Protective Authority Continuum

Protective Authority is the application of helping and/or coercive strategies that result in family accepting child welfare intervention. Effective family engagement leading to the assurance of child safety, reduction of risk of maltreatment, promotion of well-being and timely permanence.

Protective Authority can be viewed on a continuum that includes the least intrusive, most helpful strategies at the low end and the most intrusive strategies at the high end including police intervention, court ordered removal of a child and court termination of parental rights. The keys to effective use of protective authority are balance and flexibility. Balance involves using the least intrusive form of protective authority necessary to achieve client acceptance of intervention and effective engagement. Flexibility is the ability and commitment of the worker to adjust the level of protective authority higher or lower based on case requirements and client response.

Protective Authority Continuum

LOW (Less coercive)

Clarify purpose/role: "I would like to work with you to find a way for you to manage Mark's tantrums without hurting him."

Offer help: "What do you need from me to feel okay about discussing how Kathy got hurt?"

Connect agency goals with client goals: "I know you want to manage your family's personal business without outside interference. My agency wants to be out of your life as soon as it is clear that the children have a caregiver who can keep them safe when you are at work."

Demand for work: "It's been six months since the children came into care. You are going to have to work harder on the service plan goals to have a good chance to get the children back."

Confrontation: "You say you are committed to getting Tisha the medical care she needs, but you have missed the last three scheduled appointments with the endocrinologist.

Forced choice (CYS or Court/Police): "I will leave if you insist. However, I will have to return with the police and a court order requiring your cooperation. Would you rather talk to me now about the reported concerns or later talk to the police and me?"

Police assistance to interview/supervise Court intervention for cooperation Court intervention for Dependency Court ordered removal of child Filing for termination of parental rights Court termination of parental rights

HIGH (More coercive)

These more intrusive responses require clear explanation and justification by the caseworker to both the client and authorities, followed by an invitation to the client to resume work on a more voluntary, collaborative basis.