

Intervening 101: Intervening with Children and Their Families (Practice Guide)



Audience

Caseworkers

Outcome

Good child protection work should organize your practice at every level of service around targeting and building the everyday and future safety of every child with the help of the families and safety networks. To shape all future safety, caseworkers should be trained at intervening through the use of an intervening methodology that integrates their personal skills and the use of practice tools. Good outcomes include:

- practice that is designed to help families understand the impact of their behavior on their children
- nurturing the development of an agreed upon plan that is carried out by families and their safety networks
- development of new protective actions that address danger and harm
- addressing the needs of the child by allowing their voices to be heard
- understanding the position of each family member
- finding exceptions to the abuse or neglect
- discovering the strengths in children, youth and parents
- focusing on goals
- understanding the willingness, capability, and confidence of the parents and safety network

Intervening and Teaming co-exist. They are complimentary and necessary for children to have forever safety. Teaming means:

- we are respectful
- we ask lots of questions
- we honor each success and strength we observe no matter how small
- we believe all families are worth engaging

- we believe that families and their safety networks are capable of taking responsibility for the development of day-to-day protective behaviors

13 Practice Tips for Intervening with Children, Youth, and Families

1. Intervening with children, youth, and families should start at first contact. Treat every exchange as a way to intervene so that families and networks are engaged and children stay safe.
2. Intervene with the person, not the maltreatment. You can build a relationship with family members without condoning the abuse or neglect. Listen and respond to the family's story. Listen for strengths and for the times when the parent does the right thing. Acknowledge their strengths and positive behaviors. Allow the family and safety network to make choices and give them opportunities to provide input. Learn what they want. You must be up front and honest in all stages of service. Treat each person as an individual.
3. Recognize that cooperation is possible even when leveraging is required as part of intervening. You will often have to use leveraging and sometimes exercise statutory power to prevent situations of continuing danger. This should not prevent you from building a cooperative partnership with parents. Recognize that leveraging and cooperation can exist simultaneously.
4. When intervening, remember that all families exercise protective capacities at some point, however small they might be. All families have competencies and strengths. They have the ability to make their children safe, at least some, and usually most, of the time. Ensure that careful attention is given to these protective capacities.
5. Learn what your families want. What do children, youth, and families want to set as their goal? Acknowledge everyone's worries and desires. Use their goals to create a plan of action. This will motivate family members to change their behavior. When possible, bridge family and safety network goals with you and/or your supervisor's goals.
6. Intervening works when you use solution-focused skills; ask questions about the future, about relationships, about what might be already working, and about hopes for the future.
7. A by-product of intervening is the opportunity to capture detail. Always elicit specific, detailed information, whether exploring negative or positive aspects of the situation. Solutions arise out of details, not generalizations.
8. Cultural competency is required for effective intervening. If you don't understand the culture of the family or network, your intervening will feel out of place. For example, knowing the gender roles in some cultures will be essential to how you might ask questions or how you relate to the children. This may not mean you support how they live out these roles; however, it lets them know you are coming from a place of respecting their cultural identity.
9. Focus on creating small change. We call those baby steps. Think about, discuss, and work toward small changes. Don't become frustrated when big goals are not

immediately achieved. Focus on small, attainable goals and acknowledge when they have been achieved.

10. Intervening involves series of steps when bringing committed friends, family, or professionals to the table. As a note of caution, if there is no safety network to plan with for making long term safety a reality, you are not likely to have behaviors or actions that are needed to ensure every day safety.
11. Make every effort you can to use time-tested tools for engaging children. Children and youth need you to listen to their worries and talk about the good things that are happening. They also need to tell you what they would like to have happen. At this point, you can sit down and make plans together, from their point of view. The 3 Houses, The Safety House, and the Fairies and Wizard tools can be an empowering experience for children and help you in your decision making.
12. Make every effort you can to use the tools designed for parents. Genograms and Safety Circles will elicit information while helping you engage with adults.
13. Maintain a focus on safety as you intervene. The focus of child protection work is to increase safety. Maintain this mindset when thinking about the agency, your role, and the specific details and activities of the case work.

Critical Thinking Skills for Interviewing

Critical thinking is an active process of integrating, analyzing, and evaluating information about how your intervention with children, youth, families, safety networks, and professionals will be successful. Intervening should lead to the demonstration of new behaviors and actions on the part of parents that will be protective and mitigate danger. Critical thinking helps us develop constructive partnerships with families that will make children safe. We rely on families and their safety networks to actively participate and contribute to good decision making.

- Intervening is based on 6 principles for engaging. Which one can you pinpoint that helps guide you to develop a style of intervening that is comfortable for you?
- The Texas CPS Practice Model supports a strength-based and collaborative approach to intervening with clients. To be successful, each of us must be cognizant of our own strengths. What is your top professional strength you draw on in making your daily practice successful?
- Your skillful use of authority is critical. Think of the ways in which you assert yourself through honest questioning that is transparent, simple, clear, yet focused on the expectations for change, building safety, and minimizing danger.
- How can you use the SDM tools as part of your intervening methodology? How can these tools help the family and safety networks come to an agreement with you about what needs to happen?
- What is one small intervening skill you have, by way of interacting with parents and/or their safety network, which leads to good results? This skill should create the

opportunity for parents and networks to demonstrate what they do to make children safe.

- What difference does this engagement skill make when it comes to focusing on one family member or multiple safety network members regarding their responsibility for keeping the children safe?
- What is one tool you use with children, regardless of their stage of service, that helps you hear their perspective?
- What method of intervening do you use to bring the family and network to a shared agreement about what is needed to make the child safe?
- What kinds of solution-building questions do you ask that keeps all participants engaged?
- Do you regularly consider how asking families about worries and about what's going well provides you with a balance for being helpful?
- How can supervisors help you make your intervening skills sharper?