Engaging of Ohio Child Welfare Practice Profiles

Melissa Flick:
Good Morning. My name is Melissa Flick and I am one of the technical assistant specialists with the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. I am just going to go around the room real quick and let everyone introduce themselves so that you know who is here with me today presenting.

Kenyetta Lomax:
I am Kenyetta Lomax, I am the Quality Assurance Coordinator, Butler County Children's Services.

Sonia Tillman:
Good morning this is Sonia Tillman, Differential Response Manager at ODJFS.

Shannon Harnichar:
I am Shannon Harnichar, Program and Compliance Officer at Homes for Kids.

Melissa:
And then we also have Lindsay Williams in the room with us. Lindsay will be taking our questions so if you have any questions during the webinar, please send a chat. Lindsay will be monitoring that and at the end of the webinar, we are going to take the last 30 minutes to make sure that we answer any questions.

Okay so during the previous overview webinar, we discussed the Ohio's practice profile model that is founded in a differential response booklet. I did want to let everyone know that ODJFS is no longer printing the booklets. We had a lot of questions about that last time. Those booklets are not being distributed anymore but we did want to make sure that everyone knew that they are available through OFC forms central so we wanted to provide that link so that if you do not have a copy of that book, you can at least download an electronic version of that booklet. Okay so starting off, the first thing that you will see if you do download that booklet is the principles of CPS intervention. These principles were developed when the practice profiles came about and there are several there that you can see. I am not going to go over all of the principles of intervention. I do want to just focus on the ones that are specific to engagement since that is our topic for today.

I will point out though, that our first principle of CPS intervention should do with child safety. When you are listening to these practice profiles throughout this webinar series, the one thing that we cannot stress enough is that the primary function of our intervention is to assure that children are safe. The second one there, the one that I have underlined, that one should do with emphasizing family engagement and involvement in all aspects of practice. With regard to today's topic of engagement, we are going to talk about how engagement is important, not just when you are first knocking on the door but throughout the life of an agency's involvement with that family regardless of what or where your agency is. If you are a public child welfare agency, if you are private foster care licensing agency, if you are IV-E court, any of the agencies that are involved in the CPS system should emphasize that family engagement continues through the life of the involvement with the family.

The next one there that I have underlined should do with child safety and that it is best achieved through active, collaborative and respectful engagement parents, family, community and CPS stakeholders. As I previously mentioned, everyone is involved in this concept of engagement and that with everyone working together to engage the family, there would be a better outcome for that family. The other principles there we are not going to go through as much but you have them there for you. I just want to point out again the very last one there. That if families cannot ensure child safety, then it is necessary for all the agencies in our system, the court, the community, extended families, have to take action to make sure that children remain safe.

This might look familiar from the last webinar, the overview because these are all the practice profiles outlined. The worker skill sets that are felt to be necessary to improve outcomes for families. I do want to indicate that some child welfare professionals are probably really familiar with these skill sets. You have seen the booklets. You have had trainings on them. You remember when they were first launched or first, you know, discussed out into the agency but then there are others who might be learning this information for the first time. For some it is a refresher, others it is new information. We are going to try to balance between the two to make sure that the information is good for everyone, whether you've heard it or whether this is the first time that you are hearing about the practice profiles.

This one is on engaging. We are going to define engaging, effectively joining with the family to establish common goals concerning child safety, well-being and permanency. Those three concepts are discussed all the time in the child welfare world. Safety, well-being and permanency are the areas that are looked at when formal reviews are conducted through the CPOE process on the state level or the CFSR process on the federal level so when looking at these practice profiles, everything we want to make sure we are tying back to safety, well-being and permanency.

So, I want to go over a few of the ideal practices. First off, engagement is the first one in the practice profile. It kind of sets the foundation for all of the work that we do with families. These ideal practices came straight from the differential response booklets.

The first one there talks about calling a family to schedule that first appointment and that a phone call would be the preferred method of initial contact. Now, of course, if there is an immediate safety threat or immediate risk issue that needs to be addressed right away, you have to use your critical thinking skills and determine whether a phone call would be appropriate or not. Sometimes it would not be appropriate. But for a lot of the calls that are received by agencies at the intake stage, that first call could very easily be dealt with by just calling the family and scheduling that appointment with the family. Having a conversation with the family about what that involvement is about. Having a conversation with the family about the mandates that we have and that we have to meet and being very transparent about the intake investigative process.

The second one there talks about drop-in visits. They are used sparingly and only with a specific purpose that is clearly documented in the case record. If it is necessary because sometimes families don't have a phone or you are trying to track down an address. You might have minimal information when you first were contacted about the family. When you are doing those drop-in visits, sometimes it could be appropriate to say to the family, "Is this a good time? — Is there a better time?" Again, you have to be transparent about what our mandates are and the reason for you being there but there are times when you may pop in. And I remember one time I went out to initiate an investigation and I showed up and the family was having like a birthday party for the child and all their family members were there. So, obviously that would be a situation where if it wasn't an immediate risk or immediate safety issue, I would say look it seems at this point this would not be a good time to meet. Here's why I'm here but let's schedule and I can come back the next day. You want to make sure when you are engaging with the family you are using language that shows respect towards that family. One obvious way of doing this is asking how to address that mother or father or grandmother, whoever it is that you might be speaking with — whether they want to be addressed by their first name, whether they want to be addressed by Mr. or Mrs., and then also giving them the same information about how you want to be addressed and, kind of, sharing that information.

Kenyetta:
Now one thing that I can say is a person who is from the south, I was always taught that you always call everyone by their last name. And I actually had a situation where one of my family preferred not to be called by their last name. It was really difficult for me but I had to recognize for me that was a sign of respect. However, if I did not you know call them or refer to them in a way in which they wished, then that was going to hinder my engagement with that family, so it was a little internal struggle because I was just always taught to do that. So just be mindful of that, sometimes just calling someone Mr. or Mrs. it can hinder your engagement with them.

Melissa:
Absolutely. The next one I want to talk about is respecting family's choices when scheduling contact. This can sometimes be a balancing act between what our mandates are being respectful to the family but again I think transparency with what our mandates are and when we have to you know do certain things to be under the OAC requirement, just having those kinds of discussions. But one thing I want to point out has to do with the contact preferences. You know, when I started in the field, you either knocked on the door or you made a phone call. There was no texting or emailing, none of that stuff. But in today's world, it is very different and, you know, sometimes having text messages back and forth is a preferred means of communication with a parent. Sometimes their phone that is all they can do is text back and forth, like there is no calling option or whatever. Having that discussion with them about how to contact them, what their preferences are helps to promote engagement as well.

Lindsay:
And I'll just jump in here to say, you know this is Lindsay, and I'm sorry I know I'm just kind of jumping in the conversation today but the email and the text message, those would not be preferred methods for that initial contact with the family. So, you know, your initial contact would be ideally with a phone call or in a safety situation, in person, and then you can discuss, you know, email or text possibly as an ongoing preferred method of communication.

