

The Practitioner

A monthly journal of practice tips and tools for child welfare professionals published by DFCS State Office Social Services



Placement Matters

Two key values that should guide practitioners about the placement of children follow:

1. No child should be maltreated in care.
2. Children do not disrupt their placements; rather adults fail to provide children with the adequate emotional and environmental supports to meet their needs.

The first value means that our maltreatment in care tolerance rate is zero.

The second value dictates that practitioners see a failed placement as a “smoke signal” that the placement matching process failed and should be reviewed NOT that the child failed (or disrupted) their placement.

Local offices and providers should begin looking at placement matching protocols to ensure that they support the values listed. State level initiatives will be coming in the next few months.



Supervising Vision : Making Government Deliver On It's Promises

Kudos to all DFCS staff, leadership and partners! The National Governor's Association visited Georgia in June because of DFCS' gains in child safety, permanency and well-being. During the visit , Commissioner Walker delivered a powerful message on how far DFCS has come in delivering on its promise to strengthen families and protect children since 2004. A few highlights from her presentation are captured below:

How Do You Supervise Vision

- ◆ First Believe and Then Do Something Different
 - ◆ DFCS has an intentional model of change designed to deliver results.
- ◆ Communicate the Values
 - ◆ Values remove the “gray area” from decision-making.
- ◆ Take Excuses Off the Table
 - ◆ There is no acceptable reason for doing the wrong work.
- ◆ Make Your Efforts Count—Execute Well
 - ◆ Choose one or two high leverage actions that matter and take smart bites out of the “elephant.”
 - ◆ In 2004, DFCS' two high-leverage goals were to complete investigations timely and safely reduce the number of children in care.

DFCS Values

- ◆ “Our job is to assess risk—not remove children.”
- ◆ “You don't have to open a CPS case to help a family.”
- ◆ “Every decision to remove a child is a decision to do harm; state custody is a last resort.”

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The Results from 2004 to Present

- ◆ The number of investigations pending over 90 days fell from 3,711 to 0.
- ◆ The number of investigations opened monthly fell from an average of 17,681 to 4, 665.
- ◆ The percent of investigations completed timely rose from 76% to 97%.
- ◆ The number of children in foster care has been reduced by 42% without a compromise in safety.

The New Frontier

- ◆ Permanency
 - ◆ Profiles of entries to exits shows that there is work to be done.
 - ◆ Positive exits to permanency are harder to achieve and maintain.



Eleven Common Fidelity Issues in Safety Policy & Practice

Casey consultant Barry Salovitz identified 11 mistakes routinely made when assessing safety and risk in child protective services. Use the checklist below to make sure that you *aren't* making the mistakes listed:

- 1. Confusing safety and risk**—often occurs when danger of serious harm is confused with poor parenting, dirty homes, threats to a child's well-being or risk of future maltreatment.
- 2. Allegation focused safety assessment**— caseworker looks only for signs of present danger associated with the allegation.
- 3. Assuming that a sign of present danger means a child is unsafe.**—caregiver may have a substance use issue or be mentally ill, but this may not always mean the child is unsafe.
- 4. Viewing the maltreatment as the threat**—Ex., a safety plan notes that the threat is "the father beats the child leaving bruises." The maltreatment is the consequence of an active threat within a family system.
- 5. Inadequate evaluation of protective capacities**—many states use the term "mitigating circumstances" without defining what this means; can lead staff to see caregiver contrition as a mitigating circumstance or a non safety related "strength" identified, without a direct link to its capacity to support immediate child protection.
- 6. Failure to separately evaluate the safety of each child in the home**— approximately 1/3 of children removed from their homes are not victims of maltreatment; instances exist where all the children are taken into custody; some might have remained safely at home.
- 7. Accepting a caregiver's "promise" not to do it again as a safety plan**—if a child is unsafe, some aspect of a maltreating caregiver's behavior is or was dangerous or out of control, rendering such promises potentially suspect.
- 8. Using change services as the safety plan**— change services do not immediately control a threat or immediately supplement needed protective capacities.
- 9. Assuming that safety is the job of the investigator, not a services worker**—safety concerns are often precipitated by a report; safety is not a static condition; services workers are often best positioned to identify active safety threats, address safety threats through case planning and help the family develop sufficient protective capacities.
- 10. Closing a case with a safety plan**—if a child is in immediate danger without an agency intervention (unsafe), then it seems contradictory to suggest that a case can be closed with a safety plan; if the family's protective capacities are adequate to assure the child's safety, then no safety plan is needed.
- 11. Supervisors routinely approve safety assessments, decisions and plans that contain one or more of the above concerns.**—indicates a misunderstanding of safety fundamentals; a good reason to have a quality assurance, quality improvement and training system that not only looks at casework practice, but also at supervisory and mid-management practices.

For more information, visit www.napcwa.org and click on Framework for Safety Report.

AWARDS AND KUDOS

The 7th Annual Child Advocate Awards presented by the State Bar of Georgia Younger Lawyers Division Juvenile Law Committee was recently presented to Fulton County staff **Margarete Greene** for her outstanding work advocating for children and families. **Margarete** is a placement casemanager who values partnership and exemplifies the principles of family centered practice.

Ann Pope, PSSF Program Director has been nominated by the Administration on Children and Families to serve on the **National Advisory Committee for the National Resource Center for In-Home Services** (NRCIHS). The NRCIHS serves as a national center of expertise in child welfare practice for ensuring the safety of children and youth in their homes and making reasonable efforts to preserve families.



Georgia is well on the way to meeting and exceeding the 90% monthly visitation goal with children in foster care. In recognition of the great work that continues to be done, placement staff will soon receive an additions to their "visit toolbox".

Placement staff will receive an **ECM Tool Box** which includes a display case to post monthly ECEM stats and celebrate the accomplishment of staff at the regional and county level; and planners to record visits, document observations and detail next steps. County offices will also receive a scanner to aid in the upload of external documentation.

Keep up the good work and thanks for "Going the Extra Mile – For Every Child"!