

## Texas CPS Practice Model: Teaming

Welcome to today's teaming webinar my name is Angela Pie. I am the CPS practice model specialist at state office. If you joined us for the previous webinars, you'll see we have been looking through the six core competencies of the practice model. Today we will focus on the core competency of teaming but before we get to the overall objectives of this webinar, I'd like to propose a saying that should fit in with today's training. The quote goes like this "It takes a village to raise a child, not a mother and therapist." What we're saying here is that in making everyday life for children safe and forever safe we've spent a lot of our energy on wrapping ourselves around mothers and therapist. Well today, we are going to ask you to think about what else we can do.

### Objectives

So let's look at our objectives for today.

- First we'd like to define what the safety network and teaming are and what we want to achieve through the process.
- We'd like to be able to provide you all with rationale for developing teaming with the safety network.
- We'd like to present some of the necessary tools that can be used throughout the teaming process.
- And finally we'd like to detail some beginning steps in implementing a teaming process with the safety network. So we've looked at our objectives, let's look at how we define teaming.

So I want to take a moment to ask you all to think about, how do you define teaming. So teaming as defined through the practice model is the process of assembling the family and safety networks and actively implementing an achievable plan for safety, permanency, and well-being of the child or youth.

So we've defined teaming but we also want you to understand the phrase or the concept of a safety network. Safety networks include all the committed adults who will play a long-lasting part in the lives of the children youth and family so as to achieve sustainable safety. Other professionals, community members and family members are all important contributors to the safety network. They're just a group of people who are willing to raise their hand and say that they're committed to the everyday and forever safety of the children and youth we are working with.

So we discussed the definition of teaming, but what we want to achieve through the teaming process. We want to be able to develop an understanding of why we are all here, what we want to accomplish and how we are going to do it together. We want to allow for participation, meaning that everyone has a voice but also that everyone has ownership with what is about to happen. We also want to ensure that we create shared commitments for action and outcomes. As we go through the teaming process we want you to remember that teaming, it's not always easy gathering the village, pulling together the team or making a safety network part of our everyday work is not going to be easy.

### **Challenges**

There's going to be a lot of challenges that call for us to be able to manage how we organize, think about and help pull together who can be involved. Again, it's not always about us, our decisions. Yes, we have our bottom line about not involving Uncle Fred, the twice convicted for DUI favorite person of mom and dad. However, that does not stop us from digging in with families and helping them make the best logical choice for who should join the team. So there can be many challenges to teaming but we're going to go through three of those challenges today. We want you to remember that depending on your region and your team you might identify additional challenges.

#### **Challenge 1**

So the first challenge that we are going to look at today refers to the multiple voices that you and your staff are going to hear about. Some of the people involved will be angry at us, some will be angry or upset at the family, and some are going to be on our side and support us. We'll have various opinions and perspectives but what we think matters the most is how we organize our ability to respond and build some consensus. That it's always about the child's well-being and long-term safety. We say this as it's very easy to get detoured and sidetracked into the issues that the families are experiencing. It won't be uncommon as well for us to get a no way from families, that they don't want our involvement. We see this as an opportunity for us to talk about our bottom line by being firm but also hugely time. Ultimately, it's all about the skillful use of your authority. We think what is also so important in hearing this is that child maltreatment is typically a family secret, its dark and usually kept away from the public view at any cost. Our job is to not shame parents into compliance but to have those open and honest conversations with them about what needs to happen and who should be involved.

#### **Challenge 2**

So the second challenge that we often have an teaming is our ability to say no. A lot to almost all of our work should be about minimizing risk. So saying no to uncle Fred being part of any work together with families is often times can be a challenge for staff. Clearly our judgment needs to take center stage here and how we might think about :

- A. How committed is uncle Fred to this child given his own potential substance abuse issues
- B. What are the risks for having him involved? Say he comes into the office smelling of alcohol.
- C. From our own knowledge and relationships that we have with the child, how much does he or she actually value Uncle Fred. Does he or she worry about the way uncle Fred acts when he drinks or are there some things that might scare him or her.

