

Provider View: Engaging and Supporting Families in Care Process

Enabling or Empowering?

Navigating the foster care system can be tough for foster care youth and their families. With a lot of moving parts and competing agendas, the voices and choices of the child and their family can get lost in the shuffle. It can be easy to get stuck in a mode and mindset where you do everything for your clients. How do you hold firm the concept “done with you, not for you” as an empowering partner and ally and help your clients become more self-sufficient?

How Trauma Can Impact Providing Care

Many children and families involved in the foster care system have endured traumatic events, which can cause some challenges. People who have endured trauma often lose their voice and choice. Your clients may not even know how extensively trauma has affected them – physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. This can cause children and parents to act out in anger or fear.

Being a trauma-informed care provider means you understand where your clients are at, you’re committed to helping clients regain their power and voice and you provide services that center around them, their needs and preferences. Using a trauma-informed lens will help improve the services you provide and help increase your bottom line.

Amplifying Families’ Voices

To help your client and their family on their healing journey with trauma and receive more tailored services, you must consider where you can include their voices and how you use them within your organization.

Where? You can include client and family voices in policy and procedures committees, on key standing committees, in task forces and workgroups, during new staff interviewing and on hiring panels, on councils and advisory and agency boards.

How? You can use client and family voices with your direct services, in advocacy, in welcoming and orienting new patients/families to the organization, in orientation and trainings and with your partners.

Continuous Quality Improvement Propelled by Your Clients

Ultimately, if you do not center your client and their families in the care they receive, it can be hard to determine to know the services are working or not.

As you continuously gather family and support network feedback, it makes it easier to identify problem areas, make needed improvements and makes it easier for you to listen to your client. You want to ensure you receive useful feedback, make it easy and comfortable for people to give it to you and focus on the service attributes that are most important to them.

What You Can Do – How to Engage Families

The following are a few ways that you can engage with your client’s family and support network.

- **Identify who you’re engaging.** Your client *and the client’s family* provide the basis of who you engage. The client may not see their family of origin as supportive, but their family still needs support because they’re an important part of the solution.

- Anyone who your client identifies as family – whether biological or not.
 - Anyone who provides support to your client.
 - Anyone your client is willing to provide consent for the provider to involve in their care.
- **Provide psychoeducation.** Your client and their family may see the effects of trauma but not understand the source. They also may not understand the power of protective factors and resiliency.
 - Explain to your client how trauma affects their physical and emotional health.
 - Discuss how their family or support network can be helpful in the health change behavior process.
 - Educate everyone on how people who have been traumatized process information. When someone is in “fight-flight-or-freeze,” address those needs first.
 - If a family member or caregiver feels overwhelmed by the needs of your client, let them know it’s OK for them to have other care professionals to step in and help while they take care of themselves.
 - **Maintain communication.** Maintain an open, transparent and respectful dialogue with the family or support network about their comfort being included in the treatment team and what they need to feel safe and open in the process.
 - **Focus on skill, not will.** Everyone is doing the best they can with the resources and skills they have. Don’t shame caregivers or families but instead offer more resources and opportunities to improve their caregiving skills.

Resources

NCTSN (2018). Going the Distance: Implementing the Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit in Three Organizations. Retrieved from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network website:

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/going-distance-implementing-child-welfare-trauma-training-toolkit-three-organizations>

NCTSN (2018). Working with Parents Involved in the Child Welfare System. Retrieved from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network website: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/working-parents-involved-child-welfare-system>

Resources on Trauma-Informed Care for Caseworkers – Child Welfare Information Gateway. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/trauma/caseworkers/>

Trauma Informed Care. Retrieved from National Council for Behavioral Health website: <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/areas-of-expertise/trauma-informed-behavioral-healthcare/>