Social Services Assistant Training
Six Days

Social Services Assistant training is an interactive, professional development activity that focuses on the essential skills and knowledge SSA's need to support the safety and permanency of children and families served by Child Welfare. This training is required for all new Social Services Assistants within six months of hire and is six days in length spread out over two weeks.

In this training, Social Services Assistants will learn about the valuable role they play in supporting child welfare caseworks to engage families and keep children safe. This training provides entry level instruction on key practice and policy areas related to the primary functions of the Social Services Assistant position. Topics include, but are not limited to: Using the Oregon Safety Model to ensure safe and meaningful visits; Cultural Humility and how it relates to Parenting Styles, Parent Coaching, Child Development, Engagement and Communication Strategies; Documentation and Court Presentations, Mandatory Reporting, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence.

This training will include lectures, individual and group activities and application of the information to case scenarios.
# Preferred Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>SESSION</th>
<th>PRESENTER(S)</th>
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</table>
| Day One   | 9:00-10:00 | **Introductions**  
- Honoring the role of the SSA to empower families and keep children safe  
**Cultural Lens**  
- Awareness of personal values  
- Awareness of other’s personal values   | Shelly Field  
Shantika Green |
|           | 10:00-Noon | **Mandatory Reporting and Types of Abuse**  
- Responsibility of being a mandatory reporter  
- Recognizing types of abuse   | Shelly Field  
Shantika Green |
|           | 1:00-2:20  | **Child Sexual Abuse**  
- Overview of sexual abuse dynamics  
- Considerations for supervising visits   | Linda Bello  
Shelly Field |
|           | 2:30-4:00  | **Visitation: An Essential Component of the Case Plan**  
- Purpose of visitation  
- Policy regarding visits   | Shantika Green |
|           | 4:00-4:30  | **The Culture of Parenting Assignment (Section 1)**  
- Learning activity to raise awareness of various parenting practices – Values, beliefs and biases  
- Inter-cultural communication   | Shelly Field |
| Day Two   | 9:00-11:00 | **Using the Safety Model to Ensure Safe and Meaningful Visits**  
- Understanding safety threats and protective capacities   | Shantika Green |
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>Monthly Contact</td>
<td>The role of the SSA in completing monthly contacts and monitoring child safety and Types of information to gather during face-to-face contact</td>
<td>Shantika Green</td>
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<td>Monthly Contact (continued)</td>
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<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<td>1:00 – 2:00</td>
<td>Monthly Contact (continued)</td>
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<td>Shantika Green</td>
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<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>Overview of dynamics of domestic violence and Supervising visits when domestic violence is an issue</td>
<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Culture of Parenting Assignment (Section 2)</td>
<td>Examining parenting practices from various cultures and applying that knowledge when setting up and supervising visits.</td>
<td>Shantika Green</td>
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<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day Three 9:00-Noon</td>
<td>Engagement Strategies for the Contact Professional</td>
<td>Introduction to Stages of Change, Dealing with resistance, and Engagement strategies</td>
<td>Dan Garris</td>
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<td>Jennifer Scholes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 – 2:30</td>
<td>Understanding Visits from a Parent’s Perspective:</td>
<td>• Parent Panel</td>
<td>Dan Garris</td>
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<td>Jennifer Scholes</td>
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<td>2:30 – 4:30</td>
<td>Engagement Strategies for the Contact Professional (continued)</td>
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<td>Dan Garris</td>
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<td>Jennifer Scholes</td>
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<tr>
<th>Day Four</th>
<th>9:00-4:30</th>
<th>Supporting Safe and Successful Visitation: Tips, Tools and Techniques</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- Understanding normal child development and how trauma, grief and loss impacts a child’s development</td>
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<td>- Providing parents with support to have successful visits</td>
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<td>- Providing feedback to parents</td>
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<td>- When to step in and when to stay out</td>
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<td>Andrea Bellows</td>
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<tr>
<th>Day Five</th>
<th>9:00-12:00</th>
<th>Substance Abuse</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- The process of addiction</td>
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<td>- Understanding and responding to substance abusing clients</td>
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<td>Jay Wurscher</td>
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<th>1:00 –2:00</th>
<th>Foster Parent Panel</th>
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<td>- Gain information about how to communicate and work effectively with foster parents</td>
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<td>Andrea Bellows</td>
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<th>2:00 – 3:00</th>
<th>Group Wisdom – SSA Panel</th>
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<td>- Effective strategies for getting the job done</td>
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<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<td>Andrea Bellows</td>
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<th>3:00-4:30</th>
<th>Professional Parameters</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- Setting boundaries</td>
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<td>- Conflict of interest policy</td>
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<td>Andrea Bellows</td>
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<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<td>Day Six</td>
<td>9:00-Noon</td>
<td>Documentation and Testifying</td>
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<td>• Understanding courtroom demeanor</td>
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<td>• Practice testifying</td>
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<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td>Documentation and Testifying (cont.)</td>
<td>Jennifer Scholes</td>
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<td>Shelly Field</td>
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<td>2:00-4:00</td>
<td>Vicarious Trauma and Self Care</td>
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<td>• Identifying professional challenges</td>
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<td>• Developing strategies for building resilience and reducing effects of secondary trauma</td>
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<td>4:00-4:30</td>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Shelly Field</td>
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Social Services Assistant Training:
Child Sexual Abuse

