Principles in Practice

The Family Support Approach to Family Work

Practice Guide
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Background to the development of the Principles of Practice

The aim of *Principles in Practice*, is to promote evidence based practice principles that can be adopted by family support organisations within NSW reflecting best practice principles in family work. The Principles in Practice approach to family work was written by Bronwen Elliot for NSW Family Services Inc. (FamS NSW), and has been delivered in practice workshops by FamS NSW. This practice guide provides individuals and organisations with a self paced workbook to enable practice reflection related to the ten principles.

Acknowledgement

This document owes a debt to the work of Louise Mulroney who researched and prepared the initial *Standards in Family Support* document, and to the numerous family workers who participated in its development. The permission of the Family Resource Coalition of America to draw heavily on ‘Guidelines for Family Support Practice’ is acknowledged with thanks.

Other material which assisted in the development of this document included:

- *Getting Started: Orientation Kit for Family Workers* (NSW Family Services Inc)
- *Early Intervention Principles* (NSW Family Services Inc)
- *Standards for SAAP Services* (NSW Department of Community Services)
- *Standards in Out of Home Care* (NSW Children’s Guardian)

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Introduction to Principles in Practice Training Package

The Principles and Best Practice in Family Work training has been designed specifically for new family workers or professionals who don’t work in a family support service but would like to have a deeper understanding of what family work is and the philosophy that underpins it.

The demands on family support work has changed considerably and family workers are now educated professionals expected to stay up to date with evidence informed practice approaches and have a strong foundational understanding of the family support principles that underpin the family support model.
This package provides participants with basic knowledge about the child and family service continuum that state government funded agencies need to work within, an introduction to the 10 family support principles in practice and an opportunity to explore evidence informed strategies that enhance the effectiveness of the work used to support families.

Package includes:

- Information about best practice and strategies to use it in your everyday work
- Introduction to the 10 family support principles and discussion about how these principles can be reflected in your practice and organisations
- Basic information about the core activities in family work and quality improvement
- Opportunity to discuss the importance of boundaries in family work and strategies to ensure you put boundaries into practice
- Information about some of the basic tools that can be used to enhance practice in family work

This training package is divided into the following 5 sections:

Section 1: The Child and Family Welfare Continuum in NSW

Section 2: Evidence Informed Practice

Section 3: The Family Support Principles

Section 4: The core activities of Family Work

Section 5: Family work tools

It is important that you have also downloaded the Principles in Practice: The Family Support Approach to Family Work document prior to commencement of this guide.
Principles in Practice

Foundations to the Principles in Practice

Sections 1 and 2
Section 1: The Child and Family Welfare Continuum

Common to all sectors within the human services industry are service continuums and the child and family sector is no different. In order to navigate the sector successfully it is extremely important to gain a thorough understanding of the child and family welfare continuum that exists within NSW.

Funding across the continuum is broken up into the following funding streams:

- Community Builders
- Families NSW
- Early Intervention Funding - Child, Youth and Family Support
- Brighter Futures
- Placement Prevention Funding - Intensive Family Support & Intensive Family Preservation
- Out of Home Care
Readings:

Early Intervention & Placement Prevention Program: Child, Youth and Family Support Service Model  March 2011 Policy and Planning Division NSW Government Human Services


Brighter Futures Services Provision Guidelines  May 2012


Intensive Family Support Service Guidelines  May 2011


Activities:

Where do you fit in the Child and Family Continuum?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Provide a brief description of the services provided within the following funding sources:

• Community Builders

What is the purpose of this funding?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

- Families NSW

What is the purpose of this funding?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

- Early Intervention Funding - Child, Youth and Family Support

What is the purpose of this funding?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
• **Brighter Futures**

What is the purpose of this funding?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

• **Placement Prevention Funding - Intensive Family Support & Intensive Family Preservation**

What is the purpose of this funding?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

• **Out of Home Care**

What is the purpose of this funding?

__________________________________________________________________________________
What is the eligibility criteria for the programs offered within this funding source?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Why would you refer a family or child to services within this funding source?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

What is the Family Referral Service?

