

Evaluating 101: Evaluating with Children and Their Families (Practice Guide)



Audience

Caseworkers

Outcome

The Texas CPS Practice model defines evaluating as the process of continuously assessing the plans we develop with children, youth, families, and safety networks to determine our need for involvement with the family along with our ability to describe what safety looks like for a particular family. Evaluating requires us to reconsider why we are still involved with the family. If we continue to be involved with a family, it means that the child or youth is unsafe.

As we evaluate, we must always keep the child or youth front and center. We do this by making sure that their voices are heard, putting emphasis on how the plans being made will affect them, and identifying their specific, daily needs. While evaluating, we will also assess the relationships we have with the children and youth, the family, the professionals involved and their safety network while keeping our focus on creating and maintaining successful connections with each child or youth.

Evaluation of our own work helps build our skills and practice. The Texas CPS Practice Model integrates well-established standards of applications into our work; for example, the incorporation of a trauma-informed model of care, strength-based supervision, and Signs of Safety.

Why Do This

Evaluating demands that we are pragmatic, practical, and realistic when it comes to our casework. Our roles as caseworkers is to ensure that all children and youth are safe, protected, that their well-being is secure and intact, and that they are cared for by competent caregivers. Our job is to make sure that everyone's focus is on acquiring forever safety for children and youth. To keep children and youth forever safe and protected, we must establish frameworks to organize our efforts and establish the parameters for best practices that deliver good outcomes.

Our agency supports effective change strategies. We do not simply offer services to families. We understand that services do not equate to safety. Effective change strategies inform our interventions for families from the very beginning of a case.

Our focus is on the behaviors and actions that our families must demonstrate to ensure the safety of their children. When we are evaluating our plans and interventions, we want to determine what services have been effective through an observed action or behavioral change exhibited by the parents/family. Those strategies that have been effective for ensuring safety within the family should continue, but the strategies that appear to be non-effective should be changed. For example, when we do not see any demonstrated actions or behavioral changes as a result of a parenting class that we have referred a mom to, then maybe that particular service is not needed, and we need to decide with the family what *is* needed.

Evaluating includes analysis. Analysis is the phase of evaluation following the process of information gathering. Evaluation is critical but sometimes missed because at times, we find ourselves jumping ahead to safety planning or service planning before taking time to analyze where we are and where we are headed. The stakes are always high when decision making. We should never make decisions in isolation. Sound decision making depends upon thorough analysis, which is best accomplished through a teaming approach.

We are continuously learning about what it means to partner, how to ask questions instead of telling a family what to do, how to gather good information, how to make decisions based on sound judgment, and how to follow through with action plans for future safety with families and their networks. This requires a culture of evaluation, one in which we all reflect upon what we are learning in order to build and sustain a clear vision of what good practice is and what a successful child-centered protection organization looks like.

Practice Tips for Evaluating Our Work with Children, Adolescents, and Families

1. Case preparation always trumps indecision. Much of our success in keeping children forever safe is determined by the rigorous thinking we engage in with supervisors, colleagues, safety networks, and families. This is part of our trajectory.
2. A large part of preparation is related to decision making. We always need to evaluate the decisions we make on the spot, especially when it comes to immediate child safety.
3. Good evaluation comes from getting balanced information. Doing our best to maintain balance will help keep us objective when we ask questions. This includes filtering all the information through the three questions:
 - a. What are we worried about?
 - b. What's working well? and
 - c. What needs to happen?
4. Supervision can help your focus around evaluation. It is one safe place where you can think through the successes you've had but also help plan the next steps in your trajectory.
5. The use of solution focused questions helps you evaluate where the case is headed.