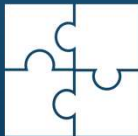
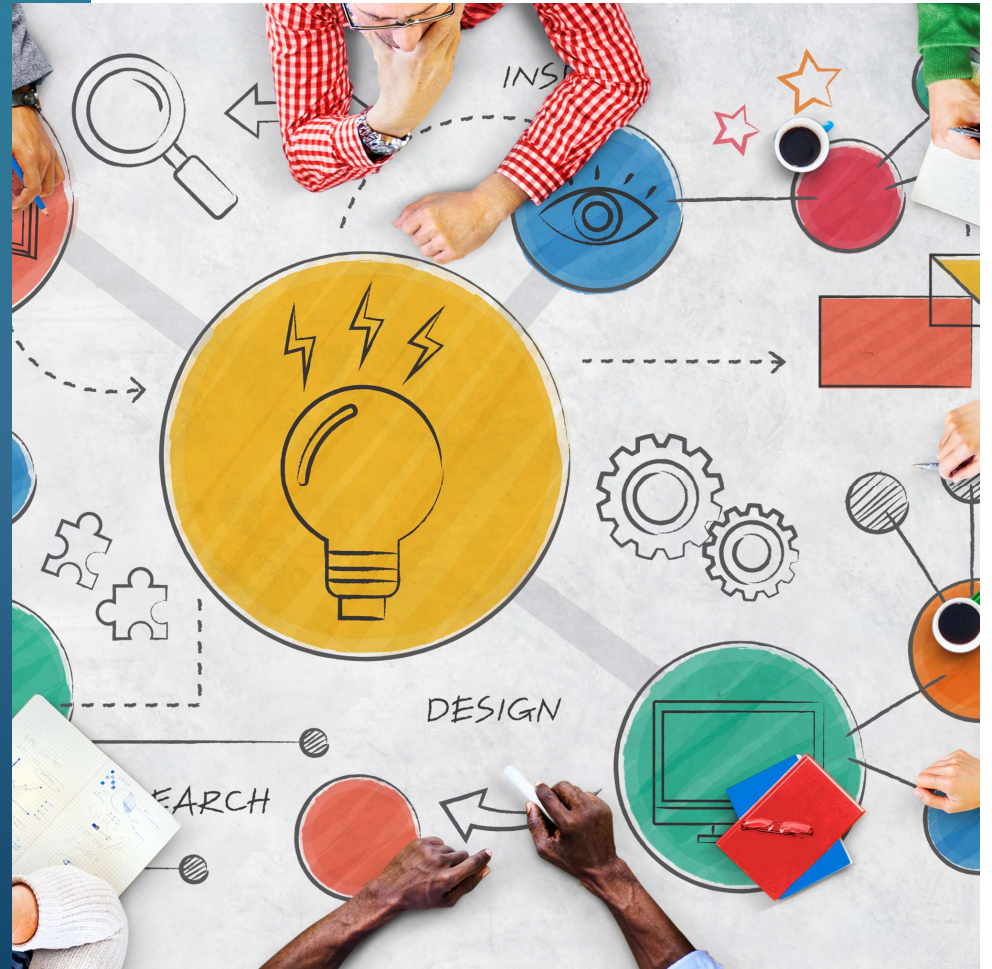


# Strengthening Skills for Child Welfare Caseworkers and Supervisors: Working with Families Affected by Parental Substance Use

Children's Justice Conference



National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare



# Acknowledgement

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National Center on  
Substance Abuse  
and Child Welfare

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# Today's Presenters

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Alexis  
Balkey

Program Director



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Wiley

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# Learning Objectives

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FOLLOWING THIS TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS WILL:



1

Develop engagement strategies to strengthen trust and collaboration with children, parents, and families affected by substance use

2

Identify practical methods to support critical thinking and decision-making in cases involving parental substance use

3

Explore strategies and questions to guide more effective case discussions and reflective supervision

