

Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration - Practice Tips

This document provides practice guidance when the aim (case plan goal) is to:

- keep a child or young person (child) safely with their family (**preservation**)
- have a child safely return to their family (**restoration**).

It is the second of two documents for case planning for change. For an overview see [Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration](#). See also [Foundations of Case Planning](#) for further information.

Family Action Plan for Change

To help guide your conversations to develop a Family Action Plan for Change (FAP) or similar case plan please refer to the following documents:

- FAP template (with conversation prompts)
- FAP template (blank, to help you write the plan with the family).

Talking with Parents About What Needs to Change

It can be challenging to talk with families about what needs to change. Your relationship with the family is the most important part of your work with them. You need to be able to have conversations that are respectful but also clearly identify the worries you have for the child.

Talk to parents and ask questions about what they think the issues are. Do they understand what impact their behaviour has on their children? Does the parent take ownership of the issues?

Example questions:

- What do you think I am worried about? Is this what you are worried about too?
- What is Billy doing when you are unwell, under the influence of drugs or drinking?
- What does he say to you?
- What do you think about that?
- What do you think needs to change?

Don't assume that parents agree with you about your worries or what needs to change. If you jump straight into case planning without a clear agreement of what needs to be different, and what a family thinks about your views, you can miss the opportunity to understand and see where the family genuinely is, in terms of their readiness, willingness and ability to take action.

Children's Participation in Case Planning

Children can participate in case planning from a very early age. Children should be involved throughout case planning including during development, implementation, monitoring and review. This helps ensure that the plan is focussed on what needs to change for the child. For tips and guidance on involving children in case planning see [Tips For Talking With Children And Young People](#).

When children participate in plans for restoration, restoration is more likely to be successful. For information on working with children during restoration see [Supporting Children and Young People in Restoration](#).

When developing the plan, ask yourself: have I connected meaningfully with the child?

When Parents Don't Want to Work with You

Parents and families may respond in many different ways to working with you. Families usually haven't chosen to work with you.

Parents:

- may not think there is any problem in their family (**denial**)
- may be reluctant to make any changes (**reluctance**)
- have different feelings on different days about whether change is needed and how to make it happen (**ambivalence**).

This denial, reluctance and ambivalence to change might show itself in several ways including:

- anger or hostility
- only occasionally attending appointments
- participating in a program in a limited way.

You need to understand what may be behind a parent's reluctance or ambivalence. Consider how this may impact whether they are ready and able to change.

The FAP can only measure change if it is targeted to a parent's situation. You cannot do this if you haven't fully understood and addressed the barriers to change.

Parents need to be given an opportunity to get to know you and your service and understand the worries you have about their child. Developing a relationship with parents will take time. You need to be patient but also assess any immediate risks and dangers to the safety of the child.

The Cycle of Change

Parents will feel differently about change at different points in their life. Some parents:

- will not realise a problem exists
- may not be ready to change
- may have thought about change
- may be taking active steps towards change
- may have taken steps and lapsed or relapsed to their previous behaviour.

Parents may shift quickly from feeling they want to change, to not wanting to change. The cycle of change identifies different stages that parents will go through when changing their behaviour. Caseworkers need to understand where the parents are in the cycle of change when developing appropriate family action plans.

Using Scaling Questions when Working with Families

Scaling questions will help you and the family to find a shared understanding of what needs to change. Use scaling questions to find out about a parent's readiness for change for each of the things that might make the child unsafe. Talk to the family about what they see as an issue, its priority, and what impact it might be having on their family.

For example:

- On a scale of 1-10 how worried are you about the effect of your drug use on (Billy)?

- Billy said when you use drugs, he worries about you an 8 out of 10. He worries about himself an 8 out of 10 too. Why do you think that is?
- This is where I think you're at [number]. These are the reasons I think this...
- Where do you think you need to be? What would that look like?
- This is where I think you need to be [number]. Or - I think for Billy to feel less worried, and for us to feel less worried about Billy, you need to be at a 3 or a 4. This is what it might look like...

Tools like the goal scaling tool can help you when you talk with parents about what changes need to happen.

The Three Houses tool is a great way to guide conversations with children about what they are worried about and what change they would like to see

Using scaling questions to measure change and progress

Revisit the scaling conversations you had with parents and children. Talk with them about where they scaled themselves during that first conversation. This gives parents and children a real sense of progress and keeps the conversations focussed on outcomes.

Ask the parents:

- What's different now?
- How is that different from before?
- Last time you said you were sitting at a six. On a scale of one to 10, where would you put yourself now? Why do you give that number? What does that look like? What are you doing now that makes it this number? How did you do that?

Ask the children:

We have been talking with Mum about trying to make some changes. When we spoke the first time, you said you were really worried about mum a lot of the time, about an 8 out of 10 of worries. How much do you worry now? What number would you give it between 0-10?

Self-Reflection

Reflect about how you are working with the family. Use self-reflection throughout the case-planning process to help ensure that the Family Action Plan best meets the needs of the child.

Some prompts for your reflection:

- How much talking am I doing?
- Can I listen more?
- Is there is a more family-friendly place that we can meet?
- What will be different for the child and their family with this plan?
- How will I know?
- Is the goal:
 - child focused
 - realistic and achievable
 - developed together with the family
 - understood by the parents
- Have I involved both parents in the FAP?
- If there is a parent that does not live with the child:
 - have I spoken with them?
 - if not, have I tried to find where they live and speak with them?