



Child and Family Support System

Common Elements

Module: Preparing for
Change

Practice: Collaborative
Partnership





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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

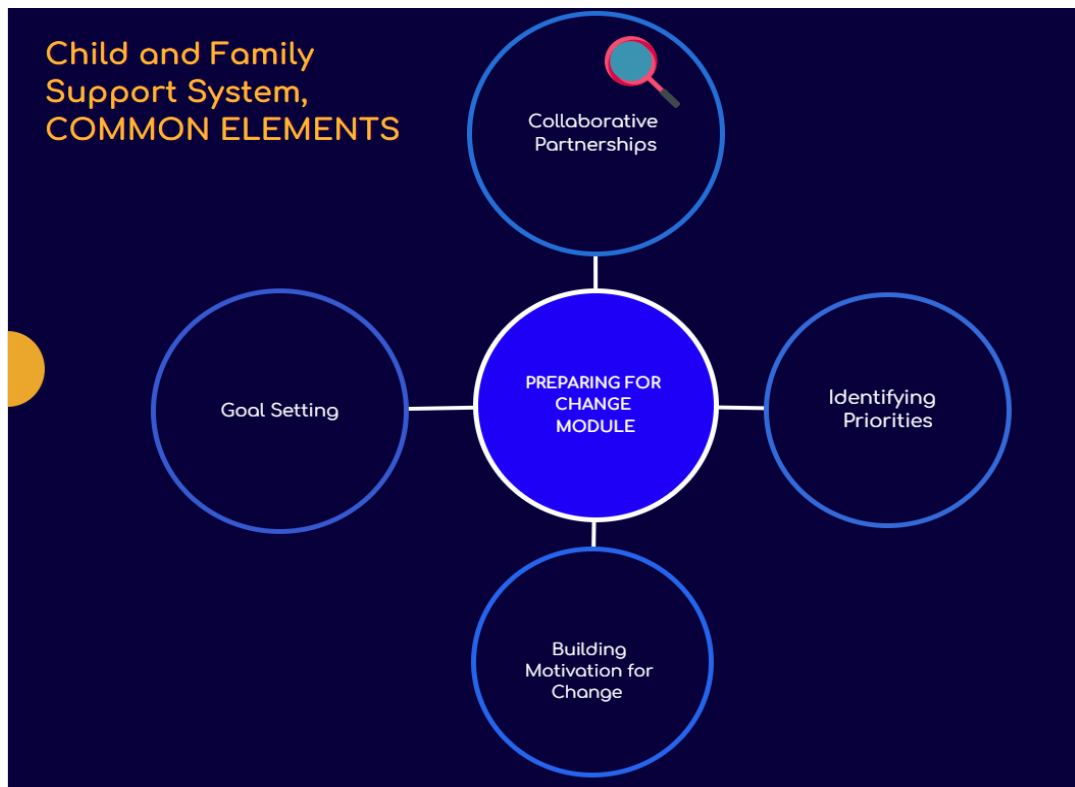
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In this document, 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, acknowledging that we work in the context of Aboriginal lands and community.



Overview



A collaborative relationship is one where practitioners and families engage in a respectful relationship that is based on truth telling, transparency and trust. This relationship should be based on the understanding that everyone brings their own expertise and knowledge to the table. A family is regarded as an expert in their own circumstances, own culture, and kinship connections. Practitioners bring their practice wisdom, skills, strategies, and ideas to support the family as they identify their need. This guide can be used with adults (parents and carers and kinship relations), family groups, children, and young people.

Collaborative Partnership is a practice within the **Preparing for Change** module and focuses on building a collaborative relationship that will support families in their journey toward implementing and maintaining meaningful change in their lives.

Purpose

A **Collaborative Partnership** is not something that is reached but something that needs continual maintenance. This approach is ongoing, throughout the intervention for as long as the practitioner is engaged within the families lives.

Practitioners should use a collaborative partnership approach throughout their engagement with a family, particularly when:

- ✓ Initially setting up the focus of the work and building relationships with families
- ✓ Working with families who have experienced difficulty in working with services in the past
- ✓ The collaborative partnership is challenged (e.g., when the practitioner makes a notification of child abuse). It is important that after such times, practitioners refocus their active efforts on building the collaborative relationship.

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.

Collaborative Partnership with Aboriginal families and communities will only begin with a relationship of trust, this can be built through:

- Demonstrated respect.
- Understand what work the partnership needs to be effective.
- Be aware of cultural differences and cultural responsibilities to the partnership.
- Genuine support for the creation of a safe relationship and commitment to maintaining this.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) clearly sets out the importance of genuine Partnerships as a way to support self-determination – the collective right of peoples to determine and control their own destiny.

Aboriginal family led decision making is critically important when working with Aboriginal families as this assists practitioner to build a partnership to identify areas of concern and to take responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and young people. It is also vital that practitioners are aware of Aboriginal family kinship systems and that family and family's roles, responsibilities and obligations may look different and need to be understood and respected. Aboriginal people are a diverse people with rich and deep heritage, these many voices are considered strengths and provide cultural authority and decision making in the partnership.

Practitioners who focus on relationship-based practices have a greater chance of building strong and a **collaborative partnership** with Aboriginal families; these are key to culturally responsive practice and positive outcomes for children and families. It is important to understand that some families may be open and engage well at an initial meeting and other families may take some time before they are ready to engage, if at all.

For Aboriginal families the traumatic impact of invasion and subsequent colonisation, dispossession of land and loss of culture and Stolen Generations may affect willingness to engage with government departments. Many people have "negative experiences of tokenistic relationships labelled as partnerships. This has led to a level of mistrust that governments and mainstream services may use partnerships to 'tick boxes' of cultural competence and community engagement, without engaging with the deeper commitment to sustainable relationships and local community empowerment". (SNAICC, pg. 31)

It is also important to build a collaborative partnership with the families but also Aboriginal staff, stakeholders, agencies (ACCOs/ACCHOs) and community.



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 developing a *Collaborative Partnership*, it is important for practitioners to adopt the following attitudes or stance towards the family:



- The practitioner believes that the child and family have insights and expertise in their life. These insights and expertise inform practitioners' understanding of how to communicate with and support families.
- The practitioner believes all families want and can have a degree of autonomy over their circumstances. They believe the family has the capacity to make choices about their circumstances.
- The practitioner believes that no point of view holds more weight than the other. Different ideas are a way of creating comprehensive goals and moving towards change.
- The practitioner believes that genuine collaboration and family voice, choice and participation contribute to healing from trauma.



Practitioner Behaviours

When the practitioner provides an opportunity for the family, child or individual to voice their own solutions, exercise their autonomy and provide choice in decision-making, it reduces the power imbalance in the collaborative relationship. Considering the pre-existing imbalance, practitioners need to be explicit about their role and that of the family, clearly setting expectations and limitations while clarifying misconceptions. Given the nature of the collaborative partnership, the family should have equal input into what the partnership looks like and how it operates.

When working with Aboriginal families it is important to recognise the value of Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making and its role when building a collaborative partnership with the family group, building the family's capacity to keep children safe, connected and within culture is key.

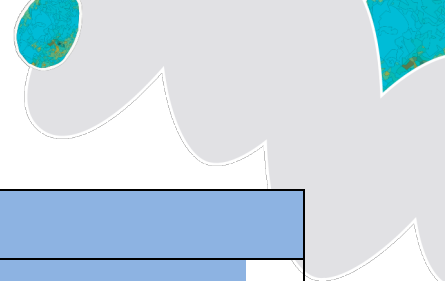
Behaviours for practitioners to work towards when building a Collaborative Partnership 	Behaviours for practitioners to <u>avoid</u> when building a Collaborative Partnership 
<p>Practitioner explains the scope and limits of their role and seeks explicit agreement from the family to work together on agreed areas of focus</p> <p>Practitioner seeks the child and family's advice as an expert on their circumstances.</p> <p>Practitioner provides regular and meaningful choices throughout each session especially on difficult topics where families may have differing opinions from the practitioner or from statutory services.</p>	<p>Practitioner assumes the family wants to work together on issues. There is no specific invitation to work together.</p> <p>Practitioner actively assumes the expert role for most of the interaction with the family.</p> <p>Practitioner assumes that the family understands how the relationship will work</p>

Practice Strategies

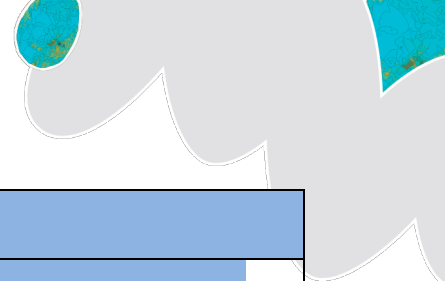
This section provides guidance on how to use *Collaborative Partnership* in practice.