How can you find out about what services are in your area?
Reflection on this Section:

What have you learnt that you could specifically use in your work from this section?
Section 2: Evidence Informed Practice

The Evidence Informed Practitioner!

Barratt and Hodson (2006) noted, “The evidence-informed practitioner carefully considers what research evidence tells them in the context of a particular child, family or service, and then weighs this up alongside knowledge drawn from professional experience and the views of service users to inform decisions about the way forward.”


When we are working in an evidenced informed way we follow a model which draws on three sources of evidence:

- Professional judgement from experience
- Relevant evidence from policy and research
- Service user feedback

The combination of these three elements enables the practitioner to use a range of factors including research to influence their decision making processes.
If you were working in an evidence informed way what might that look like?

It can be hard to describe what evidence informed practice is, so to make it a little easier to explain let’s look at what it would look like if you were an evidence informed practitioner and what you might do:

- You would know where to access good quality research on topics related to your practice
- You would take steps to keep your knowledge up to date by reading regularly, attending practice forums, participating in conferences and workshops.
- You would be able to articulate key messages from research on significant topics for example: ‘we know from research that ....’
- You would spend time reflecting on your own experiences and practices and identifying the learning
- Actively seek out research to inform your decisions about cases such as assessments, plans and recommendations etc
Are these qualities you can identify in yourself?

It is likely you are doing many of these often without even realising it.

In Munro’s 2011 report, she said, “Another crucial aspect of professional development is an organisational culture that not only provides access to research but values it and makes it feasible for workers to use it well. It is unrealistic to expect every social worker to have the time to search for research articles and the skill to appraise the research methods used in order to form a view of the reliability or validity of the findings... access to the evidence base must be supported by organisational and professional research literacy.”


What barriers do you have to working in an evidenced informed way?
What enablers do you have to working in an evidenced informed way?

Give an example of when your organisation has used evidence to inform practice?

Readings:

Strengths Based Practice

‘Strengths are among the most real and most authentic aspects of a personhood’ – Clifton and Anderson, 2004.

Chip Anderson, 2000 states ‘You start seeing people in terms of who they are when you focus on their strengths..... rather than in terms of who they aren’t...’

What is a Strengths-based approach?

‘A strengths-based approach operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. Traditional teaching and professional development models concentrate on deficit based approaches, ignoring the strengths and experiences of the participants. In a strengths-based approach the focus is on the individual not the content. Drawing on appreciative inquiry, strengths based methodologies do not ignore problems. Instead they shift the frame of reference to define the issues. By focussing on what is working well, informed successful strategies support the adaptive growth of organisations and individuals.’

Definition of Strengths Based Approach – NSW DET

This can be much easier said than done as community and welfare services have traditionally been deficit focused rather than strengths focused but what we are so clearly discovering is that when you focus on a person’s strengths that person begins to build resilience and independence through empowerment leading to long term sustainability.

St Lukes in Bendigo Victoria are leaders in strengths based practice providing a range in innovative resources to use with children and families. McCashen (2005) states ‘Strengths based practice assesses the inherent strengths of a child or family, and then builds on them. Strengths-based practice uses people’s personal strengths to aid in recovery and empowerment.’


Why use a Strengths-based approach?

Holzer, Bromfield and Richardson (2006) stated that ‘programs that operated from a strengths based approach were more effective than programs that operated from a deficit perspective.’ Clifton and Harter expand on this even further stating that ‘Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness.’ - Clifton and Harter, 2003, p.112.

Rose (1992) states that there must be four principles involved in the empowerment of clients, these are:

1. Children and families are seen as whole human beings living in a social context
2. People can grow and develop when provided with the necessary material, social and emotional supports, and validation to live stable positive lives.
3. Growth and movement occur in the context of relationships characterised by honesty, clarity of goals, purposes and shared plans of action.
4. ‘Diagnosis’ does not determine a person’s entire development or their capacity to live more fully than workers roles permit.

The most important principle that underpins all of the above is the need for the worker to develop a trusting relationship with the family and child and in doing so validate their aspirations, struggles and strengths. The family worker has the responsibility to increase the family/child’s expectation of themselves and to assist them to view themselves as being capable of progress and change.