We need to remember to have conversations with the children and families to find out who we should be bringing to the table and to be able to say no to those people who should come to the table. So let's look at our third challenge that many of you are probably already thinking.

### **Challenge 3**

What happens when we work with families who tell us "I don't have any close family or friends"? We see this is a challenge but as a good one that will strengthen any parents ability to come to the table with someone on their side. Often it can be as simple as not saying who supports you but rather, who do you Facebook with. Who is on your cell phone list the callers? Let's look over your genogram together and talk about who you've included.

### **Questions you can ask to identify and build safety networks.**

Additionally it can also be as simple as having asked about family relatives or family friends. So let's take a moment to reflect or ask ourselves what are some of the questions that we can asked parents and/or family members to help identify and build safety networks. Who are the people in your life who already know what is going on and that you are working with CPS? Who are the people in your life who have your back? Who you really feel you can trust ? Who are the people who know you at you best ? If you suddenly became sick who you trust the most with your children or to take you to the doctor? If your children were here right now who would they say they trust the most? Who would they hope would be there for them? If we had to pick one person just to begin with to come to a meeting to start talking and sharing about our work together, who would you want it to be?

### **Points to remember**

Let's look at some points to consider when we're trying to identify those people to put on the team. First, we want to remember that everyone in the safety network must be invested with the child. Child safety is prioritized, that everyone who comes to the table has proactive involvement and everyone must understand the harm, danger, worries and our bottom lines as an agency. We want our staff to remember that using a teaming and networking approach is an expectation for all open and ongoing cases. That bringing the network to the table is a

requirement. Why? The family members are experts on their own families, they know about the risk and strength of their family

Now let's go back to the three questions that we want you and your staff to use on a daily and consistent basis to organize our everyday work about child safety.

- What are we worried about?
- What is working well?
- what needs to happen?

We want to take a moment to focus on using these three questions to actually organize our thinking and our staffs thinking and how it relates to teaming. So let's take a moment when looking at teaming to reflect on what we might be worried about.

Some examples of what we might be worried about here:

- If we had family members at the table to minimize abuse
- We had family members who are willing to cooperate with us
- And some of you might be worried about the fact that we involve family members who has CPS history or criminal history

So let's take a moment when looking at teaming to reflect on what's working well. Some examples of what might be working well when teaming is collaboration, family buy-in, and partnership throughout the teaming process.

When looking at teaming let's now take a moment to reflect on what needs to happen. Some examples of what needs to happen:

- A shared commitment by everyone involved in the teaming process
- The fact that everyone knows the family goals and agency goals
- And the fact that we all need to know that the bottom line is safety

So let's move on to our next objective.

### **The Rationale**

The rationale for the teaming process. What I'd like to propose for you is the brief rationale for thinking outside the box, beyond only the mothers and therapist approach to the village approach. So to begin with our first rationale is the fundamental idea that networks are natural extension for us as humans.

Our experience pushes us to be connected to be linked to someone in our lives whether that be family or friends. The reality is our involvement as CPS in the lives of any child youth their

family is temporary. We can't and won't be in a family's life forever but friends and relatives and some professionals can. Those are often the most important and real connections that matter the most.

Our next rationale focuses on the idea that our work centers around the safety and well-being of children. We are always having to make risk-based decisions about whether a home is safe enough for the child to stay in or whether it is too dangerous. We do this by relying on the results of tools such as the STM but also by her everyday skills and professionalism, we bring to the table by talking about our worries. Having more people involved does not necessarily mean organizing oneself around the case is more complicated. It actually signals the idea that five sets of eyes looking out for a child is going to make some of the safety needs more possible. Unless we take this approach, every day safety of the children will be compromised. We are always wanting to make those bottom-line decisions that are reciprocal knowing that in some cases we can never be risk-free. It is here that we begin to rely on tools such as the STM for guidance but also on thinking through the case in-group supervision.

Going back to our focus on children and youth and their well-being is the belief that the more caring and supportive people the child is connected to in a positive way the more they are likely to have better life experiences. The opposite is also true for children who are much less safe when they are isolated and less connected.

