



Family Support Services Practice Guide

An Overview

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) is strengthening services delivered to non-custodial families through increased direction and support of the Family Support Services (FSS) division.

DCS is committed to ensuring forever families for children and youth by delivering high-quality, evidence-based services in partnership with the community. The purpose of this practice guide is to outline the skills, strategies, and responsibilities that underscore the Department's approach to implementing FSS interventions with families. By strengthening the Department's non-custodial service delivery to children and families, the resulting outcome will be a deeper understanding of familial issues influencing child safety, well-being and permanency; clear identification of service needs; and implementation of effective service delivery to children and families.

To develop the FSS practice guide, Central Office Child Programs, Office of Child Safety and the members of the Non-Custodial team of the Commissioner's Cornerstone Leadership Academy collaborated to obtain stakeholder input, and information regarding case practice, and in-home service trends.

II. OVERVIEW OF DCS FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Family Support Services are services provided to children and their families involved in non-custodial cases with the purpose of minimizing risk to children by addressing identified needs within the family, thereby enhancing well-being and permanency.

Families and communities are best equipped to provide for the healthy development and care of children. When families are vulnerable and DCS assistance is required, FSS services may be implemented to assist in meeting the identified needs of the family. Service implementation will be a collaborative effort between the family, the community and the Department. FSS workers will identify potential resources and service intensity needed to ensure the child(ren) and family safety. Intervention with the family will be family-centered and strengths-based, and a Family Permanency Plan (FPP) will be developed or revised to capture the collaborative actions and goals identified to direct and support the family. If the services are not successful, safety risks continue to exist, and if no other less restrictive options are available, the children may be placed with a third party or may come into state's custody.

Mission

FSS supports and enhances the DCS Mission of ensuring forever families for children and youth by delivering high-quality, evidence-based services in partnership with the community. This will be achieved by building organizational and community capacity, improving access to and quality of services, and enhancing collaboration with families.

Core Values

- Families have the capacity to provide safe and stable homes for their children.
- Families are partners in the collaborative development of the individualized service plan and service delivery process.
- Families have strengths that are valued and supported.

Goals

- Assist families in providing care for their children within their homes and communities, which promotes safety, permanency and well-being.
- Assist families in developing their protective capacities.
- Assist families in gaining access and utilizing resources to effectively meet their families' needs.
- Assist families to reduce risk in order to prevent repeat maltreatment or future delinquent behaviors.
- Assist families through providing services which are culturally responsive and community-based.

III. DCS PRACTICE WHEEL

The DCS Practice Wheel will be utilized in order to assess and monitor progress toward safety and goals regarding service provision. The six skills of the Practice Wheel include engagement, team formation, assessment and understanding, planning, implementation, and tracking and adaptation.

The Case Manager assists the family by:

- Engaging the family and their identified support system by forming an effective team
- Assessing needs, to include safety concerns, strengths, and resources
- Identifying protective factors that can be developed to mitigate risk and prevent future maltreatment
- Developing and implementing an individualized, culturally-responsive family permanency plan
- Tracking and adaptation of the family permanency plan until identified goals and outcomes are achieved

IV. FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES PRACTICE SKILLS

Assisting families in resolving issues that affect child safety, well-being, and permanence requires a culturally-responsive, problem-solving approach that values the participation of the family and identified supports and consideration of family strengths and needs.

Engagement/Teaming

Engagement begins during the first encounter with the family. Engagement sets the tone for honest, empathetic and respectful teaming during every stage of the family's involvement with the child welfare agency. Successful engagement is necessary in interactions with all child welfare partners, such as extended family members, services providers, and community members.

FSS Workers shall:

- Build relationships with families based on empathy, respect and genuineness. The Case Managers must also consider that his/her behavior and attitudes can significantly increase the chances that a positive relationship will develop.
- Gain an understanding of the family's perception of the presenting issues. Continue to assess the current situation at each visit.
- Engage the family members in a process to identify family strengths and protective capacities that provide a foundation to address factors that place children at risk.
- Routinely affirm with the family that the intent of the Department is to help the family keep the child safe and address mutually identified problems to reduce the risk of the child being removed from the home and promote stability within the family.
- Help the family set attainable goals concerning what can be accomplished and how long it will take to do so.

