



# Family Case Plan Supervisor Guide

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Division of Safety and Permanence



Wisconsin Department of  
Children and Families

## Foreword

“These changes to the Family Case Plan should help guide workers to utilize case planning as an engagement tool with families, instead of viewing it as a task to complete. A working partnership with families in child welfare should include highly valuing the perspectives, experiences, and voice of the individuals we work with. Families should feel this when reading their case plans”.

- Mitch Cornils, CPS Ongoing Program Supervisor at Winnebago County  
Department of Human Services



“Case planning is the backbone of child welfare practice because it translates assessment into action, providing families and workers with a clear, shared roadmap toward safety, permanency, and well-being. When our standards elevate the importance of thoughtful, ongoing case planning, it strengthens family engagement and ensures decisions are intentional which results in practice that is more consistent and more likely to produce lasting change for children and families. When plans are realistic and kept up to date, families know what they’re working toward and workers (and families alike) aren’t left guessing about next steps”.

- Marc Seidl, CYF Manager at Brown County Health and Human Services

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## **INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

This guide is intended to support one-on-one supervision or team coaching to promote critical thinking and more in-depth analysis to support case planning with families.

This guide provides critical thinking opportunities around collaboration, case planning and engaging natural supports. Throughout the guide, you will have opportunities for self-reflection, questions to prompt reflection during specific 1:1 supervision as well as for larger team discussions. In using this guide, there will likely be moments of sitting in discomfort to increase skill development. Take note of those moments and encourage curiosity to understand what is causing the discomfort and ways to work through the feelings.

Enhancing these skills will require the child welfare professionals and agencies to reflect on their assumed and actual power to determine how to share it. By nature, the child welfare system holds significant power over what happens to families' lives. Child welfare professionals have actual and perceived power by the public regarding decision making that impact the long-term outcome of families. It is important for child welfare professionals to reflect on ways to understand their power and how to share it with the youth and family as there are times where a child welfare professional can shift the power back to the family to make decisions about their lives. This can be challenging when there is a lot of pressure on the child welfare professional from additional system partners (consider legal, school, medical, placement or extended family partners). Your role as a supervisor is to help the child welfare professional identify and enhance their skills in collaboration, engaging natural supports, and empowering the family.

## TOPIC: COLLABORATION

*“Case Planning should involve families, should be asked what can help overcome barriers. It should be part of the process, and parents should be included in case planning” -Lived Expert*

Collaboration is a way to actively engage with families, natural supports and formal supports to center the family’s needs. Child welfare professionals are inundated with information from youth, families, other professionals, and their own observations, biases and opinions. With so many pressures that a child welfare professional experiences, it can be difficult to shift power to a more collaborative space. However, in order to truly partner with families and improve outcomes for children, families need to be leading the changes in their own lives.

At times, there may be multiple system partners involved (i.e. child protective services, youth justice, behavioral health etc.) and it can feel easier for the system partners to work in silos with their own goals. For a family, this can be an overwhelming number of meetings, goals/tasks, paperwork etc. It is important that the professionals center the family holistically and consider how goals/needs can align.

It is important for child welfare professionals to determine what is true and to be able to explain that determination. They also need to understand what is true to the youth and family. When there is misalignment, the child welfare professional needs to work with the family to reach consensus as a starting point to meet the family’s needs. As a supervisor, your role is critical in supporting the child welfare workforce in understanding how to build trusting relationships, be culturally responsive, and collaborate with families and their support systems to make these determinations.

Consider how a child welfare professional’s and/or the provider’s personal biases and view of the family may be impacting their ability to engage with the family or the provider. Pay attention to your or their emotional and physiological response when you are consulted on a case. Are the family’s circumstances incongruent with your, the child welfare professional’s, or the provider’s beliefs about how children should be raised? Consider how these factors and biases may be influencing reactions, thought processes, and decision-making.

### Questions & Application

#### Supervisor Self-Reflection:

- How do you gain insight into your employee’s style in building relationships with youth and families?

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- How are you working with your staff to enhance their engagement skills with youth and families?
- What touch points in supervision focus on collaboration?
- Are there regular barriers within your agency regarding collaboration? How do you attend to those?

