

# The Practitioner

A Publication of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services



## Innovations in Family Centered Practice

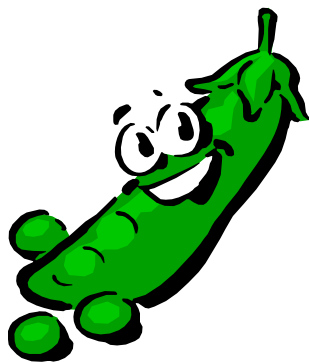
Over the last 6 months, Brantley, Catoosa, Fulton, Muscogee, Richmond and Walton counties have been preparing for the official kick-off of family centered practice. December 1st marked the official day that the family centered practice "switch" was turned on in those counties, called Innovation Zones. The beginning of family centered practice means the start of a purposeful adoption of family centered principles.

Family centered practice is a set of values and beliefs that guide our day-to-day practice with children, families and partners. A few key programs that are critical in the implementation of family centered philosophy are concurrent planning, risk assessment and Partnership Parenting.

The Innovation Zones are a testing ground for the rest of the state to determine what works well, what doesn't and how the Georgia Family Centered Practice Model should be rolled-out to the rest of the state in August 2010.

For more information on the Georgia Family Centered Practice Model, please visit [www.gacfsrpi.org](http://www.gacfsrpi.org)

A significant part of the CFSR review involves risk and safety management, better known as **Item 4**. Risk and safety management encompasses all the work we do with the families: investigations, family preservation, and placement. Item 4 is all about reducing risk to children and ensuring their safety in their living situation. It includes quality contacts and asking the right questions and following up with the answers or the lack of answers, thereof.



A few foundational questions to consider when assessing for risk and safety follow:

- ◆ Why is this case open?
- ◆ What is the risk to the child? Why can't the child go home today?
- ◆ What services have been provided? What is working and what isn't? Have the services changed behavior or reduced risk?
- ◆ What else needs to be done? What **MUST** be done for this child and the family to reduce or eliminate the risk?
- ◆ Do I have the big picture? Have I considered root causes? What other information do I need?

The most recent Social Services Quality Case Review Trend report for the period ending September 2009 indicated that the state is achieving **Item 4** at 71.63%, which means we have some work to do in this area. From the findings, what follows are areas needing improvement:

- ◆ More follow up on provided services and assessment of effectiveness;
- ◆ Ongoing risk assessment at each contact;
- ◆ Contact with relevant and knowledgeable collaterals;
- ◆ Attention to addressing all allegations and adequate review all prior history; and
- ◆ Screenings all household members.

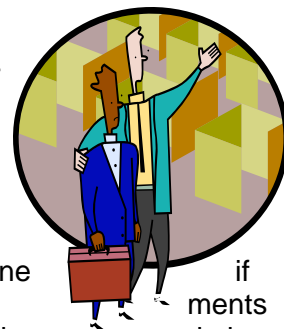
Sometimes a lack of information can place children at risk. Quality contacts with children are top priority. Building relationships with children and engaging them takes time but it is necessary to reduce risk

## Pass the PEAS: Lessons Learned on Item 4

and assess their safety. We should never assume safety exists based on where the child lives. We need to be able to ask children questions and respond to their questions. Questions should be relevant to the allegations or the risk factors.

Assessing risk and safety is more than the completion of forms. Risk assessment and safety assessments are tools we use to determine the level of risk and what safeguards are in place to reduce risk to children. Quality assessments and follow up are the basis for good casework practice. Of course, these types of decisions are not made alone.

Consistent and quality supervision is critical to successful risk management. Supervisors must be able to determine quality assessments if have been made and give feedback accordingly. Supervisors must face the challenge to build capacity for case managers to develop skills for conducting quality assessments and providing relevant services. Supervisors must mentor and train case managers to recognize safety factors and provide services which will reduce risk to children.



# Supporting Care Giver Rights: The Right To Be Heard

To Do:

## Top Tips for Achieving Safety and Mitigating Risk

1. Safety is ALWAYS first .
2. Do involve the Juvenile Court when needed. It is better to disagree than not to consult .
3. Staff cases prior to utilizing a Safety Resource.
4. Document substantively. Clearly show that the child is safe (for in and out- of- home placements)
5. Document to reflect critical thinking has occurred.
6. Ask questions! Then, ask more questions!
7. One of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior: read case history and include it when assessing safety and risk.
8. Use ALL information to arrive at decision about a child's safety and future risk.
9. Be sure to include the family in the development of the safety plan.
10. Choose collaterals and questions for the collaterals wisely! Collaterals should know the family personally or professionally, have familiarity about caretaking and family functioning skills. Remember that simply asking—*Do you have concerns*—is not enough!

Like to add your tip?

Email it to

[ffiquetions@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:ffiquetions@dhr.state.ga.us)

## The Foster Parent Bill of Rights

The Georgia Foster Parent Bill of Rights was signed into law in July 2005. The law provides twenty-three rights supporting foster parents as they support Georgia's children and families. The law includes the "Right to Be Heard" which states that foster and adoptive parents, including relative care givers, have the right to receive notice of hearings relating to the children in their care and the right to be heard at those hearings. "Hearings" means any periodic judicial review. Courts must consider their oral or written testimony along with all testimony and evidence presented.

In sum , O.C.G.A. §15-11-58(p) states the following: *in advance of each review or hearing to be held with respect to a child pursuant to this Code section, **the court shall provide written notice or shall direct that a party shall provide written notice of such review or hearing, including their right to be heard at such review or hearing, to the custodian of the child, to the foster parents of the child, and to any pre-adoptive parents or relatives providing care for the child, consistent with the form and timing of notice to parties. In its order the court shall include findings of fact which reflect the court's consideration of the oral and written testimony offered by the parents, the custodian of the child, the foster parents of the child, any pre-adoptive parents or relatives providing care.***



## Are You Supporting Your Families Right to Be Heard?

The law states that the court shall provide notice or direct that a party provide notice. In general, that "party" is DFCS. Case managers must support care givers' right to be heard by providing notice of hearings **and** ensuring that care givers understand that even if they can't attend in person, that

they can still have their testimony included in the findings of fact by providing written testimony. Encourage your care givers to attend all hearings or send a letter along with you to court.

## New Year Practice Resolution: What Are You Going to Do in 2010?

With less than 30 days to go before the dawning of a new year, now is a good time to think about your practice resolutions for 2010. Pick one strength to build upon and one challenge to meet.

Reflect on these questions first—

- ◆ What were your practice highlights?
- ◆ What were your practice challenges?
- ◆ What did you learn?
- ◆ What did you teach?
- ◆ What energized you?
- ◆ What drained you?
- ◆ Who touched your heart?
- ◆ Whose heart did you touch?
- ◆ Who did you support?
- ◆ Who supported you?

