



Child and Family Support System

Common Elements

Module: Preparing for Change

Practice: Identifying Priorities





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“The Aboriginal Cultural Lenses of Practice” Artist Sasha Houthuysen

Acknowledgment of Country

We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and occupants of lands and waters of this country, whose practices and dreaming are still living through Elder’s past, present and emerging.

Further, we acknowledge that the spiritual, social, cultural, and economic practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples come from their connection to and maintenance of lands, waters, values, heritage beliefs, languages and lore which are of ongoing importance. From the past, in the present, into the future, forever.

We acknowledge the impact of historical policies that were harmful and have contributed to intergenerational trauma. This includes policies and practices of colonisation that have had a profound impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s connection to country, culture, and one another.

We aim to continue to apply a cultural lens when we work together to promote a cultural evidence base that centres around self-determination, choice, and a healing approach, through Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. All while valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as strong, resilient people, and decision makers in their own lives.



About this document

The South Australian government is committed to creating a cohesive Child and Family Support System (CFSS).

One in three children born in South Australia (SA) are reported to the Department for Child Protection by age 10. Most of those children's families have multiple and complex needs. Children and young people who are removed from their families and placed in care experience trauma that can continue to impact on their health and wellbeing throughout their lives and across generations. For Aboriginal families and communities, the intergenerational trauma from Stolen Generations and children being forcefully taken from their communities and culture both adds and gives context to the complexities.

The CFSS is committed to ensuring Aboriginal children remain front, centre and highly visible in our work with families and communities. The CFSS commits to understanding and valuing Aboriginal Cultural strengths, enabling self-determination and being honest about the truth of our shared histories, the hurts, the strengths, and the healing. It is only by doing these actions and being true and active allies will we see change.

The "Roadmap for Reforming the Child and Family Support System (CFSS) 2021–2023" outlines the steps that the South Australian government (Department of Human Services) is taking to strengthen the CFSS workforce to intervene early, build positive relationships with families, improve family wellbeing, and avert the need for greater engagement with the child protection system.

The *Common Elements* is one strategy adopted to enhance the CFSS workforce. The *Common Elements*, once bedded into the CFSS workforce, will build greater consistency for families engaging in the CFSS, adds to the pre-existing skills amongst CFSS staff, enhance evidence-based practice and enable access to quality clinical supervision and mentoring.

The *Common Elements* are evidence-informed (the 'common elements' of programs / interventions known to be effective, and / or supported by evidence from multiple sources) and designed to be used flexibly in response to families' needs.

The *Common Elements* approach is being implemented by DHS in partnership with the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI). CEI is a global, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to using the best evidence in practice and policy to improve the lives of children, families, and communities facing adversity. Refer to the '*Common Elements: Background and Introduction - Explaining the Common Elements*' document for more information.

Each practice guide is comprised of an overview of the practice and its purpose, cultural considerations, key capabilities, practice strategies, outcomes, and practice points. It should be a practitioner's go-to resource, in addition to training and coaching in delivering these practices with fidelity.

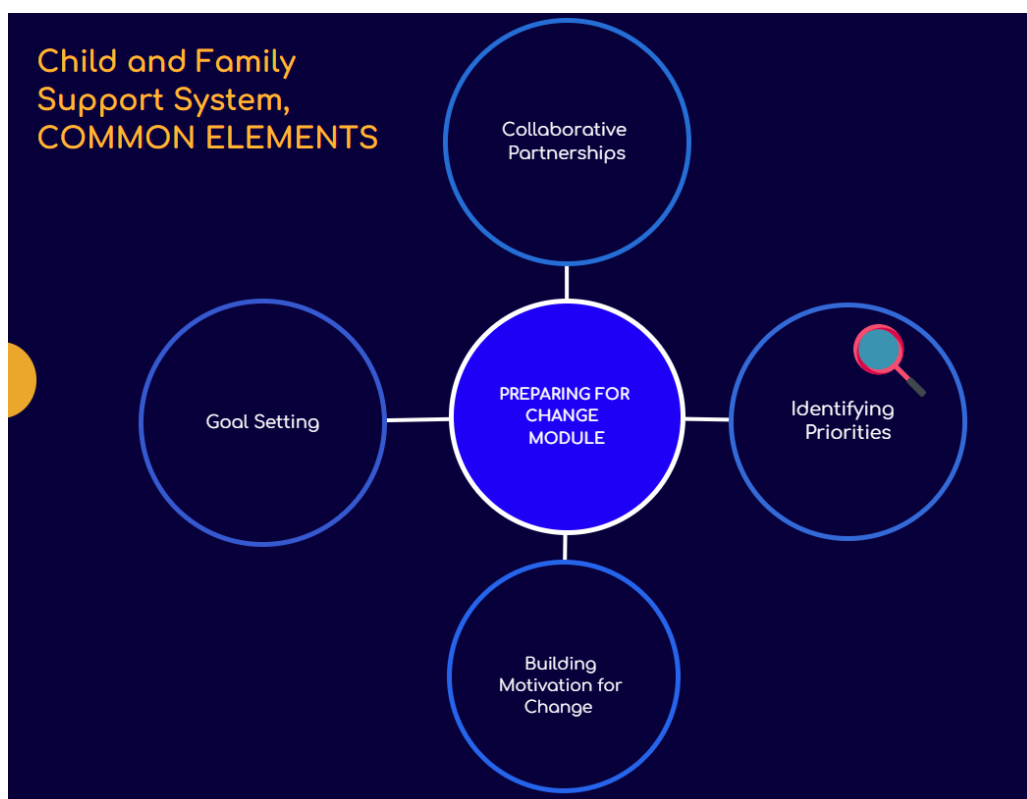
The information in this publication can be provided in an alternative format on request. Please email EIRD@sa.gov.au

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, acknowledging that we work in the context of Aboriginal lands and community.

Overview



Identifying Priorities is a practice in which practitioners work in partnership with families to identify their needs and priorities and respond to them. The practices in this guide can be used with adults (parents, carers, and kinship relations) and with young people from approximately 12 years and older (as developmentally appropriate).

Identifying Priorities is situated within the *Preparing for Change* module that focuses on increasing the family's ownership and motivation for addressing child wellbeing and safety concerns. The practice involves understanding what individuals' value most and identifying issues that are important to them and their children. Considering many families have multiple and complex issues, this practice element focuses on helping them work out which self-identified problems might be tackled first, while keeping other issues in mind. These priorities then form the basis for the collaborative work between the practitioner and individual/family.

Purpose

A practitioner uses this practice element throughout their work, particularly when:

- ✓ Families/individuals feel overwhelmed or feel the issues in their lives are insurmountable.
- ✓ Commencing work with a family and the discussion starts turning to what the collaborative work might look like (just before or during [goal setting](#)).
- ✓ Revisiting priorities after some priorities have been successfully addressed.

Often, families will identify pressing needs related to a lack of resources or practical issues related to their living circumstances rather than parenting or child safety and wellbeing concerns. It is important that practitioners respond to these practical needs as they may have a serious impact on health and wellbeing or compromise their capacity to address other concerns.

Meeting practical needs is a successful strategy for building engagement with families and may be a prerequisite for future work (for example, a person may not be able to focus on long term or larger goals until they know they have food for the week). Practitioners need to attend to these immediate needs while supporting them to identify priorities that will contribute to real and lasting change that addresses child safety and wellbeing.

Whilst it is important to respond to where a family is at, it is possible to get caught in this place of crisis response and lose sight of the path to move families out of the CFSS. Practitioners working in the CFSS are required to respond to immediate, short term needs whilst mobilising a strategy to increase family functioning.

There may be instances where priorities do not align with the child safety concerns that are a priority for statutory services (for example, priorities of an individual that are inconsistent with the best interests of the child). Families and practitioners are likely to view these challenges in different terms. When an individual's priorities do not align with child safety concerns held by practitioners or agencies, practitioners can continue to explore the individual's views on child safety concerns by:

- ✓ [Building engagement](#)
- ✓ [Checking for understanding](#)
- ✓ [Building motivation for change](#)
- ✓ [Exploring a conversation about safety.](#)

Refer to relevant practice guides for guidance on the above strategies.

At times practitioners may need to report child safety and wellbeing concerns while continuing to address other concerns the family may have. At these times, it is critical to draw on the skills outlined in the [Building Engagement](#) module to rebuild and maintain a collaborative relationship.



Allyship Accountability

Applying an Aboriginal Cultural Lens

A cultural lens is the consideration and application of how we perceive our environment based on knowledge, values, attitudes, and the traditions of the group with which we most identify. Applying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lens means stepping back and considering one's own identity and values, how one's own background influences these perspectives and adding knowledge, understanding, and embracing history, culture, and Aboriginal ways of 'knowing, being and doing'. This is also known as allyship accountability.

Aboriginal values are based on enabling, amplifying, and deeply listening to Aboriginal voices across all levels of the kinship system inclusive of children and young people, women, Elders, and men. Aboriginal people are a diverse people with rich and deep heritage, these many voices are considered strengths and protective factors which include the provision of cultural authority and decision making. It is also important to understand that Aboriginal families as a result of strong kinship systems, connections to culture and land may have additional priorities to consider as they may have multiple care giving responsibilities, kinship responsibilities, cultural commitments and responsibilities which need to be understood and respected.

Aboriginal family led decision making is critically important when working with Aboriginal families as this assist's practitioners to build partnerships with Aboriginal families, to identify areas of concern and to take responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and young people. Practitioners who focus on relationship-based practices have a greater chance of building strong relationships with Aboriginal families; these are key to culturally responsive practice and positive outcomes for children and families.

For Aboriginal families the traumatic impact of invasion and subsequent colonisation, dispossession of land and loss of culture may affect willingness to engage with government departments. Practitioners need to keep this in mind when working with families. This intergenerational and complex trauma lens will also mean that priorities are viewed in this context and practitioners need to know and understand the family's story as told by the family inclusive of safety and protective factors. Practitioners will also seek to understand how they as individuals view priorities and their own privilege and bias so as to ensure self-determination for families when working through identifying priorities and actions towards safety and wellbeing of the child.



Applying a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Lens

When working with families from CALD communities' practitioners are advised to seek out information to create a culturally safe and supportive environment. Liaison with community leaders and or culturally specific support services is encouraged.

Trauma in the CALD community is diverse and unique to the lived experiences and migratory journeys of individuals and families and may include intergenerational trauma. Trauma is often associated with pre-migration experiences including human rights abuses.

Post migration, these experiences of trauma are often made worse by other challenges, including settlement issues, racial and religious discrimination as well as the multiple losses experienced, loss of country, culture, and family.

Clear and effective communication is key to successful outcomes for families. If English is not a person's first language it is vital to seek out translation and interpreting services to ensure language barriers do not compromise service provision.

Key Capabilities

Enabling Attitudes

When using *Identifying Priorities*, it is important for practitioners to adopt the following attitudes or stance:



- The practitioner believes adult family members want the best for their children.
- The practitioner is genuinely curious about what is important to the family and how this relates to their children and the central concerns of child and family safety.
- The practitioner believes families can choose appropriate priorities and this choice is important to motivation, voice, and empowerment.

Practitioner Behaviours

Focusing on the most important issues, as identified by the family, is more likely to lead to an increase in motivation to change. Practitioners help families to identify and prioritise issues to work on, taking them through a decision-making process.

This process allows families to talk through the multiple challenges they may be facing and nominate the important ones to work on first. The practitioner's role is to keep the collaborative partnership focused on the most salient issues and help families work through a process of considering which issues will be prioritised for collaborative work.

Meeting the urgent or immediate priorities identified by families creates the space and opportunity for work on larger, prescribed, or other program goals, both through the relationship that is built, and by reducing their worries on issues that are important to them.

Behaviours for practitioners to work towards when Identifying Priorities	Behaviours for practitioners to <u>avoid</u> when Identifying Priorities
	
<p>The practitioner is focused on reflecting the values of family and individuals and the outcomes that are important to them.</p> <p>The practitioner draws on the individual/family views when discussing priorities.</p> <p>The practitioner helps individuals consider the concerns of others (e.g., child safety concerns) but respectfully leaves decision-making to the family/individual or identified cultural authority.</p> <p>The practitioner prioritises safety of the child while privileging the voice of the family. Conversations about increasing safety are to be monitored and prioritised throughout the service delivery period.</p>	<p>The practitioner is focused on raising the concerns of others to ensure that the family chooses particular priorities.</p> <p>The practitioner chooses priorities on behalf of the family.</p>

Practice Strategies

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
Introduce the discussion about priorities	<p>Introduce identifying priorities.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"We've talked a bit about some of the issues that are going on for you. There's a lot going on right now Kelly, and it is understandable that you feel overwhelmed with it all. I wonder if we might find a time to talk through these worries one by one and identify the issues that are the most important for you and your family?"</i></p> <p>If appropriate, the practitioner introduces their role to support families to <i>identify priorities</i>.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"It is my job is to help you focus on the things you and the family would like to work on, there might be times where I make some suggestions of priorities you might want to consider. Is that OK with you, Kelly?"</i></p>
Have the discussion about priorities	<p>Use open-ended questions.</p> <p>The practitioner encourages the family/individual to explore what they perceive as their current priorities.</p> <p>Practitioner:</p> <p><i>"What are your hopes for yourself/your child/your family?"</i></p> <p><i>"What immediate change would make the most difference in your life/lives?"</i></p> <p><i>"How would this make a difference?"</i></p> <p><i>"What is the most challenging issue for you at the moment?"</i></p> <p><i>"What would you most like us to problem solve together?"</i></p>

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p>Use active listening.</p> <p>The practitioner gives their undivided attention to the family/individual, remaining actively engaged in what they are saying. The practitioner lets them know they are listening using appropriate facial expressions, verbal affirmations, and body language.</p> <p>The practitioner includes input from others, including engaging with Aboriginal families from an Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making approach and embedding collaborative relationship-based approach into their practice.</p> <p>When there are other points of view, the practitioner elicits and then reflects the individual's perception of the other points of view, even if it is counter to the opinions of others (for example, the practitioner, statutory services, family members, Elders).</p> <div data-bbox="488 831 1402 1189" style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 10px;"> <p>Practitioner: <i>"[Worker] mentioned they are concerned about your ability to supervise the children. Does this factor into which thing you might start with?"</i></p> <p>Individual: <i>"I'm a good parent you know - they need to recognise that ... I know I need to supervise the kids better."</i></p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"From your point of view you're a good parent and you want to keep it that way – you recognise supervision is part of that."</i></p> </div> <p>With examples where the family finds it tricky to determine where to start, the practitioner uses the Building Motivation for Change practice. This practice is essential to help families explore their own reasons for change and in turn, identifying what to prioritise. See Practice Guide: Building Motivation for Change.</p> <p>In circumstances where statutory services have increasing concerns, practitioners may also need to use the Checking for Understanding practice to discuss the threshold for child removal or the minimum expectations regarding child safety i.e., at which point might statutory services consider becoming involved. See Practice Guide: Checking for Understanding.</p> <p>Finding out what matters most to the family is critical, but it is also important that, over time, the practitioner shares what they see as important issues and outcomes. Through a mutual sharing of information and values over time, families may shift their views about what is most important for them and most helpful for their family. It is important for the practitioner to listen deeply to the family at this stage.</p>

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p data-bbox="501 293 1382 398">Practitioner: <i>My suggestion would be to consider another priority as I think it's going to have a significant impact on your family if things just stay the same. Would you be interested in talking a bit more about that?"</i></p> <p data-bbox="488 450 791 479">Check for Understanding.</p> <p data-bbox="488 517 1374 656">Practitioner can use the <i>Checking for Understanding</i> practice to make sure they have accurately understood the family and all the information before supporting the family with identifying their priorities. See Practice Guide: <i>Checking for Understanding</i>.</p> <p data-bbox="488 692 1406 759">The practitioner ensures the family considers the needs and wellbeing of the child. The practitioner must take time to capture the child's voice.</p> <p data-bbox="488 795 1394 862">If practitioners have a strong collaborative relationship with the family, they may choose to enquire if the priorities also suit other important people.</p> <p data-bbox="501 913 1362 981">Practitioner: <i>"And if Jody could comment, what would her priorities look like? And do they fit with yours?"</i></p> <p data-bbox="488 1032 1422 1099">If it is appropriate to include their children in these discussions, it is important to make that suggestion to the parent.</p> <p data-bbox="501 1151 1358 1218">Practitioner: <i>"Considering some of these priorities are about schooling I wonder if we might bring Jessie in on this discussion about priorities?"</i></p> <p data-bbox="488 1270 799 1299">Suggest a focus on values.</p> <p data-bbox="488 1337 1414 1478">Naturally, families can talk about priorities in superficial ways. Often superficial priorities can be unpacked by investigating the meaning behind them. This can be an important step towards making decisions about what to prioritise.</p> <p data-bbox="501 1529 1358 1597">Family: <i>"My kids shouldn't have to put up with all this, the interruptions from child protection, you know."</i></p> <p data-bbox="501 1635 1283 1664">Practitioner: <i>"What does it mean to them to have interruptions?"</i></p> <p data-bbox="501 1702 1382 1769">Family: <i>"You know, playing, enjoying life. Being kids. Not having the stress of knowing there are social workers coming into the home."</i></p> <p data-bbox="501 1807 1273 1836">Practitioner: <i>"Having a stress-free space to play with each other"</i></p> <p data-bbox="501 1874 991 1904">Family: <i>"Exactly! Just having a good life."</i></p>

