

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

Volume 15, Number 3
June 2010

This publication for child welfare professionals is produced by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families within the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

To comment about something that appears in *Practice Notes*, please contact:

John McMahon
Jordan Institute for Families
School of Social Work
UNC-Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550
jdmcmaho@email.unc.edu

Newsletter Staff

Mellicent Blythe
Lane Cooke
John McMahon
Tiffany Price
Deb Vassar

Visit Our Website

www.practicenotes.org

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN SUPERVISION

Child welfare supervisors are coaches, mentors, and evaluators responsible for the quality of services children and families receive. The tone and expectations they set are so important that some have called them the "keepers of the culture" for their agencies.

All of this means that supervisors have a powerful influence on families and on a child welfare agency's ability to achieve the safety, permanence, and well-being of children.

It's a big job. *Practice Notes* can't reduce the number of things for which supervisors are responsible, but we can try to make their burden a little lighter. In this issue we highlight supervisory practices that can develop

your staff and improve their satisfaction and performance—key ingredients to improved outcomes for families.

The articles show the parallel process between what supervisors ask workers to do with families, and what in turn supervisors need to provide for their workers. While front line workers strive to engage families in a productive relationship, supervisors strive to engage and empower their workers, their community partners, and their peers to create a more successful agency. ♦



Enhancing Your Unit's Performance

USING PARTNERSHIP IN SUPERVISION

 by Deb Vassar

Over the last several years North Carolina's child welfare professionals have widely embraced the "Six Principles of Partnership" as indispensable tools for engaging families and achieving the outcomes we seek. But these principles have the potential to affect more than just our interactions with families. If we can effectively apply them to the supervisory context, the principles of partnership can also transform and improve staff performance.

OUR WORK HAS CHANGED

In today's workplace, the challenges we face are fast-paced and relentless. Steven Covey calls this "permanent whitewater," implying that we no longer encounter occasional stretches where the river of our work life gets wider and slows down. Instead, it's just swift, surging rapids, day in and day out.

In this context, the old ways of leading and supervising don't work as well. As management expert Ken Blanchard has ob-

served, "In the past a leader was a boss. Today's leaders must be partners with their people...they no longer can lead solely based on positional power."

Blanchard is saying that mere "supervision" isn't enough anymore. To adapt to today's workplace, supervisors *cont. p. 2*



THE PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

The NC Division of Social Services' vision is that all programs it administers will embrace family-centered practice principles and provide services to promote security and safety for all. Among the values it sees underlying a family-centered approach include these six "principles of partnership":

1. Everyone desires respect
2. Everyone needs to be heard
3. Everyone has strengths
4. Judgments can wait
5. Partners share power
6. Partnership is a process

(NCDSS, 2010; Appalachian Family Innovations, 2003)

PARTNERSHIP from p. 1

and managers must partner with their employees. By doing so, they stand a better chance of safely (and sanely) navigating the whitewater and ensuring the safety, permanence, and well-being of children.

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Having trouble picturing what a partnership approach to supervision would look like in the real world? Let's take a look at each of the six principles of partnership from a supervisory perspective.

PRINCIPLE: Everyone desires respect. This principle, which is the foundation of the other five, means that partnership is impossible without mutual respect. Accepting this principle as a supervisor means you must honor your employees' opinions and world views. Asking their opinion, listening to what they have to say, and valuing their abilities demonstrates your respect.

In their book *I Don't Have to Make Everything All Better* (1995), Joy and Gary Lundberg write that every person has the universal need to believe "I am of worth, my feelings matter, and someone really cares about me."

When supervisors ask the simple question "What do you think?" they are recognizing their employees' worth. Truly listening to their answers to this simple question is a universally recognized sign of respect. Employees will recognize this and feel empowered.

PRINCIPLE: Everyone needs to be heard and understood. The key to understanding is listening, not only with your ears but with your eyes and your feelings. Empathic listening begins with the listener's desire to understand another's point of view—to enter their frame of reference.

