

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



October 20, 2003

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-64-03

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH
DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY ADOPTION AGENCIES

SUBJECT: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN CASE PLANNING

REFERENCE: ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-78-98
ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-28-99
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (CDSS) MANUAL
OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, DIVISION 31-201, 31-206
WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE (W & IC) 16501.1(f)

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to re-emphasize the importance of engaging families, and children when appropriate, in the development of all case plans for children who receive child welfare and foster care services.

The federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) require that States comply with three Well Being Outcomes. Relevant to this notice is Well Being Outcome 1, Item 18 which states that: "Families should have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs, and in order to assess those needs, families must be involved in the case planning process". Systemic Factor 2, Item 25 addresses the Case Review System and provides a process to ensure that each child has a written case plan developed jointly with the child's parent(s).

The results of our federal review for both Well Being Outcome 1, Item 18 and Systemic Factor 2, Item 25, indicated that in "47 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children (when appropriate) in the case planning process". One of the identified sources of the problem was that "practice does not always emphasize child and parent involvement in case planning", nor are "parents made aware of their rights and responsibilities during the process". Thus, the CDSS agreed to implement specific action steps as a part of our Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which was approved in April 2003. This notice is one of a series of notices that will be issued pursuant to action steps written in our federal PIP.

Key sections from the CDSS Manual of Policies and Procedures, Division 31-200, and Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16501.1(f), in summary, provide that when it has been determined that child welfare services are to be provided, the social worker shall:

- Complete an assessment;
- Determine the case plan goal, the objectives to be achieved, the services to be provided and case management activities to be performed;
- Inform the parents of their rights and responsibilities in the case planning process; and
- Complete a written case plan documenting all of the information relevant to the case situation.

Family engagement is a critical element of the Child Welfare Services Redesign. “In order for child welfare service to recognize the importance of building parental capacity, implementation of the new emphasis on family restoration child welfare services should perform inclusive and comprehensive case planning that engages families in individualized services and support to build on their existing strengths while addressing the issues of concern based on the periodic assessments of child safety”. (Redesign Final Report, September 2003).

As the Redesign is implemented counties will begin executing and expanding strategies for improving this essential practice. We recognize that some counties are already implementing many of the strategies, such as team decision making, family conferencing, family group decision-making, etc, to fully engage families in the case planning process. Full and active engagement of the family in case planning is also expected to assist us in addressing the disproportionality of African American and Native American children in the child welfare system. The Fairness and Equity Matrix is an emerging tool designed to bring fairness and equity issue into focus as families interact with the child welfare system. This tool is relevant to engagement practice because it addresses both individual and system biases and suggests remedies to reduce bias.

Engaging families in a collaborative and supportive manner from the first contact establishes a cooperative foundation for future relationships and provides the opportunity for families and service professionals to assess family concerns, strengths and resources together. Assessment and case planning is the process of gathering and evaluating information relevant to the situation and appraising the service needs. An interactive process with the family is necessary in order to complete a comprehensive assessment of a child’s needs and develop a relevant service plan.

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In the past, the CDSS has provided the following resources for strength-based engagement of families in the case planning process.

- Best Practice Guidelines for Assessment of Children and Families, issued as ACIN No. I-78-98 (December 17, 1998) laid the foundation for the development of a family-centered, strength-based assessment and planning process across the full spectrum of child welfare and foster care services.
- The final Wraparound Standards, issued as ACIN No. I-28-99 (April 7, 1999) provided detailed expectations that must be met by wraparound programs, many of which articulate the values and philosophy of engaging families that can be utilized across all programs.

These ACINs, the Fairness and Equity Matrix and related information in the Redesign Final Report, and the PIP are available on the CDSS website <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov>.

Counties are strongly encouraged to have an articulated family engagement process in all aspects of the case planning that promotes and supports the use of a non-judgmental, non-blaming, family-centered approach in dealing with families. This should include, but not be limited to:

- Policies and procedures that inform parents of their rights and responsibilities regarding the case planning process. This should include information about the purpose of the case plan, an explanation that the plan is flexible according to changing needs, the consequences of progress or lack of progress on the plan, and an explanation that the plan is part of case documentation.
- A procedure by which the information is to be shared and discussed with the parents; including documentation of family involvement in all areas of case planning, starting with initial contacts, as evidenced by parent signature on the plan.
- Obtaining a written copy of the parent' signatures indicating that they have read, discussed, and understand the process.
- All agency policies, training and supervision should provide clear, consistent direction on family engagement principles.
- A single, unified case plan, open for review by the family, should document family participation in the development of the plan and any changes in the plan.

Counties that are implementing a local System of Care program may want to expand their Family Partnership Program to include more child welfare service families. A strong Family Partnership Program can assist in the development of the policies to assist parents in the engagement process.

The California Institute of Mental Health has developed a Family/Professional Partnership Implementation Guide for Family Partners and Agency Administrators. It is rich with family focused strategies. The manual and examples of work plan, family partner activities, communication materials, training resources are available and may be downloaded at <http://www.cimh.org>.

Additional Suggested Guidelines and Strategies

The following are general guidelines and strategies taken from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, *Resource Guide for Rethinking Child Welfare Practice under the Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) of 1997* and the Child Welfare Institute, *Ideas in Action*.

1. Approach the family from a position of respect and cooperation.
2. Engage the family around concern for the child's safety, and explain the agency concerns and reason for involvement.
3. Assist the family and in the instance where youth are involved, with a clear understanding of safety and risk issues.
4. Help the family define what they can do for themselves and where other members may need to help.
5. Focus on family strengths, with specific attention on culture, traditions, values and lifestyle as a means to build a bridge for case planning and service delivery.
6. Inform the parents of the shortened timeframe for reunification and the consequence of not meeting the limits with the approach that the agency wants to the help parents meet the time limit. This knowledge may help to motivate parents. The consequence of not meeting the time limits may result in the termination of parental rights.
7. Be prepared to commit to frequent and clear communication to the parents so they are aware of what needs to be done within the timeframes.
8. Parents need to know they have the power to maintain their children in the home or regain the custody of their children by becoming safe parents.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (916) 657-2614 or Teresa Contreras, Chief, Child Welfare Policy and Program Development Bureau at (916) 445-2890.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Sylvia Pizzini

SYLVIA PIZZINI

Deputy Director

Children and Family Services