# Safety and Risk Video Series

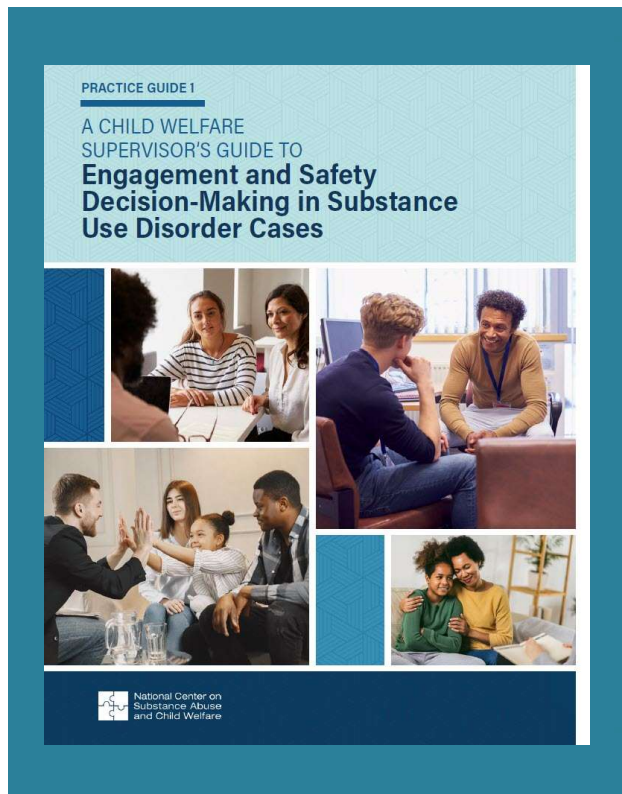


This video series provides child welfare professionals with details on child safety and risk factors related to parental substance use disorders (SUDs). The series highlights strategies to promote parent engagement and support a coordinated approach—across systems—that helps families mitigate child safety and improve family well-being. It includes considerations when planning for safety with families.

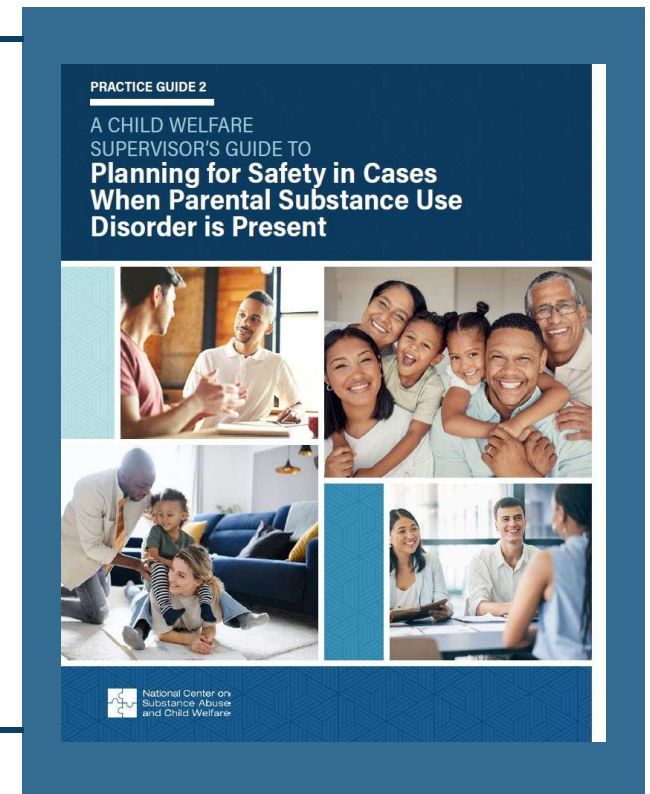
- *Engagement and Safety Decision-Making in Substance Use Disorder Cases*
- *Planning for Safety in Cases When Parental Substance Use Disorder is Present*

Coming soon! Visit our **Safety and Risk Topic Page** to learn more:  
<https://ncsacw.acf.gov/topics/safety-and-risk/>

# Child Welfare Supervisor's Practice Guides to Safety and Risk



These two practice guides for child welfare supervisors supplement the *upcoming safety and risk video series* for child welfare professionals. The practice guides complement the information in the videos and guide supervisors on how to build upon the concepts in the videos to strengthen child welfare workers' practice with families when parental substance use is present.



Scan the QR code or click the link to access the series @

<https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/topics/safety-and-risk/safety-risk-guides-series/>

# Learning Objective

1

Participants will develop engagement strategies to strengthen trust and collaboration with children, parents, and families affected by substance use.



# Helpful Techniques for Building Rapport

Empathy

Mirroring

Reframing

Partializing

Past  
Success  
Questioning

# *Build Partnerships with Families to Increase Engagement*



Create space for families



Develop a shared understanding and trust



Use a trauma-informed approach

# Collaborative Strategies to Use with Families

Be empathetic vs  
exerting power

Don't assume—  
ask questions

Empower and  
respect  
autonomy

Engage in shared  
decision-making

Be honest and  
transparent

Incorporate the  
use of peer  
recovery supports

Create plans  
together that are  
individualized

Guide do not  
problem solve

## Practical Example— *Engagement*

---

### Scenario

Sarah is a mother of three children, ages 3, 6, and 9. The children recently returned home after a period of separation due to parental substance use and housing instability. She's been in recovery for about 5 months. During a monthly home visit, the worker notices Sarah appears distracted and agitated. She is normally talkative with the worker but today her responses are short and evasive. These are not typical behaviors for her. The children mention she's been "sleeping a lot during the day" and "forgetting to make dinner." The worker notices the house—usually very tidy—is cluttered and in disarray.

