

LESSON PLAN/NARRATIVE

Day 2

Module 2: Understanding the Family Solutions Model of Casework

Time 1 hour

Rationale: Casework with families from a strengths based perspective is fundamentally different from more traditional approaches to casework. Strengths based, family centered supervisory practice requires a paradigm shift for many workers. Since supervisors are typically not present when a worker is with a family, supervisor competencies and skills are modeled in the process of engagement, assessment, case planning, service implementation, monitoring of worker and his/her interaction with the family. Supervisors and their teams will practice family centered, solution-focused approaches. Kentucky's model of family center, solution focused casework, Family Solutions, is a conceptual model that defines problems as difficult situations in everyday life. It focuses attention on understanding exceptions to the problem as well as the problem itself. Family Solutions is an approach to assessment, case planning, and on-going casework that targets specific everyday events in the life of a family which: 1) have caused the family difficulty and, 2) represent a situation in which at least one family member cannot reliably maintain his/her behavior. The model combines the best of problem-focused relapse prevention approaches that evolved from work with addiction, risk, and helplessness. Goals include working in partnership with families, focusing on everyday life events, and promoting prevention skills.

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe how Family Solutions defines the problems of child welfare clients.
2. Identify stages of family development and associated tasks.
3. Recognize that there are exceptions to problem behaviors in families.

Outline of Activities:

1. Explain basic assumptions and goals of Family Solutions model for casework practice
2. Use Smith Family case scenario for group discussion/application of two key concepts: everyday life events and exceptions to the problem
3. Pairs work together in small groups to identify their own FLC stage, client at same stage and exception to that client's problems.

Materials

1. How Does the Model Define Problems? Handout
2. Family Development Stages and Tasks Handout
3. Developmental Tasks Common to Each Stage of Family Life Handouts
4. What Goals Do We Agree On? Handout
5. Definition of the Problem Handout
6. Funnel Handout
7. How Will We Get There? Handout
8. The Effect of Problem Definition on Partnership Handout
9. Smith Family Case Scenario
10. Deficit Approach/Family Solutions Approach Worksheet

Glossary of Terms

1. Family Solutions
2. Everyday Life Event
3. Exceptions
4. Partnership
5. Prevention Skills

Trainer's Instructions

1. Introduce the module by presenting the purpose and objectives.
2. Provide basic overview of Family Solutions model using the following as a guide:

Kentucky's Division of Protection and Permanency calls its model of assessment and casework planning Family Solutions. The name is intended to convey that we are solution focused instead of deficit focused, and that we are committed to working with the family to find appropriate solutions.

Show the How Does the Model Define Problems? slide during discussion.

Our model finds that it is most productive to define problems as difficult situations in everyday life. It may help you to note the impact that defining problems as difficult situations in everyday life if you compare and contrast this approach with other models of problem definition. Historically, the medical profession and mental health to large degree defined problems as deficits or diseases of the individual. For instance, depression or mental retardation would be considered "problems." But if we were to use those definitions of "problems" then we would have to open a case anytime a parent was diagnosed with depression or received low results on an IQ test. That would be a lot of cases! But of course we don't open cases for depression or mental retardation or even alcoholism by themselves. You can be depressed or have a drinking problem, and that alone will not demand that the case be opened.

So when do we open a case? (Allow group to generate answers.) Correct, only when the problem situation interferes with basic safety and care of family members. So that is our first fundamental building block. We define problems as difficult situations in the life of the family that must be improved upon. This particular idea allows that all families face challenges and it helps to emphasize the common ground between worker and client. So that is our first fundamental idea--that problems are most solvable when defined as difficult situations in the everyday life of the family.

The second tenet of Family Solutions is that we should spend as much time understanding the exceptions to the problem as the problem itself. Much of our information about the family historically has been about times when the family has not been successful at managing its everyday tasks. While this information is accurate, it certainly is not the whole story.

Families have many moments in which they are taking care of everyday life and ensuring the well being of family members. How do they do that? What are they doing in those moments that is different from the moments in which the problems occur? Can we learn something about how the family manages in non-conflict moments that would tell them and us about what they might need to do in conflict moments? This process of being

curious about what works in the family, particularly in similar situations as the one that presents risk to the family, provides a balanced view of the family, more hope on everyone's part, and some useful clues regarding where to start.

This is not a simple "Pollyana" approach to problems. The problems in a substantiated case are real. It is simply a recognition that if we are to help the family change, we must first acknowledge that they have already been working on the problem, that they have been partially successful in some areas, and that maybe something they are doing in those areas might be useful in the high-risk area.

These two fundamental concepts lead to the four basic goals of Family Solutions:

- *Partnership: In each and every case we intend to become a partner with the family to assist them in establishing safety. This is not always easily achieved, but it is our goal, our responsibility (not the family's). When it is difficult to achieve, it is our responsibility to explore what we might do differently to establish a partnership to protect vulnerable family members. It is acknowledged that this will sometimes be unattainable, but that it remains our goal in each and every case.*

Show the What Goals Do We Agree On? slide.

- *Focus on Everyday Life Events: In each and every case, our goal is to be as practical and useful to the family as possible. This means we set a goal to define problems, phrase objectives, write case plans, work with providers, and measure change in terms of the specific tasks necessary to accomplish successful management of an everyday life type of problem.*
- *Target Prevention Skills: In each and every case we want to focus intervention on skill attainment. We want to assist families in identifying existing skills and learning new skills that specifically reduce risk. Additionally we set as our goal the measuring of successful use of prevention skills so that the family and the courts can be reassured that risk has been reduced.*
- *Ensure Family Owned Prevention Plans: As many of you know, our families often are faced with complying with multiple case plans based on the multiple agencies they work with. Often in our desire to fix their problems, we in social services and mental health fields act as if "everything would be better if the family just listen to us and did what we asked." We often do have good ideas but research has shown that unless a family really "owns the plan of action" they tend to resist (sometimes just passively) its implementation. How do we accomplish a FAMILY-OWNED plan?*

Show the Definition of the Problem, Funnel, How Will We Get There?, and The Effect of the Problem Definition on Partnership slides and walk participants through each.

- 3. Distribute and present the Smith Family Case Scenario to the participants. Explain that this case scenario will be used throughout the training so that each step of the process can be applied to a single case. Have participants**

identify 1) the developmental stage and task (everyday life event) with which the Smith Family is struggling and 2) at least one exception to the problem.

- 4. Have large group break into pairs. Each pair should complete three tasks: 1) Identify their own FLC stage; 2) Identify a client who is in the same stage and discuss how this client is the same and different 3) Identify exceptions to this client's problems (times they are not struggling or things they do well).**