- Provide opportunities for the family to express their feelings and concerns throughout the case-planning process.
- Engage in a collaborative decision making process regarding outcomes, goals, and tasks with family members, their identified supports, and providers.
- Develop a team of personal and professional supports to inform and support the family's permanency plan and to promote successful outcomes for the family.
- Consult other providers when there is an identified service need for the family that requires an additional level of expertise.
- If outside service needs are identified, maintain regular contact with the provider and communicate and clarify all gathered information in order to evaluate current interventions and to assist further case planning decisions.

Assessment

Assessment of the family's situation is an ongoing process of collecting and evaluating the information needed to make decisions in a timely, culturally competent manner in keeping with the goals of child safety and family stability. A comprehensive assessment will consider both the risk factors and the protective factors evident in the family. It will identify the risks and needs of the children; assess the children's developmental and emotional competence; assess the capacity of the parents to meet the needs of their children, and identify parental needs that are compromising the safety or well-being of the children in the home.

A thorough family assessment must also identify the strengths, resources and protective factors that may serve to mitigate risk. These include:

- The parents' capacity to manage stress, overcome adversity and seek outside help if needed,
- The presence of social networks that can provide assistance and/or emotional support to the family,
- The parents' knowledge of their child(ren)'s developmental needs, including expectations, and how to best provide structure and discipline that promotes developmental growth,
- The families' exposure to previous trauma and the impact on the family system,
- The presence of strong attachment between child(ren) and parents that supports the social and emotional development of the child(ren).
- The family's ability to access services and utilize resources to meet the basic needs.

This individualized family assessment should analyze all critical information in order to develop solution-focused service plans that will ensure the safety of child(ren) and stabilize the family.

Case Managers shall:

- Assess the safety of each child at every contact.
- Be specific with the family about the purpose of each contact and avoid technical or professional terminology.
(Refer to: [*Tennessee Family Advocacy and Support Tool Manual 2.1*](#)).
- Address identified underlying needs and supports through the teaming process.

Planning and Implementation

The Family Permanency Plan is a working document that identifies family strengths, protective capacities, opportunities for growth, and utilizes individualized assessments to identify coordinated services. The plan should include tasks for each member of the team. The family plan establishes desired outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time limited. Implementation of the family plan will be timely and consistent with a family-centered, strengths-based approach. The utilization of FAST results should provide guidance to family planning. Successful implementation of the family plan will minimize risk to each

child and optimize the family's ability to attain their desired outcomes. Plans are adjusted as tasks are accomplished, barriers are identified, risks are reduced, and assessments tools are completed to provide further direction concerning identified service needs or supports.

Case Managers shall:

- Convene Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs) in order to engage families in the development of the individualized, culturally-responsive, family permanency plans and to make any needed decisions regarding the safety of their child(ren).
- Encourage families to bring members of their support networks and communities to the family team. Actively engage these informal and formal supports as fully participating team members.
- Review and adjust the Family Permanency Plan continuously throughout the family's involvement with the Department
- Utilize both formal and informal resources to meet the identified needs.
- Provide, coordinate, and evaluate the delivery of services to children and families to reduce trauma and help families develop the capacity and resourcefulness to achieve sustainable independence.
- Continually evaluate the quality and efficacy of the services, the family's accessibility to the service, and the service provider's responsiveness to the family and Department.
- Engage service providers in regular communication to assess progress and needs.

Tracking and Adapting for Progress

Tracking starts with implementing the plan and involves ongoing and collaborative efforts to ensure that services address specified needs. Adaptation of the service plan occurs as new needs emerge or as identified needs are resolved through ongoing assessment. The completion of particular tasks and review or completion of assessment and tracking tools also support the monitoring and tracking process. The process of termination between the Case Manager and the family occurs after a mutual review of the progress made and the determination that risk has been reduced through the helping relationship.