**Team Discussions:**

- Does our agency incorporate feedback from youth and families in decision making? If so, how and if not, could that that happen and what might that look like?
- What does it look like when we have multiple system partners involved? How does a youth or family know who to call for various needs?
- Where is our agency at in partnering with youth and families? What might it look like if we were more collaborative?
- How will we know when youth and families feel as though their voices matter?

**One: One Supervision**

- Who matters to this youth and family? How are they involved in the Family Case Plan?
- How do the youth and family define their needs and strengths?
  - What do they believe needs to be done?
  - How does this align with what you believe?
  - If there is misalignment, what does that bring up for you?
    - What may be happening to cause the misalignment?
    - What might happen if you follow the youth's and family's plan?

**Resources**

[Wisconsin Child Welfare Model](#)

[CCIP: Stages of Change](#)

## **TOPIC: SKILL BUILDING FOR CASE PLANNING**

Case planning encompasses everything child welfare professionals do with youth and families. It includes engagement, rapport building, assessments, developing and monitoring goals, service referrals and partnering to safe case closure. Each contact a child welfare professional has with a family connects to the case planning process, regardless of if they are looking at the formal Family Case Plan. Strong case planning helps to develop a map to exit the child welfare system that both the child welfare professional and the parent, youth and family understand.

Your job as a supervisor is to help child welfare professionals understand how their interactions and the relationships they build connect with the larger purpose – supporting the map designed with each parent, youth and family. At times, child welfare professionals are pulled in many directions. Supervisors maintain the goals of the Family Case Plan, analyze gathered information, and actively support the child welfare professional by providing an informed outside perspective.

### **Questions & Application**

#### **Supervisor Self-Reflection:**

- How do I encourage case planning on my team?
- In what ways do I support enhancement of case planning skills?
- What role does my power play in case planning?
- How do I support my team when they are struggling to be transparent with youth or families? What if the news they have to provide makes them uncomfortable?

#### **Team Discussions:**

- How have we historically thought about case planning?
- How do we want that to change?
- How do we as an agency think about the goals of case planning?
- What reaction arises when we talk about creating a map to exit the child welfare system?

#### **One: One Supervision**

- What does case planning look like with this family?
- In which areas does the family take the lead?
- Are there any areas of misalignment? How are you considering ways to reach consensus?

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- What is causing the misalignment?
- What has surprised you about case planning with this family?
- How do you check your bias and understanding when working with a family whose culture, values, and beliefs are different than yours?
- How does providing direct and kind feedback encourage power sharing?

Share the following exercise with the child welfare professional and discuss the importance of case planning. Script out how you might introduce case planning to a family. Be sure to include:

- Why do we need a case plan?
- What is their goal?
- How can we accomplish that?
- Who can help with that?
- What else is important for the child welfare professional to know?

Ask the child welfare professional to identify where bias can show up in their decision making or the case planning process. Examples could include perhaps they've worked with a family with similar conditions and assume outcomes will be the same (i.e. all families with substance use result in the removal of a child), or perhaps a parent is making a different parenting decision based on their experience, culture or identity than the child welfare professional might make for their own family, but that doesn't inherently make it "wrong" or unsafe. Brainstorm with the child welfare professional how to maintain the case planning process as family centered as possible. Resources

### [Types of Bias in Child Welfare](#)

Tools to Help Guide Child Welfare Professionals:

- [SMART](#)
- [OARS](#)
- [DCF AHT Engagement Tool](#)

Understanding the Importance of Language:

- [Understanding the Language of Child Welfare - A Resource for Parents, DCF-P-5626](#)
- [How does the language used in child welfare impact families? RISE and Casey Family Programs](#)

## **TOPIC: ENGAGING NATURAL SUPPORTS**

Natural supports are integral to keeping children and youth in their homes and in their communities. Children, youth, and families can be supported by many different people, regardless of biological connection. Including and supporting a family's natural supports as part of a child welfare agency's intervention is an essential component of our state's vision of Putting Families First. A natural support's help with the family can minimize the amount of trauma the family experiences because they are receiving support from someone they already know.

Families and their natural supports exist and function outside of the child welfare system. Regardless of what brings youth and families into the child welfare system, they have their own interconnected relationships and systems that have shaped who they are and how they show up in the world.

