

G. Tips for Collaboration:

When working across systems ensure you:

- *Identify Interagency Service Planning Team (ISPT) Meeting Members* – Although you may know everyone at the table, others may not know one another. It is a good idea to take a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting for introductions (names, roles, etcetera).
- *Tune in to the Other Side* – Collaborating with cross-systems teams often proves difficult because the approaches to working with children and adolescents who have mental health concerns may be quite different depending upon the perspective of the person at the table. For example, a Mental Health Professional may have a completely different set of goals for the child than the Children and Youth caseworker. The only way to overcome this barrier is to collaborate, as much as possible, with the other stakeholders on the cross-systems team.
- *Appreciate Different Viewpoints* – Through collaboration, each side may begin to appreciate the approaches of others, while keeping in mind that everyone should work toward ensuring the safety of the child or adolescent.
- *Seek to Understand All Components of Other Agencies* – Different avenues exist for collaborating with cross-systems teams whose community-based components include providing health care, mental health, case management, and support services to the family.
- *Apply Different Approaches* – Caseworkers may need to apply different approaches in the use of cross-system teams to coordinate services needed to effectively assist families of children with mental health concerns and to obtain team member professional assessments regarding the effectiveness of mental health services offered to the child as well as the family's progress toward achieving the Family Service Plan and permanency goals.
- *Maintain Regular Contacts with Other Agencies* – Team members must meet regularly with service provider agencies and/or use other means of contacting those agencies to achieve the interagency collaboration to meet the goal of effectively serving children and families in the Child Welfare System.
- *Include the Child* – Include the child and family in meetings whenever possible. At the very least, keep the child and family informed about what takes place during collaboration sessions.

- *Include the Right Stakeholders* – If the appropriate stakeholders are not present, the group cannot make informed and meaningful decisions. An effective and well-attended meeting with a diverse group of participants (beginning with the child and immediate family and drawing from extended-family, community, child-serving system representatives, and school staff) does not just happen. Such a meeting requires preparatory discussions with the family, identification of desired participants, active recruitment, written invitations, and follow-up telephone calls, with clarity as to who remains responsible for each task to get the meeting to occur.
- *Keep the Primary Goals in Mind at all Times* – These goals are: a.) to create a context for restoring hope to the child and family and b.) to promote constructive, collaborative treatment planning to benefit the child and family.
- *Allow Enough Time to Accomplish the Work* – It is important to be realistic about time expectations. In most instances, members cannot complete an Interagency Team Meeting (ITM) in one hour. Although an ITM requires multiple participant hours for the caseworker and other involved parties, and may be logistically difficult to schedule, serial meetings with each involved system ultimately requires considerably more time. In addition, such a fragmented approach provides neither a forum nor mechanism for all involved parties to share relevant information. Such an approach also allows little time to resolve disagreements.
- *Understand the Role of Child Welfare* – Understand the child welfare worker's service coordination role in cross systems partnership in order to assure the child's safety and well-being. Understand the importance of cross-systems/interagency collaboration, with mental health, health care providers, schools, private service provider agencies, and JPO. Many agencies may be working together for the child.
- *Keep an Open Mind about All Treatment Options* – Understand the distinctions between the Child Protective Authority of the Child Welfare Agency and the Client Self-Determination Treatment and Service Philosophy (CASSP) of the Mental Health and other systems. Better inform yourself regarding the different roles of Mental Health and other community-based service provider agencies such as CASSP as well as how to coordinate mental health services that remain, for the child, consistent with the child's service plans and permanency goals.
- *Identify Barriers* – Understand potential barriers to cross-systems/interagency collaboration. Effectively address any communication barriers to facilitate mental health services to the child and services support to the family. Avoid power struggles.
- *Share Information* – Make all stakeholders feel free to offer their ideas without feeling threatened by the rest of the group, even if others do not agree with that person's opinion. Sharing your feelings also makes others more aware of your role.

- *Clarifying Key Issues* – Assist the rest of the team in clarifying key issues such as the child's diagnosis and recommendations for treatment options. Encourage the team to look at all options. Make sure the child and family know what is happening and why. Work actively with the child and family.
- *Listen Actively* – Truly listen to and hear what those at the table say. Not only might a parent or child ask you for clarification later; but, good listening skills, at any meeting, show professionalism. As a consultant to the child and family, you need to be responsive to questions and concerns as they arise. Only as an active listener can you hope to fulfill your role as consultant and advocate.
- *Be Genuine* – You must remain true to the ideals of safety, permanency, and well-being for the child. In doing so you must form relationships with your partners and clients. In forming these relationships, remember that trust develops over time and only if you remain genuine when working with clients and those at the meeting table. So, do not get discouraged or give up no matter how bleak a situation may get. With time, problematic relationships will improve as long as you are genuine in what you say you plan to do and how you act towards others!