

Teaming 101: Teaming with Children & their Families

(Practice Guide)



Audience

Caseworkers

Outcome

Using the guidance provided, caseworkers will develop respectful, clear, transparent, and mutually agreed upon strategies with families, their network of support, and involved professionals to come to the table and plan for the everyday safety of each child. This information will enable caseworkers at every stage of service to be clear regarding the expectations for families and their safety networks about what is required to progress towards the next step. In addition, this outcome will meet the competency framework of the Child Protective Services Texas Practice Model.

Why Do This?

Teaming is the collaborative process of bringing together the family and safety network or adults who are committed to meeting the long term developmental and safety needs of each child. Along with professionals, teaming seeks to implement achievable plans as goals to meet the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child or youth. The expectation is that the parent/caregiver, with the support and monitoring of the caseworker, will initiate the beginning steps of bringing everyone together.

Teaming can and should be an extension of every day casework at CPS. Our work is temporary; we can't and won't be in a family's life forever but friends, relatives, and some professionals will. These connections are often most important; these are the connections that matter most.

Teaming provides an opportunity for everyone involved to think critically and thoroughly about the steps to ensure child safety. These steps include the hour-by-hour and day-by-day rules that will keep every child and youth safe. We often find that there are one or more family members who have been involved in some caring capacity without our knowledge.

The work of keeping children safe is complex, there are risks, and families often have multiple needs not easily managed by one or two caseworkers. In these instances, teaming without the

involvement of the family and professional safety network will create more risk for the child or youth. The phrase of “it takes a village to raise a child” holds true.

Teaming means that the case worker skillfully uses her or his authority to develop an understanding with everyone of why we are together, what needs to be accomplished, and what steps are to be taken. The caseworker will set the expectation that teaming is a necessary and required step towards closing the case.

The goal of teaming is to give everyone a voice and the opportunity to participate. This allows for multiple perspectives to be considered, which helps support the long term commitment needed for what is about to happen.

Teaming allows the caseworker to focus their professional practice in a collaborative approach to meet the day-to-day, specific safety needs of each child by bringing the family and formal safety network to the case planning table.

What Do I Want to Achieve?

The importance of teaming is to develop a shared vision and collective agreement with parents, the safety network, and professionals involved about what is needed to keep each child safe throughout the life of the case and beyond. In every day terms, this will include *a specific set of behaviors and actions* that everyone (parents, safety network, and professionals) agrees will mitigate danger for the child, as well as build and ensure forever safety.

General Guidance

Teaming with children and their families means a caseworker’s role is to lead the conversation and guide the process that will bring everyone together to plan for the immediate and future safety of each child. It may be useful to remember that if you do not have a safety network, you do not have a sustainable plan for safety.

Teaming focuses on finding many ways to develop a partnership with children, their families and their extended network.

You do this by:

- 1. The skillful use of your authority.**

This means you are clear about your role and that you are exercising your leverage to influence families and safety networks in the direction of forever safety. By using your authority, you are asking and expecting parents to think and behave differently, oftentimes in ways in which they may not want to or may not be used to doing. This can be done at all levels of service in a manner that is firm, fair, yet respectful, and focused on developing a partnership with all involved.

2. **Pursuing the agreement and support of your professional stakeholders as part of the teaming process.**

It is critical to brief the professional network regarding your intentions. This entails a straight forward explanation of your rationale and why you are advocating for their involvement. Getting their endorsement and ensuring that they understand their role is crucial. The professional presence underlines the seriousness of the issues and helps them gain insight into the family's and safety network's perspective. Our bottom line/non-negotiables for child safety are always communicated when teaming.

3. **Being preparatory in your thinking about teaming by seeing each step as part of a trajectory with the child/youth and family.**

With each case, regardless of service needs, there must be a course of action that is planned and has an objective or outcome. Thinking ahead of time what this may be reflects your analysis of the case and specifically what you want to achieve.

4. **Taking a critical thinking stance with regards to teaming.**

Critical thinking when teaming is a self-disciplined way to make decisions while reasoning at the highest level no matter what stage of service. As a team leader, you have the capacity and responsibility to advocate that all members of the safety network practice this. You make this happen by using a detailed questioning approach. For example, asking relationship and/or future-focused questions. The use of our SDM tools is another way of helping us think through teaming in an analytical, structured manner.