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p>Reflect and summarise.</p> <p>This strategy can be used to show understanding, call attention to important elements of the discussion, or to shift attention or direction and prepare the family to 'move on' in the discussion.</p> <p>Use reflections and summaries as described in Practice Guide: <i>OARS (Open ended question, Affirmations, Reflections and Summaries)</i> to highlight important parts of the discussion about priorities.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Let me see if I have heard you correctly about getting Child Protection out of your life. Firstly, it's not nice having someone look over your shoulder. Secondly, you really want the best for Gracie, a better start than you had. This is something you'd like to work on."</i></p>
<p>Rate priorities, choose the most important</p>	<p>Rating priorities on scale of one to ten can be an important activity to decide what to start on, especially if the family has more than two priorities. One to two priorities are usually practicable to start working on.</p> <p>Introduce a rationale:</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Considering you have a list here of priorities, I wondered if it might be important to rate them in order of importance? This might help you decide where to start. I wonder if we might prioritise some to work on first, perhaps just one or two things that are really important to you."</i></p> <p>Ask the family to choose a value out of ten for each priority.</p> <p>After listing the priorities, the aim should be to have the family rate each priority one by one.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Okay, so with your first one here, if one is 'not important' and ten is 'most important,' what number would you choose?"</i></p> <p>Ask clarifying questions:</p> <p>After they have rated each priority ask clarifying questions that explore why they have chosen that rating.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Okay, so a seven. Why have you rated this as a seven?"</i></p> <p><i>"And given your ratings, which do you think you/we might start on first?"</i></p>

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
Summarise understanding of priorities	<p>At the end of any discussion focusing on priorities, the practitioner summarises their understanding of what issues or outcomes matter most to the family and check with them that this account is correct before moving on.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"So we have talked through a few things today. Firstly, you listed four things that were important to you 1) restarting your studies 2) reducing stress when parenting 3) getting on top of your money 4) getting your car running.</i></p> <p><i>You gave them a rating and you put money and parenting first because a) the kids are important to you and b) knowing how much money you have will help you tackle the other two.</i></p> <p><i>Have I missed anything?"</i></p>
Seek collaboration and agreement to working on identified priorities together	<p>Seek collaboration on the important priorities:</p> <p>Seeking explicit agreement to work on identified priorities together is an important step in expanding the agreed focus of the collaborative partnership. Generally, one or two priorities are preferred to focus the collaborative partnership efforts.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Okay. So, you've chosen 'reducing stress when parenting the kids' and 'getting on top of your money'. I'm wondering if these are things we might work together on?"</i></p> <p>Family: <i>"Yeah, I just don't know where to start with the fines and stuff."</i></p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Okay. Let's remember to talk about this on Tuesday along with anything else you feel we should talk about."</i></p> <p>Family: <i>"I'd like that."</i></p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"On Tuesday, let's talk about where we will start our work together and set a goal, or the first step that you want to see on these priorities."</i></p>



Outcomes

Practice level outcomes

- Families feel that their priorities, needs, and values are understood, respected, and attended to.
- Families are motivated and supported to work on identified priorities that improve family functioning and increase child safety.
- Families are less likely to feel overwhelmed by the issues they are facing.
- Practitioners have capacity to help the families prioritise and address their needs.
- Practitioners can focus on issues important to the family and those that will address child safety and wellbeing concerns.

Practice Points

- The family's priorities should always be the starting point for collaborative work.
- It is critical to preserve the collaborative partnership and resist the temptation to be directive or use coercive approaches (for example, telling somebody they need to focus on a particular priority). In the medium term, a collaborative partnership will better engage parents in a discussion/action to address concerns raised by statutory services. Drawing out the family's intrinsic motivation is important to work towards change on child wellbeing and safety concerns (see Practice Guide: [Building Motivation for Change](#)).

Longer term considerations:

- A family's views about their priorities are likely to shift over time as their ambivalence reduces. It is important to keep revisiting priorities to ensure both the practitioner and family are still addressing the issues that matter most to the family. It is also important to be responsive to needs as priorities can easily shift.
- Practitioners should show respect for the family's choices and adopt an optimistic attitude regarding their hopes and aspiration.

Reflective questions for practitioners

Consider a family you are currently working with:

- Have you been able to identify and discuss child safety concerns with the family?
- Has the family been able to identify areas of concern that align with those outlined in the initial referral? If not, how has this been raised with the family?
- Is the family willing to work through self-identified concerns in a meaningful manner?
- As a practitioner, are you able to achieve child safety whilst working toward the family's goals?
- Does the family have a sense of self determination and control over the process? If not, how can you work toward empowering the family to ensure the intervention is meaningful to them?

Notes

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