

Courageous Leadership Opportunities

A. The Structured Decision Making® System Is an Intervention

1. Screening and response priority: We will use child protection responses when they are needed and work collaboratively with the community to develop other resources for families in need.
2. Safety assessment: We will make placements when there is danger that cannot be controlled. We will use in-home safety plans to manage danger when possible. We will not remove a child unless there is danger.
3. Risk assessment: We will direct our ongoing intervention resources to families at higher risk and work collaboratively with the community to develop other resources for families at lower risk.
4. Strengths and needs assessment: We will focus on supporting families to change in areas that are directly connected to the child protection issue and will work collaboratively with the community to develop other resources for families in need.
5. Reunification assessment: We will promptly return children to their families when there is evidence of reduced risk, acceptable visitation, and safety. We will not allow children to return home if risk remains high. We will support alternative permanency for children who cannot go home.
6. Risk reassessment: We will close cases when there is evidence that risk has been reduced.

Questions:

- How will you share these principles with key stakeholders? How will you explain the value of these decisions to overall community well-being?
- What evidence will you present when facing opposition to these approaches? (For example, if a stakeholder argues that you are removing too many children or not enough children?)
- How will you respond when an adverse event is used to marshal public opinion and political forces to divert you from these principles? (For example, a well-designed and monitored safety plan is in place, but there is still a child fatality.)

B. The Structured Decision Making® System Works Best When Used in the Context of Good Practice

1. We will use a practice approach that balances forensic requirements, family engagement, and strengths-based practices—these are not mutually exclusive.
2. We will use a practice approach that balances family voice and choice with our statutory responsibility to make decisions impacting child safety, permanency, and well-being.
3. We will use a practice approach that attends to key decision-making moments, and we will be transparent about our systematic approach to making these decisions.
4. We will use a practice approach that values both professional judgment and research and evidence-based decision tools.
5. We will employ staff with the knowledge and skills to implement our practice approach.
6. We will ensure that we have enough staff to meet at least minimum workload standards.

Questions:

- How do you select and retain the best people for the work?
- How do you adopt and maintain a practice approach? How do you know whether what you are doing is working?
- How do you promote the value of decision-support tools?
- What do you say in response to pressures to focus exclusively on forensic investigation and to use power and control as your primary intervention? What do you say in response to pressures to eliminate forensic investigations for some or all families and to avoid use of power and control?
- How do you tell the story to the community and key stakeholders about what you do and how you make decisions?
- How do you advocate for sufficient staff to do the work well?

C. Implementing the Structured Decision Making® System Requires Attention to Best Practices

1. We will focus on a small set of changes, attend to them with intensity until they are embedded, and then continue to monitor and ensure their sustained fidelity.
2. We will require and facilitate integration among purveyors of our major initiatives.
3. We will ensure that leadership is equipped with the information and data needed to provide technical solutions and create adaptive solutions when needed.
4. We will invest in sufficient training and coaching for staff to develop knowledge and skill to do the work and continue to promote learning and deepening of practice knowledge and skill.
5. We will ask questions about our practice, gather the needed data, take time to understand the data, and act informed by the data.
6. We will have the smallest number of policies necessary to facilitate practice.

Questions:

- How will you set limits on the number of initiatives and changes being undertaken at once, despite political pressure to adopt one more thing?
- What will you do when one purveyor is persuading part of your organization to think about the work in one way, while another purveyor is working with another part of your organization and leading them in an opposite direction?
- Are your data dictating your questions, or are your questions informing the data you collect and analyze?
- How do you know if your staff know what to do and how to do it? How do you support continuous deepening of practice knowledge and skill?
- Are you over-dependent on training versus coaching? Are your supervisors spending their time monitoring compliance and serving as “up-the-chain” deciders or as professional developers of their staff?
- Do you solve problems by writing new policies?