Kenyetta:
And one thing that I would like to point out from the quality assurance perspective is good faith efforts. If you know that a family works from 9-5 and you're making all your attempts at 2:00 p.m. that is truly not a good faith effort, so please keep that in mind. It is all about scheduling your contact with them that fits around their schedule.

Melissa:
And the same can be said for kids who are in school. If you know a child is not going to be home from school until 3:00 or 3:30 pm and you are, you know, constantly going out in the morning, again that is not what I would consider a good faith effort.

The next one, I feel practice has to do with using protective authority. Protective authority should only be used when necessary. That’s when you have to engage law enforcement to help you gain access to a child or sometimes it is just in the statements that someone says to a client. By virtue of you right role if you work for a children's services agency and you are out assessing an allegation of child abuse, neglect or dependency, we have a layer of protective authority already attached to that role. Just by virtue of our job, we are using protective authority but then you can take the next step like when you should utilize law enforcement to go out to a home, it really should just be used for a safety issue, not as a means of intimidating the family or having that backup like, you know, to bang on the door with the billy club and make it look, you know, more serious than maybe what it is. You want to make sure that you are utilizing that as a last resort to ensure child safety. It all goes back to that child's safety. Now some agencies, their county MOU does require sending all abuse and neglect or all abuse referrals, all sexual abuse referrals to law enforcement just by virtue of the MOU and that is fine, I mean that is part of your MOU with that law enforcement agency. But what I am talking about is the use of them to try to get compliance from a client.

The next one with engagement, just recognizing and verbalizing to the family member, their strengths and skills. You know you hear in grad school about you know family is the expert on themselves. And that is true, they know more about themselves than you know or that you think you know reading a referral about a family or reading their case files. Making sure that you are discussing with them not just the deficits that brought you to the door but what strengths and what skills allow for that family to function well at the times when that family is functioning well.

The next one effectively uses strategies detailed in the profiles to continuously explore and address family resistance and encourage participation, collaboration. Later on, in the webinar, we are actually going to get into more information regarding how to deal with family resistance. I am not really going to dwell on this one more too much because we are going to get into it later.

The next one, listens actively to each family member and solicits perspectives from all involved. Summarizing for the family members what you understood them to say, encouraging them to tell their story, allowing them to speak more than the worker speaks. One of our mandates when we go out to investigate child abuse and neglect cases is that anyone that lives in the household is supposed to be interviewed. You are supposed to interview all adults in the household, all children who are of a verbal age to be interviewed in that household. So, making sure that while you are doing that, that you are actively listening to what each of those people have to say. There could be different perspectives from different people, different skill sets from different people. Things that you can learn about the family if you talk to everyone in the household. So, if you just go out and speak to the mum and maybe, you know, the children but there is a dad or there are grandparents in the home, you could be missing a great opportunity to better engage with that family. You want the actively involved children and parents or other caregivers in all the aspects of the case. There are different activities that are outlined in the practice profile booklets scaling life circles, genograms, strengths and needs exercises. We are going to talk a little about some of those in today's webinar as well as in future webinars when we are talking about the other practice profiles and how those activities can help with engagement and other processes. You can do it with the family individually. You can do it with them appropriate based upon each case situation one of these activities could be more appropriate than another.

Shannon:
And as someone sitting here representing a private agency, I just want to encourage everyone that when the child has been placed with a private agency in foster care, don't forget us as private partners. If the child happens to be a state placement with a private agency, we can be helpful in engaging the family when appropriate and with the custodial agency permission, we can always then include the family by sending them a letter explaining the services that we are

providing to the child, that they are receiving while in our foster home. Also, we can make phone calls to the family, include them in on therapy sessions and invite them to our service plan meetings. So just always remember that we can be a partner there through you and help you with that.

Melissa:
And one other thing I want to point out when talking about using these activities or using listening skills is it's not just about your verbal skills but your nonverbals as well. So you want to make sure that when receiving information from family that your nonverbals are not speaking more loudly or louder, correct grammar there, than your verbal because sometimes you are going hear information that may make you go huh and so you want to make sure that you've got your poker face on and that you are not you know you are not impeding the engagement process by the look on your face or by other nonverbal activities that you might be doing, you know, tapping your pen, it could show that you are impatient with what they are saying to you. So just keep an eye out for not just what you are saying to families but how you are actually listening to families as well.

Sonia:
And try not to text message as the family is telling you their story. It definitely is important to be connected with them as they are telling their story and giving them your full attention and not being distracted by other things. I know we are in that generation so we always have to put that out there.

Lindsay:
It is and you know, Sonia, that is a good point too because of the thinking with, you know, being able to take laptops or iPads or things into the home, sometimes it, you know, it may take time to answer some of those assessment questions and type them right into the fact list as you are sitting there but just like you said, you know, it is respect thing, you should always ask permission before you just kind of pull out your laptop and start you know doing that work or entering it in your iPad or your smart phone or anything so – good point.

Melissa:
Yes, I like that about what Lindsay said about asking permission because some agencies, their protocol or procedure because of the laptops and the iPad is to document while they are there because we all know that documentation takes a long time and it is a lot of the job, but if that is your agency's procedure to do that, then explaining that being again transparent, I use that word a lot, with the family about why you are typing away, it could be very distracting for the family and if you are finding that it is or that they are wanting to know what you are typing, you may need to make the decision that this is not a family where that is going to work.

The next ideal practice, returning phone calls within one business day. Now, I know that everyone has a couple of people that, you know, you dread when you hear the word, no, that you don't want to return that phone call. You know, sometimes it might be best just to do the worst one first – worst first – and just get it out of the way and then you can move on. I always like to make a list and so I was the person that if there were a bunch of little things I could cross off my list, I would do those first. Like if I had six or seven calls to return and I knew a couple of them would be real quick, I would do those first, because I like to cross that off the list and get it done and I felt like I was being more productive. If you are that kind of person, that might work for you but if you are the person that dreads speaking to so and so and you just know that that phone call is going to be a 30-40-minute ordeal, then you might want to think about okay let's just get this done first because if you put it off, you put it off, you put it off, it just doesn't get done. And just think about, I think someone in a prior meeting that I was in talked about if you had called your doctor and left a message and your doctor waited several days to get back to you, how would that make you feel? I always try to put myself in the shoes of the person who has left me the message, how would it make them feel if they felt ignored or if you didn't get back to them. Another thing is sometimes you are out of the office for a couple of days. Just make sure that you are leaving that on your message. Let people know that you aren't going to be available. If you are going to be in core training for two or three days or out you know obviously on vacation those sorts of things you think about doing it. But if you are just going to be out in the field for a couple of days, you might not necessarily think about changing your voicemail message, but that would be helpful because then they know oh this is the reason Melissa has not returned my phone call.