In moving to the next rationale I think it's worth noting that as CPS worker's we need to keep making the best decisions based on critical thinking and less so on our intuition. Yes, sometimes our intuition that hunch is going to be our best friend but complexity and anxiety of cases and our work require us to be more precise and more analytical as we make certain decisions. Critical thinking in teaming is still a self-discipline way of being able to make decisions with the reasoning at its highest level. Our staff are going to be seen as team leaders throughout the teaming process and they have the capacity and should advocate that all members of the safety network do this. Typical ways of encouraging this through the use of solution focused questions. The use of our SDM tools can also be another way of helping us think our way through cases in an analytical structured way.

At CPS we have a tendency to feel like we are responsible for solving the problems for children, youth and their families and this often leads towards an over reliance on telling everyone what to do. Well, teaming is a way of bringing the safety network together family members friends and professionals and getting all the worries out on a table in a constructive and respectful way. By doing this we want everyone to do their best thinking and ideas to conversation. We do our best to talk with families and not talk to her at them. The adoption of a questioning rather than a definitive approach around issues and solutions should build conversations for parents

and support people to take greater actions and ownership around actions necessary to know what safety will look like.

### **Teaming & Bringing the Safety Network Together**

So let's look at our final rationale for teaming. For any teaming and safety networking plan or meeting to work we have to involve the children and youth. They are the voices often missing that we have lots of evidence that many times children are not told or given information about why we are involved. Our focus on assessing children is an attempt to do just that. Having the voices of children for the safety network to see through the use of tools brings the seriousness of our worries into the open. It makes the child front and center to what we are doing. Using our engaging skills to sit with the child and listen to their worries through the use of tools such as the three houses or the safety house provides that understanding for the inclusion of children. It also raises every person's awareness of what the child is thinking, feeling, wants to have happen and what makes the child feel safe or unsafe.

### **Safety House**

As discussed the safety house is a tool that can be used with children and youth to help us identify and bring more people to the table. As you take a moment to look on your screen, you'll see an example of a safety house. At the top are the rules of the safety house. For this child his rules were no fighting no biting-if your veins crack you will die, no pushing when cooking you may get burned. This rule for example was a rule given by a child because he saw his mom's boyfriend push her into the stove and she got burned. For our children they often identify rules that their safety house by things that make them feel safe. We move to the center of the house you'll see people who live in the safety house and what they'll be doing. Mom and dad in this case were divorced so you'll see the child has daddy will cook for me when he comes back. Daddy would be looking after me. Mom would make sure I go to sleep and I'm safe in school. Mom cooks now. And then towards the bottom you have people who can visit and it says my mom make sure I see Auntie Janet, Nana, Granddad and Jesse often. In the bottom right-hand corner you will see people that the child doesn't feel safe with. And in this corner the child mentions Michael which is mom's boyfriend and the dad are nasty to mom. This is just another excellent tool that we can use throughout the teaming process.

Let's take a moment to focus on our next objective in teaming, which revolves around process.

### **Process**

Process simply is learning to rely less on a textbook approach and more on the steps of using our skills of listening observing engaging and partnering with the safety network. Let's begin talking about process by looking at a few practice principles of teaming. So let's look at teaming and practice principles:

- We want to respect our families as people worth doing business with.
- We want to ensure that we maintain a focus on safety.
- We should always search for detail.
- Recognize that cooperation is possible even when leveraging where the skillful use of our authority is required.
- And we want to remember that we can cooperate with the person and not the abuse.

So let's take a moment to look at each of the principles in more detail.

### **Principle 1**

Principle one is the idea that maintaining the position that the family is capable of change can create a sense of hope and possibility. It's really about taking an open-minded approach toward family members as possible in spite of what is happen and approaching them as potential partners in building forever safety. For us to build every day and forever safety for children and youth family members have to be able to join us as partners.

### **Principle 2**

Principle two focuses on the fact that safety networks maintain a focus on safety. Here we see that all families have competencies and strengths. They keep their children safe at least some and usually most of the time. If we are looking for safe parenting with family members, we need to be asking about the times when they were focused on their roles as a family member providing the care that made them proud.

