



## Engagement Strategies

### Caseworkers

- Assume that they want to engage. Remember that building rapport begins with your first phone call or in-person contact. Be respectful of their time and availability to meet with you (be flexible, when possible). Set the tone of the partnership that you want to establish by being transparent about the concerns brought to the agency's attention. We are not in this business to "catch them", but to effectively join with them to assure child safety, permanency and well-being.
- Ask for their perception of his or her situation, being aware and understanding that it may trigger trauma for them. This is key to demonstrating your belief that they are the experts of their life situation. Engagement is done with sensitivity by creating a safe space to allow them to tell you what is really occurring. Your role is to help them formulate the safest solutions to resolve the concerns of their life situation. If this cannot be collaboratively achieved, be transparent in your discussion and use protective authority to engage law enforcement only when necessary to ensure child or worker safety.
- Compliments can help to build and maintain relationships. For compliments to have real meaning and not feel false to the other person, they need to be specific and provide details about how you were affected:
  - Thank you for allowing me to meet with your family so quickly, it shows that you are invested in working with our agency timely to keep your family safe.
  - Thank you for providing me with this information, it will help me to get a whole picture of your family dynamics.
  - I appreciate your honesty and sharing of sensitive information regarding your family's situation. This is commendable.
- Actively listen to each family member's perspective and encourage them to tell their story without interruption. Allow family members to speak more than the caseworker.
- Look for exceptions and/or coping questions to better engage in the discussion. Learning about this can help a family become more aware of their strengths and small successes.

Exception and coping questions provide important information about what is possible, the parent's skills and current supports available to them:

- Please tell me about a time when this issue seemed much better?
  - Has anyone offered helpful advice about this issue? Was it helpful when you tried it?
  - There seems to be a lot that you are dealing with, please tell me what helps you to manage? (compliment their ability to manage the situation up to this point and explore who or what resources were in place to help – use these resources as strengths!)
- Tour Guides and Family Portraits are also useful tools to help break the ice if you are struggling to engage a family in conversation, and it is a great way to engage the children.
- After gaining their permission, have a family member act as a tour guide and show you around their home. This demonstrates your respect for the family and you can observe the living arrangements.
  - Having family members draw family portraits will help you to engage and learn more about their family dynamics (how parents feel about each other and their children, how close the children are to their parents, how they feel about their parents).