The next one discussed the family with agency and stakeholder's roles and responsibilities in the assessment investigative process. Again, I kind of said this all along about being transparent about what our role is, what our mandates are, different requirements that we have, different responsibilities that we have. Nothing that you do with a family should really be a huge surprise unless there is like a crisis that occurred right at that moment and you are out there and you have to make a decision to remove for safety or something like that, but in your typical cases, it is working through the process. There really should not be any kinds of surprises. The family should know what that process is. And that informs the family about what to expect from the agency both verbally and in writing including caseworker contact information, and who to contact if you are not available, providing your supervisor contact information and then information about consumer rights, information about alternative response and traditional response. Some agencies have a very formalized process of this. You have a consumer rights pamphlet or booklet. You can write your name and number on the front. You can write your supervisor's name and number. Others are less formal. You just hand them a card. But make sure that your supervisor's information is on the back of the card. Some agencies may be even less formal than that. But whatever the process is, making sure that they have your contact information, the person that you are engaging with should know how to reach you in case they have questions, concerns, all of those sorts of things.

Sonia:
In addition, we also have differential response pamphlets and so it does not go into the consumer rights part of it but it gives them a very good understanding of Ohio's Child Protection System and what those pathways offer and it also highlights the skills. And so those differential response pamphlets can also be obtained through our warehouse and can be downloaded from forms central.

Kenyetta:
Alright by show of hands, please show me how many people have dealt with a resistant client. I am sure every single person has raised their hands on this webinar.

Sonia: I've seen a lot of them.

Kenyetta:
I've dealt with resistance as a screener, I know our receptionist at the front desk, she has dealt with resistant clients, as a caseworker, as an adoption worker, as just every type of worker, we deal with resistant clients. But I want to tell you that there are two basic assumptions when dealing creatively with resistance. The first assumption is resistance, it just exists. The second is resistance should be honored and dealt with respectfully, and I cannot stress that enough. If resistance is handled from the perspective that incorporates these two assumptions, it can

enhance, rather than injure your relationship with your family. Even if compliance is not possible, the resistance will become more workable. This positive approach is called the SHER model. It has four separate steps. The first being SURFACING. Second is HONORING. Third is EXPLORING. And the fourth is RECHECKING. I want to let you know that each step must be completed before you move onto the next step.

The first step, surfacing the resistance. This is where the caseworker gets the resistance out in the open. Keep in mind that most people intentionally withhold their resistance for a number of reasons. It could be because of their past experience, mistrust or poor interpersonal relationship. For example, if a worker handles a client who is visibly upset, that worker must determine why the client is upset. It is important that the client feels safe in disclosing their resistance. But once the client does not feel that they are going to be attacked or punished, the caseworker has a greater chance of exposing the real source of the resistance. I always tell our new workers, you have to address the elephant that is in the room or you are not going to be able to move forward.

The next step would be to honor the resistance. The caseworker must listen. I cannot stress this enough. And I get it. I was a caseworker at one time and I get a mandate, you have your checklist, what you need to accomplish in unfortunately sometimes a short amount of time but we have to listen. It is just critical that we listen and we don't cut people off because that can be interpreted as we don't care about what they are saying and what they are saying does not matter, and we know that it does. It is critical that during this step, the caseworker does not attempt to reinforce their original position, to reason or in any way imply that the client should not feel the way that they do. They are justified in their feelings. We just need to listen.

The next step would be to explore the resistance. Once resistance has been surfaced and honored and the client understands the worker's intent to keep it in a direction to conquer one thing, the caseworker can then elicit the client's concern using open ended and clarifying questions. Then ask the client to consider the future. What are their goals and how the caseworker can help them achieve those goals of child safety and permanency.

The last step would be to recheck. Always recheck the status of the current resistance and the agreements that have been made. This step is essential because it provides closure to the issue and assures that no agreement will be forgotten. And throughout that rechecking stage, it is just important, you may have jumped over one hurdle but while you are in the middle of your conversation, you may encounter some resistance, so it is just very important that you are rechecking. Let the client know at the very beginning if anything I say if you have an issue or concern about that, please let me know and then you may have to start this entire process over. It is just important that we recheck the resistance. And I know you guys have a short amount of time because of mandate responsibilities and you may not feel that you can commit to the process but I do feel that it is necessary. And as Lindsay pointed out during our first webinar, we need to slow down to speed up.

Lindsay:
Before we move on; on that one. I don't know if I want to go back to one slide. So, kind of, if you are planning this out in real life, what does that look like? I'm talking to a client and I notice they are real nervous and I notice they don't really want to tell me much and they don't really want me there. You know what can we say to help kind of surface that resistance?

Kenyetta:
I think what you could say is you know, "Mr. Jones I notice that you appear to be upset, can you just tell me a little bit why you are upset?" And I know in interactions I have had in the past; a lot of people don't want Children's Services to knock on their door. I understand that. I can respect that feeling. But it is important that if they do say something along the lines of, "I don't trust Children's Services" - explain to them what the process is. I think that it's all about us being honest and forthright and just letting people know exactly what we do. Children's Services is not about snatching babies, it is about us ensuring that children are safe. And I believe that all parents want their children to be safe too. So, I think if you come from it in that perspective and explain to them why you are truly out there to ensure the safety of the child, I think that we can get a lot of buy-in from our family.

Sonia:
Sometimes the resistance also can come from a bad experience. A previous experience that they had with Child Protection that did not go well for them. And so again, surfacing that issue and talking with them humbly about, "I apologize that your last experience may not have been very pleasant or what you expected, but I am here to work with you and try this with a different approach." And so again, we have a shared common goal of making sure that your children are safe. I can't go back and fix what may have happened from your previous involvement but I can only tell you genuinely that I am here to make sure that your family is safe and intact. Being very honest and again, transparent, and sometimes just acknowledging that you may have had a bad experience but let's start fresh.

Kenyetta:
And I love the fact that you said, acknowledge. They may have, in fact, had a bad experience. And I love that you apologized for that because you may not have been the person that did that or you know added to that negative experience but we are all still a part of that same agency. So, I love that and I think a lot of clients will respect that.

- Absolutely.

But people just want that apology and just acknowledge what they experienced.

- Absolutely.

Kenyetta:
Okay, now in the engagement approach. The caseworker helps the family assure safety, permanency and well-being and the underlying functions include the following. That the family has the capacity to partner in a collaborative process to protect the child. The days of the caseworker going back to the desk and typing up their case plan without the family's input, those days are long gone and I have been in this field for 20 years and there was a time when that was what I did. That was my practice. But we need to be collaborative in our process.

The next assumption would be that the family members have strengths and protective capacities that can be mobilized to produce effective change. Of course, there must be clear assurance that these assumptions will, in fact, protect the child from immediate and serious harm. The engagement approach can be frustrated when a client refuses to cooperate or cannot engage. Some families may simply refuse to cooperate with you. Engagement is likely to improve over time for most parents and the caseworker must be careful not to resort to using solely protective authority, simply because engagement strategies are slow to create trust and collaboration.

You can't, just because you got the first time the family continues to be resistant, you can't just switch and all of a sudden say, "You know what I'm going do my protective authority. You don't want to engage with me, let me go ahead and see if I can get law enforcement to assist me on that." We constantly need to work on this. And engagement can change. You can have the first two visits, they are just a walk in the park and maybe the third visit, you have just come on a bad day and you may, in fact, encounter some type of resistance.

