

Case Planning in Child Welfare

Principal System Goals of Child Welfare Practice

- Identify children at risk of maltreatment.
- Ensure children’s safety and prevent future maltreatment.
- Enhance families’ ability to care for and nurture children in their own homes, communities and culture.
- Provide least restrictive placement with child’s extended family, or as close to child’s home as possible.
- Reunify as quickly as possible.
- Provide alternative, permanent placement when reunification is not possible.

Case Planning is a Continuous Process

Everyone plans—even when they are not conscious of planning. In child welfare, careful planning is essential. The planning process is dynamic and occurs throughout the life of a case—no plan should be static. Case planning helps identify, organize and monitor activities and services to families needed to achieve case outcomes. These formal “action plans” are based on family assessments that identify high need areas and help determine service objectives. Family assessments and developing case plans are always completed jointly with family members.

Six Step Process for Case Planning

1. Identify the problem.
2. Engage the family in a collaborative partnership.
3. Assess the nature of the problem and its contributors, and identify family strengths and resources available to address the problem.
4. Form goals and objectives for what needs to be achieved.
5. Identify the best actions to achieve the case goals and objectives; assign responsibility to the agency, to family members and to other providers; and set realistic time frames for completion.
6. Review the case and evaluate whether the actions were successful in achieving the desired outcomes.

Involving Families

Case planning requires collaboration between the caseworker and the family, both immediate and extended. Involving families improves outcomes in the following ways:

- It facilitates engagement, because the family's thoughts, feelings and experiences have been heard, considered and respected.
- It increases the family's commitment to working on the plan, since they have had input in its development.
- It empowers the family to take action to change behaviors and conditions that contributed to the risk of maltreatment.
- It ensures that everyone is working towards the same end.

For more information on involving fathers go to:

www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPSummer02.pdf

Goals (comprehensive outcomes), Objectives (specific outcomes), and Activities

Case planning includes goals (comprehensive outcomes), objectives (specific outcomes), and activities.

Goals—Goals are comprehensive statements of the desired outcome toward which all case activities are directed.

Goals:

- Address the overall goals of child safety, child permanence, child and family well-being.
- Common and clearly-stated goals promote coordination of many activities by multiple players to help address multiple needs and problems.
- Goals may change during the life of a case. (For example, if a child cannot be reunited with his/her family, the goal may change from reunification to adoption.)

Objectives—Objectives are statements of specific desired outcomes that must be met to reduce risk to children and to achieve case goals.

Objectives:

- Address the high-priority problems and needs identified during the family assessment.
- Address the enhancement of family strengths that can lessen the risk.
- Must be observable, written in behavioral terms and measurable to allow agreement on when objectives have been met.
- Should be mutually agreed upon by the family and the caseworker.

Activities—Activities are a step-by-step listing of tasks, services, actors and timeframes that guide service delivery. They are mutually agreed upon and should be consistent with the family’s culture and preference when possible.

Action plans include:

- The correct sequence of activities to achieve the desired outcome
- Assignment of responsibility for each activity to a family member, the caseworker and/or a community provider
- Where each activity is to occur
- Timeframes for beginning and completing each activity (average timeframe should be three to six months)

Safety Planning

If the initial assessment indicates a child is at high risk of imminent harm, the caseworker must develop an action plan to ensure that the child is protected, preferably at home using family-centered strategies that minimize trauma. Strategies include mobilizing protective factors in the immediate and extended family, intensive homebased or homemaker services, protective day care, respite care, removal of the perpetrator, or assigning child care to a responsible adult. If placement is necessary, extended family, family friends and other people the child knows should be explored before considering foster care.

Case Planning

Case plans document the outcomes for each family and child and the action plan to achieve those outcomes. Federal regulations require that case plans describe how child safety and permanency will be achieved. If placement is necessary, case plans outline how this occurs in the least restrictive, most family-like setting in close proximity to the child's parents. In Child in Need of Care cases, case plans are submitted and reviewed by the court.

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent case planning is a process of working towards family reunification while, at the same time, developing an alternative permanency plan. When children are not in safe and stable homes, the child welfare system has an obligation to quickly plan and provide services to ensure safety and permanency. By achieving timely permanency, children experience fewer attachment-related difficulties than children who linger in foster care. Concurrent case planning provides caseworkers with a structured approach to move children quickly from foster care to the stability of a permanent family home.

Case planning takes many forms including:

- Safety planning
- Case planning
- Supplemental planning
- Reunification planning
- Semi-annual reviews
- Case conferences or staffing

Case Conferencing/Case Staffing

During these staffings, caseworkers and other participants formally review a case, assess progress, identify barriers to achieving outcomes and revise the case plan accordingly.

Outcomes that Promote Permanency

- Child will remain with his/her own family
- Child will be returned to his/her own family
- Child will be placed in permanent home with a relative
- Child will be legally adopted
- Child will be placed in a family that will assume legal guardianship
- Child will remain in a foster home under a Planned Permanent Living Arrangement
- Youth will be emancipated to independent living

Case Planning Review

Instructions:

Now that you have read this article, please print a copy of this page, complete the assignments and bring the completed form with you to the Core Module VI training. This assignment will be used during the morning of your first day of training.

Please identify three questions or issues related to any aspect of case planning you would like the trainer to address during your training.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This article stressed the importance of involving families throughout the case planning process. Identify a potential barrier to involving a family and a possible strategy you would use to ensure their partnership.

Potential Barrier to Involving a Family in Case Planning:

Potential Strategy I Could Use To Enable Families to Become Partners in Case Planning: