Module 1 Chapter 2: Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model

Overview
The Minnesota Department of Human Services implemented a child welfare practice model to inform policy, practice, program development, training, and relationships with all stakeholders.

The practice model sections are:
- Foundational concepts
- Outcomes
- Values and principles
- Continuum of service
- Skills.

Foundational Concepts
Child welfare has shifted from deficit-focused forensic investigations, worker-created plans and compliance monitoring to strengths-based, family-centered, safety-focused assessments and partnerships with families. We have learned that child safety can be accomplished in the majority of families while keeping the family intact. We achieve safety, permanency and well-being when we engage parents and caregivers as partners.

We also recognize that while most families want to keep their children safe, there are situations that interfere with parental ability to do so; these circumstances require interventions that engage protective capacities, strengthen the family, maintain cultural and community connections, and address immediate safety concerns and continuing child maltreatment risks.

DHS, in conjunction with county and tribal social services agencies, works towards strengthening families and communities, and engaging in essential partnerships to increase positive outcomes for children, youth and families who come into contact with the child welfare system.

These foundational concepts of respectful child welfare practice set the framework for our goal of achieving positive practice model outcomes.

Outcomes
The goal of the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model is to achieve specific outcomes for all families, children, and youth who have contact with the child welfare system:
1. Safe, permanent, and nurturing families that have the necessary skills and resources to provide for physical health, mental health, behavioral, and educational needs.

   This means engaging and partnering with families to provide necessary supports and services so they are strengthened to meet basic needs and provide safety, permanency and well-being for their children.
2. Children, youth, and families who encounter Minnesota’s public child welfare system are strengthened and supported based on their unique potential, capabilities, and needs to achieve equitable outcomes regardless of race, ethnicity, culture or socioeconomic status.

   This means strengthening and supporting families through provision of fair, reasonable, unbiased and relevant services to meet basic needs. It also means identifying, engaging and utilizing a family’s informal supports.

3. Children are safely maintained in their families and communities with connections, culture, and relationships preserved and established.

   This means child safety within the family unit is paramount; and when a child is unable to remain in the home, workers endeavor to maintain and preserve the child’s connection to family, community, culture and other relationships. Workers also strive to help children and families establish connections and relationships when necessary for child safety.

4. Minnesota's public child welfare staff is a diverse, professionally competent team that supports strengths-based practice and demonstrates inclusiveness at all levels.

   This means agencies and workers are diverse and embrace diversity; child welfare professionals strive for proficiency in partnering, engaging, and collaborating with families and communities; child welfare workers include all relevant systems to strengthen families and communities, meet basic needs, and ensure child safety, permanency and well-being.

These outcomes are achieved through partnerships between Minnesota’s public child welfare system and Minnesota’s children, youth, families and communities.

You are essential to achieving these outcomes.

**Values and Principles**

The practice model has 11 inter-related values and principles that guide all levels of practice:

- Safety
- Permanency
- Fostering Connections for Youth
- Well-being
- Family Focus
- Partnership
- Respectful Engagement
- Organizational Competence
- Professional Competence
- Cultural Competence
- Accountability
The first four primary values and principles – safety, permanency, fostering connections for youth, and well-being – are best achieved through strengths-based, family-centered and safety-focused family and community partnerships. Primary needs for children are best met when families are supported and strengthened to provide and meet basic needs of their children in their own homes. When we foster connections for youth, we help them transition into adulthood.

Values and principles of safety, permanency and well-being are an integral part of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). They are also the primary focus of all case plans created with families.

The next three values and principles – family focus, partnership, and respectful engagement – help us recognize that child welfare must be focused on establishing collaborative partnerships with families through respectful engagement practices. We focus on the safety and well-being needs of all family members to ensure safety and well-being for children.

We recognize that in order to meet needs, we must partner with families and the community to establish supportive, meaningful connections. We actively listen and openly invite participation from the family in the decision-making process.

Respectful engagement necessarily includes understanding and honoring the culture, history, and traditions of all families, empowering families to meet needs by utilizing their strengths, and educating families regarding the child welfare process.

Family Group Decision Making, Family Assessment Response, and Parent Support Outreach Program are examples of services and programs rooted in these values and principles.

The values and principles of Organizational, Professional and Cultural Competence promote our belief and desire that public and tribal child welfare agencies join with us and work toward increased competence.

Minnesota’s Department of Human Services strives to perform as a high quality organization with strong leadership guidance, a clear statement of mission and priorities, and resource allocation. Achievement of organizational competence necessarily includes committed, qualified, trained, and skilled staff and providers who apply evidence informed practices.

Minnesota’s Department of Human Services endeavors to achieve professional competence through ensuring that its workforce:

- Responds proactively to evolving and identified needs
- Is knowledgeable of the historical context of child welfare practice
- Respectfully provides culturally relevant and needs-based services
- Continues to strive for professional excellence.

Public child welfare agencies and workers best achieve cultural competence through understanding and serving children, youth and families within the context of their individuality.
This means recognizing and understanding the worldview of the family and community in which the family lives, treating families equitably, and engaging in consistent practice.

The final value and principle is Accountability.

Public child welfare must hold itself accountable to the highest levels and standards of practice. Accountability includes recognizing our responsibility to assess and manage our performance, self-correct, innovate, and enhance our ability to achieve positive outcomes through continuous improvement.

We also recognize that our practices, service delivery and performance must be easily understood and evaluated, and we must be receptive to feedback that we can use to spur change.

**Continuum of Service**

The organizational, administrative, and service practices of public child welfare occur on a continuum.

We recognize that child maltreatment is caused by many factors with varying levels of complexity, requiring child welfare agencies to be flexible in all levels of practice. We recognize that many families have multiple needs and child-rearing practices that require different interventions and creative solutions.

The continuum of service specifies organizational and administrative practices, and service practices.

**Organizational and Administrative Practices**

To meet varying needs, organizational and administrative practices must include:

- Cultural competence
- Quality assurance and evaluation
- Staff development
- Supervision
- Communication
- Leadership
- Resource identification, development, and utilization
- Community partnerships
- Outreach.

Culturally competent organizational and administrative practices ensure service delivery for children, youth and families within their cultural context. Culturally competent organizations ensure that staff and community resources are reflective of the populations served; and, the importance and strength of cultural norms is openly recognized.

To assure quality, organizational and administrative practice must include partnering with families and stakeholders to collect and analyze data and information for the purpose of evaluating child welfare practices, systems, and innovations.
The public child welfare system aids staff development through competency-based training, and helping workers build awareness, knowledge, skills, and abilities. Agencies support staff development by allocating resources for training, and through on-going performance evaluations.

Organizational and administrative practices include effective supervision, communication and leadership. Agencies build and maintain effective structures to review and guide key casework decisions, and to provide support and professional development to workers.

Communication is an essential practice for all organizations. Effective communication is the process of providing and receiving information in a manner clearly understood and easily accessible by stakeholders.

Effective leaders create, affirm, and sustain an organizational culture and structure that supports strengths-based, family-centered practice. Leaders identify, mobilize and utilize the strengths of staff and programs to meet the needs of children, youth and families. They join with stakeholders to focus on continuous program, service, and staff improvement.

Resources, community partnerships, and outreach are also essential components of effective organizational and administrative practices.

Public child welfare agencies function as members of and in partnership with the community. Agencies identify, develop and utilize community resources and service options to provide accessible, culturally responsive, and relevant to meet unique family needs.

Outreach involves partnering with communities to identify needs and strengths of children, youth and families. Public outreach also includes dedicating resources to meet needs, and initiating action to engage, educate, offer information, and support families.

**Service Practices**

To meet the diverse needs of children, youth and families, agency service practices must include:

- Outreach
- Screening
- Engagement
- Assessment
- Safety planning
- Identifying and engaging relatives
- Providing for well-being
- Service planning, coordination and delivery
- Acknowledging progress
- Placement process
- Visitation
- Documentation.
Outreach involves staff at the state and local level working with communities to identify needs and strengths of children and families and reaching out jointly to educate, offer information, and support families in need.

Outreach and education includes providing the community with information about abuse, neglect, child protection and child welfare services, and assessment and service processes; it also includes soliciting input from parents and public stakeholders.

An important area of public child welfare is screening reports and referrals. Screening involves gathering and evaluating information, and subsequently determining the appropriate response.

Engagement is an on-going process of soliciting, identifying and acknowledging the child’s or family’s point of view, strengths, and culture through two-way communication, active listening and inclusion when assessing, setting goals and discussing options.

Assessment is an on-going, comprehensive gathering of information in order to effectively evaluate and prioritize the urgency of a child’s need for safety planning, and the present and future risks of maltreatment. Specific types of assessment include Family Assessment Response and Family Investigations.

Safety planning is a process for determining specific actions that must be taken to address immediate safety concerns. The safety planning process is collaborative and includes participation of all children, youth and adults in the family to the level of their capacities.

Relatives, kin, extended family, tribes, and clan members are integral to safety planning, and are viewed as vital resources to provide support and guidance to the family throughout the life of the case. Identification and engagement of relatives as early as possible is critical. When placement is necessary, relatives are the preferred option.

Providing for the well-being of children, youth and families is an integral part of service practice. Physical, mental and behavioral health, and educational and cultural needs are assessed throughout the life of the case. When gaps are identified, necessary and appropriate services are arranged and delivered.

Service planning, coordination and delivery all consider the results of assessments and include a collaboratively developed set of strategies, supports, and services that are accessible, sustainable, timely, relevant and culturally appropriate for the child, youth and family. When families receive services from multiple agencies, the child welfare worker is responsible for implementing the case plan, coordinating service delivery, minimizing duplication, and clearly educating the family about processes and choices. The worker further monitors and evaluates services, and shares relevant information with appropriate stakeholders such as the family and service providers.

Through service planning, coordination and provision, the worker consistently and meaningfully acknowledges family progress toward the mutually established goals. Such recognition positively affects the family to continue working towards remaining goals.
The placement process utilizes multidisciplinary reviews and collaborative decision-making for children and youth currently in, or at risk of, out-of-home placement. The process engages children, youth and families in development of creative, individualized responses to meet needs, maintain relationships and community connections, and plan for permanence.

Visitation practices are a natural and essential part of the placement process. We recognize visits between children and parents, and children and their siblings, as a right – and as necessary to maintaining or re-building strong, emotionally supportive family relationships, unless child safety is compromised.

Every aspect of service practices involves SSIS documentation of factual case events, key case activities, case observations and all contacts with children, youth and families. Documentation is clear and concise, informed by sound professional judgment, entered in a timely fashion, and accurately reflects ongoing progress and challenges to successful completion of goals.

**Skills for Implementation**

A variety of skills are necessary to implement the practice model at all levels of child welfare. As you complete your web-based training, you will notice that each skill is addressed in different ways throughout the modules.

**Engaging:** Effectively joining with family and community to establish common goals concerning child safety, permanency and well-being.

**Partnering:** Working in respectful and meaningful collaboration with families and community to achieve shared goals. Partnering and engaging are related skills.

**Assessing:** Gathering information about reported concerns and family needs, evaluating the relevance of that information as well as identifying family strengths and community and tribal resources to address concerns and needs.

**Planning:** Setting goals, developing strategies and outlining tasks and schedules to accomplish goals derived from the engaging, assessing and partnering process.

**Implementing:** Identifying and applying the most effective and culturally appropriate services, resources and processes to meet the goals established in the planning stage.

**Evaluating:** Monitoring outcomes of service plans and system programs to determine whether desired goals are being achieved. When goals are not being achieved, information is used to reconsider and modify the goals, services and resources as appropriate.

**Advocacy:** Recognizing individual or group needs, providing intervention on behalf of a client or client group, communicating to decision makers and initiating actions to secure or enhance a
service, resource, or entitlement to effect change. You are an advocate for children, youth and families when you practice from a strengths-based, family-centered approach.

**Communication:** Effectively sending and receiving information within the appropriate cultural context. Methods include verbal, non-verbal, electronic and written.

**Cultural Competence:** Interacting with families without making assumptions, respecting and learning from the unique characteristics and strengths of the family and tribe while acknowledging and honoring the diversity within and across cultures, and applying these skills to the partnership with the family and tribe and the options made available to them.

All modules and classroom training incorporate awareness of culture as an important factor to competent public child welfare practice.

**Summary**
The practice model was designed to be a foundational resource for all workers. Its values, skills and practices are addressed throughout foundation training and guide your practice with children, youth and families.

**Next Steps**
From the web resources link, print the chapter transcript; file it behind the Module 1 Transcript tab.

Consult with your supervisor regarding questions you have about this chapter.

Take the Module 1 Post-Test. Be sure to print your results; give a copy to your supervisor and keep a copy for your records.

Begin Module 2 when you are ready.