

Dignity Driven Practice

What is Dignity Driven Practice?

Dignity driven practice focuses on building an understanding of children, young people (child) and their family's acts of resistance against violence, oppression, suffering or harm. It identifies strengths and protective factors which can be used to work with a family to achieve positive change and safety.

Dignity driven practice encourages curiosity, it helps you to:

- understand what life is like for the child and each member of their family
- ask questions about what has happened to a child and their family members in the past
- examine the motivations behind behaviour and actions
- identify resistance, strengths and protective factors that can be built on in positive ways to achieve safety and change.

When you identify acts of resistance and strengths, it support families to view themselves as being strong and adaptive in the face of suffering.

Three Main Elements of Dignity:

- **Autonomy:** includes freedom, independence, control, self-determination and the ability to choose and act on a choice.
- **Respect:** includes self-respect, self-esteem and the respect for others.
- **Worthiness:** includes a sense of self-worth, sense of integrity and trustworthiness.

It is important to remember that everyone has dignity and a child, their family and/or carer will do many things to preserve their dignity.

Principles of Dignity Driven Practice

Dignity driven practice is about caseworkers upholding the dignity of each child, family, carer and community. This is done by using specific conversation/language skills and understanding what might be happening for those you are working with.

Key principles of dignity driven practice:

- **Self-determination is the foundation of dignity** - All families and communities should be given the respect to make decisions and choices about their lives and futures. Listen deeply and adapt your approach and practice to their needs and choices, so you can advocate for them and respond with respect to the decisions they make.
- **Language is key** - The words you choose to say and write are powerful, they influence the meaning you and others give to situations. They have the potential to partner, empower, support and build relationships with a child, their families and/or carers.
- **Be aware of your power** – As a PSP caseworker you hold a powerful position. This includes being a caseworker in PSP, as well as power that exists across gender, race, ability and culture.
- **People respond to and resist acts of violence, adversity and oppression** – where there is violence or oppression, children and adults will resist in many different ways. This resistance helps protect them. Consider people's behaviour by exploring what suffering they may be resisting. Identify acts of resistance and support families to view themselves as being strong and adaptive in the face of suffering.
- **The responses people receive are critical** – when you respond to a child, their family and/or carer experiencing or using violence it can be called a 'social response'. Social responses have the power to further perpetuate violence and suffering – or, alternatively, to validate them and support a person's recovery.

What is Resistance?

Everyone tries to prevent, stop or reduce violence, oppression and suffering. A child, their family and/or carer also resist racism, sexism, poverty and emotional pain. Some forms of resistance are clear, like running away, hiding or fighting back. Others are smaller or less noticeable, such as staying silent or avoiding situations.

See: [Dignity Driven Practice – Recognising Resistance Practice Tips](#)

Dignity Driven Practice – An Approach To Working With Children And Families?

Dignity Driven Practice is not just about being respectful and strengths based. It is about drawing out accurate information for assessments, case planning and family work.

These skills help you:

- get detailed assessments about risk to a child and what a person does to protect themselves and their children
- support children to feel strong and powerful in the face of violence and suffering
- show families and carers empathy and understanding
- understand context and motivation behind a child, parent or carer's decisions that might cause harm
- create more meaningful and purposeful partnerships with families
- preserve their dignity, meaning families and/or carers are more likely to be accepting of change and help
- understand how other people in their lives respond to them
- learn what the person values most and what they hope for
- talk and partner with people who use violence.

Watch

- Some hidden acts of resistance are not necessarily shown in physical behaviours. People may resist spiritually, emotionally or mentally.
- Watch **Dr Cathy Richardson** , a specialist in violence prevention and recovery, describe how she incorporates upholding dignity.



This graphic depicts dignity driven practice, an approach to working with children and families who are working within the NSW child protection system. At the centre of the graphic are the words social interaction, dignity, accurate description and social justice.

These words represent what is at the core of Dignity Driven Practice. These are the things a caseworker does as part of Dignity Driven Practice.

Around these words is a circle, representing what is happening in a person's life that caseworkers must be attuned to in order to work with Dignity Driven Practice.

“Dignity is best defined as each person’s inherent value and worth.”

Understand Power, Roles Within The Family and Broader Experiences

The skill of dignity driven practice starts with understanding how each child, family and/or carer you work with experiences life in their family, community and society. Do they experience discrimination? Do they have less power in society (or the family) than others? Do they have control over their lives in the same way other people do?

Think about what privilege you have compared to the families you are working with. This may include your cultural background, religion, economic status, nationality, sexuality, ability and gender.

Understanding your own privilege is not about feeling bad about it. Rather, it's about being aware of what you do not know or understand; using your privilege for good; and constantly thinking about how it might affect your values, the decisions you make about other people's lives or the way you view and talk to each person in a family. For example, how do your views about family and independence view how you feel and react when a parent or carer tells you it is impossible for them to ask another family member to leave the home, even when they acknowledge the family member's behaviour can be hurtful towards the child.

Remember that some families may be resisting oppression they perceive from your involvement. This may be due to many reasons including past experiences of PSP Service Providers or Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) or because of broader experiences of oppression such as racism.

Some families may resist by:

- refusing to work with you
- being reluctant to share information
- responding to you with anger, disdain or disinterest.

Understanding what sits behind this behaviour is critical to providing a social response to the family that honours their dignity and begins to create relationships of trust and respect.

Watch

Watch Allan Wade and Linda Coates talk through some useful examples to help you understand the [Contextual Analysis Framework](#).

Summary

Dignity driven practice asks caseworkers to identify acts of resistance and to support families to view themselves as being strong and adaptive in the face of suffering. It asks caseworkers to think about the use of language; consider power dynamics and to give a child and/or their family every opportunity to fully participate and make decisions about their lives. Also See: [Dignity Driven Practice – Recognising Resistance Practice Tips](#)