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
<p>Provide an overview of and rationale for working in partnership</p>	<p>Practitioner explains that they will work collaboratively with the family in partnership, respecting their experience, values, and preferences.</p> <p><i>Practitioner: “If we are to work together, my job will be to make sure we’re working on or talking about what’s important to you and what’s important to Imran. My role is to understand your point of view so we can work together to find out what will work for you and your family. I understand that it might feel like you don’t have a choice to work with me, but what I can say is I’ll do my best to do this in a way that is best for you and your family and support you to make sure your children are safe and well.”</i></p> <p>When introducing the idea of collaborative partnership practitioners should think about how their introduction can help establish a future collaborative partnership.</p>
<p>Explore and clarify roles</p>	<p>Practitioner talks personally about how they work:</p> <p>Making it personal (i.e., about how <i>you</i> work) is a way of showing honesty and is also an invitation for families to share how they work best.</p> <p><i>Practitioner: “When we work together, I’m very interested to hear from you about how you think we should communicate. I value honesty and open communication. I’m straightforward if there are issues. I’ll bring them up as soon as I’m aware of them.</i></p> <p><i>That means I encourage you to let me know if there are any issues that you feel I need to be aware of. For example, if there is something that I haven’t got quite right, that you want to clarify, I’d like you to tell me.”</i></p> <p>An important consideration here is the relationship with other services. This can be a good time to talk about the practitioner’s relationship and information-sharing obligations with services.</p> <p>Practitioner talks through what is negotiable and non-negotiable:</p> <p>Being honest and upfront with families and individuals about the way practitioners work can prevent misunderstandings later. This prepares families for difficult conversations and gives them permission to bring up things that they might be unhappy about.</p>

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p>Practitioner: <i>“Most things in our relationship are negotiable - what we focus on, what we talk about etc. I will listen to your views about what’s good for you, your family, and children. However, there are a few things that are part of my job and are non-negotiable. So, to give an example, sometimes families ask me to pass on what we talk about to other services like a housing worker or a psychologist, while others prefer to keep our conversations private – that’s your choice. However, the law requires me (or anyone working with children) to report anything that I believe is unsafe for your children. Although this is non-negotiable, I will always attempt to call you prior to making such a report. In most circumstances, I will make every effort to raise my concerns with you before I need to make a report. What do you think about that? Do you have any non-negotiables?”</i></p> <p>The example here can be particularly difficult to get right if this is a new relationship. To personalise it, practitioners might like to add their own experiences of working with other families. For example, the practitioner might choose to add that making a report without notifying the family rarely occurs. There may also be specific circumstances that the practitioner is already aware of, that they know will need to be addressed early on.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“It’s important I am clear. If Hamish were left with his Uncle Peter without your supervision, I would need to report that.”</i></p>
<p>Seek collaboration and permission to work together on specific issues</p>	<p>Seek explicit agreement and permission where possible:</p> <p>Practitioners should seek permission especially when talking about a new topic or sub-topic (e.g., although parenting stress is on the agenda, after noticing talk about an individual’s ex-partner, the practitioner seeks permission to talk more about the stress of the ex-partner).</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“I know we’ve been talking about your stress around parenting. I’ve noticed you’ve been stressed out about your ex-partner the last three visits - I wonder if you’d like to talk about this stress as well?”</i></p>
<p>Provide meaningful choices</p>	<p>Putting forward meaningful choices:</p> <p>Families can have meaningful choices about many aspects of service delivery. This includes choices that are easy to establish (e.g., how to raise concerns, what to focus on, when to talk about issues) and those that are more difficult (e.g., whether the family chooses to change their behaviour). Regardless, even small choices are a great way to show the family that they have autonomy over aspects of their life. Importantly, it shows them that where possible, they have autonomy in this relationship.</p>



Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p>Practitioner: <i>“What would you like to focus on today?”</i></p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“How are you going with the decision on whether to enrol in the parenting program we discussed last week? Would it be helpful for us to weigh up the pros and cons of doing the program?”</i></p>
Support autonomy	<p>In addition to the ongoing use of OARS (Open ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections and Summaries), questions and reflections can be used to support the family’s autonomy. See Practice Guide: OARS for additional examples.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“I’ve heard from [Worker] about their concerns for April but I’m interested in what you make of these concerns?”</i></p>
Provide information as a contribution where needed	<p>When introducing new information, practitioners sandwich it between questions that seek the family’s perspective using the Elicit-Provide-Elicit technique (see the Practice Guide: Building Motivation to Change). This makes it clear that the practitioner’s contribution is only part of the decision-making process.</p>
Call on the collaborative agreement when it is challenged	<p>Agreed or discussed ways of working can be called upon in circumstances that challenge the collaborative relationship.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“You know how I said I was going to be honest with you and mention if I’m concerned about something? I wanted to raise a concern I have about the supervision of Ivy.”</i></p>
Get feedback and reflect on the partnership	<p>Practitioner uses the strategies outlined in Practice Guide: Seeking Feedback to regularly check in with families regarding their experience of the collaborative relationship.</p> <p>Time for reflection</p> <p>Every now and then, practitioner sets up a time to reflect upon the partnership relationship.</p> <p>Practitioner: <i>“Do you think this might be a good time to talk about the way we’ve been working together?”</i></p> <p>Focus on goals or relationship</p> <p>Practitioner begins the reflection by reminding the family of agreed goals for the work together and invites them to say what their experience has been like.</p>



Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	<p>Take care to note the family’s contributions and achievements and help them reflect on what this means for them.</p> <p><i>Practitioner: “I feel as though you’ve been really taking the lead on letting me know what we need to focus on. How do you feel about how I’m supporting you?”</i></p> <p>This is a partnership exercise, so the recollection and reflections should involve both practitioner and the family. Both parties can share their thoughts and ideas on what is working well and offer suggestions to make changes if needed to the partnership relationship.</p>
<p>Rebuilding the collaborative partnership after setbacks</p>	<p>Rebuild using the practice elements in the <i>Building Engagement</i> Module. <i>OARS (Open ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections and Summaries)</i></p> <p><i>OARS</i> can be used immediately to repair a relationship usually before any other practice element. For example, the practitioner reflects the family’s thoughts and feelings about the ruptured relationship.</p> <p><i>Checking for Understanding</i></p> <p>This practice can be used to check understanding regarding the relationship rupture.</p> <p><i>Seeking Feedback</i></p> <p>This practice can be used after there has been some attempts to repair the relationship, to get the family’s feedback about how to improve the way the relationship functions to avoid future ruptures.</p> <p><i>Strengths-Based Practice</i></p> <p>This practice can be used to call on strengths when there is a risk that the relationship rupture has led to a sense of hopelessness. For example, a family may disengage with the practitioner and subsequently feel that the agreed goals are too difficult to achieve.</p>



Outcomes


Practice level outcomes

- Families are clear about their role and the role of the practitioner in their working relationship.
- Families are willing to engage in a constructive working relationship with the practitioner.
- Families feel that practitioners are working alongside them rather than directing the work.
- Families feel like they are valued, expert partners in the relationship and their strengths and ideas are acknowledged and leveraged.
- Families have an increased sense of personal agency and self-efficacy.
- Families have increased confidence to identify, create and implement effective solutions to resolve challenges.
- Practitioners have increased ability to collaboratively identify, create and implement effective solutions to resolve challenges that the family is experiencing.

Practice Points

- To be effective, both practitioner and family must build trust and have belief in the other person. Practitioners need to lead by example and believe that every family has the capacity to be a meaningful participant in a partnership. If the family does not feel that the practitioner is genuinely interested in them and understands their views and circumstances, they are less likely to invest in the relationship and less inclined to collaborate in finding ways to address their challenges.
- In sharing their own knowledge and expertise, practitioners need to regularly assess engagement and be careful not to overload the family. Along with checking in with them regularly, practitioners make sure families are permitted to pause or stop if they are feeling overloaded or when they have enough information.
- Families benefit from the opportunity to reflect upon what they have achieved and what it means for them. This is part of the process of moving forward. Constructing a positive narrative about the family and their capabilities gives them a new perspective on what they may be able to achieve in the future.
- Engaging with services can be intrusive and at times difficult for families. Think of ways to make things more positive as this will help with developing a partnership that families want to invest in.
- When working with families who may have current/previous contact with statutory services, it is important to consider the degree to which the family is mandated to participate. Even if the family has theoretically signed up to the service voluntarily, it can often feel like they have little choice.
- Despite a practitioner's best efforts to use the skills described in this practice guide, and those in the *Building Engagement module*, it is important to consider that families still may not feel truly autonomous in the *collaborative partnership*. The *collaborative partnership* may be tested due to the unavoidable challenges of the child protection system. With this in view, the practitioner must empathise with the family.
- Even if all efforts to collaborate with the family fail, this effort will help increase trust in services in future. It is important that practitioners are persistent in their efforts to form a *collaborative*





partnership with families despite potential negative family responses to the practitioner's genuine offer to collaborate.

Reflective questions for practitioners

- Consider a family you have been working with, one that you feel has been a positive relationship.
- What has worked well?
- Do you think working collaboratively has supported this relationship?
- Do you feel the family are 'invested' in this relationship, and are working towards mutually agreed goals?
- Can the success of this relationship be replicated with other families? If not, what are the barriers to building a collaborative partnership?



Notes





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