STEPS TO TAKE

- Show respect by regularly asking your employees: "What do you think?"
- Whenever appropriate, say, "Tell me more" in a way that clearly conveys your desire to understand their point of view.
- Suspend judgment, even if an employee's suggestions seem completely "off the wall."
- Ask yourself, "What behavior do I want MORE of in this person?" Then emphasize that behavior.
- When you can, share your authority. This gives people a chance to show they can handle situations independently and helps them learn.



THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH HELPS SUPERVISORS BY . . .

- **Improving staff retention.** Study after study has linked supervisory support to staff retention. Supporting your workers makes a real difference to your agency's bottom line, both financially and in terms of the outcomes that can be achieved by a stable, cohesive, well-trained workforce.
- **Giving you peace of mind.** The partnership approach helps you develop your staff. As your partnership deepens, so will your trust and confidence in their abilities.
- **Helping you find solutions.** No one has all the answers. Partnering with your staff by regularly seeking their input boosts creativity and expands your problem-solving options.
- **Sending a clear, consistent message.** Consistently approaching staff in partnership models the approach we want them to take with families.

Because of time pressures, supervisors often feel it's easier to simply tell an employee who's asked a question what to do. Although this is understandable, "partnering" with your staff requires exploring options with them instead of giving answers.

If you respond to a question by saying, "Tell me more," with a clear intention of understanding their point of view, you validate both the person and their opinion. In short, you tell them that you have heard and understood what they have to say.

PRINCIPLE: Everyone has strengths. We hire employees for their strengths. When problems arise around an employee's performance, however, strengths are sometimes forgotten.

For example, an especially creative employee may sometimes appear unfocused, even childlike. Yet as a supervisor, you need to keep your employees focused and on task. Because of this, your employee's lack of focus may look like a problem to you.

How do you keep an employee focused on the task at hand without stifling creativity? One strategy is to ask yourself, "What behavior do I want MORE of in this person?" Then emphasize that behavior.

Most of us do not get better in our work by focusing on what we do wrong, but by focusing on our strengths and what we do right.

PRINCIPLE: Judgments can wait. Accepting this principle requires that judgments be carefully consid- cont. p. 3

from p. 3

ered and well founded. Once we make a judgment, we tend to stop gathering new information or to interpret new information in light of the judgment already made.

We all make mistakes, and inexperienced employees generally make more mistakes than the veterans. But as the Zen master Shunryu Suzuki (1970) noted, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

How often are we surprised when "fresh eyes" provide critical insights into a particularly knotty problem? Just because a new employee's suggestions seem to be completely "off the wall" doesn't mean they are wrong. Suspend judgment and try to see the problem from their perspective. You may be very glad you did.

And remember, your decisions and judgments as a supervisor can have far-reaching consequences affecting not only the families we serve but your employees' performance and their careers as well.

PRINCIPLE: Partners share power. Power differentials create obstacles to partnership. In our society, the person in power has the responsibility to initiate a relationship that supports partnership. It's a tricky matter, complicated by the fact that along with power comes responsibility, not only for the partnership but for the consequences of your partner's actions.

As a manager/supervisor, it's your job to develop your workers. You want them to grow stronger, develop their abilities and competencies, and learn to handle ever more complex situations independently.

As they grow, you will naturally share more of your authority. Your partnership with them deepens as your trust and confidence in their abilities grows. Ultimately, of course, you still have your power, as well as responsibility for the outcomes they help families achieve.

PRINCIPLE: Partnership is a process. While each of the principles has merit on its own, all six are necessary for partnership. Each principle supports and strengthens the others.

In addition, this principle acknowledges that putting the principles into practice is difficult. Accepting the principles is not enough; applying them consistently requires both intention and attention. Developing an effective partnership with employees requires new learning, attitudes, and behaviors on everyone's part.

