working in the long and sometimes slow process of positive change (Steib, 2004)."

Changes you will be seeing in court

Over the next three months, caseworkers are being asked to use some different strategies to engage and get to know their children and families by:

- Taking pictures of their children and families
 - Giving these pictures to Judges (if court involved) or keeping them in the file (if not court involved).
 - Talking with the children and families to find out more about them. For example:
 - What is their favorite family activity, food, happiest, time, etc?
 - What is something nobody knows about them they would like to share?
 - What would they want the Judge to know?
 - What is one thing they want the Caseworker to know?
 - What do they want most in the world?
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Contributions judges can make

To help families establish a positive, working relationship with those wanting to help them be successful, consider asking to see the pictures caseworkers have taken. This can be a positive, non-threatening entrée to other topics.

Questions you could ask the family:

- Can you tell me who is in the picture?
- When - or where - was it taken?
- How often do you get to see your caseworker?
- How were your ideas used in the case plan that we're looking at today?
- What progress or successes have you achieved?
- Is there something you want me to know?

Questions you could ask the child:

- How often do you talk to your case worker?
 - Are you able to talk with your caseworker alone?
 - Did your ideas get into the case plan? What ideas came from you?
 - Is there something special you want me to know?
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Why is this important?

- Successful outcomes depend on how well we - as helping professions - are able to develop trust based relationships with families, to effectively engage them in a change process.
 - Because child welfare services are based on relationships, diligent and culturally appropriate efforts must be made to reach out to children & families in ways that balance protective authority and family centered practice.
 - Various engagement strategies are necessary to build trust, meet the particular needs of each child & family and engage them in a change process.
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Social work best practice

Social work best practice teaches that families must be full partners in the service process in order to be successful. Successful engagement requires that families are approached from a position of respect, empathy and concern around the health and safety of their children. Caseworkers and other interveners should help the family achieve an understanding of the safety needs, risk issues and what behaviors need to change to keep children safe. When engagement is successful, both the child and family are involved as active participants in planning and achieving case goals.

For more information on Iowa Children's Justice

For more information please contact Wendy Rickman at wrickma@dhs.state.ia.us

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