Primary Trainer: Shelly Field
Back up trainer: Shantika Green
Time: 1 hr. 30 min.

When children are removed from their caregivers because there is a concern of sexual abuse, visits are sometimes court ordered until there is documented information that visits would be unsafe and not in the best interest of the child. Visits may also be court ordered when convicted perpetrators have spent time in sex offender treatment. It’s important for SSAs to have an understanding of how to ensure the safety of children when visits between children and alleged perpetrators are required and/or deemed to be in the best interest of the child. This session provides an overview of the dynamics inherent in child sexual abuse cases and examines strategies that can be used to safeguard children during required visitation with sexual offenders. Participants view a movie, complete an individual exercise and engage in a large group discussion to facilitate their learning.

Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to identify general dynamics prevalent in child sexual abuse cases.
- Participants will be able to describe strategies for safeguarding children from alleged sexual offenders during visitation made mandatory by the court.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Documentation & Testifying

Primary Trainer: Jennifer Scholes
Back up trainer: Shelly Field
Time: 4 hrs.

This session is designed to help participants learn to appropriately document the visits they supervise. The learner will be able to accurately and objectively communicate to other parties in the case what is taking place during visits. This session focuses on both written documentation and on presenting this information when participants are called on to testify in court. The session includes practice in evaluating written documentation as well as practice answering typical questions should an SSA testify in a case.

Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to identify the required elements of visit documentation.
- Participants will be able to identify documentation that produces clear, objective and relevant communication.
- Participants will be able to demonstrate verbal skills in a mock courtroom setting to describe visits.
Social Services Assistant Training:  
Engagement Strategies for the Contact Professional

**Primary Trainer:**  Dan Garris  
**Back up trainer:**  Jennifer Scholes  
**Time:**  4 hrs. 30 min.

The Social Services Assistant upholds a public trust through a professional presentation that involves vital contacts with clients, colleagues and partners operating within the Child Welfare system. SSA’s routinely meet, plan and negotiate with children, youth, birth parents, foster parents, caseworkers, service providers and each other. Engagement Strategies for the Contact Professional is a session designed to honor this multi-faceted role by raising professional expectations, enhancing professional identity and improving tactical communication skills. Knowing how to redirect a person’s behavior with words is an SSA’s most important strategy for keeping everyone safe.

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the Qualities & Characteristics of a Well-Rounded Rapport Professional.  
- Understand the nature of resistance and learn non-escalation tactical communication skills.  
- Learn and practice key communication strategies that cultivate a prepared mind-set for performance in high pressure situations.  
- Review and practice responsive listening techniques and action generating listening techniques.  
- Deepen insight and empathy through a facilitated Parent Mentor panel with opportunity to learn through question and answer.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Foster Parent Panel

**Primary Trainer:** Shelly Field

**Back up trainer:** Andrea Bellows

**Time:** 1 hr.

Social Services Assistants have frequent contact with foster parents via telephone, e-mail, and in person to coordinate visits. This session provides the participants with a foster parent's perspective of the visitation experience. The panel is asked a variety of questions related to helping children maintain family connections and ways that they have worked effectively with agency staff. For example, the panel is asked to describe how they help prepare children for visitation, how they help the child manage their emotions and behaviors surrounding visitation, what they have found useful when SSA’s are transitioning children to and from visits, and ways to effectively communicate with foster parents to avoid or manage conflicts.

