

Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Supervisor/Worker Conference Dialogue

PREPARATORY PHASE:

The supervisor has reviewed the documentation statistics of the five workers in the unit and has determined that caseworker, Jessie Morgan is behind in meeting the documentation requirements for concurrent planning efforts on one-third of his caseload. Review of Child Permanency Plan documentation statistics on the four other caseworkers in the unit indicates that Jessie is the only worker that is presently failing to meet the standard. However, in the past, there have been periods of time in which Jessie has managed to successfully address concurrent plans in Child Permanency Plans. Case assignments have been slightly higher over the past five months. The supervisor has alerted Jessie that the documentation issue will be addressed in their weekly conference.

In preparation for the conference, the supervisor considers the three requirements of a professional interview – giving/getting information; initiating/maintaining engagement; and initiating/maintaining movement toward solutions. The supervisor also considers the importance of using the Interactional Helping Model skills of Tuning In to Self and Others, communicating understanding of the worker's ideas and feelings, and giving and receiving feedback.

BEGINNING PHASE

1. **Supervisor:** Good morning Jessie. How are you today? _____

Jessie: Not bad. Traffic was pretty heavy this morning, but I got here on time.

2. **Supervisor:** Is there anything that you wanted to add to our conference agenda? _____

Jessie: Yes. I wanted to get clarification on the policy about making Interstate Compact referrals.

3. **Supervisor:** I'll make sure we save some time at the end of our conference to go over the referral process. Is there anything else? _____

Jessie: No, I think that's it.

4. **Supervisor:** OK. As I noted on the conference agenda I gave to you earlier, I wanted to go over with you the issue of working both primary and concurrent permanency plans simultaneously. At present, 1/3 of your child permanency plans don't indicate any objectives or services for the concurrent goals. What are your thoughts about the issue? _____

Jessie: It's hard to keep up when I keep getting more cases. The families I'm working with have a lot of problems. I think everyone would agree that the workload around here is way too heavy.

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5. **Supervisor:** So you think that the workload is keeping you from being able to do the required permanency planning. _____

Jessie: I am working both goals, but probably just not documenting them. Does the county want me to do quality work with families or spend all my time with paperwork? No one seems to care about quality, just quantity of paperwork.

6. **Supervisor:** You sound frustrated and angry that you have to choose between serving the needs of your client families and meeting documentation compliance requirements. _____

Jessie: Exactly.

7. **Supervisor:** Despite that challenge, somehow you have managed to keep up to date on the documentation requirements on two-thirds of your cases. How have you managed to do that? _____

Jessie: Well I...ah...let me think about that. I guess those cases seem to be more clear to me. I mean, the problems are pretty straight forward and I have been able to find placement resources that seem to be working well for those families. It's easier to follow and document the progress. On some of those other cases, especially the ones where there are no placement resources and the families are resistant, I'm not always sure about what to do. I don't know what to say to families in person or in writing about the concurrent goal.

8. **Supervisor:** So, if you had a better idea of how to discuss concurrent goals with families that are resistant, you might be clearer about what to put in your child permanency plans. _____

Jessie: Yes, I think so.

MIDDLE/WORK PHASE

9. **Supervisor:** In going over the child permanency plans for the past twelve months, I noticed that you had a three-month period when both goals in all your child permanency plans were completely addressed. I think you were carrying about the same number of cases then as you are carrying now. What were you doing then that helped you to address both goals so thoroughly? _____

Jessie: Hmm...ah...I think that was after I talked to Mary about how she manages to always find common ground with parents about the inadequacy of growing up in foster care. Agreeing with parents that it isn't fair to let them grow up in foster care always made it easier for me to discuss why I am recruiting for adoptive homes.

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I tried that and it worked for awhile. I guess I got a little lax. Sometimes it's easier to not engage hostile families and get out of their house as quickly as possible, than to spend time and energy to work on a relationship.

10. **Supervisor:** I agree that building relationships with some of our families is extremely challenging. It takes time and patience. But it is one of the best predictors of good outcomes for children.

Let me ask you something. I want you to imagine a time in the future when this problem with child permanency planning is completely resolved. What will be different then about how you will be feeling and what you will be doing? _____

Jessie: Wow! I guess...ah...I wouldn't be feeling anxious and worried about working behind the scenes to get permanency for children.

11. **Supervisor:** What else? _____

Jessie: I think I would feel more confident and maybe a little bit more professional.

12. **Supervisor:** What would other people notice about you that would indicate that something different has happened? _____

Jessie: Maybe I would be more upbeat and not so cynical at times.

13. **Supervisor:** What would you be doing different in this future time? _____

Jessie: I would probably be following Mary's strategies for discussing such hard issues with families.

14. **Supervisor:** On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being no confidence and 10 being every confidence, how confident are you that you can achieve this kind of miracle where the problem is solved? _____

Jessie: Let's see. I would say about a six.

15. **Supervisor:** How did you decide on that number? _____

Jessie: I have been able to do this before with hard cases, so I know that the miracle isn't impossible. However, I know we are having this conversation today because I haven't been consistent.

16. **Supervisor:** What would help you to boost that confidence number by one point, or maybe two points? _____

Jessie: Perhaps if I observed Mary discussing concurrent planning with families, I think I would be more confident.

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17. **Supervisor:** Anything else? _____

Jessie: I hate to say this, but maybe reviewing progress on my engagement efforts during supervisory conferences might help me to stay focused.

ENDING/TRANSITION PHASE

18. **Supervisor:** Those are excellent ideas. I'm impressed that you really seem to be taking ownership for working on a solution for this issue. What I would like you to do before our next conference is to shadow Mary as she discusses concurrent planning with a challenging family. We can review your findings at our next conference. We can decide then if you think a family engagement training might be helpful to you. Does that work for you? _____

Jessie: Yes, sure.

19. **Supervisor:** Thank you Jessie. Now let's take a look at the referral process for the Interstate Compact. _____