

Collaborative Assessment

Engage, Team, Assess, Plan, Intervene
Monitor & Adapt, Transition



“I never felt like my worker was coming from a place of judgment. He was always warm and welcoming. It helped me come out of my shell and be able to trust people again and stop judging myself on my past... He removed the file from our relationship and got to know me for myself. It was just person to person. It was the first time I felt I could trust someone. My worker taught me how to have healthy relationships.” Foster Care Alumni

Assessments are used to organize our collective knowledge and understanding of individuals and families, and to support clear communication and sound recommendations when developing plans related to individual and family safety, permanency and well-being. The process of collaborative assessment is designed to get to know the individual, hear the family’s story, and develop an understanding across the team, as opposed to asking a series of prescribed questions. The gathering of accurate information hinges upon our ability to build trusting relationships with youth, vulnerable adults, families, and our professional partners. A successful relationship-building process is based upon our ability to articulate and build consensus around the **shared vision and understanding of the individual and family’s concerns and desired goals**.

Our **GOALS** during the collaborative assessment process are to:

- Promote engagement and meaningful involvement from the individual, family, other professionals, and natural supports in the information-gathering process, and ensure their voices are represented in the completed assessment.
- Demonstrate respect and empathy by valuing the individual and family’s story.
- Accurately describe the individual and family’s current concerns and relevant past experiences.
- Ensure collaborative assessment data are routinely shared in an objective, strength-based, and culturally responsive way with the individual and family as well as relevant team members.

Our Principles in Action: We Demonstrate

- We are **Family-Centered** when we partner with individuals and families as experts, listen to their story, and consider the context of family history, concerns, and relationships in identifying strengths and needs, and share decision making with individuals and families when creating plans.
- We are **Trauma-Responsive** when we seek to understand trauma experiences and consider what has happened to an individual or family as a context for understanding their needs and internal strengths.
- We are **Outcomes-Driven** when we ensure assessment data inform plans related to safety, visitation, treatment and permanency. Subsequent assessments (e.g., CANS, trauma screens, Adult Services Risk Assessment Tool, etc.) help to update the team of progress made and whether the strategies put in place have resolved areas of need and enhanced internal or environmental strengths.
- We are **Individualized & Strengths-Based** when we collaboratively complete assessments with individuals and families, making sure their voices are captured and their experiences reflected in the assessment data. We are strengths-based when we identify and build upon how families have coped in the past and bounced back in the face of hard times. These strengths are reflected in the assessments and tracked over time to support building protective factors.

- We are **Culturally & Linguistically Responsive** when we develop an understanding of the person within the context of their family and community culture -- their ideals, beliefs, the meanings they assign to events, their connections, hierarchies, communication styles and the rituals that help connect them to their identity.
- We are **Community-Focused** when we work to identify the individuals' and family's assets, resources and natural supports within their community, and work to utilize, preserve, and increase them to promote their safety, stability, well-being and timely closure and transition from care.
- We are a **Safe, Engaged and Well-Prepared Professional Workforce** when we understand the importance of protecting individuals' and family members' privacy and the purpose of the assessment, explaining the limits of confidentiality and how the information gathered will be used in plans and decision-making, and when we keep up-to-date with assessment training and best practices as it relates to understanding the ratings and criteria.

Reflective Prompts: Have I routinely ...

- Engaged the individual and family in conversations about their prior experiences with assessments and used that information to create an assessment process that is respectful, with open communication?
- Provided an understanding of the assessment tools, process, and explained how information will be used to support decision making and planning with the individual and family?
- Created a safe and private environment for the individual and family to tell their stories related to their current time in care, their believed solutions and desired goals and outcomes?
- Assessed my own biases and judgment while listening to the individual and family tell their story?
- Identified a clear and thorough understanding of the individual and family's history (including trauma experiences), needs, strengths and desired goals?
- Worked to resolve inconsistencies in the individual's story and any documentation?
- Assessed for trauma reactions (e.g., visible anxiety, resistance, defensiveness, fatigue, etc.) during and after the assessment process and helped individuals understand how such reactions could be trauma related?
- Inquired about the individual and family's culture and various aspects of their identity, and considered these contexts in assessing their history, needs and strengths?
- Ensured recommendations and decisions are informed by assessment findings, needs, and strengths?
- Shared and reviewed completed assessments with the individual and family to make sure that they agree with and understand the ratings and identified areas of need?
- Used assessments tools at times of re-assessment to understand progress over time and acknowledge success (e.g., resolved needs/enhanced strengths)?

