



Child and Family Support System

## Common Elements

Module: Building Engagement

Practice Guide: Seeking

Feedback





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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 connection and maintained 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.

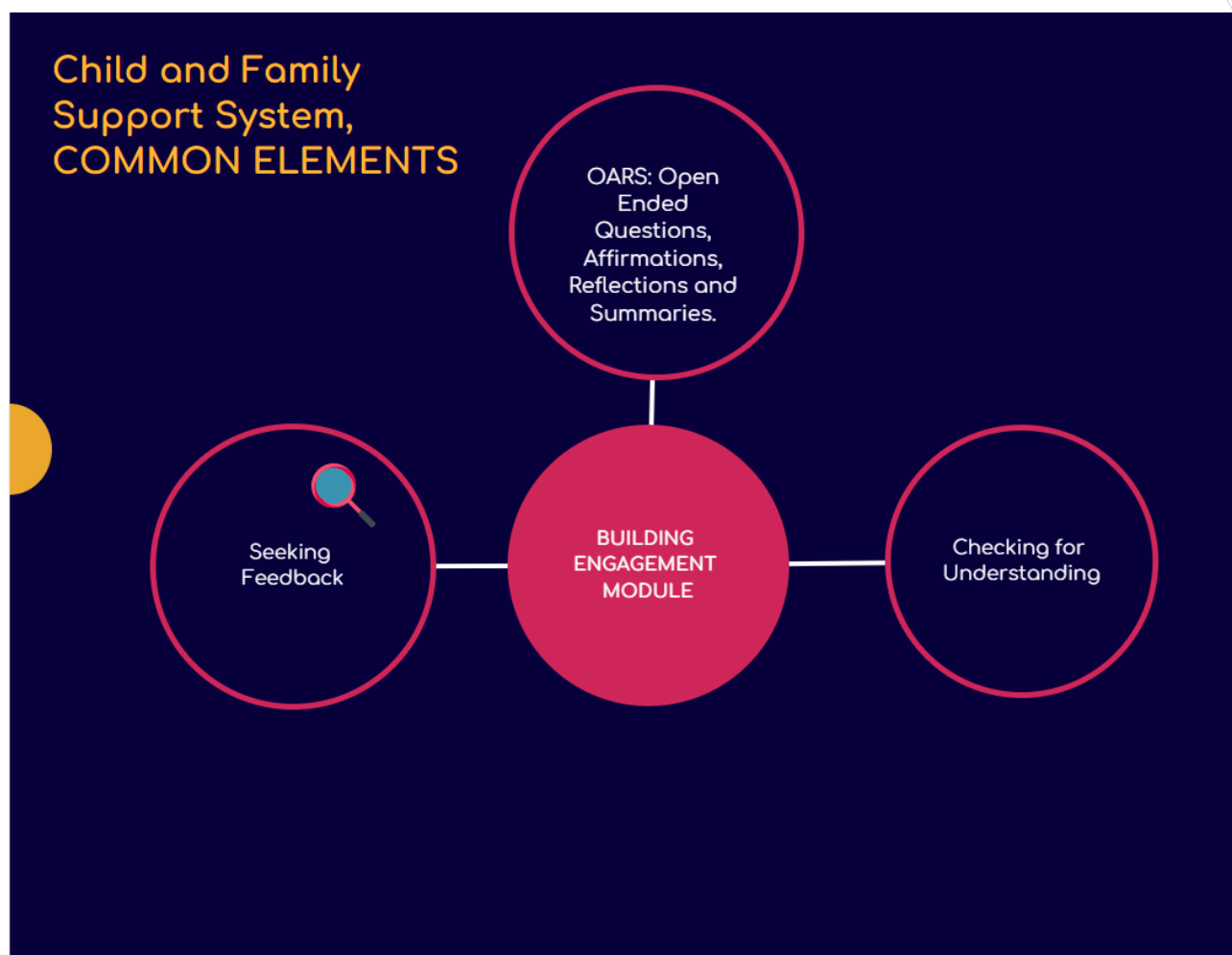
Each practice guide is comprised of an overview of the practice and its purpose, cultural considerations, key capabilities, practice strategies, outcomes, and practice points. It should be a practitioner's go-to resource, in addition to training and coaching in delivering these practices with fidelity.

The information in this publication can be provided in an alternative format on request. Please email [EIRD@sa.gov.au](mailto:EIRD@sa.gov.au)

Authorised and published by the Government of South Australia.

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 © State of South Australia, Australia, Department for Human Services (June 2022).