**Learning Objective**

- Gain information about how to communicate and work effectively with foster parents.
Social Services Assistant Training:  
Group Wisdom

Primary Trainer: Shelly Field  
Back up trainer: Andrea Bellows  
Time: 45 min.

This session provides the participants with an opportunity to learn tips and techniques from experienced Social Services Assistants. The panel is asked to share their wisdom on such things as: preparing for and setting up a first visit; effective communication with foster parents, caseworkers, birth parents and children; making office relationships work; setting boundaries; time management; ideas for difficult transports; tips for handling difficult visits; creative ideas to enhance visits; etc. In addition, this session provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on what they have learned throughout the training and then network and problem solve with their peers and experienced SSAs. They have an opportunity to bring up any unresolved questions or concerns that they may have to help better prepare them for their work.

Learning Objective

- Gain useful information and insights from experienced SSAs that will assist participants in their job.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Introduction to SSA Core Training

Primary Trainer: Shelly Field
Back up trainer: Shantika Green
Time: 1 hr.

During introductions, Social Services Assistants are asked to examine what strengths they bring to their work as an SSA, what they hope to get out of training, and what they will contribute to the learning environment. Participants will gain an overview of the training curriculum and have an understanding of what will be expected of participants during the training.

Learning Objectives

- Participants will get to know their peers and build relationships to work as a team throughout the training.
- Participants will feel valued as a part of a professional team to keep children safe.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Mandatory Reporting & Types of Abuse

Primary Trainer: Andrea Bellows
Back up trainer: Shantika Green
Time: 2 hrs.

This session will inform participants of their mandate to report child abuse and neglect and provide them with information about what constitutes abuse and neglect. The roles and responsibilities of mandatory reporting will be discussed, as well as the stressors involved in making a report. Participants will be asked to identify ways in which they can take care of themselves or support other mandated reporters who may be experiencing stress as a result of making a report.

Video tape, lecture and group discussion are used to provide information to participants on what constitutes abuse and neglect.

Learning Objectives

- Gain awareness of the responsibility, authority and stressors involved in being a mandated reporter.
- Understand the legal definitions of the categories of abuse and neglect.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Monthly Contact

**Primary Trainer:** Shantika Green

**Back up trainer:** Shelly Field

**Time:** 2 hrs.

This session introduces participants to Policy I.B.1 Monthly Contact and Monitoring Child and Young Adult Safety. The role of the SSA in assisting the caseworker complete monthly face to face contact is discussed, as well as the benefits of monthly contact.

Participants are provided with information regarding who can request they make the contact, how often they can assist in making contact with a family, how to prepare for the contact, information which needs to be gathered and how to document the information.

**Learning Objectives**

- Become familiar with the role of the SSA in completing monthly face to face contacts and monitoring child safety.
- Identify types of information to gather during monthly face to face contact visits.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Planning Visitation for Cases with Domestic Violence

Primary Trainer: Shelly Field
Back up trainer: Shantika Green
Time: 1 hr. 30 min.

Domestic violence is a dynamic that is present in many of the families served by child welfare. It overlaps with every other type of child abuse and when present creates a challenging dynamic in supervising visitation. This session will provide participants with a quick overview on how the dynamics of domestic violence intersect with visitation. Participants will discuss a case scenario and plan strategies for enhancing visitation in cases where domestic violence is a factor.

Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with the dynamics of domestic violence.
- Discuss strategies to use while supervising visits where domestic violence is a safety concern.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Professional Parameters

Primary Trainer: Andrea Bellows
Back up trainer: Shelly Field
Time: 1 hr. 30 min.

This session is designed to assist participants in creating personal and professional boundaries as they work in Child Welfare. Participants will be introduced to the DHS Conflict of Interest Policy. Participants will learn about boundary crossings, boundary violations, and professional sexual misconduct. Learning tools include group discussion, small group activity, and a quiz related to ethical considerations.

Learning Objectives

- Recognize where, when, and how to set boundaries when working with children and families.
- Identify boundary crossings, boundary violations and professional sexual misconduct as they relate to work in Child Welfare.
- Understand the potential struggles in creating appropriate boundaries in the work place, and how to gain support when situations arise on the job.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Substance Abuse

Primary Trainer:  Jay Wurscher
Back up trainer:  Andrea Bellows
Time:  3 hrs.