It's important to remember that a certain level of organizational distress is inevitable as you develop and strengthen this partnership.

A REFLECTION ON LEADERSHIP AND COURAGE

Child welfare supervisors are managers. They take care of day-to-day affairs, seeing that the job gets done right. Yet supervisors are also leaders.

"Leadership" brings to mind words such as creativity, innovation, and vision. Leaders demonstrate an ability to see and do the right thing.

Leadership demands of us the courage to speak and act according to what "ought to be." It asks us to see and model the changes we want to see in others.

No one can question that child welfare supervisors have their hearts in the right place. When you look into your heart, you will like what you see. Use its reflection to guide your purpose and the purpose of your organization, workers, and families.

True leadership takes guts. In the world of child welfare, with its built-in focus on risk and safety and the regular reminders that bad things can and do happen, fear is never very far away. Yet if we proceed from fear, it is very difficult to reach our goal – the trust and engagement of both families and our workforce.

Think of leading not in terms of the individuals involved, but as a process of defining a vision for what "ought to be" and helping people achieve that vision.



You must find the right balance. The secret is to foster partnership without letting the distress reach the point where your employees can't function.

CONCLUSION

Gone are the days when we thought of good management and effective supervision as a set of rules to follow. The task today is to redefine the problems represented by the never-ending set of challenges that child welfare presents us with and to find new ways of solving those problems.

In today's world, partnering with our employees is both a "best practice" and a sure path to success. ♦

COACHING IN THE KITCHEN

Attend "Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents through Teachable Moments." Although the focus of this course is on teaching workers coaching skills for use with parents, supervisors can apply what they learn to their work with their employees. For class times and registration information go to <www.ncswLearn.org>



OUTLINE FOR A SUPERVISORY CONFERENCE

Reprinted with permission from the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program, 2008 <<http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu>>

PREPARATION

- What is my agenda for this conference?
- What are the key safety and high risk-related cases and issues I must review?
- What professional goals do I want to reinforce and support with this worker?
- What are the performance issues I want to address?
- Have I protected the conference time so I won't be unnecessarily interrupted or distracted?
- What are the worker's questions or issues from the last conference that I need to be prepared to address in this conference?
- Are there issues or information from administration that I need to share in this conference?
- Have I shared my agenda with the worker so the worker is able to prepare?
- Has the worker had an opportunity for input into the agenda?
- Have I prepared myself to focus and listen objectively and "lead from one step behind" (Tuning-in skills; solution-focused values and questions)?
- Have I considered the worker's learning/work style in preparing the conference environment and my engagement style?

ENGAGEMENT

- Greet the supervisee.
- Small talk, if appropriate for worker's learning/work style.
- Review and confirm agenda, adding new items based on worker/supervisor input.

WORK PHASE

- Ask the worker to review a selected case.
- Ask worker about any changes in demographics, household composition, or whereabouts.

Examples of solution-focused questions useful in exploring the area of safety.

- Ask the worker for last safety assessment results and current safety plan.
- Ask the worker if child remains safe.
- Using scaling, ask the worker to assign a number that reflects the worker's confidence level about the child remaining safe, with 0 being no confidence at all and 10 being very confident.
- Ask the worker for information and observations that led the worker to assign that confidence number, especially exceptions to the problem behaviors and/or evidence of client making more effective use of

strengths.

- Ask the worker what the client or others need to do to increase that number by one point.
- Ask what he or she believes the worker needs to do or continue to do to help the client reach that one point improvement.
- Ask what the worker needs in terms of supervisor support, training, etc. to effectively support the client's progress in meeting service/permanency goals.

NOTE: The above questions can be modified to review current levels of risk and/or service plan objectives and to explore client and worker strengths and opportunities to promote positive change.

Ask worker about client's goals/"Miracle" (personal goals; family goals; well-being issues).

- What are the strengths that the client possesses that can contribute to accomplishment of the "Miracle"?
- Has the client experienced any small part of the "Miracle"?
- What can the worker do to further support positive movement toward the "Miracle"?

Review worker's professional goals

(This review can be done periodically on a schedule determined by the supervisor and worker).

- Review goals
- Ask what the worker is presently doing to move toward accomplishing professional goals.
- Ask how well these efforts are working.
- Ask what else the worker can do.
- Ask what the worker needs from the supervisor and/or others to continue positive movement toward accomplishment of professional goals.

TRANSITION/ENDING PHASE

- Give/receive feedback about what was useful to the worker and what was less useful.
- Prepare tentative agenda for next supervisory meeting.
- Assign tasks that need to be accomplished in preparation for next conference with timeframes.
- Thank worker for preparation, presentation of information, and feedback. ♦

Excerpted from the course 521 *Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Supervision*



SUPERVISORS AND CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS

Child and family team meetings (CFTs) are a central strategy in North Carolina's child welfare system. Child welfare professionals participating in CFTs need to be able to represent the agency with confidence, prepare families for meetings, and help the family engage and build its natural support network. It can be a challenging job.

It's also an important one: as the plans and recommendations produced by these meetings become more accepted by courts and other key partners, they can have a big impact on what ultimately happens to children and their families.

With so much at stake, supervisors have a clear interest in ensuring that CFTs are done well. Here are some tips, based on interviews with experienced supervisors and CFT experts, that supervisors can use to ensure CFTs are as successful as possible. In all of this, the supervisor's presence at the CFT meeting itself is an important factor.

BEFORE

Set the tone in your agency. Use supervisory and staff meetings to emphasize how useful CFTs can be for engaging families, demonstrating the agency's desire to respectfully partner with them, and for ensuring safety and other positive outcomes for children.

Contribute to the prep work. Successful CFTs require



There is so much at stake during CFTs: supervisors have a clear interest in ensuring that they're done well.

adequate preparation. Without taking over the process, supervisors must ensure that the worker and all parties understand the specific purpose of the meeting at hand and the principles that should guide all CFTs. You can find these principles in Chapter VII of North Carolina's child welfare manual: <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-55/man/>.

Support your staff. Prior to the meeting, spend time one-on-one with the worker to discuss how to prepare family members for the meeting. Identify ways to overcome blockages, such as the family's inability or unwillingness to invite supporters to the meeting. Ask exploratory

questions such as, "What are ways you might work with the family to brainstorm people to come to the meeting?" Be consistent in emphasizing this as an important part of practice with families. Later on, follow up by asking, "Did those questions I suggested work with the family?"

Be clear about your role. If a supervisor and worker are aligned in their understanding of their roles prior to a meeting, they stand a greater chance of having a solid partnership during the meeting. This partnership will communicate to others around the table that the worker is the person to go to with questions.

If you can't attend . . . As explained below, it can be extremely beneficial to everyone involved when *cont. p. 6*

ADVANTAGES OF HAVING SUPERVISORS PRESENT AT CFTS

Benefits for Families. When workers must present unpopular information in the meeting, families may need reassurance that what they are hearing from a worker is the reality. Having the supervisor on hand to confirm a worker's assertions depersonalizes the situation for the family. They are more likely to see that things are the way they are because of law and agency policy, rather than the whim of the worker.

A supervisor's presence can also convey to families the agency's commitment to the team process.

Benefits for Workers. Staff of all experience levels benefit when supervisors attend CFTs. New workers can find the supervisory presence reassuring as they gain experience in representing the agency and explaining its policies and mandates within the team setting.

For all staff, supervisor participation in meetings can lead to better alignment in decisions. As one supervisor puts it, "When I'm not there, I don't always like the outcome. It is not fair to my worker to question the way things went in the meeting after the fact. Supervisors can really

throw a wrench in the process if the worker comes out and says 'we decided x' and after the fact, I say that he should have done 'y' instead."

Having the supervisor in the room to maintain the agency's position can reinforce a worker's efforts. Workers may feel most supported at times when the agency has to hold to a tough stance.

Benefits for Supervisors. Supervisors gain a firsthand perspective of case progress and what workers are experiencing in their daily work, enabling them to offer the kinds of tangible support likely to make a difference for individual workers and the agency as a whole.

Also, by taking time to help a worker prepare for a CFT meeting and listen to concerns, a supervisor extends critical support that may in the long run help to alleviate burnout and increase staff morale and retention.



from p. 4

supervisors attend CFTs. However, if you will not be attending a CFT, be sure the worker knows how to get in touch with you or another supervisor, and that they are confident they will be supported and backed up during the meeting, should they need it.

AT THE MEETING

Being part of a CFT meeting helps supervisors see firsthand the reality of the risk, family dynamics, and other aspects of a case. It can also help supervisors identify ways to develop, support, and retain their staff. Because most supervisors don't have time to shadow staff in the field, CFTs can be an opportunity to get insight into their level of practice—where a staff member is strong and where they need coaching and training.

CFTs also provide an opportunity for the supervisor to model good practice for the worker. By demonstrating a family-centered approach and good communication skills, a supervisor enhances staff learning.

Here are some things supervisors attending CFTs can do to ensure meetings are productive:

Reassure families, if necessary. Even when communication has been good prior to the meeting, many families find CFTs intimidating. If they are on the same page regarding their roles in the meeting, workers and supervisors can find the right way to provide support and information to families and other team members. If necessary, reassure the family that, like the other professionals present, you are here to help them to resolve their situation successfully.

Stick to your role. When there has been good preparation, after the initial introduction, supervisors will need to say little aside from making a clear statement of the agency's position at the end or at key points—for example, to say, "If things don't go well, X will happen." If appropriate, talk in terms of timeframes, actions, and consequences. It's often better for statements of the "bottom line" to come from supervisors—they have the authority, so it helps to convey the seriousness of the situation.

Use your power carefully. Supervisors must use their authority and power carefully during CFTs. If they don't, things can go awry. As one worker shared, "I've been part of meetings where the supervisor unintentionally undermined the worker's power in the eyes of the family."

This can hurt more than the worker's relationship with the family. As one supervisor explained, "I've been in meetings where I overpowered the worker because she wasn't doing what she was supposed to. Bad outcome—the family starts calling me! Supervisors, be very aware of your role in the meeting."

CFT PREP TIP: Identifying "Hot Buttons"

Prior to a CFT, supervisors should help their workers identify what their "hot button" issues might be—for example, the worker may really recoil at the presence of family violence. If these issues are present in this family (e.g., abusive dad, alcoholic parent, etc.), how will the worker leave this issue at the door during the meeting?



It's not easy for supervisors to do this. It's not easy for the worker. We all have hot button issues. But it helps no one if our reactions cloud our judgment.

AFTER

Debrief. When supervisors sit in on a CFT, they should take time soon afterwards to ask the staff member working with the family:

- How did that feel?
- What went well?
- Is there anything you would do differently?
- What about your role?
- What about mine?

Encourage learning by asking these kinds of questions and helping workers see the importance of taking time for reflection.

Be positive. During the conversation, reinforce good practice by discussing the strengths you saw the worker demonstrate. Give your supervisee a boost!

Be constructive. Talk about specific ways to enhance family engagement with the worker, if you observed this as a need. Create opportunities for skill development in areas such as modifying tone of voice or body language to open up communication with families.

Spread the word! Take time to celebrate CFT successes, sharing what went well with the rest of the team or the agency. Doing so creates a positive climate and can spark change you want to see in people's practice with families. ♦

Special thanks to the following for their contributions to this article: Jenny King, Holly McNeill, Billy Poindexter, and Katie Turk.