## Overview



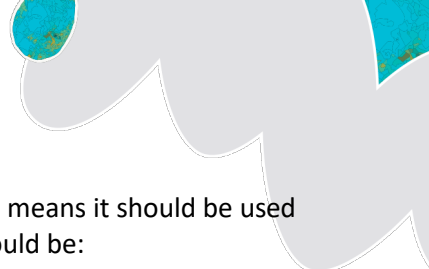
Obtaining regular, semi-structured feedback is a powerful way of improving practitioner skills and service delivery whilst maintaining or improving engagement with an individual/family. *Seeking Feedback* is a practice within the *Building Engagement* module and focuses on how to seek feedback, which involves regularly checking how individuals have experienced the service and whether the practitioner who is delivering the service is meeting their expectations and needs. This guide can be used with adults (parents and carers and kinship relations) and with children from approximately 12 years of age and older (as developmentally appropriate). This practice guide will focus predominantly on its use with parents and carers.

## Purpose

By obtaining direct feedback on how the service is experienced by the individual/family, practitioners can identify aspects of the service that are less effective and work to improve them. The benefits of feedback are not limited to the practitioner. The opportunity to provide meaningful feedback is empowering for individuals/families as it enables them to contribute more to the partnership with the practitioner and ensures the service is meeting their needs and priorities.

*Seeking Feedback* is a prevention strategy to ensure that the individual/family has a platform to raise issues or concerns about the partnership itself and the work being done. Regularly seeking individual/family feedback ensures service delivery and practice can be tailored and improved. Although this guide is useful when there





are obvious issues, it is intended to be used before there are issues or problems. This means it should be used regularly and in an ongoing way to create a platform for discussion. Typically, this should be:

- ✓ At the end of sessions or when a small piece of work is starting or coming to an end.
- ✓ During natural changes in the relationship such as when the practitioner brings in new ways of working (e.g., role playing a parenting strategy).
- ✓ When introducing new topics or interventions.

## **Allyship Accountability**

### **Aboriginal Cultural Lens Application**

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. Because of these values based in equal voice seeking feedback can resonate with Aboriginal community.

When working with Aboriginal families it is important for practitioners to create a culturally safe partnership that allows for a relationship of trust and where the feedback is honest, so to maintain this, feedback should be sought at each interaction. Aboriginal and western communication styles can be different and receiving feedback can also look like getting 'growled', clients disengaging, clients saying yes or getting talked to 'straight out', all of which are valid styles.

This is again why it is vital to continually seek meaningful and honest feedback and understand the style, context, and intent in which it is given. Allyship accountability sees practitioners seeking understanding through undertaking Cultural Consultation with Aboriginal practitioners, cultural authority, and cultural decision makers.

Practitioners also need to understand and support client preferences: some conversations are better to have as a family or group in adherence to Aboriginal Family Led Decision making and respecting cultural authorities and decision makers. It is important that the practitioner makes the client and family aware that seeking feedback will occur so if individuals or family members are asked to provide feedback, they are aware of the why and the importance of this to keep children safe and well at home.

Having a clear and shared understanding around seeking feedback means that people will feel included, have clarity, and can self-determine their experiences. Therefore, it does not single family members out when seeking feedback, as this can be intimidating for the person and the whole family. Direct questioning of a single family member could result in people feeling shame if they do not feel they know the answers.

Consideration of communication barriers is of high importance as effective communication is key to successful feedback. If English is not a person's first language, then it is vital to seek out translation and interpreting services to ensure language barriers do not compromise service provision.



## Applying a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Lens

When working with families from CALD communities' practitioners are advised to seek out more 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, then 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 *Seeking Feedback*, it is important for practitioners to adopt the following attitudes or stance towards the individual/family:



- The practitioner believes that the individual/family's contribution to service delivery and the working relationship is important to child and family outcomes.
- The practitioner believes that the individual/family's perception of the working relationship is always dynamic, never static.

## Practitioner Behaviours

It is helpful when practitioners assume that an individual/family's view of their working relationship may differ from theirs and considers this to be a normal part of a relationship.

Doing so will allow the practitioner to regularly check in with the individual/family to seek feedback.

