

# Signs of Safety

## *What are the practice principles of this approach?*

- ◆ **Respect service recipients as people worth doing business with.** Maintaining the position that the family is capable of changes and can create a sense of hope and possibility. Be as open-minded towards family members as possible, approaching them as potential partners in building safety.
- ◆ **Cooperate with the person, not the abuse.** Workers can build a relationship with family members without condoning the abuse in any way. Listen and respond to the service recipients' story. Give the family choices and opportunities to give you input. Learn what they want. The worker must be up front and honest particularly in the investigation. Treat service recipient as individuals.
- ◆ **Recognize that cooperation is possible even where coercion is required.** Workers will almost have to use some amount of coercion and often have to exercise statutory power to prevent situations of continuing danger, but this should not prevent them from aspiring to build a cooperative partnership with parents. Recognize that coercion and cooperation can exist simultaneously, and utilize skills that foster this.
- ◆ **Recognize that all families have signs of safety.** All families have competencies and strengths. They keep their children safe, at least some, and usually most, of the time. Ensure that careful attention is given to these signs of safety.
- ◆ **Maintain a focus on safety.** The focus of child protection work is always to increase safety. Maintain this orientation in thinking about the agency and the workers role as well as the specific details and activities of the case work.
- ◆ **Learn what the service recipient wants.** Acknowledge the client's concerns and desires. Use the service recipient's goals in creating a plan for action and motivating family members to change. Whenever compatible, bring client goals together with agency goals.
- ◆ **Always search for detail.** Always elicit specific, detailed information, whether exploring negative or positive aspects of the situation. Solutions arise out of details, not generalizations.
- ◆ **Focus on creating small change.** Think about, discuss, and work toward small changes. Don't become frustrated when big goals are not immediately achieved. Focus on small, attainable goals and acknowledge when they have been achieved.
- ◆ **Don't confuse case details with judgements.** Reserve judgement until as much information as possible has been gathered. Don't confuse these conclusions with the details of the case. Remember that others, particularly the family, will judge the details differently.
- ◆ **Offer choices.** Avoid alienating service recipients with unnecessary coercion. Instead, offer choices about as many aspects of the casework as possible. This involves family members in the process and builds cooperation.
- ◆ **Treat the interview as a forum for change.** View the interview as the intervention, and therefore recognize the interaction between the worker and the service recipients to be the key vehicle for change.
- ◆ **Treat the practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions.** Continually aspire to implement the practice principles, but have the humility to recognize that even the most experienced worker will have to think and act carefully to implement them. Recognize that no one gets it right all the time in child protection work.

Taken from Signs of Safety A Solution and Safety Orientated Approach to Child Protection Case work, Turnell & Edwards 1999 pages 30 & 31.