MAKING CFTs WORK FOR WORKERS

To make CFTs work for families, supervisors must also make them work for workers. For example, can workers work after hours? Support flex time so there's a balance between taking care of families we work with and taking care of the families we live with. Advocate for changes in your agency to make high quality CFTs possible.

Update on North Carolina's Child Welfare Supervision Advisory Committee

SUPERVISORS TAKING THE LEAD ON BEST PRACTICES

Efforts are being made to strengthen child welfare supervision on a number of fronts. The federal government has taken a strong interest in this issue, including funding training initiatives for supervisors and offering technical assistance and resources through the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network. In addition, individual states, child welfare agencies, and supervisors are providing leadership in this area. That's definitely true here in North Carolina.

Since its formation in 2007, North Carolina's Child Welfare Supervision Advisory Committee has made important strides in shaping the future of child welfare supervision in our state. A majority of committee members are county DSS child welfare supervisors, with additional representation from the NC Division of Social Services.

An offshoot of the committee is a pilot of supervisory best practices in 10 county DSS agencies. As participating agencies implement recommended supervisory practices, the pilot group collects feedback so these practices can be enhanced for use in other DSS settings.

COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

According to the Division's Candice Britt, the committee's accomplishments include:

- Served as advisory group to revisions in the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tools.
- November 2008–present: Ongoing implementation of supervision best practices, including:
 1. Weekly contact with all staff
 2. At least 2 individual conferences per month for each supervisee
 3. Protecting that conference time by being truly available
 4. Using an agenda to guide the discussion
 5. Using a consistent tool to review case records
- Collected baseline data from county staff on "good supervision." The plan is to continue to collect data and monitor the impact on practice.
- Completed a time/study analysis regarding use of supervision time
- Created and promoted use of a supervisory tool kit site <www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/best_practices_pilot/>.

PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMITTEE

The decision to participate in the committee's efforts is an investment that counties make on an individual basis. A meeting day away from the office every other month and participation in bi-monthly phone calls (1-2 hours) may

A RESOURCE SUPERVISORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



Thanks to the Child Welfare Supervision Advisory Committee, supervisors in North Carolina have a new county-to-county resource for sharing tools that help them do their jobs. You can post tools or descriptions of things you've tried (e.g., how you are staffing cases, how cases are transferred), that may be of interest to other supervisors. You can also see what other supervisors have posted, and borrow and adapt anything you wish. No need to reinvent the wheel!

Although available now, the tool kit is not finished. According to committee co-chair Kristy Perry, "Eventually we will land on some tools or approaches that we will endorse as best practices. . . The ultimate vision is that it would be for new supervisors. That way, supervisors would have something that works that they could use right off the bat. This could be a real boon for someone moving up from line worker to supervisor."

Although it does not specifically endorse these tools, the Division is interested in providing information that counties have found useful. You can find the tool kit at: http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/best_practices_pilot/

Want to share your county's tools? Contact Candice Britt at candice.britt@dhhs.nc.gov.

seem challenging, particularly as resources and personnel are stretched in the current economic climate. However, according to committee co-chair Kristy Perry, "that time away from the office is worth it to the agency in terms of enhanced supervisor performance."

"To me," she says, "it's really sharpening the saw while you're gone."

In addition to the benefits this professional network provides to supervisors and their respective counties, North Carolina stands to gain from the progressive work of this committee.

For more information on the committee, contact co-chairs Kristy Perry (Person County DSS, kperry@personcounty.net) or Bridget Happney (Mecklenburg Co. DSS, bridget.happney@mecklenburgcountync.gov), or Candice Britt (NC Division of Social Services, 919/334-1138, candice.britt@dhhs.nc.gov). ♦

Focusing on a Core Supervisory Skill

HELPING WORKERS DEVELOP THEIR CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Because every family is unique and the challenges they face can be so complex, decision making in child welfare is often profoundly difficult. Structured Decision Making tools and other protocols can promote accuracy and consistency, but they don't actually make things any easier. We will always need front line child welfare staff who can approach situations with an open mind, analyze complex information within its context, and respond creatively.