## Learning Objective

2

Participants will identify practical methods to support critical thinking and decision-making in cases involving parental substance use.



# *Enhance Critical Thinking*



The 5 Why's



Motivational  
Interviewing (MI)



Reflective  
Supervision

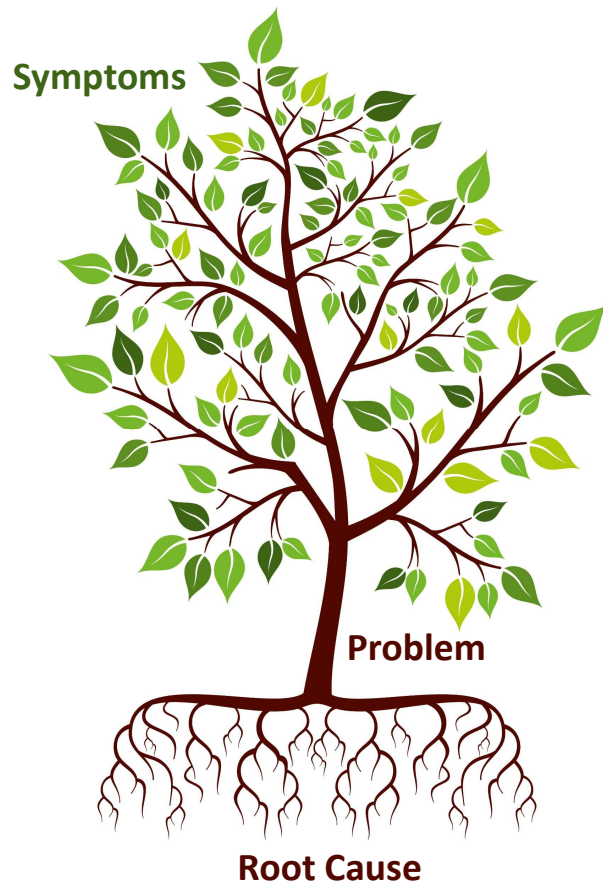


Group  
Supervision



# The 5 Why's

# 5 WHY'S OVERVIEW



The 5 Whys method, rooted in implementation science and systems thinking, can be a powerful tool to help child welfare workers enhance their critical thinking skills by guiding them to dig deeper into problems rather than stopping at surface-level explanations. This approach encourages reflection, analysis, and problem-solving, helping workers recognize systemic factors influencing family situations.

(Altman et al., 1994; Sholtes, 1988; University of Kansas, n.d.)

## Practical Example – *The 5 Why's*

Why was the home unsafe & children left unsupervised?

- Because the mother was experiencing frequent periods of instability, inconsistent caregiving, and lacks a support network.

Why was she experiencing instability?

- Because she was struggling with substance use, couldn't maintain a structured daily routine.

Why was she struggling with substance use?

- Because she was using substances to cope with untreated mental health and trauma.

The initial report stated the children are left unsupervised frequently; the home environment was unsafe; and the mother

Why weren't her mental health issues being treated?

- Because she lacked access to affordable therapy and had negative past experiences with treatment providers.

Why didn't she have access to effective treatment?

- Because local treatment programs had long waitlists, she lacked transportation, and stigma around substance use made her afraid to seek help earlier.



# Motivational Interviewing

# Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a strengths-based, evidence-based communication method professionals can use to support families involved in the child welfare system. MI relies on four core communication skills to cultivate change talk and support realistic progress toward a goal or desired change:

**Asking Open-  
Ended  
Questions**

**Affirmations**

**Reflective  
Listening**

**Summarizing**

# How MI Enhances Critical Thinking in Child Welfare

**Meaningful Family  
Engagement**

**Exploring Ambivalence**

**Collaborative Goal Setting**

**Reflective Listening**



(Casey Family Programs, 2021; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023)

## Practical Example—*MI*

---

### Scenario

A child welfare worker, Alex, is discussing a new case with his supervisor. The case involves a mother, Lisa, who has been reported for neglect due to concerns related to her substance use. The report indicates that Lisa has struggled with maintaining stable housing, keeping appointments for her child's medical care, and ensuring consistent supervision. She doesn't feel like her cannabis use is affecting her ability to safely parent her children and has missed multiple treatment sessions. Alex is struggling with how to have the discussion with the mother and how to best engage her back into treatment.

# Practical Example (Worker)—Motivational Interviewing

How could you use MI techniques with Lisa to build rapport and explore her ambivalence?

## Asking Open-Ended Questions

Lisa, can you tell me more about what parenting looks like for you day-to-day?

## Affirmations

It's clear you care deeply about your children and want what's best for them.

## Reflective Listening

It sounds like you feel your cannabis use isn't interfering with your ability to care for your children.