This session is designed to establish a basic awareness of substance abuse and the challenges that people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol may face. The instructor facilitates the process of understanding what addiction is and the effects that it has on our clients.
Methamphetamine, Alcohol, and Opiate addictions are discussed in depth. Tips and guidelines are shared on how to work with addicted clients in relation to setting up and supervising visits.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the dynamics of addiction and recognize the effects of long term abuse.
- Describe ways to effectively communicate with and provide support to families who are dealing with substance abuse and alcoholism in the context of visitation.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Supporting Safe & Successful Visitation: Tips, tools and techniques

**Primary Trainer:** Andrea Bellows  
**Back up trainer:** Shantika Green  
**Time:** 6 hrs. 30 min.

This session focuses on the elements that will help the participant structure and have successful visits. The session looks at the child’s needs based on their development. Time is spent exploring normal child development and how trauma can influence that development. During this session, participants will see examples of parent-child visits and learn techniques to help increase the parent’s capacity to meet their child’s needs. Lastly, participants practice implementing plans for successful visits based on what both the child and parent need for success.

**Learning Objectives**

- Participants will understand normal child development.
- Participants will understand how trauma interrupts development.
- Participants will learn how and when to intervene; how to coach parents for more successful visits.
- Participants will learn ways to plan activities for successful visits.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Understanding Visits from a Parent’s Perspective

**Primary Trainer:** Dan Garris

**Back up trainer:** Jennifer Scholes

**Time:** 1 hr. 30 min.

This session provides participants with the parent’s perspective of the visitation experience. Dan Garris moderates the panel in the context of his training on engagement strategies. The panel is comprised of parent mentors from the Morrison Center, who describe what it was like the first time they visited with their children in care. They share their general insights with participants as well as what specific activities their SSA did that were helpful and what practices they think can be improved upon.

**Learning Objectives**

- Gain an understanding of visits from a parent’s perspective.
- Learn techniques to enhance the visitation experience between children and their parents.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Using the Oregon Safety Model to Ensure Safe and Meaningful Visits

**Primary Trainer:** Shantika Green  
**Back up trainer:** Shelly Field  
**Time:** 3 hrs.

This session provides participants with a brief overview of the Oregon Safety Model. Participants are introduced to the Oregon Safety Threats Guide and information on how caseworkers make determinations about level of supervision, location, time and frequency of visits based on those safety threats, a child’s need for contact and the parental protective capacities. This session also addresses the important role that the Social Services Assistant plays in assisting the caseworker in monitoring child safety during visitation. Through the use of discussion and case scenarios, participants will learn what to look for when monitoring child safety during visitation, who to contact and what action to take when there is a concern about child safety.

Participants will learn how they can assist the caseworker in developing and facilitating the least intrusive plan possible that will still ensure safety for the child.

**Learning Objectives**

- Recognize when there is a need to report a safety concern, and understand the process for reporting a concern.
- Define safety threats, protective capacities and safety service providers.
Social Services Assistant Training:  
Vicarious Trauma: Taking care of yourself

**Primary Trainer:** Shelly Field  
**Back up trainer:** Shantika Green  
**Time:** 1 hr. 30 min.

DHS Child Welfare staff work in a stressful and challenging environment. Research has shown that exposure to the traumatic events of clients can be problematic if workers are not prepared for the exposure and equipped with information and skills to process and manage the experience. This session will provide information about vicarious trauma, managing work stress and how this can impact the worker, their clients and their family. This session will also provide workers with hands-on skills to prevent the harmful effects of vicarious trauma during the session.

**Learning Objectives**

- Discuss the challenges of child welfare work for social services assistants related to vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress.  
- Identify strategies for building resilience and reducing the effects of vicarious trauma.
Social Services Assistant Training:
Visitation: An essential component of the case plan

Primary Trainer:  Shantika Green
Back up trainer:   Shelly Field
Time:            1 hr. 30 min.

Visitation is one of the most significant services Child Welfare provides for children and families. Research has shown that the quantity and quality of visitation has a strong correlation in determining if and when a child will return home. In this session, participants will learn about the many purposes that visitation serves for children and families. The important role that visitation and contact plans play in reducing trauma for children will be emphasized.

Participants will also be introduced to Oregon’s policy regarding child and family contact plans, and gain an understanding of their responsibility in creating an environment that promotes a positive visiting experience for children.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the purpose of visitation.
- Become familiar with Oregon’s policy regarding child and family contact plans.