Case Manager shall:

- Evaluate if the services delivered, as outlined by the family plan, are having the desired effect in helping the family achieve the desired outcomes.
 - If necessary, changes will be made to the service plan by the family team.
- Assess child and family progress towards safety by identifying the child's safety needs, determining if the child's safety needs have been met, and determining if there has been an adequate reduction in the risk of maltreatment to the child(ren).
- Evaluate, in collaboration with the family team, that the risk that precipitated DCS's involvement has been adequately reduced and that child and family functioning has improved prior to case closure consideration. The updated FAST outcomes and other assessments will be utilized during this evaluation process. (refer to [Tennessee Family Advocacy and Support Tool Manual 2.1](#)). regarding quarterly updates).
- Document any ongoing concerns present at the time of case closure to ensure accurate available information, should the family be referred to the agency in the future.

V. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FSS TEAM

Case Manager

The primary role of the Case Manager is to address safety and risk concerns while enhancing families' capacity to keep children safe through connecting them to formal and informal resources. Case managers will ensure families receive high quality, community based and culturally sensitive services when appropriate. Case Managers will attempt to render and connect families with services that will allow children to remain in their biological home or with their relatives, as it is believed that children thrive when they are in familiar environments. The foundation for providing case services involves approaching each family with genuineness, empathy, and respect.

The Case Manager shall:

- Continually utilize all required assessment tools per identified timeframes to assess for child safety, both formally and informally.
- Understand the dynamics of family relationships and address any potential impacts to the success of provided services and goal achievement.
- Identify needs and action steps, in collaboration with the family, to achieve desired outcomes.
- Engage families in the case planning and service delivery processes.
- Advocate and coordinate for families to receive high quality community-based services.
- Provide direct case management services.
- Monitor and evaluate service delivery.
- Develop collaborative relationships with service providers.
- Communicate with service providers to ensure they are aware of the desired outcomes.
- Document all pertinent and required information into [TFACTS](#). [Maintain case file per policy](#).

Team Leader (TL)

Team Leaders guide the decision making process to ensure child safety, well-being and permanence. TLs work with Case Managers to gather thorough and accurate information, analyze the information thoughtfully, and draw reasonable conclusions.

The TL provides guidance to Case Managers through the case conference process. The consult includes reviewing the case documentation and service provider materials, as well as having a verbal case discussion with the Case Managers.

Team Leaders are responsible for the following steps when reviewing cases:

- Review for risk factors, including exposure of the child and/or family to previous traumatic events,
- Review and assess the Case Managers' skills in identifying and assessing the impact of a range of critical issues and provide opportunities for learning,
- Assist the Case Managers in using the assessment of family strengths to develop service plans and evaluate progress toward the family's desired outcomes,
- Assist Case Managers in determining how to engage families in decisions concerning next steps in the service delivery process,
- Use the case review process to identify Case Managers' training and professional development needs.
- Review cases for completion of tasks and policy compliance,
- Address casework barriers and highlight/focus on successes,
- Consider remaining needs or concerns,
- Support the utilization of court liaisons and juvenile court staff to link families with service referrals in lieu of opening FSS cases.

Timeframes for case conferences are outlined in DCS policy [14.18](#). However, if the Case Manager is having difficulty at any point in the case, the supervisor should provide guidance to the Case Manager including

whether to request a consultation with an interdisciplinary team or an evaluation of presenting problems by other experts.

Team Coordinator (TC)

Team Coordinators utilize a strength based approach to support and guide TLs and FSS teams to ensure the delivery of quality services to children and families. TCs routinely consult with TLs on the status and progress of FSS cases. TCs promote and enhance effective outcomes by:

- Participating in the development of reports reflective of the FSS program,
- Attending CFTMs when additional guidance is warranted to explore most appropriate decisions on FSS cases,
- Identifying training and development opportunities to increase professional development of TLs,
- Coaching TLs and Case Managers to better comprehend the utilization of the practice wheel to promote effective results.

TCs consult with TLs on cases open beyond ninety (90) days to discuss progress, interventions delivered and needed, and immediate tasks and strategies to move case to closure, while bearing in mind safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and family.

Regional Director (RD)

Regional Director, utilizing the skills of effective leadership and competent management, provide the practice guide for ensuring the delivery of quality services to children and families. RDs help to develop and sustain strong leaders and teams in the FSS program area which contribute to the agency's effectiveness. FSS cases periodically warrant collaboration and support from the Regional Director, Regional General Counsel (RGCs), Court Liaisons, and Juvenile Court.