Fortunately, supervisors have many opportunities to foster critical thinking:

Hiring. Use realistic case scenarios that provide insight into people's thought and decision making processes as part of interviews with all job applicants.

Ongoing assessment and development. Use case staffings, regular one-on-one conferences, role plays, trips into the field with workers (shadowing), child and family team meetings, and other contacts with workers to assess and nurture critical thinking.

Self-reflection is a key element of critical thinking—seize opportunities before, during, and after contact with families to encourage workers to reflect on issues of self triggered by their work. Use multiple perspectives and explanations to explore and challenge the worker's thinking about the family (Dill & Bogo, 2007).

Know your stuff. To find and develop people who think critically, you must know what you're looking for. The profile at right provides some of the characteristics found in critical thinkers. To learn more about this topic, go to <www.criticalthinking.org>. ♦

Fostering critical thinking skills fits well with a partnership approach to supervision.

PROFILE OF A CRITICAL THINKER

- Uses information skillfully and impartially
- Organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently
- Suspends judgment in the absence of sufficient evidence to support a decision
- Attempts to anticipate the probable consequences of alternate actions before choosing among them
- Has a sense of the value and cost of information, knows how to seek information, and does so when it makes sense
- Applies problem-solving techniques appropriately in domains other than those in which they were learned
- Listens carefully to other people's ideas
- Recognizes that most real-world problems have more than one possible solution and that those solutions may differ in numerous respects and may be difficult to compare in terms of a single figure of merit
- Looks for unusual approaches to complex problems
- Can respect differing viewpoints without distortion, exaggeration, or characterization
- Is aware of the fact that one's understanding is always limited
- Recognizes the fallibility of one's own opinions, the probability of bias in those opinions, and the danger of differentially weighting evidence according to personal preferences
- Can strip a verbal argument of irrelevancies and phrase it in terms of its essentials
- Understands the differences among conclusions, assumptions and hypotheses
- Habitually questions one's own view and attempts to understand both the assumptions that are critical to those views and implications of the views



Source: Nickerson, 1987

Children's Services Practice Notes

Family & Children's Resource Program
Jordan Institute for Families
UNC–School of Social Work
Campus Box 3550
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550
State Courier # 17-61-04

Works Cited in this Issue

- Appalachian Family Innovations. (2003). *Partners in change: A new perspective on child protective services* (curriculum). Morganton, NC: Author.
- Covey, S. (2004). *The 8th Habit*. New York: Free Press.
- Dill, K. & Bogo, M. (2007). *Clinical supervision in child welfare practice: Moving beyond the symposium*. Social Work Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Accessed May 31, 2010 from <www.cwlc.ca/files/file/events/Dill%202007.pdf>.
- King, J., Poindexter, B. & Turk, K. (January 11, 2010). *Personal communication*. Asheville, NC: Author.
- Lietz, C. A. (2010). Critical thinking in child welfare supervision. *Administration in Social Work*, 34(1), 68-78.
- Lundberg, J. & Lundberg, G. (1995). *I don't have to make everything all better*. Las Vegas: Riverpark Publishing Co.
- McNeill, H. (January 11, 2010). *Personal communication*. Asheville, NC: Author.
- NC Division of Social Services. (2010). *Our mission*. Accessed June 5, 2010 from <www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/about/mission.htm>
- Nickerson, R.S. (1987). Why teach thinking? In Baron, J.B. & Sternberg, R.J. (Eds.), *Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice* (pp. 27-37). New York: W.H. Freeman & Co.
- Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program. (October 2008). *521 Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Supervision*. Mechanicsburg, PA: The University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work.
- Suzuki, S. (1970). *Zen mind, beginner's mind*. New York: Weatherhill.