To achieve this the family worker needs to direct the conversation to the identified strengths leading families and children to appreciate and acknowledge their strengths. To do this it may involve discussions around self-concept. Rose (1992) discusses that it is more effective to use a clear process rather than be focused on achievement. In doing this the family worker’s role is to support the client:

- To put goals into operation
- To construct manageable steps that move towards the goal while continually reinforcing its meaning and purpose
- To mutually determine implementation responsibilities by joint decision making about who will be responsible for taking specific steps within an agreed timeframe

The key here is joint decision making and responsibility to implement the plan as this is where the client’s or individual’s control is maximised. The most important value of empowerment in this process is the focus on goal formation; goal framing and purposeful activity. The process is really important particularly for clients who have complex needs and have experiences with service providers and systems that can de-value them leading to low self-confidence. A relationship with a family worker who assists a client in goal setting and evaluating the service and direction leads to greater client driven outcomes.

So to draw out the key points here again:

**Client driven outcomes require three activities:**

1. Focusing on clients own understanding (context) of their social being. This should facilitate dialogue where clients feel free to express, elaborate and reflect upon their feelings and understandings about life.
2. Supporting clients to identify a full range of possibilities which might meet their needs. This work centres on helping clients to make decisions which affect their lives.
3. Connecting clients to relationships and reducing feelings of isolation. This experience of socialisation produces stronger feelings of self-worth among clients. It also assists clients to see their personal issues as ones that have a structural bases.
Dennis Saleeb’s work on Strengths in Social Work Practice

There are many different ways to discover what strengths clients have. One way is to ask questions aimed at uncovering strengths and abilities.

Saleeb (2008) states there are eight different sets of questions that we can ask clients to assist to identify their strengths:

**Survival questions**, such as:
- Given everything that you have faced recently, how have you managed to survive?
- How do you do that?
- Facing which of your challenges has given special insight, strength or resolve? How?

**Support questions**, such as:
- What people in your life have given you special understanding, support and guidance?
- What friends, relatives, teachers or neighbours have made a difference in your life? Where are they now? Are they still available to you? What did they respond to in you that made them want to help?
- What organisations and associations have been supportive of you? A church? A social club? A neighbourhood group? A school group? Are they still a part of your life?

**Possibility questions**, such as:
- What is your fondest hope or dream?
- What do you want your life to be like? How far along are you to reaching that dream? What special abilities or talents will help you get there? What is the first step to that dream? How can I help you get there?

**Exception questions**, such as:
- When things were better in your life, when you were not facing the difficulties that you are now, what was different?
- When your problems did not seem to be so much a part of your life, what was going on?
- What about your relationships, your circumstances, your thinking, or your behaviour was different?
- What were you doing to make your life better and more fulfilled? What were others doing?

**Esteem questions**, such as:
- What is it that you really like about yourself?
- What is it that others like about you?
- What things that you do give you real pride?
- How would you describe your personality and its good qualities to someone who doesn’t know you well?

**Perspective questions**, such as:
- What is your view of your problems? Your successes?
- What are your theories about how you have gotten to where you are now?
- What kind of sense do you make of your recent experiences and difficulties?
- What are your triumphs and how do you explain them to yourself?
- What makes the most sense to you as an explanation of your current situation?
Change questions, such as:
- How do you think your current situation can change to a more positive one?
- What do you and those around you have to do to make that change?
- How has your situation changed for the better in the past?

Meaning questions, such as:
- What beliefs do you have that are most important to you?
- What parts of your life do you value the most?
- Do you have purposes beyond the self that are important to you? What are they?
- What are your most important values?

(Saleeby, 2008, p.71)

Saleeby’s Strengths Perspective

Further Reading:

Sustaining community Evidence for Strengths Based Practice
https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2012/05/30/what-is-the-strengths-perspective/

Uniting Care: Strengths Based Practice: The Evidence
http://www.childrenyoungpeopleandfamilies.org.au/info/social_justice/submissions/research_papers_and_briefs/?a=62401
Child Centred Practice

In order to work from strengths based practice perspective it is vital that you are working in a child centred practice approach.

What does it mean to be child centred?