Problems or difficulties with the working relationship, whether they are practical or relational, need to be addressed to reinforce the fact that individuals can influence the way that the service is delivered. For example, if it becomes clear that an individual finds it difficult to talk about a particular issue without 'shutting off', the practitioner and individual/family can collaboratively identify steps to mitigate this. They may agree that the practitioner asks permission to put the topic on the agenda each home visit so the individual/family can be mentally prepared and empowered to make choices and decisions.

| <b>Behaviours for practitioners to work towards when Seeking Feedback</b>  | <b>Behaviours for practitioners to avoid when Seeking Feedback</b>  |
|--|---|
|   |    |
| <p>Practitioner seeks feedback regularly regarding both single sessions and the collaborative work more generally.</p> <p>Individual/family's feedback, particularly when difficult or negative, is explicitly noted and changes are actioned.</p> <p>Practitioner assumes individuals/families have appropriate and insightful feedback about the way they work together.</p> | <p>Practitioner rarely asks for the individual/family's feedback (e.g., topics, ways of talking).</p> <p>Practitioner does not act when feedback is provided (e.g., does not acknowledge individual/family concerns or provide their view as to how feedback will be addressed).</p> <p>Practitioner is defensive when feedback is given.</p> |



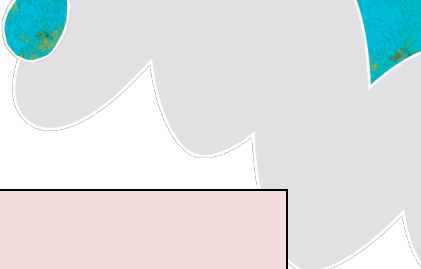
## Practice Strategies

This section provides a step-by-step guide on how to use *Seeking Feedback* in practice.

| Steps/Components            | Skills/Strategies   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Introduce the feedback role | <p>Practitioner explains that they will be asking individuals to regularly give feedback on how the practitioner and individual/family are working together.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"I'm going to check in regularly to see if I understand you correctly and to make sure you're happy with the way we are working together."</i></p> <p>Practitioner lets the individuals know that their voice is important, and that the practitioner invites the individual/family to be honest, rather than being afraid of hurting the practitioner's feelings or losing the service.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"I'm here to support you so it's okay to let me know if I'm not working well with you. It's important that you get to have your say in how this works."</i></p> <p>Or</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"I won't take it personally if you tell me what we are doing doesn't work for you. We will work together to make changes to the way we do things to make sure you are getting the service you need."</i></p> <p>Practitioner lets the individual/family know they are happy to receive feedback at any time, but especially at the time when the individual/family may not feel the practitioner has taken their views on board.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Along the way I'm going to check in with you that what we are working on together is OK. If you feel I have not listened or understood what you want, it's really important that you tell me about it."</i></p> <p>To increase the individual/family's comfort level, practitioners may reflect on their practice and provide examples of times when they have not done things well in the past.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Sometimes I hear from other families that I talk too fast and tend to focus on problem solving. I do not want to do this, so it is important for you to let me know if I do this without realising. Is that OK with you?"</i></p> |

| Steps/Components    | Skills/Strategies   |
|---------------------|---|
| Supporting feedback | <p>Providing feedback may present as a challenge for some families. There may be a genuine fear of consequences if they speak their truth about their experiences of support. A sense of safety in the relationship is essential and an awareness of how families may perceive practitioner power is necessary.</p> <p>Safety and trustworthiness in relationships can take time and so it is important to refer to the key scripts for ideas on how to allay these fears and encourage open feedback. Revisit the enabling attitudes frequently when inviting feedback from families. It is important that you don't leave opportunities for feedback too late, time is critical in working through complex issues and we need to know sooner than later that the support is meeting a family's needs.</p> <p>It is preferable that a family feels safe and supported in providing direct feedback to their support practitioner, this enables a recalibration of the relationship towards improved understanding.</p> <p>Other avenues for providing feedback can be explored for eliciting feedback, however it is important that during the active period of service engagement that this generates a direct conversation between the practitioner and the family or the family and someone from the support agency – line supervisor for example. This aids the identification of issues in the practitioner- family relationship that may impede positive outcomes for families.</p> <p>It is suggested you ask general open-ended questions such as:</p> <p>'It's important that I get this right for you and your family – it's important that you have a voice.</p> <p>When we come together:</p> <p>Do you feel heard?</p> <p>Do you feel understood?</p> <p>Do you feel respected?</p> <p>Tell me is there anything about the way we are working together that isn't meeting your needs?</p> <p>Feedback can be obtained in various ways, including through a collaborative conversation (see example below) With the individual/family, the practitioner explains the types of feedback they could give, with examples, ensuring to cover both positive and constructive criticism.</p> |