Now, engagement can be from two different perspectives. Engagement in a helping or change process. For example, that would be helping the family to resolve their problems that contributed to the child abuse or neglect. Or you can look at it as engagement in a trusting, collaborative relationship and that would be the relationship between the caseworker and the parent. Engagement strategies from either perspective are designed to establish a caseworker's intent to be honest and forthright in dealing with the family. I cannot stress that enough and we have talked about that. I really believe that families and everyone can tell when someone is being disingenuous. Creating the expectation, the family will actively participate in the process. Once again, this is a collaborative effort. Provide the family with a road map of what is to occur. This should never be an "I got you moment", or the family should know what the process is once you leave their home. You should be providing the client rights book, you should explain step by step what is going to happen in the future. They should know every step that you are taking while you are taking it. And deal openly with the family's feelings of anger, frustration or resistance.

Shannon:
Again, from the private agency perspective, when appropriate and with the permission of the custodial agency, the private agency workers and the therapist can work with the family when reunification is the goal. We can include the family in our therapy sessions, include them in our behavior modification techniques that are working in our foster home and educate the family with the skills and tools that they can use when their child starts visiting at home, and the goal is that maybe this will give the biological parents that confidence that they need that, "Okay I can do this. I can work with my child and continue what was taught and being implemented in the therapeutic foster home." And it leads to a better reunification, hopefully a successful reunification.

Sonia:
So that is a great example of how you still need to engage through all aspects of the case. Not just at the front door, but however that case takes up, we need to continue to have strategy to keep that family involved every step of the way.

Kenyetta:
And just to take you back on what you were saying, Sonia, I mean we are engaging when a client walks in and they are just asking to speak with their caseworker when engaging at the screening process. I think I probably did more engagement when I was a screener than I am doing now in my current position. Sometimes I will be the first representative of Child Welfare for a family being a mandated reporter or someone, a non-mandated reporter. It is just important that we recognize that engagement does not start with the intake worker knocking on the front door.

Now engagement strategies are designed to reaffirm that the worker is dependable, competent and respectful, demonstrate the worker's ability to understand and empathize with the family situation, identify support and use family strengths. I know that we collectively a lot of times focus on people's deficits but I am here to tell you that everyone has strengths. We really need to identify our family's strengths and hopefully use those strengths to determine what their protective capacities are in order to keep their children safe. Promote the family's involvement. In order for our work to be successful, our families have to be a part of that process.

And once again, that is all about our collaborative approach.

Now here are some interview strategies, I will not talk about all of them due to our time limitations, but I will talk about some of them that I love and some of them that can be tricky sometimes. Of course, we know that there are definitely strengths with our closed ended probing and yes or no questions. A lot of times you are able to keep clients or families on focus with those types of questions. Generally, I would use those when I was a worker for more demographic information to try to get things that I didn't need an elaborate explanation for. Also, it can be a limitation with that sometimes. Some questions you may need more than a yes or no response. It is just very critical that you determine what type of questions are appropriate.

Open ended questions, I always laugh about this because they can be your best friend or your worst enemy sometimes. If you have a talker, you can ask two questions and you get every single safety assessment question answer just based on those two questions. But then the limitation with that is if you have a talker, you can literally be there for two hours and not get any of your safety assessment questions answered because some people will use that open-ended question to sometimes divert from what you are actually out there to talk about. It is just important that you recognize when it should be used.

One of the things that I also want to talk about is redirection and the reason why I want to bring that up is because for me, especially when I was a screener, I used redirection to kind of keep me on focus. My conversation because this is the way my mind works I like some type of order. But I also want to tell you that that can create some limitations too. Because sometimes in my effort to redirect people, it could be interpreted as me cutting them off and not interested in what they were saying. So just really be mindful of how you are using redirection. And the last one I will talk about is constructive confrontation. I really want to suggest that is only used when you have an established relationship and rapport with the family because if this is used ineffectively, it can damage your rapport with that family and you may not be able to engage with that family. We also included a handout with our webinar that also goes more into detail about the additional strategy.

Next, we will talk about solution based casework. It is an evidence based family centered model that seeks to help the family team organize, prioritize and document the steps that it will take to create safety, improve well-being and permanency for their children. There are six basic interview steps, solution, focus, casework practice.

The first step is seeing if the client wants to engage. That means that we need to set the tone for the partnership you want to establish and be transparent and real. Also remember that the client is the expert in their life. It is not you.

The next step would be asking the client's perception of his or her situation, and I kind of chuckle about this because this is something that I know every single person who is listening to this has dealt with. Your perception of what is going on may be vastly different from the family's perception but it is important that we know what their perception is.

The next step would be use of the client's perceptions to build on what the client wants to be different in his or her life, advise the client to describe what will instead of what won't. Then we have asked what it will take for a solution to happen. What they would need to be different. And it is important that you steer the conversation away from problems and concerns, focus on what is possible.

The next step would be asking what small steps the client can and what they are willing to take in order to reach their solution. Then we have summarized what your impression of the work the client has done to come up with the solution and what will draw attention to their accomplishments and competencies as experts of their family.

We have some solutions, focus strategies in our handout it will go into a little bit more in detail about all of them but I do want to point out a few of those. We have looking for exceptions and some examples phrases for that would be, "Was there a time when you didn't get so angry that you needed to hit someone?"

We also have scaling questions with the solution focus strategy and that would be if you ask the family to on a scale of one to ten with ten being completely and one being not at all, “how would you rate your ability to help to keep your child safe?” And then if they say they felt that they are a five. Your follow-up question would be, "What would need to happen in order for you to get to a seven?"

And then I have questions as a solution focused strategy and that is when you would ask your client, "What pushes their buttons? And what do they think pushes their family members' buttons?" But once again we do have handouts that will cover some of these additional solution focus strategies.

Now one of the things that I want to also talk about is how agencies have an ethical and legal responsibility to include both parents in planning for their children. Whether or not they reside in the home with the child or have custody of that child. While some parents may provide false information about the other parent or request that the other parent not have contact with the child, workers should engage the parent to assess the validity of the other parent's involvement. The non-custodial, non-residential parent and extended family member of the child's non-resident parent may be able to provide emotional support to that child if that child still remains in the home or they could possibly serve as a placement resource for the family if they are, in fact, removed from the child.

Some of the work that we are doing currently at Butler County is we have a policy in place that if a child comes into our custody that we have to complete an accurate search within three business days of the child coming into custody. We are doing that so we can identify potential family members for potential placement resources as soon as possible. And another step that we are taking is we are actually having all of our screeners during the intake phase to actually get the identify of both biological parents, regardless of whether or not they reside in the home. So that is something that we are trying to do to hopefully include both parents in the entire child welfare process.

And we talked a little bit about this in our previous webinar in regard to CAPTA which is the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. One of the things that I like to stress is that it is important that workers clearly identify themselves, their role and clearly state the purpose of their involvement with the family. One of the things that I see or I notice that new workers have difficulty with is actually telling people that they are the alleged perpetrator. Actually, in a training course that I teach, we actually do role-playing around that and that is one of the things that a lot of new workers struggle with. They want to know, "Can I just tell them, you know, you are named on here as the person … answering to the child … or, you know, we have a concern". They have a lot of difficulty with being really specific with what the allegations are and use been identified as alleged perpetrator but we must clearly state that. They also need to ask for permission when you are entering people's homes. I think that is something that, you know, sometimes we take for granted. You know, you should ask, even if it has been implied that you can come in, still ask it. I think that is a sign of respect. And you need to ask for permission to interview parties unless there is an emergency or court order. And then consent must be freely given and cannot be coerced by threat, intimidation, duress, promises or subterfuge. And we cannot stress this enough, I know every single person knows this, casework 101, it must be documented.

Sonia:
So, we hope that we have given you many strategies. You can find more strategies in the caseworker self-assessment and field tool kit. In the back, there are tons of engagement activities and also activities that you can help to assess what the family's situation is. You will hear some of these same techniques next month when we talk about assessment. When looking at your own skills, it is always key to identify where you are on the spectrum and so Kenyetta mentioned the scaling activity. Now that you have become familiar with some of the ideal practices and the indicators and behaviors that really help you narrow down what that ideal practice looks like, take some time after this webinar to assess where you are and where you feel you can have some growth. Engaging your own level of comfort in providing these skills is key. If you don't identify where you are, it is hard to then move to another level. You want to make sure that you are determining your own comfort level and then work with your supervisor or other coworkers to try to move up your skill level from a 4 to a 6, from a 6 to an 8, and use some of these suggested activities to help get you there.

Lindsay:
And Sonia, I wanted to just say here because I just heard a really relevant story actually earlier today that I wanted to share. So, you know, for us that have been in Child Welfare for a long time and you know we have a pretty good grip on engagement techniques, we are talking with people and you know and you say "well, I don't need to skill myself. I don't need any coaching on this. You know, I've got this". The story I heard today that was really relevant was a doctor that has been doing a certain procedure for, you know, years and years and years and that was really pretty perfected in it, but he was trying to decrease his rate of something with the procedures, I forget exactly what it was. He had somebody come in to kind of coach him and observe him all through the procedure and see what would in essence look like and, you know, he got done with that and he is like, "I aced that, you are not going to have any feedback for me, this is great." When he actually sat down and met with a set of professional as a coach, you know, he had all these tips and things that the person could try and so that kind of goes to show that even if you are very much at the high end and you have been doing this for a long time and you are an expert at it, there is still room to continue to grow in our profession.

Sonia:
Absolutely. Which is why we having to take continuing training hours. As social workers and as licensed professionals, we still have to take those training hours. There is always room for improvement and growth, and so, just take this opportunity to utilize some of the toolkits that we have to assess where you are and help move yourself and grow within your work.

Kenyetta:
The one thing I like to see is what I love about the booklet is, you have the columns 'ideal', 'developmental' and 'unacceptable'. When I tell everyone, our new workers, I don't want to see

you on this ‘unacceptable’. I know even, and I've been doing this for a long time. There are some things I am still developmental with. Everything I do is not ideal and that is full disclosure. But at least it is what I am striving to. I am a work in progress. I am not going to return every phone call in one business day. I know that. But one day that will be my goal to return every phone call within you know one business day. But unacceptable is clearly unacceptable. I would challenge everyone to look through that booklet and see what is involved.

Sonia:
And so that actually leads right into the next piece for a supervisor. As your supervising casework staff, you are going to have a variety of learning levels and a variety of history so you may have workers that are fresh out of college that don't have a lot of acquired skill but you may have workers that have been there for 15 or 20 years and feel that they are very knowledgeable. Individually, you really need to take time to see how they are engaging and practicing these skills so that you can figure out the best way to help coach them. How do they make that initial contact with the family? How did they introduce themselves? And these are things that you can either observe while they are doing that first home visit, go out with them, observe some of that practice, or when you are meeting with them for supervision, you can ask those things.

In the supervisory toolkit, we’ve provided you with some coaching prompts to help gauge where your staff skill level is in all of these areas. Asking them how they accommodated that first home visit. We talked a lot about being flexible with the family's life and with their schedule. Did our worker adjust their own time so that they can meet with the family but still be able to make their OAC mandate? And then how did they explain the report to the family. I think you hit on that Kenyetta, when you talked about new workers that struggle with telling the family why they are there.

What I used to do was have my staff practice with me before they go out on that first contact, especially if it was a sketchy situation or something that was going to cause them to have some difficulty. I would say okay, well practice with me. How would you talk to me if I was Mrs. Jones and run it by me and kind of give them some input and coach them through that initial conversation because that can be very tough when you are in this field. I think again, making sure that we have explained all of the family's consumer rights. How do we reinforce with that family that they are the experts of their situation?

Again, long gone are the days where child protection just comes out and tells them this is what you need to do to correct this problem and I am coming back in another month to see that you've done it. We need to engage with the family and get their perspective and their perception of what their family's situation is and then use those perceptions and strengths to help build the plan for safety. We don't need to recreate ways for the family to have a safety component if they already have some supports that they are utilizing and so we need to build upon that. Allowing them to tell their story and then again encouraging them to build that as a strength.

Lindsay:
And something I will add to all these suggestions is, you know, as supervisors, sometimes in supervision, we get so focused in on what went on with the family, how are they doing, that kind of dialog that, you know, we don't always remember to ask those kinds of questions that may help with the professional development of, you know, our staff or coworkers and these kinds of questions can do exactly that. You can almost just take one case every time you sit down with somebody for supervision and. you know and one profile and ask some of these questions to kind of get that deeper understanding.

Sonia:
We used to also do group supervision and we talk about that in the supervisory toolkit as well. Getting everyone's perspective of best ways to move forward with that family. It takes the pressure off of the supervisor to have to be the one to make the decision but it allows for the colleague and others in the agency, especially our CQI staff, to give their feedback on what's the best situation or plan that we can develop with the family.

Melissa:
So, the outcomes slide may look familiar because we did utilize this slide in the overviews of module one overview for this practice profiles webinar but because it is specific to engagement, we wanted to include it again for those that may not have seen it or just, I think it is a great slide to use when you are having interactions. You know, we have just talked about as a supervisor coaching your staff, but again kind of assessing where staff may be and how that might impact the engagement process, and so with this slide here it talks about the balance between a family's willingness to engage in the process and a caseworker skill level.

So, if you have low engagement and you have low skill, you see down there in the bottom quadrant that there could be poor outcomes, the family is not engaged and then the caseworker lacks the skills to effect that change. Looking at some of those skill issues there in the red, talking about a timid or fearful caseworker, a caseworker who is new or developing new skills, or caseworkers who have been around a while but are resistant to learning about new skills. Like we have just talked about, you think you know it, you think you've got it under control but for some reason you have a lot of resistance from families so there may be something to that that needs to be relooked at by the supervisor or by the child welfare professional themselves. There are issues related to secondary trauma. I won't get into that because that can be a whole other webinar but you know those can impact a worker's ability to engage.

And then with the family's engagement, they see themselves as victims or they have self-sabotaging habits. They doubt their own personal value or they also have their own PTSD issues. Then we want to make sure that we are moving somewhere along the quadrant here. If you have low engagement with the family but a highly skilled caseworker you can see successful outcomes. They might be slower than what you would want to see but they will get there eventually because that worker has the ability to assess the needs of the family, engage the family, they have the skills to link the family with services so the family can see better outcomes due to that linkage. They can communicate well with the family so even though the family has all of those things in the red there on the left, that can be impacted by the high skill of the caseworker, or let's say you have a highly engaged family but a caseworker that doesn't really have the skill set, you can have mixed outcomes. So sometimes those outcomes could go very well or sometimes maybe not so much.

But again, just kind of taking a look at how to get from the lower skill level to the higher skill level for that caseworker, maybe that is one way a supervisor if they are observing that you have a really high engaged family can help develop those skills with that particular family because it might be a little easier to do so. And then, of course, those superior outcomes, you've got a highly engaged family, a highly engaged or highly skilled caseworker, things will be moving in the right direction, probably much more quickly.

Sonia:
And as a supervisor, you may not hear about those often though. You kind of have to ask about those families right.

Melissa: Absolutely.

Sonia: To build upon the strength of the worker once they identify that skill.

Shannon:
So, hopefully this looks familiar to everyone and I hope everyone is sending the first Friday so, as we go through this webinar series, we are going to be using the CQI corner to emphasize each practice profile so this past month, the practice profile highlighted engagement and they used Muskingum County. They submitted some ideas of what they are doing and how they are using CQI to improve engagement. As we all know the work of CPS workers is hard enough and especially with the challenges of the opiate epidemic, it is really taking a toll on frontline workers. Muskingum administration, they decided it would be good to get back to some basics. During job chaperoning days, they are working on the skill set of engagement and some of the things they are doing. They are learning to recognize ideal strategies to engage the family and establish common goals. They are also learning to identify unacceptable practices. So, for example, just casually in the office if someone uses as an acronym that only professionals or people in the field would know or a phrase they kind of catch each other like, "okay families wouldn't know that, how would you rephrase that?" So, workers are also being asked to complete self-assessment sheets and go into the field and document observations of ideal engagement strategies, and then administration, they are trying to catch workers doing something right. Instructing little ways that promote customer service and engagement. And finally, the administration in Muskingum County is showing their support of this endeavor by encouraging all of their staff to participate in these practice profiles webinar series throughout the next several months.

Melissa:
And I would just add that if you would like to see your agency highlighted and your name in print, please feel free as we go through the series and it doesn't necessarily have to be assessment, is our next one, but any of the upcoming practice profiles if you have an example such as what was submitted by Muskingum County, please be sure to let us know that. We want to make sure that we are highlighting in the first Friday or during the webinar series these examples of, you know, best practice or use of the practice profile.

Lindsay: Or if you have a strategy to share.

Melissa: Absolutely.

Shannon:
This next flyer, Summit County actually came up with this and then I know other counties have gotten a hold of this and are using it. They are putting it up in employee lounges, restrooms, whatever it may be. But they came up with this nice flyer as just a great reminder of different ways to promote engaging. And you know, they have the tree here. It's got the different apples. There are pieces of fruit there. Reminding to motivate families, empower families, communicate with families, establish healthy boundaries, provide positive reinforcement, emphasize family strengths and use active listening. And then while remembering these key concepts don't forget to use unannounced visits sparingly, which we have talked about that. Ask families how they prefer to be contacted, whether it be phone or email. Respect the family's choices. Use language that shows respect. How would they like be addressed. And again, no use of acronyms or professional terms that they may not understand. And when possible schedule that first home visit. And I think this was included as part of one of the attachments when they gave a handout. You guys can feel free to print that off.

Melissa:
Okay so we are doing really well on time, it is like 11:02. I think we are going to take a pause here for about five or ten minutes to look at what questions may have come in. If you have a question and you haven't submitted it via chat, please do so now. I know Lindsay has been monitoring that as we go so we are going to take a look at those questions so just give us a moment here to go through them and I am going to mute us and then we are going to come back in just a moment to answer those questions.

Lindsay:
Before Melissa unmutes us and we take a few minutes, in addition to questions because we've only had a couple of questions so far but I think another thing that might be helpful is if you have a suggestion that we have not mentioned about how you personally like to engage with different families, just shoot that into the text too and we will see if we can highlight a couple of those in the next few minutes.

Melissa: - Great idea!

PAUSE

Melissa:
Okay we are back. We have a couple of questions and some suggestions so I am actually going to let Lindsay, since she is the one manning the questions right now, get us started with that.

Lindsay:
Sure, so the first question when we were talking about how to kind of engage and do that first contact with families or how to ask about their preferences for contact with text message and email messages, the question that came in was:
"Should we be entering text messages (and I will add email messages) into SACWIS?"

Melissa:
The discussion that we had here was SACWIS is your case record and so documentation regarding contacts with families should go into fact quest. Now some agencies depending upon your own internal policies and procedures would want you to verbatim, you know, put the text message, the information in, but typically it would be more along the lines of summarizing what your contact wants, just as you would on the telephone. If you have a telephone conversation, you are doing activity logs summarizing what that conversation was about, you would want to do the same with text messages. Again, as a technical assistant specialist, if you are trying to contact a client, a parent, trying to schedule an appointment with someone, that's your documentation of those efforts to do that and so like if I were to come in and review the case, I would want to see those kinds of documentation that you have made your efforts to do those contacts to get those contacts completed.

Lindsay:
It maybe you know worth putting in your activity logs that you know talked to the family about their contact preferences, you know, I mean some families have the phones with the minutes and they can't talk but they can text and you can even document that, so then you know, let them know you are looking at that like that kind of goes with the work for engagement with the family in some of this.

Melissa: Absolutely.

Sonia:
Now that should not be your primary means of contacting or communicating. We want you to have some face-to-face contact with that family. I believe we can engage in conversation.

Lindsay:
We do have some really good examples that are coming in too. I hope you guys keep sending in the examples, because I think those could be really rich conversation if we do that. Catherine from Richland County said, I always shake my family's hands when I see them at meeting their home visit, of course, etc. as a great way to engage a partner.

Melissa:
Again, I spoke about verbal and nonverbal and that is a nonverbal way of showing your engagement with that client you know holding the hand out to shake hands.

Sonia:
Also make yourself aware of the cultural differences because with some cultures that may not be the most respectable thing to do and so we want to make sure that we are also honoring any cultural or religious connection to a hand shake.

Lindsay:
I'm going to jump to another question real quick and then we will go back to some examples that came in with engagement. This person says, "Hi I work for a private office or agency. We typically assist the foster parents and have limited access to working with the bio parents, is there a way to engage this part of the process for my role in the child's life?" That might be a good question for you, Shannon.