## Summarizing

What I hear you saying is...What would make it worth your time to go back to treatment?

# Practical Example (Supervisor)—Motivational Interviewing

## Step 1: Engage with Open-Ended Questions

- “Tell me more about what you’re seeing in Lisa’s case. What stands out to you?”

## Step 2: Guide Reflection and Critical Thinking

- “You mentioned that Lisa has missed treatment sessions, and she doesn’t feel her cannabis use affects her ability to keep her child safe or provide for them. What do you think this tells us about where she is in the change process?”

## Step 3: Reinforce Critical Thinking with Affirmation & Summarization

- “What I hear you saying is that you are not sure how to get Lisa to see that her cannabis use could be contributing to the instability she is experiencing, the potential effects to her child, and to recognize the importance of treatment. Does that sound accurate?”



# Reflective and Group Supervision

## Practical Example – *Reflective Supervision*

Element	Description	Example
<b>Emotion-Focused Questions</b>	Ask a question that inquires about the emotional aspects of the job.	<i>“What was that case like for you? What feelings are brought up for you when you think about his case?”</i>
<b>Reflective Listening</b>	Reflect back the emotion you heard and check in to make sure you heard correctly.	<i>“What I heard you say is _____. Is that correct?”</i>
<b>Modeling</b>	Provide examples from personal experience related to the work to help staff feel understood and validated.	<i>“When I was going into a similar case, I felt nervous about those home visits. I’m wondering if that is similar to what you were feeling?”</i>
<b>Compassion Satisfaction</b>	Focus on the positives and joys of the work so staff feel supported and confident in their abilities.	<i>“What is one thing you are proud of in this case?”</i>

# Practical Example – *Group Supervision Framework*

## Opening Check-In (10m)

- Icebreaker
- *“Share one word or phrase that describes how you are feeling about your work this week”*



## Case Presentation (10m)

- Worker volunteers to present a case
- Brief overview
- Challenge or concern



## Clarifying Questions (10m)

- Ask clarifying questions
- *“What do you think is motivating the parent’s behavior?”*



## Wrap-up & Takeaways (10m)

- Worker shares one insight or next step
- Group reflects on what they’ve learned



## Supervision Reflection & Modeling (5m)

- Summarize key themes,
- Model reflective thinking
- Highlight strengths



## Reflective Feedback & Peer Input (15m)

- Use “I” statements to avoid judgment
- Reflection and insight

## Learning Objective

# 3

Participants will explore strategies and questions to guide more effective case discussions and reflective supervision.



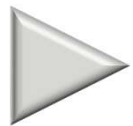
# Preparing for Supervision—What Everyone Can Do



Develop a structure for supervision

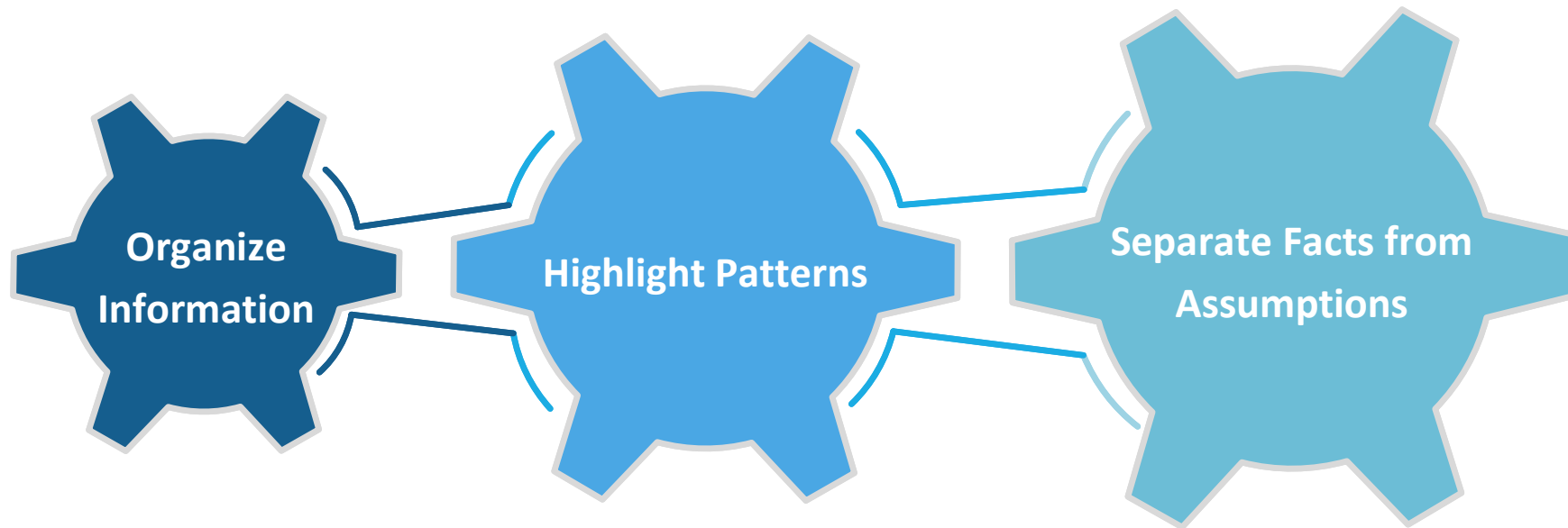


Review case notes, progress reports, family time/visitation notes, assessment results, home visit observations, collateral contact information, etc.



