



# Practice Guidelines

## Engaging Parents during the Investigation Process

Version Date 12/29/17

### Learn how the family's culture influences parenting.

- Recognize historical experiences that may influence the parent's response to your involvement with their family and may create an immediate fear that you are there to remove their children.
- Parenting roles differ in different cultures. Ask questions such as: Who has primary caretaking responsibility for the children? What happens if you and your spouse disagree about a parenting practice or a caretaking responsibility?
- Supervision of children may differ by family and may be culturally based. In some families relatives may be close by and take an active role in watching over the children if the parents are not home; but these relatives may not be in the home with the children. Take time to learn more about these arrangements.

### Keep parents informed about their rights and the steps in the investigation process to encourage participation.

- Actively and genuinely engage the parents by fully informing them throughout the assessment, involving them in the decisions that affect them, and providing choices and opportunities for their input (such as when and where subsequent meetings will be held, or who will attend a TDM meeting).
- Explain what the parents can expect during the investigation process, from start to end.
- Do not use acronyms or uncommon legal or child welfare terms.
- Ensure communication and written materials are in a language the parents and caretakers understand.
- Assure the parents that you want to hear what they have to say. At the first contact, introduce yourself and explain that your role is to:
  - make sure children are safe;
  - investigate the specific allegations in the report; and
  - assist with securing supportive services if needed by the family.
- While reviewing the Notice of Duty to Inform with each parent, explain each right listed on the form, and check to make sure they understand all of their rights.
- Before ending a contact, tell them what you plan to do next and when, and when they will likely hear from you again.

### Remaining non-judgmental and solution-focused starts with self-awareness and believing that all people have strengths and capacity to change.

- Avoid making assumptions about the parents based upon the allegations in the Hotline report or case record. Meet the parents with an open mind.
- Parents and children may be experiencing stigma or shame associated with substance addictions, mental health issues, family stressors, or poverty. Remain non-judgmental when a person is sharing about traumatic personal situations that have occurred in his or her life.
- Acknowledge and recognize that some parent's attitudes or behaviors may spark reactions or emotions within yourself. Demonstrate professionalism and self-control by noticing your feelings and maintaining your composure, demeanor, and tone in all interactions.
- Identify specific strengths within the family such as a history of protective behavior, adaptability as a caretaker and ability to successfully meet the unique needs of their children.
- Build upon protective capacities to co-construct a plan to address any safety threats or risks. For instance, a mother experiencing stress due to heavy child care responsibilities could be asked how she can engage individuals from her social support network to come to the home a couple of nights a week to provide some relief.

## Share and encourage these simple ways to enhance protective factors in families.

- To foster nurturing in parents, suggest a weekly family game night or a simple craft project with their child.
- Increase knowledge of child development by discussing what children can and cannot typically do at different ages.
- Build resilience by teaching parents relaxation strategies, such as taking a few deep breaths and thinking about a place where they feel happy.
- Enhance social connections by helping parents to identify all the people in their life that are sources of support.
- Show the family how to access concrete supports through resources such as 2-1-1Arizona.com or community resources centers.
- Discuss how to support the social and emotional needs of their child by identifying what makes their child sad, frustrated or angry. Discuss how the child behaves and what the parent does. Help the parent identify strategies to support their children.

Adapted from: *Building Community, Building Hope. 2016 Prevention Resource Guide. Children's Bureau*

## Act with respect, empathy, and compassion to foster trust, hope, openness, and readiness for change.

- Be genuinely curious and open to learning about the family and their unique experiences. Acknowledge that the parents are the experts on their family by allowing them to share what works for them when managing the day-to-day needs of their family.
- While speaking with the parents, look at them attentively and turn your whole body towards them to demonstrate that you are listening to what they have to say. Encourage them to continue by nodding or responding with an "okay" or "uh-huh." Reflect back what they say to check that what was said has been accurately understood.
- Address each family member by name and give the parents a chance to invite you to enter and inspect their home.
- Consider what you want to say before speaking. Spend more time listening and less time talking.
- Consider how you would respond to a crisis happening in your family. Try to see things from the parents' point of view.
- Parents and caregivers are often fearful and worried when DCS begins an investigation of their family. Validate any feelings of fear by acknowledging that the feelings are real and normal.
- Avoid escalating fears or worries by staying calm, keeping a neutral facial expression, and remaining objective.
- Be as adaptable and flexible as you can throughout the process. For example:
  - Don't follow the same interview script with each family. Instead, adapt your questions to reflect the parent's current emotional state and needs.
  - If child safety has been confirmed, but the investigation is incomplete and a parent needs to go to work, or pick up a child from school, schedule another time convenient to the parent to continue the interview.
  - Visit parents at times that are convenient for their schedule, if possible.
  - Be respectful of the person's time by keeping scheduled appointments and calling if you are running late or need to cancel.

## Begin interviews with less personal and less threatening topics.

- If parents feel threatened, they are more likely to defend or justify themselves. When they *do not* feel threatened, they are more likely to be trusting and share information that makes them vulnerable.
- Beginning the conversation with less personal areas of information, such as asking them to tell you about each of their children. This gains a rapport with the parents while collecting crucial information for the family assessment, and demonstrates that you are empathetic, respectful, and genuine.
- Move deliberately toward more personal topics (parenting, discipline, adult functioning) once a rapport has been established.

---

### For additional information:

- DCS policy Chapter 2: Section 3 Initial Contact and Conducting Interviews
- *Child Abuse and Neglect User Manual Series - Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers* <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/cps.pdf>
- *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health* [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)
- *Engaging Clients from a Strengths-Based Solution-Focused Perspective* <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Curriculum/301EngngClntsFrmAStrngthBsdSltnFcstdPrsptv.html>
- Action for Child Protection, Strategic Path Approach