

Getting Acquainted with Your Files

Background Notes

An important part of casework requires an understanding of the work that has been done previously on a case and what remains to be completed. One part of gaining this understanding is to completely read your case file. Talking to the previous worker, as well as reading the entire file, is best practice and fills in the areas that the written documentation may not have completely explained. Correct placement of documentation in the file is important to many of the legal aspects of the child welfare system.

Tasks / Assignments:

- Ask your Supervisor for an active case to review. Read for the key elements in a file including the case notes, narratives, court orders, action agreements and family decision meeting notes. After you have read through the entire file, answer the following questions:
- What were the original safety concerns?
- What was the parent's reaction to initial contact by CPS?
- What factors helped determine the level of intervention that was required? What was the outcome of the referral and/or assessment? Was the court involved in some way?
- Have there been family meetings? And, if so, what decisions were made?
- Is this an out-of-home case or not? If it is, what is the visitation plan?

Discoveries:

- *What did you learn about the areas that are most often referenced in a caseworker's daily work?*
- *Did you read anything in the documentation that appears biased?*
- *If there was court documentation is there a specific format to be followed?*
- *What key content did you notice in the case notes?*
- *From the documentation is the progress or lack of progress identifiable?*
- *What positive factors can you identify in the case that have been influential?*
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Tasks / Assignments:

- What progress has the parent made in remediation of the initial concerns? What are the enhanced and diminished protective capacities of the parents?
- What support systems helped the family?
- What may be some cultural considerations in this case? How can you determine whether there are specific cultural considerations?
- Become familiar with the layout of the case file. Locate the following: The legal section, where minutes from the Child Safety Meeting are filed, where action agreements are placed, where the narratives are filed, correspondence section, medical section and protective services reports. Ask for case filing guidelines. Note the file is organized by most recent reports on top.

Discoveries: