

# DFPS CPS Practice Model: Evaluating

## Welcome and Definition

Welcome to the CPS Practice model video on evaluating. Which is the last of the series of core competency videos for the practice model. As we've done with each video, we'll start off with giving you time to think about your definition of the core competency being discussed. So for today, how would you define evaluating? Or what do you think it means to evaluate? The CPS practice model defines evaluating as the process of continuously assessing the plans we develop, with children, youth, families, and the safety networks to determine our need for involvement with the family and to be able to describe what safety looks like for the family. We want you to take a moment to notice that evaluation is different from monitoring. Monitoring is a part of our work, however, we want to create lasting change in our families. And to do this, we have to evaluate the significance of the actions and changes that occur throughout the life of a case.

## Why are you here?

So you've had a moment to think about your definition of evaluating and we've defined it through the practice model. So now let's start with talking about why you're here. First, as we've discussed throughout all the videos, our bottom line is always safety. If we are involved, then the child is considered unsafe. Therefore, with evaluating, we want to reconsider why we are involved. As we reconsider our involvement, we want to insure that our approach remains child centered. Then we want to discuss what needs to be done for us to support effective change strategies. We want to make sure that we support the family with insuring the safety of their child or youth so that we do not need to be involved if we do not need to be. Next, we'll discuss the need to adjust plans as we evaluate. Since our plans need to be developed in partnership with the family to insure the everyday and forever safety of the children and youth on our cases. As we discuss evaluating, we want to remember to keep our focus on gathering correct information, analyzing what we are working with, using judgment to move forward in a case, and how to use action plans, not simply services, to build every day and forever safety.

## The Three Questions

As we have done with the other core competencies, we want to think about how the three questions that organize our everyday work impact the competency being discussed. So for today, let's look at how the three questions apply to evaluating. So first, when evaluating, what are we worried about? When evaluating, how would we answer the question, what's working well? And, when evaluating, how would we answer the question, what needs to happen? As we evaluate we want to analyze the safety of

the child or youth that we are involved with. We reconsider whether or not a child is safe by being able to define safety in measurable ways, logically connecting our interventions and goals, as well as, determining success for a family.

## Reconsider your Involvement

Throughout today's video it's important to keep in mind that evaluation requires us to continually reconsider why we are involved with a family. If we continue to be involved with a family, it means that the child or youth is unsafe. As we evaluate and reconsider our involvement, as we do with all of the other competencies, we need to start our evaluations with keeping the child or youth front and center. Although the notion of keeping the child and youth front and center of our work seems almost second nature. It represents a key priority that often can get lost in the complexity of cases when evaluating. Let's imagine a number of large circles and the child in the center. This illustrates how we need to keep our focus on the child and continually ask ourselves how we can make what is going to happen clear for everyone involved.

## The Voice of the Child or Youth

We want to take time to think about that when we are staffing cases. How much of our time is spent bringing the voice of the child or youth into the mix? When we plan or expect parents to fulfill responsibilities, how much emphasis do we put on how children will be impacted? How much difference this will make to a child? Or, how will the child's relationships with significant others be impacted? When we plan around what needs to happen, or what safety will look like, how much time do we spend talking through the details of what the child's day will actually look like? How do adults look after the child with respect to their everyday needs? From the time they wake up, till when they go to bed. Do we identify the specifics? Or, do we just assume parents will follow through correctly? Imagine how this could impact a safety network meeting and the importance of each adult's role. Imagine how this could impact the way we measure a child or youth's safety.

## Keeping the Child or Youth Front and Center

Another way to keep children and youth front and center throughout our evaluations suggests that every second question we ask parents should have a direct reference to any child or youth involved. So if we ask parents to tell us the steps they will take to provide some routine in their home, the next question should directly relate to the child. For example, how is this going to be good for your child?

We can also use our tools that have been discussed throughout the prior videos, to keep children and youth front and center. Our tools help us stay focused on what is important to each child or youth. The three houses is a great tool for engaging and

assessing. But, it is also a great tool that we can use to evaluate how the child is coping. It allows the child to tell us directly, visually, and artistically about what they are experiencing. The tools, when used when evaluating, can tell us whether or not the child is safe and whether or not our continued involvement is needed. The safety house is another good tool you could use that helps the child let you know what he or she needs to feel safe. The safety house allows us to determine whether or not the child feels safe in the house. Or what steps might need to be taken for the child to reunify and feel safe.

Though a lot of our work demands that we spend a considerable amount of time talking to the adults, we need to be sure that the children remain front and center, and that we bring them into the conversation both directly and indirectly. By continuing to bring children front and center, we can reevaluate the need for our involvement by determining whether or not they are safe.

## Effective Change Strategies

So we have discussed the importance of reconsidering our involvement based on whether or not a child is safe. But now we want to move our focus, when evaluating, to making sure that we as an agency support effective change strategies. This goes back to our focus of moving away from simply offering services to families, as we have all agreed 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 insure the safety of their children. When we are evaluating our developed plans and interventions, we want to determine what services provided have been effective through an observed action or behavioral change exhibited by the parents and family. Those strategies that have been effective for insuring safety within the family should continue. But, the strategies that appear to be not effective should be changed.

What we mean here, is that when evaluating the interventions or plan for a family, and we do not see any demonstrated action or behavioral change, as a result of a parenting class that we have referred a mother to, then maybe that particular service is not needed. And we need to decide with the family what is actually needed. What we mean here is that when evaluating the interventions or plan for a family, and we do not see any demonstrated action or behavioral change, 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 actually needed.

As we just discussed our evaluations support effective change strategies. We are able to support the identified change strategies by taking a look at our trajectory or that path we go on when it comes to evaluating. Our case trajectory helps us evaluate where we

are headed in a case. As discussed in our planning and intervening webinars, each case has a trajectory, a course, a set of actions, and, an outcome.

Overall, at the macro level, we are looking at the big picture. What we want to accomplish and what long term safety looks like. At the micro level, our trajectory helps us think about what needs to happen on a short term basis right now or in the next week. It helps us decide what we need to think about or prepare for.

About eighty percent of our success is directly related to preparation. We need to think actively and with a purpose about what we need to do. As we evaluate, we want to remember that our continued involvement with children and youth is based on the determination of whether or not the child or youth is safe. As we've mentioned in every video, in order to keep children and youth safe, we must have a positive and constructive relationship with the family, the safety network, and all the professionals engaged in our cases. We need to continually evaluate our partnership.

Partnering is a continual work in progress. It's not reserved for just those moments when we are feeling stuck on a case, or when parents become angry with us when we've had to make a decision. Partnering requires basic principles, like listening, being supportive, asking rather than telling, and seeing all families and safety networks as people worth doing business with. It's remembering that our families are more than just clients. We need to be aware of the steps we are taking to put our best practice principles into motion.

The five principles you now see on your screen come from our last video, intervening.

#### Five Principles of Intervening:

- Understand the position of each family member.
- Find exceptions to the abuse or neglect.
- Discover strengths and resources.
- Focus on goals.
- Ask about capability, willingness, or confidence.

### Action Plans

As we evaluate our need for continued involvement, we need to be mindful of these principles and use them to continue to build safety with the family and safety network if we have identified that we need to remain involved because the child or youth is unsafe.

Finally, we want to remember that our developed plans are adjusted to meet the changing conditions and the needs of the child, youth, and family based on our evaluations. As a reminder, strategies that are not effective stop, and new solutions are found until we reach a good outcome. How many of us have heard the following

questions often more than once? What do you want from us? When can my kids come home? What do I need to do to get you out of my life? How long is this going to take? These questions should sound familiar. And our action plans enable us to set a trajectory or path to use our best practice skills and to evaluate our case goals and answer these questions.

Action plans help us make sure that we are getting our job done, keeping the children front and center, building forever safety, and ultimately closing the case. Our action plan is the path we take with the family to move towards the case goal. As we've talked about in many of our core competency videos, our trajectory is our route, or our game plan. It is a rigorous and well thought out series of key steps that we take to reach our bottom line, which is always child safety.

Action plans also create a clear vision for families, and lead to an increased sense of hope for them and for us. Action plans are a culmination of everything we have done together with the children, youth, family, professionals, and safety network before reaching this point. Now is our chance to build on everything we've done together since the onset of the case. It's hard work and it may have been difficult for us to reach this point. But now is the time to draw upon our engagement skills to involve the children, youth, family, professionals, and their safety network.

If we have been diligent, thoughtful, and done the best we can to partner, everyone will understand and agree to two things; our worries and why we're involved. In order for the case to be closed, the family must demonstrate what they will do differently and what steps they will take to keep the child safe. You might ask yourself why are we talking about action plans in the evaluating video. Well, our evaluations continue to determine the need for these action plans and our involvement. As mentioned in all of the videos, all of the core competencies are interconnected. As we engage, we assess. But, as we evaluate we are also intervening and planning. Evaluating might also occur as we team. Everyone includes the family, the safety network, and all adults who are willing to commit to keeping the child safe. Now let's look at our own steps when evaluating. In particular, what the relationship is to decision making.

## Information Gathering, Decision-Making and using Judgement

Evaluations are designed to shape and guide human decision making. In our work, we are forced to take in massive amounts of information on a daily basis. We may find ourselves wondering, how are we supposed to manage so many things in such a short period of time? Within the first few minutes of meeting a family, we process an enormous amount of verbal and nonverbal information without much conscious thought. Usually within two minutes, some of us, or our staff, has reached a judgment about the family with whom we are working. This is a problem. Once we make a decision, it is

hard to change. And we tend to see all behavior filtered through our initial judgment. These judgments tend to be intuitive and may be spontaneous and impulsive. Being intuitive is good in some respects. But, when it comes to processing information quickly, we need to develop a complementary state, one that is critically informed by a step by step, conscious, and logically defensible process.

As we just discussed, evaluating involves decision making, and remembering that decision making should never occur in isolation. Staff need to make their worries, their supervisor's worries. Decisions made about child safety are difficult, and have a huge impact on the lives of children and their families. Relying on the opinion of one individual can have huge ramifications, not only for the family, but also for the worker, and the agency as a whole.

Some of the best and most rigorous work we do comes from gathering information. We'll use this process to evaluate as we meet with all the key players. This mapping template, currently on your screen, is an extension of what your structured decision making tools capture.

#### What are we worried about?

- Harm statement
- Danger statement
- Complicating factors

#### What's working well?

- Strengths

#### Existing safety

What needs to happen?

- Safety goals
- Next steps

It's also part of a series of questioning tasks we undertake with families. Our evaluation of our work, what the family understands about why we're involved, what we believe, and what the family believes are the next steps, can be captured through using our three questions. The three questions that organize our work help us pull together the most critical elements of what's happened and what needs to happen. Using the harm and danger statements, articulating the complicating factors, identifying strengths and existing safety, identifying safety goals, and next steps, all help us temper our judgments, avoiding getting into those denial disputes with families. And, they help us determine what we have done to insure a fair and balanced assessment.

As we have learned from our past videos, getting information that will create forever safety, comes from many different directions. When we view our work with children, youth, and families through the lens of our three questions, what are we worried about, what's working well, and what needs to happen. Our assessment skills will be sharp. Our danger statements will be clear and specific, and our bottom lines for safety will fall in line with our main worries about the safety. The use of genograms, safety circles, and the tools used to engage children, will enhance our ability to gather the best and most helpful information from children, youth, and families. By using these tools, we can also evaluate our work quickly, effectively, and efficiently. These tools continue to help us to keep children and youth safety at the center of our casework.

## Analysis

Analysis is the next 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. As we mentioned in the teaming video, we should never make decisions in isolation. Sound decision making depends upon thorough analysis, which is best accomplished through a teaming approach. So let's talk more specifically about evaluating our analysis. We have found that using the appreciative inquiry process is an effective way to evaluate our casework.

## Appreciative Inquiry

The appreciative inquiry process uses questions that aim to extract the details about what went well, the worries, and what needs to happen. This inquiry process gives our caseworkers the opportunity to reflect upon their casework, the family, and any others involved. This process creates a shared learning environment, where reflective practice can actually grow the capacity of the social worker who is sharing and team members who are observing. This process also slows our caseworkers down, so they can think through what worked well in a particularly difficult situation to grow their good practice. This is what we call good supervision.

Let me say one final practice piece about our new practice model, especially where it speaks to transparency and partnership with families. If our intent, through our practice model, is to collaborate with families in such a way that they understand our reason for involvement and come to an understanding with us about what needs to happen, our interventions will make our analysis that much sharper.

Let's clarify how this occurs. It's a combination of analyzing, using the skillful use of our authority, and it's really about our ability to stay connected to our families. The term judgment might seem out of place here because people in our field are often told to be nonjudgmental. While that is true, that we should avoid judging people, we want to

remember that it is our job to assess and make judgments about safety for children throughout our evaluations.

## Professional Caseworker and Supervisor Takeaways

Finally, let's go over our professional caseworker supervisor takeaways:

- First, we want to remember that evaluation starts on day one. We start evaluating from that first point of contact, about what's worked well with the family, what we might be worried about, and what needs to happen.
- We also want to remember that good evaluation keeps us mindful about our continued involvement with a family. Partnering and collaborating enable us to do our best evaluations. Here, we remember that we are not in the lives of our children and youth twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. Their family members are. So the better we partner and collaborate with families, the better our evaluations will be.
- We want to remember that evaluations help us support effective change strategies. Meaning here, that it's not about the services our families engage in, but it's about what behaviors and actions that we see changed as we evaluate.
- And finally, we want to remember that supervision is a parallel process. As supervisors, we help plan out the trajectory in a way that builds our staff's learning and skills. So if we effectively evaluate our staff's casework, our staff will be able to effectively evaluate how our families are insuring the safety and well-being of their children.

## Conclusion

If you have any questions, or comments, then please feel free to email me, Angela pie at [angela.pie@dfps.state.tx.us](mailto:angela.pie@dfps.state.tx.us) Thank you.