5. **Knowing the importance of what safety from the big picture looks like, as with vulnerable parents.**

Special attention should be given to the safety of mothers, particularly with issues of domestic violence. For example, understanding the details and patterns of abusive and controlling behaviors on the part of fathers could preclude teaming with both parents in the same room.

6. **Reminding ourselves that children/youth are always in the front and center of our work.**

Their need to feel safe, experience permanence, and well-being are a priority. Your role in teaming will be to help the child or youth understand what happened, what we are worried about, and what are we going to do about things.

Practice Tips for Building Teaming Skills with Children/Youth & Families

1. Teaming should be a bottom line, an expectation for parents that allows them to demonstrate behaviors and actions that will show you, the safety network, and the community the child will be safe.
2. You may need to help family members find their safety network. You can do this by:
 - a. listening carefully for who they mention as important people

- b. keep asking....be persistent
 - c. ask the child who are the big people they trust
 - d. doing the family tree or genogram
 - e. gathering network information through the safety circles
 - f. building questions that focus on past, present, and future relationships on the Family Finding website.
3. Teaming has a process that begins by bringing everyone together with a clear focus on why we are meeting, what we are going to try to accomplish together, and how we are going to work together.
4. Teaming meetings with families are best with two workers, one who scribes on a sheet or white board, and one who leads.
5. Teaming can include "mapping the network"; building conversations about "what's going well, what worries us about our family, and what needs to happen?" Everyone is asked to share a balanced view of the family. Don't be afraid to ask "How will we all know the child is safe?"
6. Caseworkers bring the children to the table by sharing the child's summary of worries, what's going well, and what needs to happen. Whether or not to include the child in person should be critically thought out ahead of time.
7. Expect disagreements or even anger at parents or between family members. Always bring the conversation back to our purpose: meeting the safety needs of the child.
8. Caseworkers need to state their danger and case goal statements and be prepared for discussion. You need to ground these two statements around, "What behaviors and actions do we need to see so that there is no more danger?"
9. When teaming, caseworkers will need to integrate important cultural perspectives into their work. They can do this by asking family members or the safety network what might be needed based on the cultural needs of the family.
10. Teaming includes the caseworker offering as many realistic choices to the process as possible. Choices minimize the power differential between the caseworker and safety network.
11. A good outcome for teaming is a list of rules that includes behaviors and actions that will take place to ensure the safety of the child. These actions and behaviors will include those of parents and safety network. A collective agreement of what should happen opens the door for everyone to own the outcome rather than being told what they must do. By doing this, the safety network is monitoring the safety of the child.
12. There are no set rules for the number of times teaming should take place. Meetings will depend on the needs of the child, the safety issues, changes in the agreed to

rules, and so forth. A teaming meeting should occur upon case closure or transfer to a different stage of service.

13. The parents, safety network, and caseworker should draft an explanation for the children about the teaming process. To assist with this, you may use a words and pictures outline. The outline should summarize the teaming process clearly in a manner that all children will understand. By doing this, you will give the family an opportunity to focus on openness and to think more compassionately about what it will take to create lasting safety.

Critical Thinking Skills for Teaming

Critical thinking is an active process of integrating, analyzing, and evaluating information about the everyday teaming work we do with families, their safety networks, and the professionals. In the end, critical thinking helps us get better information, be more analytical about the case, and ultimately helps us make better decisions about what we do.

- Your skillful use of authority is critical. Think of ways to be assertive, honest and transparent when discussing safety issues with a parent.
- Show respect to each family member and their safety network from the first contact.
- Compliment family members for what you see them say or do, however small.
- Are words like harm, risk, danger, and safety used consistently so professionals and family members know what they mean?
- How do you engage children at their developmental level?
- Minimize the use of jargon.
- Gain traction with a family by seeing yourself as an authority figure with influence by asking short, open-ended questions rather than demanding answers.
- Your listening skills are critical. A parent's anger is NOT about you; they are frightened. How do you alleviate that? How do you listen to their side of the story?
- Non-verbal behavior, such as eye contact and body posture, speak loudly to family members and/or safety network members about your intentions.
- What do you do to engage children who might be at the table when teaming?
- Ask family and safety network members quality questions rather than stating expectations.
- Tell family and safety network members specifically what will happen next.