Child centred practice means being aware of children at all times. Putting the child at the centre is much greater than having awareness of the child, it is about thinking about how their involvement with their families may affect them. It is about engaging with children, listening to them and acknowledging the importance for them to participate and contribute (Tess Ridge 2003).


Why is child centred practice important?

Tess Ridge (2003) states that we should engage children wherever possible in the work that we do with families. Ridge discusses there are many advantages to engaging children, these include:

- A more holistic approach to working with families
- Insights gained from working with children can assist adults to work more effectively and help to ensure that services provided are relevant to children’s needs
- Extremely valuable to the child themselves
- Research evidences that children learn to express their own needs when they are engaged in this process and learn to consider the needs of others including skills of cooperation, negotiation and problem solving.
- Being child centred can enhance the opportunity for children and parents to work together in turn strengthening these relationships and fostering greater understanding and respect for each other
- Involving children and respecting their ideas and capacities assists the child to grow in confidence and self esteem


Child centred practice is evidenced in the following ways:

- Wanting to understand what a day in the life of the child is like
- Hearing the child’s voice
- Engaging and involving children as much as possible
- Providing opportunities for the child to make decisions as much as possible
- Using a collaborative approach – family and home, school, community and society
- Considering the child’s developmental stage
How do Family Workers do this?

- Start where the family is at
- Build respectful relationships
- Set goals that are collaborative
- Help in practical ways
- Build strong networks
- Build on the strengths of the family and child

As Dr Bruce Perry states ‘before any kind of lasting change at all in behaviour can be made; families need to feel safe and cared for. Healing and recovery are impossible even with the best medications and therapy in the world without lasting caring connections to others.’

What can we learn from this and translate into our practice?
Further Reading:


What might your service look like if you were child centred?

What actions do you need to take to ensure that your practice is family and child centred?
Effective and Active Engagement

Are families ‘hard to reach’?

or

Do services find it difficult to engage and retain vulnerable families?

Group Activity!

If there are a group of staff working through this training package in your organisation, find half an hour and discuss the following questions or you could do this activity in a staff meeting:

1. Discuss together: How could family workers engage more effectively with ALL families?
2. Choose one example of a ‘hard to reach’ group and brainstorm at least one ‘off the wall’ idea that would help you to reach this group.

Key point to remember about effective and active engagement

- Families are more responsive at times of transition ie. pregnancy, new baby, child starting school
What does effective and active engagement look like?

- Active listening
- ‘down to earth’ manner
- Appropriate self-disclosure to establish a personal connection
- Transparency
- Culturally competent workers and workers that reflect the demographic of the area
- Reliability and truthfulness
- Empathy and humour
- Follow up quickly
- Regular contact with families
- Persist at least three times when the family is not responding
- Non-stigmatised approaches eg. using the language of ‘support’ not ‘intervention’
- Organisational culture that enhances engagement

*Active engagement: Strategies to increase service participation by vulnerable family. Dr Johanna Watson (2005).*
Accessible Services for Families

Engaging families is about providing accessible services for families and children. If your service is not accessible for families and a conducive environment that makes families feel welcome then it is not an accessible service.

Accessible services have the following characteristics (where possible):

- Communication strategies that match the target group
- Agencies offer extended opening times
- The service works in partnership with other agencies and services in the area
- Provision of childcare and transport options
- The service is responsive to the local community – evidenced through cultural competent practices such as material provided in different languages, access to interpreter services or staff who are reflective of the cultural demographic of the area.

Evidence based practice demonstrates that families need services that will:

- Build on formal and informal networks
- Provide greater focus on children’s basic needs
- Increase collaboration/linked services
- Reduce the procedural process that inhibits relationships and requires stories to be told several times
- Target services operating from non-clinical, non-stigmatising settings
- Actively linking families with support
- The significance of relationships

Further Reading:


This is a strong resource providing case studies and strategies to assist you in your work with children and families.

Engaging Indigenous Families:

Working and Walking Together: Supporting Family Relationship Services to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Organisations. Published March 2010.

What have you learnt from this section?

How can you put what you have learnt into practice?
Congratulations!

You have reached the end of Sections 1 and 2.

You are now ready to move to Section 3.