RDs strengthen and support practice by:

- Facilitating outreach to strengthen agency/community partnerships,
- Working with Regional Leadership to build FSS capacity,
- Partnering with RGCs to appeal court orders when FSS oversight is not warranted,
- Collaborating with courts and judges to explore strategies that will allow closure of FSS cases when presented to the court with safety and risk concerns being addressed and ready for closure.

When FSS cases remain open beyond one hundred-twenty (120) days, the RA will appoint a designee to formalize and facilitate the FSS Case Review Team. The FSS Case Review Team will review the case and develop a plan to remove barriers to case closure. The developed plan will also identify next steps and responsible persons to ensure the case is prepared for closure and will identify a targeted closure date. The team will include representation from:

- The regional CQI program area
- FSS Regional Leadership
- Central Office Child Programs

Service Provider

The role of the service provider is to partner with the Case Manager and family to enhance the families' capacities to keep children safe in their homes. The service provider will assist families and Case Managers in developing and carrying out a plan designed to reduce risk and address concerns to promote better outcomes for the child(ren) and family. Service providers will actively demonstrate respect for and sensitivity to individual and family diversity.

The service provider shall:

- Provide services that help to minimize risk and enhance families' capacity to keep children safe within the community,
- Use a strengths based assessment to align needs with evidence-based services,
- Identify and link the family to formal and informal community based resources and support,
- Empower families to use formal and informal resources for future problem solving,
- Recognize that families are equal participants in the service planning process,
- Provide services that are focused on safety, permanency and stability,
- Have a customer service orientation and ensure family satisfaction.

Metrics

Concurrent with the review process, metrics have been developed to support regions in better analysis and evaluation, which in turn, will support how to best allocate resources. Data accessed from TFACTS, Safe Measures, and/or the regional tracking mechanisms include the following by region:

(Reports currently available)

- Monthly FSS caseload by worker/region
- Average length of time FSS cases are open

(Reports to be developed)

- Number of FSS cases transferred from CPS Assessments Number of FSS cases transferred from CPS Investigations Number of cases transferred to FSS from Brian A or Juvenile Justice
- Number of cases opened in FSS due to Court Order
- Number of former FSS cases that require CPS involvement within one year subsequent to closure
Number of former FSS cases that require a custodial removal within one year subsequent to closure

Staffing Organizational Units:

Coaching and Developing Others:

23. Coaches subordinates on understanding the underlying needs and core family concerns in order to address key issues that will ensure safety.

Making Decisions and Problem Solving:

1. Utilizes data to make decisions and plans to address issues, trends, and concerns to choose the best solutions.

- 2.Models a holistic approach to problem solving through exploring multiple sources and “thinking outside the box” to promote child welfare outcomes.
- 3.Approves safety plans and removals in situations where abuse or neglect has occurred as to reduce risk and harm to protect children.
- 4.Works collaboratively to assist in making recommendations for reunification or termination of parental rights to ensure permanency.

Analyzing Data of Information:

1. Identifies, reviews, and compiles data with multiple sources to recognize trends in the child welfare and juvenile justice system. etc.).
- 2.Conducts case conferences, as needed, with staff to provide guidance, feedback, direction and next steps to promote safety, permanency and well-being.
- 3.Oversees the quality of service providers and resources such as counseling, placements, and case management in order to ensure families receive high quality services.
- 4.Ensures that the rights of families are recognized and acknowledged to promote best practices.
- 5.Reviews regional data and reports to ensure data elements are meeting required time frames.
- 6.Oversees and coordinates information that is submitted to outside entities e.g. courts, service providers, law enforcement is professional, accurate and consistent with DCS policies and procedures to provide high quality work.
- 7.Participates as an active member of a team; support and rely on team members for additional knowledge and help when needed.
- 8.Builds multi-disciplinary teams to conduct peer reviews for cases to ensure quality case management services.
- 9.Identifies pertinent information about cases that require decisions and/or actions from leadership and DCS attorney.
- 10.Engages with staff, children and families to build a trustful relationship.
- 11.Communicates issues effectively to build solutions.
- 12.Encourages self-sufficiency with clients and staff to overcome barriers and promote permanency.