Identify challenges, concerns, and strengths related to safety and risk, child permanency, and well-being

# Organizing Case Information

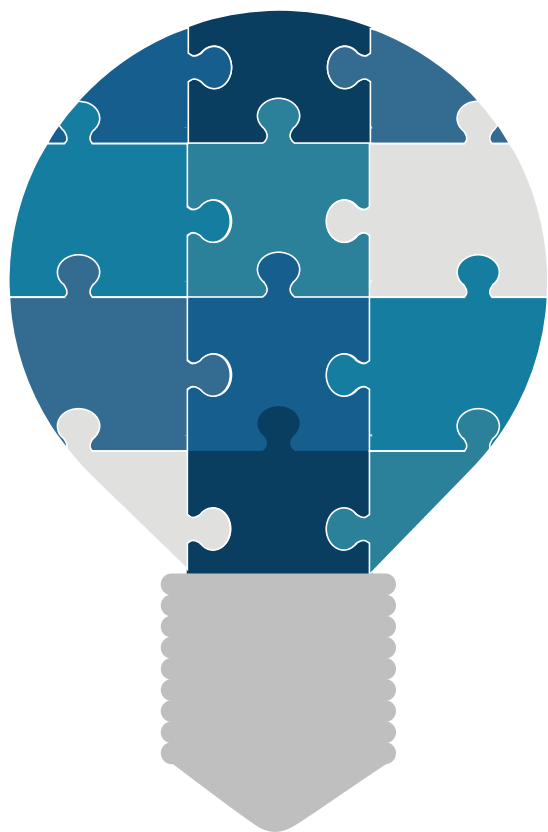


- Safety threats
- Risk factors
- Protective capacities and factors
- Collateral information
- Family history

- Trends or patterns
- Changes over time
- Reoccurring issues or concerns

- Facts—see, observe, hear
- Assumptions—  
impressions,  
interpretations,  
secondhand reports

# Supervisor's Role—Guiding the Conversation



## Ask open-ended, reflective questions

- *What do you think is driving the behavior?*
- *What is the family's perspective?*
- *What are the safety vs. risk concerns?*

## Help synthesize the information to understand safety and risk factors

- *Okay, let me see if I caught all this...what I heard was the mother has a history of substance use and mental health challenges, is a single parent, no support system, has income instability, and aged out of foster care herself.*

## Support the worker in developing next steps

- *What do you think needs to happen?*
- *If we do X, how do you think the family will respond?*
- *Let's brainstorm for a moment...of these options which one do you think will work best for the family?*

## Considerations for Case Discussions with Child Welfare Workers

This section provides strategies, techniques, and specific questions to use with child welfare workers during case discussions to help staff work more effectively with families.