Shannon:
So yeah, I have been working for our agency for 24 years and so I have seen that struggle and, you know, I can't even say it differs by county. I think it’s almost by each individual county worker and may be their experience. My suggestion is: One, we have to remember that counties have contracts with numerous private agencies, so they may also be assuming well this private agency was not willing to, so I may be assuming this private agency doesn't. Just always put it out there that you are willing to. How you can do that. If you are finding it across the board with a county, one of the things we have done in our agency is our administration or the head of our foster care department will go meet with the county, over at the county, and have like a provider meeting and just casually bring some donuts, bagels, whatever it may be, say hey, just want to put it out there for you. Here are the different ways you can use us to help engage your family and we are more than willing to do this. You know we can attend these meetings with you, with the biological parents. Again, always reminding the custodial agency we are not going to do anything without your permission and guidance because we don't want to cross a boundary as a private agency that we should not. Always take the lead from the custodial agency. But just put yourself out there and, you know, again, I always say face-to-face meetings with your county workers whether you can get them to meet you for a cup of coffee somewhere or to meet them over at the county agency. Once you have that face-to-face contact, you should develop a relationship. That county worker is more likely, I think, to reach out to you. So, you know, I think so many times we just call each other on the phone and we keep that relationship just phone based. Try to meet each other. And make them a team.

Melissa:
And I think based upon what you just said, an important point would be from a county perspective is to have conversations, engage in those conversations about those roles and

responsibilities. And just be very open about what that big picture would look like. Like how is it best to help this family, because I as a county worker may be going into it thinking well their role and responsibility is to work with the foster parent and not even really thinking about the fact that they might want to help engage with that birth parent in that process and I might not even be thinking about that at all and that is not to say that I wouldn't want that to happen, it just never crossed my mind to do that. And so maybe thinking about because we talked at the very beginning about ideal practice using all the stakeholders and collaboration with everyone and just kind of opening your mind to having these conversations about roles and responsibilities and how that might look. What is the best team effort to approach this family to have a better outcome for that family.

Lindsay:
Absolutely, and if anybody any other books out there in webinar land from a private agency have other strategies that they use, please type into the chat. Let us know if you guys want me to give your agency kind of credit as we are going through some of these suggestions, be sure to let me know where you are from when you send in these suggestions too.

Our next comment is from Sara at Hamilton County and she said you know I have always instructed my new staff, not only own staff but other staff within our agency to try to really highlight a positive right off the bat when they walk into the home. Even something simple like, "Hey I love the color of your couch" or "wow this is a really nice vase." She said they found it to be a way to give that person some pride and it has always assisted them with kind of getting in the door, keeping people positive and starting off the conversation on a good note.

Sonia:
Lindsay, we highlighted that in one of the handouts for the caseworker. Compliments definitely can help build and maintain that relationship. Make sure that the compliment has some real meaning and just simple things like, "Thank you for allowing me to meet with your family today." It shows that you really have connected with them and invested some time with working with the agency. Give them thanks and compliments as you are continuing to do your assessment. Sometimes families share things with us that are pretty hard to talk about and so again acknowledging that. "Thank you for sharing that story with me it really gives me a good picture of what your family's dynamics are." Or how you survived this situation. Those kinds of compliments are great.

Kenyetta:
I know we didn't talk about this, but I also think that whole entire commonality piece helps with engagement. I know one of the things that I would do especially when I went out in the field was as soon as I walk in a home, try to figure out is it something that I can refer to. Do they have a TV show that's on I am familiar with it, maybe that is my way to engage. One experience that I had was a client had one of these photos, you know when everybody used to take those photos in a big white chair, and I spotted that so I went ahead, I was like “oh my God I have a photo just like that at home”. We were talking about that, you know how cute those photos were but just something like that. I mean I think it kind of like let her guard down. She was like “is she seriously talking about the photo?” And I think that kind of opened up the gate as far as you know her feeling comfortable, me feeling comfortable and I think we just gained rapport just from that simple comment about the photo. We were like talking about the pets. You know people like to brag about them. We talk about those. You know you sometimes have some unique situations like I had the giant potbelly pig that nudged me under the table one time, but you know that is a topic of conversation that you can use to engage because you never know.

Lindsay:
Right. The next question we have, someone says, "Can you please assist in how we would settle a claim with a family that insists they cannot meet with us until after the timeframe that we are required to make face-to-face and how can we explain about you know our mandate and use engagement skills so that they know when we have to go out there sooner to meet our mandate, make our attempt, that it is not because we are being disrespectful of them, right?

Melissa:
Well, the rule does allow for, if there truly is a way, or you know you can't meet with the family within those first four days, you know there are certain requirements within the rule that you can waive that. If you made diligent attempts to do so and it is not an immediate safety where you just should knock on their door regardless of what they are saying, you know that mandate can be waived. But with that being said, you can explain to them, you know, some agencies will say, "Look I understand that you can't meet till Tuesday but your fourth day was Monday, but I am going to drop off a letter at your door to let you know that I'm going to drop an appointment letter for that date." You've gone out, you've knocked on the door, you've made your mandate, let your boss know. And let the family know you are going to do that and then you know meet with them the following day. There are different things that can be done when they absolutely, you know, are legitimately saying I am not going to be home. It might not even be legitimate, but they are absolutely saying to you, "I am not going to be able to meet with you." And really if there is not a very specific safety issue going on right at that moment, then just document those conversations. That is the key for really everything that you do in child welfare is you can justify a lot of stuff as long as you have the clear documentation about what your steps were and what steps were taken and you are doing the waivers as needed.

Sonia:
And those situations will come up frequently especially at the end of the school year when kids are going away for camp. My workers that I used to supervise would often get referrals on a Thursday and go make contact with the family and the family would say, "Oh I just sent him off to camp until next Wednesday." Those kinds of situations are going to happen, and so again as long as you are documenting that, there is always a way that we can justify why we can't. And you may still meet with the mom or the dad and meet with the young person once they return from camp. Or once they come back from visiting grandma for the weekend. But you still have made some contact with the parents.

Lindsay: Absolutely

Sonia: But be creative.

Lindsay:
We have a couple of more. Actually, we got a lot more. We are doing great with this presentation. We have ten more minutes and we will try to get in all the comments that we can in that time. Question: Are these strategies designed for kind of the primary worker or the worker of record engagement or can they be used by support staff or both?

Sonia:
I'd say everybody. Any and all. I think Kenyetta mentioned it earlier, the person at the reception desk that makes that first contact with the family needs to know these engagement techniques. Needs to talk about the importance why engaging with that family because it really sets the tone for that family's involvement and connection all the way through. I mean think about when you go into a store. If you walked in the store and the first salesperson you come across is rude or

nasty or mean, I don't know about you guys but I've turned around and walked out. And they really had some great deals going on in that store. But because you come across to me as nasty or rude or mean, you are not going to get my business. The immediate person, anyone that is touching the involvement of our families need to utilize these practices.

Melissa:
And I think that is one of the things we talked about at the last webinar for the overview was that practice profiles when they were originally marketed, for lack of a better word, there was a lot of thought that it was just for your intake assessment investigation workers and it is really not. And that is why we are kind of doing this webinar to rebrand the practice profiles because they apply to all child welfare professionals. It is not just your intake worker, not just your ongoing worker but your foster care worker, your private agency workers, your IV-E court probation officer who is going out there. You all know all face that. But anyone who is touching the lives of the families that we touch can benefit from these profiles. We really, really cannot stress enough the fact that although in your mind you might have thought these just applied to the first knock on the door, that intake stage, they are not just for that. They are for the entire child welfare practice continuum.