It can at times feel easier to only engage with those who are identified as the "client" for both the child welfare professional and the parent, youth and family. Limiting engagement can be less cumbersome, take less time and involve fewer contradictory or difficult feelings. However, having a deeper engagement with the whole family system creates more organic opportunities for deeper understanding of the family and their strengths and needs. Regardless of who is engaged, when a parent, youth or family exits the child welfare system, if patterns and dynamics have not been attended to, systems will return to their original functioning.

Your job as a supervisor is not only to help the child welfare professional consider ways to identify and engage with natural supports, but to help them consider the importance and urgency of doing so. This may include helping the child welfare professional identify any discomfort they have in engaging natural supports and supporting their skill development to move through the discomfort.

### **Questions & Application**

#### **Supervisor Self-Reflection:**

- How do I feel about engaging with natural supports? Does anything give me pause and if so, what?
- What biases might I have about natural supports?
- How do I support development of staff skills around engaging with natural supports?
- How do I learn about my team's comfort in engaging with natural supports? (consider during supervision and in side-conversations around the office)

### **Team Discussions:**

- When have we leaned into a family's natural support system and it went well? When were there areas of improvement we could learn from?
- How does our agency support engagement with natural supports?
- What excites you about engaging with natural supports? What gives you pause?
- In what ways can natural supports help the case planning process?
- How does our agency's perceived and actual power impact natural supports willingness to engage with us? How do we share that to make genuine connection and change?

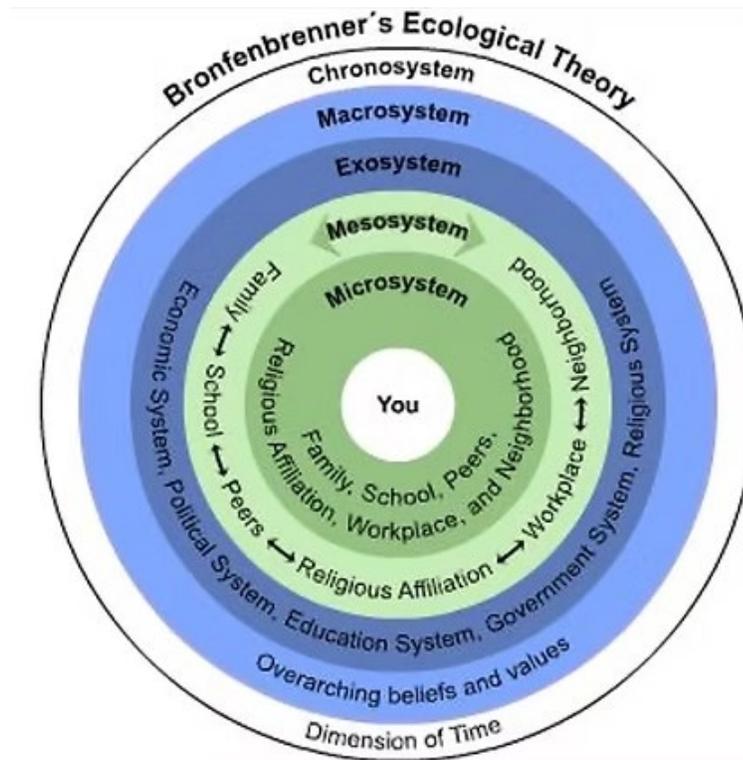
### **One: One Supervision**

- How do we maintain realistic expectations for a natural support?
  - Ask natural supports how they prefer to be contacted (i.e., phone calls, text messages, or emails) and what time of day they prefer.
  - Talk to natural supports about what communication will look like with the child welfare agency. Discuss how plans can be adjusted due to the evolving needs of the family.
- How do we explain what the natural support's role is for the family?
- How have you learned about the parent, youth and family's natural supports?
  - What tools have you used? What questions have you asked?
  - How frequently do you ask about who matters to this parent, youth and family?
- Which natural supports have agreed to be at the table? How does that feel for the parent, youth and family? How does that feel for you?
- Are there dynamics that concern you about bringing this team together?
- What would it look like if engaging in natural supports goes well? What if it's not going well? What worries you?

## Resources

### [Safety Planning for Natural Supports](#)

[Systems Theory](#)<sup>1</sup> guides practice to understand that people function within a web of relationships and connections. People are shaped by their various levels of system connections and any behavioral changes cannot occur within a silo.



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