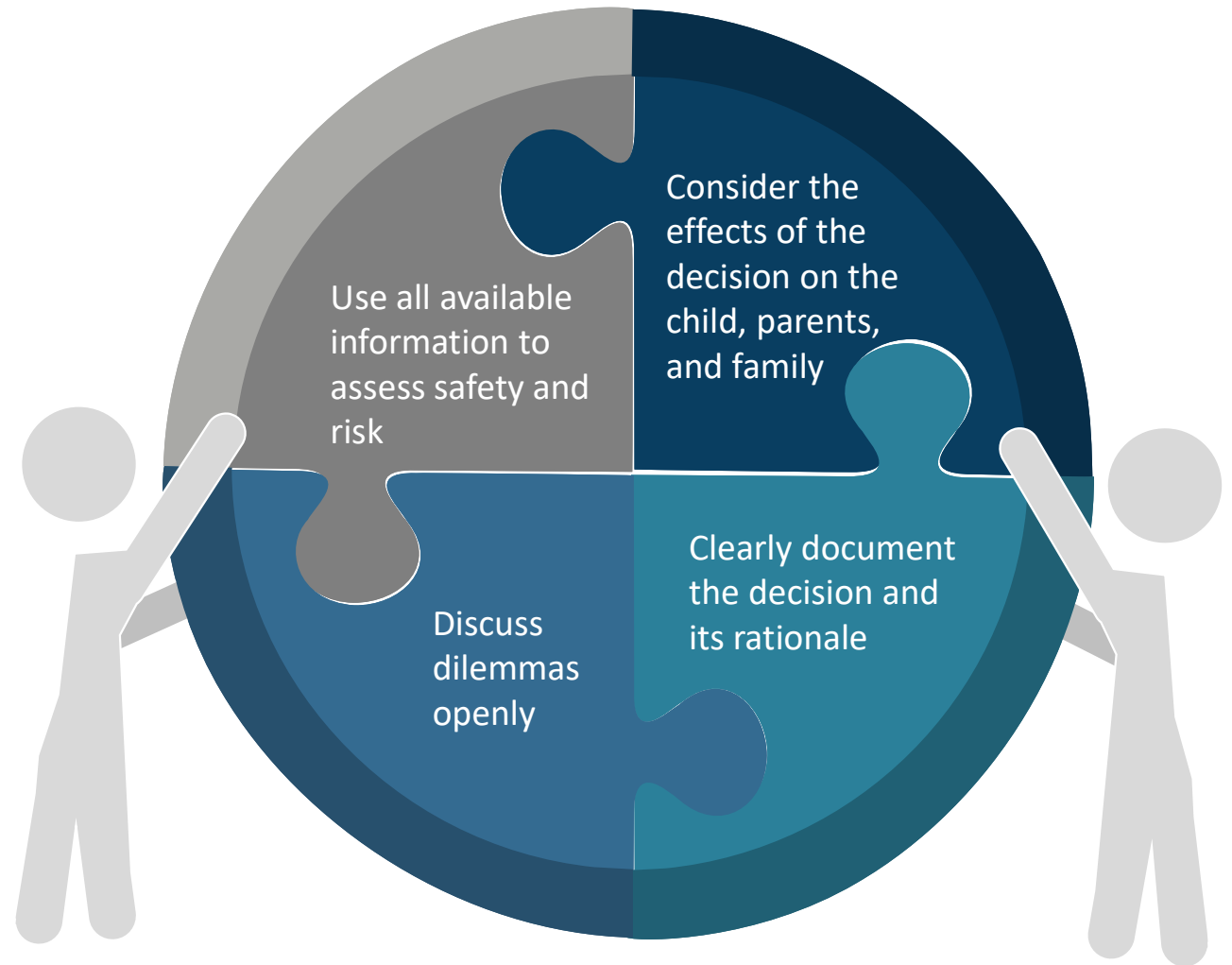
### Assessing Ongoing Safety and Maximizing Family Engagement

- Help child welfare workers determine if what they see in the home environment constitutes a safety concern (e.g., conditions of the home, controlled substances, drug paraphernalia)
- Explore with child welfare workers what questions they can ask to determine how parental substance use affects child safety and how they can weave the following questions into the discussion:
  - What have your friends and family said about how you take care of your children when you engage in alcohol or drug use?
  - Why might someone be concerned about your children's well-being?
  - What concerns do you have about taking care of your children while using alcohol or drugs?
  - How do you think your alcohol or drug use affects your children?
  - How do you protect your children while using alcohol or drugs?
  - What treatment have you received in the past for alcohol or drug use? Have you been in recovery before? How long were you able to maintain recovery? What worked well for you?
  - How do you feel about getting a SUD assessment and entering treatment?
  - Whom do you have to use for family support nearby or in the home? Tell me about your relationship with them.
  - Tell me about your children's schedule. When do your children eat their meals? What are some examples of the meals you provide? How do they get to school? Do you have any challenges getting them to school on time? If so, what are they? What is their bedtime routine? Where do they normally sleep? What time do they go to bed?
  - How does your child sleep? How are they eating? When was their last well-child visit? How did it go? How is daycare, preschool, or school going? What concerns have others had about the child (e.g., family member, daycare provider)?
  - Has anyone expressed concerns, or do you have concerns with your child having developmental delays, chronic medical issues, learning disabilities, or fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)? If so, what are they? What treatment services does the child receive?
  - What challenges do you have paying for housing, utilities, food, etc.?
  - Have you and your family been involved with other agencies in the past because of concerns about your children? If so, what agencies?
- Help child welfare workers use their observation about young children to determine how parental substance use affects the parent-child relationship:
  - What is the child's body language?
  - Does the child answer questions and respond to interactions with the child welfare worker or look to their parent? Are they hesitant or uncertain on answering certain questions?

# Considerations for Case Discussions with Child Welfare Workers

Practice Guide Resource

# Decision- Making— Putting It All Together

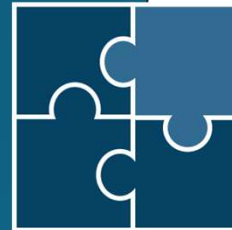


# Contact

## Contact the NCSACW TTA Program

Connect with programs that are developing tools and implementing practices and protocols to support their collaboration.