### **Principle 3**

Principle three differentiates the specific from the more general. it is important to get specific detailed and concrete information when looking at what worries us , what's going well or what the safety networks hopes for building safety are. To simplify this principle it's more likely that we as a safety network are able to get really good solutions out of detail and not generalizations.

### **Principle 4**

In principle four we look at the idea that workers will almost always have to use some amount of leverage or their skillful use of authority and sometimes the power of the courts to prevent situations of continuing danger but this should not prevent us from aspiring to build a cooperative partnership with our parents. Our work is hard but it's also about leverage in the ability to influence. Essentially leverage along with partnership and influence can exist side-by-side.

## Principle 5

Principle five suggest workers can build a relationship with family members without condoning the abuse in any way. We can do this by listening and responding to the family member side of the story. We can also do this by giving the family choices and opportunities to provide us with their input. What is important here is how upfront clear and honest we are with families about what we've heard but also about what's going to happen.

Our bottom lines: At every level, child protection involves the skillful use of our authority, when we use the skill we are balancing ourselves between being firm but also hugely kind. So we say to a family we need to get your family together so that we can plan for your child safety. So I'd like us to talk together about how we might do this. What are your ideas?

We been clear about our bottom line, about safety, but we've laid out an olive branch so to speak that invites the family members to work with us. So the skillful use of our authority is about honoring the smallest glimpse of strengths and accomplishments as well as into and capabilities

It's also about being able to demonstrate compassion by her willingness to consider the various perspectives that families are safety network members' offer. We always want to be respectfully clear about what needs to happen, about our agency goals in our bottom lines regarding safety.

We want to remember to ask questions rather than assume that we have the answer. So teaming involves the use of various tools. Tools help us think into and through an issue they provide some objective measure of a person are safety networks accountability and they often can be a forum for planting the seeds of behavioral change that will lead to forever safety. Sometimes tools help us prepare the groundwork for identifying the points of seriousness as well as the positive things that will bring the safety network to the table.

## Tools

These tools include:

- The SDM tools
- Danger statements
- Safety circles
- Genograms

The danger statement, which is adapted from the SDM safety tool reflects the harm to the child and the worries we have or what will happen if nothing changes. Parents will often report they don't know why we are worried and the danger statement provides the specific and observable

harm that may have occurred and what the future holds if things remain the same. This statement also is a straightforward way of letting everyone know in an understandable way what the maltreatment issues are.

Safety circles are intended to help parents find anyone who can help them or for those who say they have no one in their safety network. The first course of action here is to let the parents know that involving people from their everyday friendships and family network is a bottom-line requirement and then simply asking them whom they could involve. To use this tool is to ask parents to brainstorm and to list everyone they know and from there begin categorizing acquaintances into categories

- People the child would not want to be involved
- People the child would be okay with
- And people your child would want involved.

Every attempt should be made to complete the genogram as part of the teaming process. The genogram is a symbol picture of an extended family usually three generations. It allows one to clearly diagram the general and complex information about a family is organized to illustrate the basic relationships among family members. Their names important dates and chosen characteristics such as personality or health of individual family members. Doing a genogram has a number of benefits for teaming. Which include helping the family see itself as a group of individuals who are connected and not connected to each other in important ways. Tracking important family issues like health debt or problem behaviors throughout the generations. It clarifies important family ties through the generations. And also provides both simple information such as dates, births, marriages and deaths and complex information.

Family issues for making decisions and seeing what needs to be further clarified. It's also an important tool of helping us identify additional people to bring to the table throughout the teaming process. Although it might seem that teaming and collaborating with the safety network is a series of techniques that's really not the case. Yes we have techniques but at the heart of teaming is our engaging and partnering with families and networks by language. That means we listen converse and inquire by asking good open-ended solution focus questions. Teaming and safety networking is a process of never assuming we as caseworkers have the expert answers. And know what is going on in the mind of everyone at the table. If we did that I'm afraid may be wrong much of the time. In some ways then teaming with safety networks is a questioning and less telling approach.

