

Working with a Team of Professionals

Working collaboratively with other professionals is the most effective way to achieve safety and permanency for children and young people (child) in the Permanency Support Program (PSP).

Why is working in a team good for:

Children, families and carers?	Agencies and organisations?
Empowers the child, family and carers to partner with us to create change	Relationships are built upon trust, mutual respect, and commitment.
Establishes an effective support network around the child, family and carers that they trust to help create change.	Opportunities are created to learn from and enhance each other's capacity .
Resources are coordinated for the child, family and carers, making their efforts and your casework toward a permanency goal, more effective.	Consolidates a shared visions and clear steps and responsibilities when working toward the child's permanency goal.
The child, family and carers will have the opportunity to connect with the most appropriate services . This is especially important when working with Aboriginal and/or Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families.	Sharing information aids decision-making, streamlines services, offers innovative ideas and approaches, and provides opportunities to improve practice.
Supports the safety of the child when going through difficult and challenging processes.	Resources are better managed and become more flexible. Service duplication for the child, family and carer is reduced.

Who could be in your team?

Internal	External
Your manager/team leader/supervisor	The child's school
Your peers	Aboriginal and CALD consultants
Aboriginal and CALD consultants	Allied Health and other therapeutic professionals
Practice specialists	Supervised family visit services
	Legal professionals
	Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Permanency Coordinator - Adoption Caseworker - Caseworker and Manager - Aboriginal and CALD Consultants - Casework Specialist - Psychologist - Housing and Homelessness
	Centrelink
	Emergency services (such as police)

What are some of the challenges of working in a team?

- Navigating the different strategic directions, policies, practices and funding requirements of different agencies.
- Working with professionals of different disciplines, with their own language/terminology, perspectives and approaches.

- Working with professionals who have a different goal for the child, family and carer. For example, their focus is to meet the needs of a family member other than the child.
- Making decisions when there are different opinions and perspectives.
- Misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations resulting from poor communication.
- Ensuring everyone involved keep the views of the child, their family and carer at the centre of their work.
- Making sure everyone has the ‘full picture’ to ensure the best permanency decision is made for the child.
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How will you work effectively in a team?

Know your role, its function and the purpose of your work with others.

Understand the role of others, and how they impact on a child, family and carer.

Identify the challenges that may arise when working in a team and how to manage those challenges.

- Remember that people have different perspectives, communication styles, personal and professional experiences, motivations and responsibilities. Working with, rather than against these, gives you the best chance of building relationships and achieving better outcomes.
- **Work together toward common goals** and shared visions, including:
 - supporting the safety and wellbeing of the children, family and carer, and,
 - achieving permanency for the child.

Share risk – risk is an inherent part of working with children, families and carers. Involve professionals in decisions around risk by sharing your perspectives, thoughts, and feelings, and encouraging the same from others.

- Sharing risk results in better decision-making, by increasing the collective confidence during the decision-making process, and consolidating meaningful relationships.
- Voicing your anxieties around a decision in a team allows you to explore realistic options, and guides you away from emotionally driven reactions
- Collective decisions are made in a broader context, supporting professionals to think outside their individual agency's processes and tools.

Be self-aware and reflect to better understand how you, your attitudes, and your behaviours influence your professional relationships and casework. Critically reflecting on your work improves casework practice, produces better permanency outcomes for the child and helps you learn and grow.

- Being self-aware involves reflecting on personal factors that impact your casework and teamwork, such as:
 - values,
 - role at work,
 - lived experiences,
 - cultural background,
 - personality,
 - views, biases, and judgements.
- Learn how to effectively practice self-awareness by engaging in individual reflective practice. See [Reflective Practice](#), [Reflective Practice –Practice Tips](#) for more information.

Communicate effectively by being considerate, respectful and a good listener, whilst also conveying clear, concise, and direct information.

- Clear, concise and respectful communication helps achieve positive outcomes for the child, their family and carer.
- Listening to all child, family, carer and team member's views gives you the best opportunity to gain useful information and understand different perspectives and views.
- A lack of communication may create confusion, time delays and interruption in meeting case plan goals for the child.

Nurture professional relationships - Use the elements of **relationship-based practice** – empathy, a strengths-based approach, and reflection - to build trusting, authentic relationships within your team.

- Allows for you to engage and sustain collaboration by gaining greater understandings about the people you work with.
- Information between teams can be shared efficiently.
- Worries and risks are more openly shared.
- Provides avenues to support each other when faced with complex and challenging situations.

For more information, see [Relationship-Based Practice](#).

Keeping A Healthy Mind



Look after yourself - Remaining purposeful, empathic, flexible and dedicated in your casework with the child, family and carer takes a lot of energy. Self-care is an important practice for you to maintain and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Infographic 'adapted from The Healthy Mind Platter, Dan Siegel (2021)

You can engage in by:

- asking for and accessing regular supervision to help identify signs of exhaustion and fatigue,
- taking a day off to look after yourself,
- having a good support network within and outside of work,
- recharging away from work by listening to music or relaxing,
- getting enough sleep each night,
- engaging in regular exercise
- being conscious of how you transition between work and home time.

- Practice self-care regularly so you prolong your longevity in the PSP sector that sees many people burn-out or experience vicarious trauma.
- See [Understanding Resistance in Practice](#) and [Caring for Yourself](#) for more information on self-care and managing wellbeing at work.

Group-Reflective Practice

Group-reflective practice is an effective way of working within a team to discuss, explore question, plan and make decisions for the child, family and carer.

Group-Reflective practice involves:

- facilitation by a practitioner within the group, to identify and understand what everyone hopes to achieve from the session
- sharing broader ethical dilemmas or choosing one child or experience to explore per session
- using respectful language, talking about a child, family and carer as if they were in the room
- identifying and discussing the strengths and protective factors for the child, family and carer
- identifying worries and opportunities for change
- practicing casework skills to explore how they could be used to help effect change for the child, family and carer.
- identifying next steps, roles and responsibilities to help effect change.
- Group reflective practice helps:
 - create a culture of critique-seeking to improve practice
 - challenge your own biases and explore different possibilities for families and children
 - share risks by working through complex issues as a team
 - collectively ‘see’ an event, experience, or individual clearly with minimal judgement, criticism or praise
 - role model good language and respectful ways to tell people’s stories

explore how you use power in your casework See [Group-Reflective Practice](#) for more information on this process that supports your work in a team of professionals.

Remember:

It is essential that your team of professionals keeps the child at the centre of your work. You will do this by the team engaging the child, their family, carer and community in planning for their future.

As a team of professionals, you must continue to **empower families through family-led decision making**. This shows respect by acknowledging families are experts in their own lives and enables meaningful participation as you work together toward a permanency goal.

See the fact sheets [Tips for Talking with Children and Young People](#) and [Relationship-Based Practice](#).

References

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