Training and technical assistance to support collaboration and systems change.



## National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare

 <https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov>

 [ncsacw@cffutures.org](mailto:ncsacw@cffutures.org)

 Toll-Free @ 1-866-493-2758

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# Resources



National Center on  
Substance Abuse  
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## HELPING NAVIGATE THE INTERSECTION OF SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL DISORDER TREATMENT AND CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



### WHO WE ARE

For more than 20 years, the **National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare** (NCSACW), has been a resource center providing information, expert consultation, workforce development resources, and technical expertise to child welfare, dependency court, and substance use treatment professionals to improve the safety, permanency, well-being and recovery outcomes for children, parents, and families.

NCSACW is a *cohesive team of subject experts* with a deep understanding of and experience in collaborative practice and the systems we serve. Our staff and consultants, many with personal experience, have worked as policymakers in state and local governments, held clinical and administrative leadership positions in substance use disorder and mental health treatment agencies, worked on the front lines of child welfare practice, and served as court administrators.

The National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare enhances cross-agency collaboration based on a shared understanding of the needs and challenges of children, parents, and their families—and a sincere appreciation for the workforce serving them.

## Learn more about the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW) including:

Our goals

Where we  
make a  
difference

How we can  
help

Our  
specialized TA  
programs

“Each system that serves children and families operates under its own goals. Yet the overarching objective for each system is undisputedly the same: **Provide the best service possible to children and families.**”

—Nancy K. Young, Executive Director, Center for Children and Family Futures



Scan the QR code or click the link to access @

<https://cffutures.org/files/NCSACW%20Who%20We%20Are.pdf>

# Child Welfare Practice Tip Series



Scan here  
to learn  
more



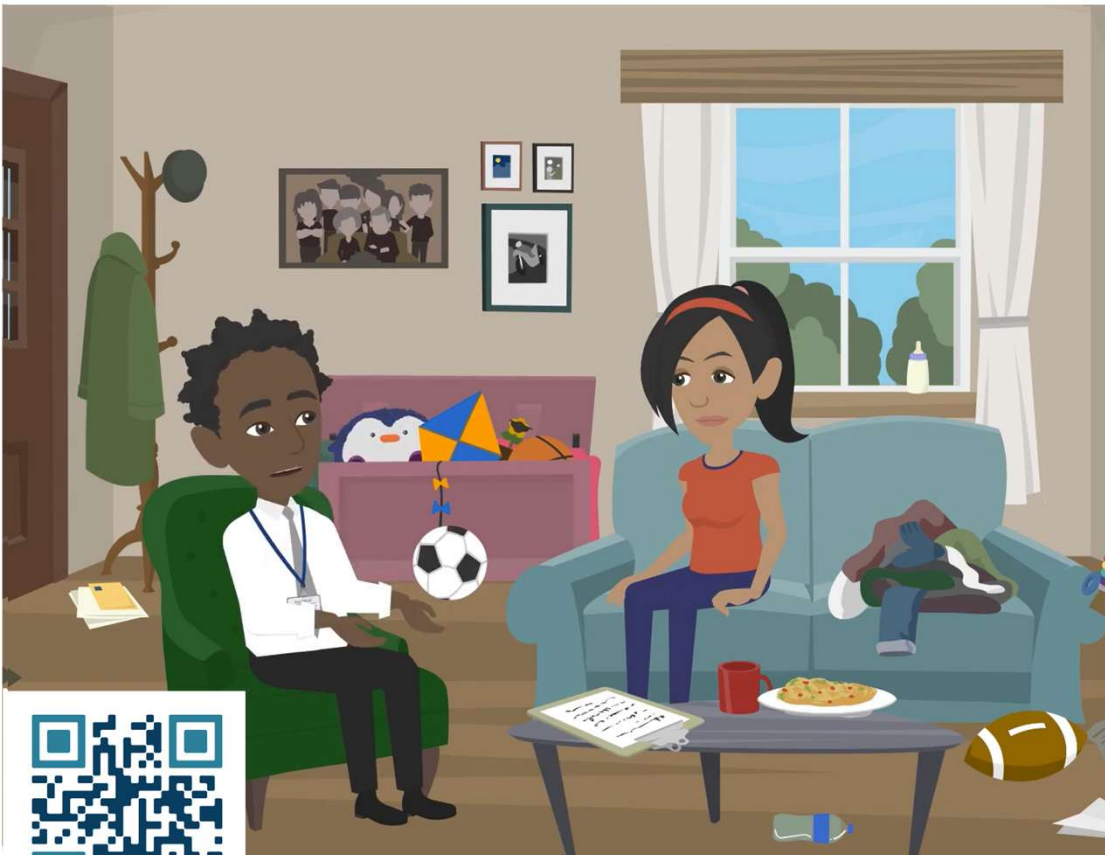
1. *Understanding Substance Use Disorders: What Child Welfare Staff Need to Know*
2. *Understanding Engagement of Families Affected by Substance Use Disorders-Child Welfare Practice Tips*
3. *Understanding Screening and Assessment of Substance Use Disorders-Child Welfare Practice Tips*
4. *Identifying Safety and Protective Capacity for Families with Parental Substance Use Disorders and Child Welfare Involvement*
5. *Child Welfare & Planning for Safety: A Collaborative Approach for Families with Parental Substance Use Disorders and Child Welfare Involvement*