Lindsay:
Absolutely. Okay. The next one we have is somebody said, "Hey, I had read in a first Friday a while back about an agency that was sending thank you notes to the families after their first contact as a means of engaging", and if my memory serves me correctly, I believe that was Lucas County.

Melissa:
We think it was Lucas. We think it was Lucas. And if you if you are out there, can confirm that for us?

Sonia: Kudos! But kudos on that!

Lindsay:
But what the agency was doing, it was really a good example of continuous quality improvement too because the one unit within their agency had a couple of workers who had said we are going to try to do this engagement strategy so they took it upon themselves to start sending out these handwritten thank you notes after their first contact with family and they got all sorts of positive feedback back saying you know, "I have never received a card from somebody who works at, you know, the CPS agency and this is awesome." And it really helped their work with that family.

Shannon:
Yeah. And how this whole topic of this thank you letter came up is we were sitting in a CQI meeting here talking and we were talking about how just CQI can be such an intimidating turn. Continuous Quality Improvement. Oh, that's not me. I don't do that. That is not my department. We were talking about how just the simplest things are part of CQI and improvement. And writing a simple thank you letter, right there, it improves the process so you just became part of a CQI by writing a thank you letter.

Sonia:
And I think you are right. Like Melissa had mentioned before, we don't realize that we do that also. We all do CQI. We all contribute to some aspect of quality engagement and connections with families, regardless of where you are in your agency or what role you are in.

Lindsay:
Yeah. Okay. We've got some other good questions and suggestions. The next question is talking about, going back to when we were talking about best practice and making a phone call to make that initiation. And so, you know, the question was just kind of a clarification of are “we allowed to do that?” You know, we kind of heard that the best practice may be moving back towards going and doing this unannounced home visits again and then kind of following up, you know, if you do make a phone call where does voicemail fit into that.

Melissa:
So, with regard to OAC, when you are looking at differential response, your traditional response and your alternative response. For both pathways you can use a phone call to initiate the case. But what I want to be clear about is with traditional response. You have to actually speak to someone who can attest to the safety of the child. If you are calling the school to say, is so and so at school right now. And the school says no they are absent today. They are not speaking to the safety of the child. That is not a correct initiation. You should initiate it by actually speaking to someone. The alternative response rules do indicate that if you call and it is an unsuccessful phone call, that still counts as initiation. Now I want to put on my critical thinking cap and say, but have I really assured safety. Because remember everything goes back to child safety. If you have initiated your case by an unsuccessful phone call in an alternative response pathway, your initiation is okay. You are within compliance but have you insured the safety of that child? What else do you really need to do to make sure that child is safe? My thought is one and done does not really assure safety. While you are in compliance with the rule, there is rule and there is best practice and so assuring that when you are thinking about your case, is best practice okay? It could be that whatever allegation you got is not so severe that, you know, leaving a voicemail message is okay till the following day or till you can get back to that case. But if it is a case where you are looking at it and going, I really don't know that that is going to assure the safety of the child, you should be making other attempts to do so. It could be that you have left that message but then you need to follow up. And again, you know, you need to follow up with a face-to-face within 24 hours anyway. Going out later that day after making those attempts and doing that unannounced home visit. Again, as long as you are assuring the safety of the child. And then when you knock on the door and you are doing all the other things that we talked about with engagement today, you can still engage with the child or with the family. You know in child welfare I practiced for a long time before alternative response was a pathway and I never had any issues engaging with a family. I could call someone an alleged perpetrator and still engage with that family. It is not about your pathway. It is not about what you call things. It is about your skill set and how you are utilizing your skills as a worker to involve that family in the process.

Lindsay: What an excellent answer Melissa!

Melissa: I thought about it. (laughs) For a minute or two.

Kenyetta:
The only thing that I would like to add was that once you make that call to ensure safety, document that how you insured that safety. Because sometimes I see people say they made a phone call. They assured the safety of the child. But what actually was discussed to assure the safety of the child. Document it. What did that look like?

Melissa: If you didn't document, it didn't happen.

Lindsay:
Because that is the critical thinking piece. Just point out here because we are all child welfare professionals whether you are you know a case aid, a caseworker, whether you are a licensed social worker, you have a background in something else, we are all child welfare professionals and that is something that we need to think about as the critical thinking pieces and kind of taking that minute to assess you know what information do I have about this family to make that thank your determination.

Sonia:
So that is a good segue into our next topic because we are going to talk a little bit about critical thinking during the assessment webinar. We hope that you tune in for that.

Melissa:
I know we are getting close to our time. I will say that if you did not receive an answer to your question here in our live forum, Lindsay is responding to questions via the chat and we also document the questions and the answers so that information will be available after the webinar. We will get that information out for the past overview webinar and then we will do the same for each of the webinars that are upcoming in the series. I want to point out that our contact information is here, so I think I speak for everyone when I say that if you have a question or concern, you can certainly contact us or you can contact through the [help me with the mailbox]

Lindsay: Oh it is OCWLC@JFS.Ohio.gov.

Melissa:
Yes. So that is the learning collaborative mailbox. It is being manned here at ODJFS and so any questions that you have, please feel free to send them through that mailbox, or again I would like to hear about the suggestions that you have because I think knowledge is power and the more that we share about what we are doing with one another, the better our practice overall becomes.

Lindsay:
Real quick, a couple of other things. I have a couple of people that have said, "Hey it was Lorain County that did the thank you cards." Sorry that we gave the shout out for Lucas. We had the L but not the correct county.

Melissa: Right Lorain County.

Lindsay:
And then I did have, though we did get another so we have Gregory at Lucas County that says some helpful validation statements. Like you were talking about use a SHER model earlier, Kenyetta, would be, "No one knows you child better than you do. I have never met a parent that has not loved their child." Those kinds of things. Let's see is there anything else we want to touch on. I know we are going to miss some of these guys. Let's see. I see one from one of our TAS's One of our TAS's, Robynn, said also be mindful when you are talking to the subjective report who is a parent who is the source of the safety information by telephone.

Melissa:
Yes. The rule does allow you to initiate with the AC or the AFO. Again, go back to those critical thinking skills. If there is an actual perpetrator of whatever the abuse or neglect may be, you may not want to use that as your initiation or if you have used it as your initiation, making sure

that you are getting out there much more quickly than you would if you could get that from a collateral resource. Good point Robynn.

Lindsay:
Then we have some other questions, just about, I think we will stop after a few more. I'm going to go back through these and all of these good suggestions. Maybe we can kind of pull them together and send them out to everybody who attended today so we don't miss anybody's suggestion. But when you click out of this webinar here in a minute, you should get five questions, if you are with a group, you guys can all answer those together as a group and then also as far as with the evaluation following them, you will get an email sent out with a link to a survey monkey evaluation, and then if you are participating in a group, we did send out hard copies of the evaluations as well so you can give us some feedback.

Melissa:
Thank you to everyone for your participation and our next webinar will be on assessment.

Lindsay: We hope to see you back.

Have a great day everyone. . .Thank you!