

Engage (Building Authentic Partnerships)

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



“Support is the most important thing to have when you’re in foster care because you need someone who will be there for you. They could say, ‘I understand how you are feeling and I will try my best to help you through this situation.... I think it’s all in their actions -- do they do things that show me they heard what I was asking for?’”

Current Youth in Foster Care

Engagement serves as the foundation to building trust and maintaining strong partnerships with our families. Successful partnership occurs when our verbal and non-verbal communication and interactions with individuals and families are receptive to change, non-judgmental, compassionate and empathic; when individuals report feeling respected and empowered, are able to talk openly about their culture, racial differences, values, beliefs and experiences and drive all activities and decisions regarding their care and future. According to research on best practices, we have the greatest impact when our messages are clear and concrete; when goals are agreed upon mutually and when supports and/or services offered are perceived as relevant, helpful and effective (Dawson and Berry, 2002).

Our **GOALS** for building a collaborative partnership with individuals and families are to:

- Value individuals and families of origin when building partnerships and incorporate their expertise as to how change can occur, allowing them to drive the plan.
- Demonstrate honoring the role of every family and individual we engage with through empathetic, respectful and family/person-centered practice.
- Acknowledge individuals and families’ strengths and expertise and incorporate that knowledge in your interactions and practice.
- Build a supportive relationship that promotes authentic partnership, collaboration and shared responsibility that empowers and motivates individuals and families to take an active role in their planning and decision-making.
- Gain a deeper understanding of what it means to coach through compassion and motivation. Our laser focus is “relationships **with** families/individuals over services **for** families/individuals”.

Our Principles in Action: We Demonstrate

- We are **Family-Centered** when we encourage individuals and family to share their story and listen to their ideas about why things are the way they are; when we use the family’s history and relationships to partner with them to generate solutions that build their supports and bring positive change.
- We are **Trauma-Responsive** when we acknowledge trauma reactions and listen for re-traumatization, including our own, and engage in a manner with individuals, families and others that promote insight, healing and recovery.
- We are **Outcomes-Driven** when we establish a collaborative partnership with individuals and families that supports open communication and honest disclosure, promotes their desire to change and empowers them to recognize their own needs, protective capacities and supports.
- We are **Individualized & Strengths-Based** when we identify and celebrate the individual and family’s successes and strengths (e.g., preferences, attributes and capabilities) to further build their skills and protective capacities.

- We are **Culturally & Linguistically Responsive** when we encourage individuals and families to talk about their culture and routinely incorporate this information in our plans, actions and decisions.
- We are **Community-Focused** when we help individual and families find support and assistance from the natural and community supports and when we partner with them to preserve and build their community connections for emotional, social and concrete support (e.g., housing, food, etc.).
- We are a **Safe, Engaged and Well-Prepared Professional Workforce** when we demonstrate our values of collaboration, advocacy, respect and empowerment when partnering with individuals and families, and remain transparent and open even during difficult conversations.

Reflective Prompts: Have I ...

- Treated youth, parents, families and vulnerable adults as authentic partners in my daily interactions and communications by collaborating with them to draw upon their knowledge, skills, and experiences, and using language that is respectful, empowering and non-judgmental?
- Consulted with individuals and families for their input and preferences before scheduling our appointments and meetings, and helped them generate solutions to conflicts or challenges that may prevent their full participation?
- Taken the time to learn about the individual and family's culture, interests and preferences?
- Ensured individual and family psychological safety by addressing their trauma experiences and reactions before, during and after our conversations and interactions?
- Prepared the individual and family for the meetings, court and appointments by answering their questions and making sure they have a full understanding of the reasons for contact?
- Created a psychologically safe and welcoming environment that is inclusive of the individual and family's supports (e.g., family of choice, fictive kin, friends, community partners)?
- Explained my process for organizing, sharing and protecting the information we have gathered?
- Confirmed the individual and family's understanding and agreement by asking them to explain their understanding of our conversations?
- Respected the individual and family's time and knowledge by documenting in detail after each contact, their perspective using their own words, stories and goals?
- Conveyed a sense of hopefulness that individuals and families can change?