Asking good questions is about never being sure we've got it down and instead asking for input of ideas thoughts plans and actions. To do this means we have to assume all safety networks have ideas about what good safety and safe parenting would look like. People might say this is a

leap of faith however I'd argue when you listen clearly by asking questions that tap these thoughts you are bound to hear the beginnings of conversations that looks similar to what our bottom line might look like as an agency. For example, we might hear positives that are present even in the face of problems.

By asking questions, we don't minimize the seriousness of our worries but attempt to tackle some of the problems with more depth and purpose. Family finding is an invaluable resource for teaming with families and safety networks when the safety and permanence of children and youth are at the center of our work. Familyfinding.org is a great website that provides additional resources to assist staff with locating and identifying additional family members to bring to the table. Family finding was developed by Kevin Campbell as a set of methods and strategies to locate relatives and family members for children and youth currently living in out of home care.

The goal is to have every child connected with the family so that lifelong connections can occur. Will how does this fit into teaming and safety network. Family finding works on principles that as many as possible are all relatives connected to any child should be located and consulted with respect to decisions about the future care and well-being of the family member. In doing so family finding seeks to preserve a sense of belongingness and preserve the culture language faith and membership thought to foster resilience. Family finding has a place in teaming because at the heart of its practice is a focus on engagement by asking family member questions building a support team but being urgent about it and practicing transparency.

To highlight and leave you with the power of how questions can be used to seek out and bring the safety network to the table you'll see a series of four categories of questions come up on the left side of your screen and I've listed two questions that will come up on the right side of your screen. So when looking at the questions in the category of immediate:

- We would ask how big is your extended family.
- If you wanted to know who would you ask first.

We look at the past we want to focus on asking questions such as who are the people that have stuck by you at your worst and best moments. Who will be relied on the most when things get crazy.

Questions of the present who is someone in your life you call on when in a crisis.

- Who would you call today if you had wonderful news and we look at those questions of the future who will be the people sharing your birthday with you five years from now.
- If next year you found yourself homeless who would you call.

All these questions are just additional solution focus questions that can help you and your staff identify additional people to bring to the table in the teaming process.

So our final objective today is focusing on our role as CPS during the implementation process of teaming from the beginning to the end.

### **Our role as CPS**

At the beginning, we want to identify and bring everyone together. Someone the child can go to our call if they are feeling unsafe or worried. We want to identify a group of people that will appropriately intervene if they feel the child is unsafe and appropriately address any worries before the child returns to the care of his or her parents.

We want those people who can honestly share their worries with the family and if this is not a commitment want to make the family need to be aware now so that we all have the opportunity to find more people willing to make this commitment for the everyday and forever safety of the child or youth.

The middle section of the teaming implementation process is what I call the heart and soul. This is the section requiring everyone to openly and honestly talk about the worries. The good things and all those things that every safety network participant wants to see happen to ensure the safety of each child or youth. The focus here is on balance. Talking in an open and honest way about the dangers but also about what are the good things about the child youth and family members.

The ending slide represents a collective and agreed upon understanding as to what needs to happen to bring about child safety. Not only does this include a list of rules, but also a time frame for outcomes, and it directly plans in response to the danger and case goal bottom lines of the agency. The safety network in collaboration with the family and the caseworker is expected here to create a plan to address the agencies worries that can be agreed upon by everyone in the safety network. Our hopes here are to ensure child safety is our bottom line.

So what are the professional caseworker supervisor takeaways for teaming ? Well first, we want to ensure that the safety and well-being of every child includes the responsibility of the family and the network. Understanding that the accountability for every day and forever safety of children doesn't just rest on our shoulders. That it's a shared task. We want to remember that teaming makes it possible for there to be an agency family and safety network understanding of harm and danger but also what needs to happen. We build on those conversations that focus on solutions for every day and forever child and youth safety.

We want to remember that the skillful use of our authority is going to be one of the most important characteristics in helping us move the teaming process forward. Our skillful use of our authority forms the basis of good working relationships.

We want to remember that there's also a logic and structured set of steps towards accomplishing the teaming process that can be developed across all stages of service were detailed plans can be written for forever child safety.

Finally we effectively team we ensure that our approach is safety organized child centered family focus collaborative and sustainable.