| Steps/Components                           | Skills/Strategies  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>Practitioner: <i>"I am really fine with you telling me if I haven't got things right. It is okay to say to me, 'Look I don't think you understand that's important to me'."</i></p>   |
| Session by session feedback                | <p>It is important that families know they do not have to wait for a formal check in or regular session to provide feedback. They can do this at any time. Practitioners seek regular and general feedback from individuals regarding <i>how</i> they are working together and <i>what</i> they are focusing on.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Last time we agreed to spend today's session talking about the meeting at school tomorrow regarding Prianka's attendance. How do you feel about that?"</i></p> <p>Or</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Thanks for getting involved in role playing in this session, it can be uncomfortable. I just wanted to check in with you about how that was. Is there anything we can do differently?"</i></p> |
| Ongoing feedback                           | <p>Practitioner seeks ongoing feedback about the how, what, and why (e.g., whether their regular work is contributing to larger goals) of the collaborative work.</p> <p>For example, a practitioner might check in with the individual/family about whether they feel the ongoing home visits are focusing on the family goals or whether things need to change.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>"Amal, we've been meeting for four weeks now around supervision of the kids and improving family routines. Just thinking about this goal that we talk over every week; how do you think we are going? Is there anything that's not working, anything I can do to make things easier?"</i></p>  |
| Act on both positive and negative feedback | <p>Practitioners should use this feedback to ensure an individual's feelings (e.g., values and preferences) are being incorporated into future sessions or work. The explicit use of feedback should continue to support the individual/family's autonomy.</p> <p>For example, an individual may value the practitioner giving them a reminder text regarding home visits on the day.</p> <p>Or</p>  |



| Steps/Components | Skills/Strategies  |
|------------------|--|
|                  | <p>Practitioner: <i>“You mentioned that you preferred me to write things down to help you remember, so I’ thought I could write it down in a text to you so that we can keep on track or we can jot it down on a piece of paper? what would you prefer? does that sound like something you would find useful?”</i></p> |



# Outcomes


## Practice level outcomes

Record keeping is a critical element of safety planning and should be conducted in a timely manner in ways indicated throughout this practice guide.

- Individuals are empowered to provide honest feedback to practitioners.
- Individuals' relationship with a practitioner is collaborative - both parties are clear on expectations and desired outcomes.
- Individuals experience responsive services that are tailored to their individual needs.
- Practitioners are open and responsive to feedback and adapt to improve their practice.
- Practitioners improve understanding of individual/family needs, preferences, and perspectives.
- Practitioners are alerted to approaches and processes that do not resonate with the individual/family.

## Practice Points

- If the practitioner is seeking written feedback, it is important to sensitively check with the family whether they need assistance to give feedback or would like the support of a friend or family member.
- Be prepared to deal with feedback that cannot be actioned in the way an individual/family desire (e.g., not raising a safety concern). See OARS practice guide for additional guidance on responding to such feedback and other practices for maintaining engagement.
- Avoid saturating the individual/family with too many opportunities to provide feedback such that the offer may seem not meaningful. Make sure the offer is genuine and that the individual/family believes it to be genuine.
- Feedback naturally contributes to reflective practice. Practitioners can use supervision and/or coaching sessions to reflect upon feedback they have received and how they can use this to improve their work with individuals.
- Practitioners build in feedback as part of the session, like saying 'Goodbye' at the end of each session. It is not only good practice, but it also signals the close of a session.
- Feedback does not have to be verbal only. Watch out for non-verbal cues such as the way someone responds to a discussion. If noticed, a practitioner may ask probing questions from a position of curiosity to make the feedback more explicit.
- For individuals who have had prior contact with statutory services, they may not be expecting the opportunity to give genuine feedback regarding the collaborative work or may not feel comfortable doing so. If this is the case:
  - ✓ Encourage them to 'start small' and offer them repeated experiences of their feedback being heard and acted upon. This could be small such as texting ahead of the home visit to give them time to get ready. This will help them to gain confidence in the feedback role.
  - ✓ Provide them with an example of positive feedback



e.g., *Practitioner using voice of individual: "I like how you encouraged me and reminded me that I can sit and listen to you without interrupting"*

and corrective feedback,

e.g., *Practitioner: "Maybe next time we can allow more time to discuss this important issue as it felt a bit rushed, and you might not have been able to express your thoughts"*

to help the individual/family understand what feedback is and why it can be helpful.

### **Reflective Questions for practitioners:**

Reflecting on the content of this practice guide providing families a 'voice' to feedback on their experience

How will you ensure families are supported to engage in the feedback process going forward? What resources will you utilize in this process? What resources do you feel you may need?

How will you ensure children are included in the feedback process and are provided their own voice?

Consider families who may be uncomfortable providing feedback – how will you approach this sensitively whilst building the family's confidence and capacity to be open and honest in their feedback.

Consider how the feedback you receive from family's can be included within your own supervision sessions and how you can be supported in this process.

What did you learn about yourself because of feedback received?

What behaviours align with your own values and what behaviours don't align?

How might you use this feedback to enhance your capacity to support individuals and families



# Notes