Download @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/topics/safety-and-risk/cw-practice-tips-series//>



National Center on  
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and Child Welfare

# Screening for Substance Use in Child Welfare Using the UNCOPE



This short video depicts a child welfare worker demonstrating best practices while administering the UNCOPE screening tool in a situation involving suspected substance use. Viewers will learn how to

- Incorporate this screening in their child welfare practice
- Use motivational interviewing and open-ended questions
- Reflect on responses
- Connect families to the services they need



View the video @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/training/videos-and-webinars/screening-for-substance-use-in-child-welfare-using-the-UNCOPE/>



National Center on  
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# UNDERSTANDING FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

*For child welfare and substance use treatment professionals*

- Overview of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)
- Effect of FASD on child development
- Treatment for FASD
- Practice strategies to support infants, children, and families with a family-centered approach
- Indicators of FASD among adults in SUD treatment



For Child Welfare  
Professionals



For Substance Use Treatment  
Professionals

Learn more @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/topics/infants/>

# PLAN OF SAFE CARE LEARNING MODULES



*Plan of Safe Care Learning Modules*: Is a five-part series on POSC for infants born with and identified as affected by substance use or withdrawal symptoms—either from prenatal drug exposure, FASD, or their affected family or caregiver. These modules include the following:

***Module 1: Preparing for Plan of Safe Care Implementation***

***Module 2: Collaborative Partnerships for Plans of Safe Care***

***Module 3: Determining Who Needs a Plan of Safe Care***

***Module 4: Implementing and Monitoring Plans of Safe Care***

***Module 5: Overseeing State Plans of Safe Care Systems and Reporting Data***



# Implementing a Family Centered Approach Series

This three-part series allows state, and agency-level collaborative partners to jointly improve systems, services, and outcomes for children and families affected by substance use disorders.



## Module 1

Overview of a Family-Centered Approach and Its Effectiveness

## Module 2

On the Ground—Family-Centered Practice

## Module 3

Collaboration To Support Family-Centered Practices at the County and State Level



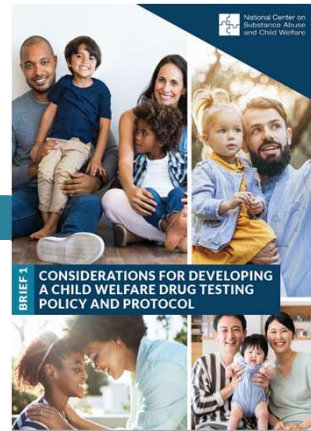
Scan the QR code or click the link to access the series @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/topics/family-centered-approach/fca-modules-series/>



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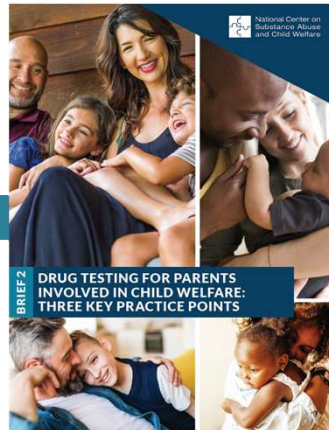
# Drug Testing in Child Welfare

Brief 1: Considerations for Developing a Child Welfare Drug Testing Policy and Protocol



This two-part series helps to develop clear and consistent drug testing policy and practice protocols—in collaboration with substance use disorder treatment providers and the courts—to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach that promotes recovery.

Brief 2: Drug Testing for Parents Involved in Child Welfare: Three Key Practice Points



Available @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/topics/drug-testing//>



National Center on  
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and Child Welfare

## Understanding Substance Use Disorder Treatment:

A Resource Guide for Professionals  
Referring to Treatment



- This TA tool is designed to equip professionals who refer parents to SUD treatment with a fundamental understanding of treatment.
- The tool includes a list of questions child welfare or court staff can ask treatment providers to ensure that effective linkages are made.
- With the knowledge gained, professionals will be able to make informed referral decisions for services that are a good fit to meet the parent and family's needs.



Available @ <https://ncsacw.acf.gov/files/understanding-treatment-508.pdf>



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