

COLLABORATIVE CASE CONSULTATION TOOLS

Objective:

To introduce staff to the potential opportunities and challenges of working collaboratively on behalf of families' well-being

Intended Use:

These simulations and case studies can be used to foster discussion and practice skills needed to build cross-agency collaborations.

Audience:

- Staff members of diverse agencies who are new to collaborative case consultation

Outcome:

- Staff members increase awareness of the diverse partners who can support their efforts on behalf of families.
- Staff members are able to leverage a broader range of resources on behalf of families.

Context:

In vulnerable communities, it is common for families to have diverse needs that cannot be met by a single organization. Often, families have relationships with many organizations who do not communicate with one another or coordinate efforts. Cross agency consultation provides an opportunity to support families in a more holistic way, reducing duplication of effort and better leveraging the range of available resources.

The following simulation and case studies have been structured to help staff understand some of the opportunities and challenges faced by organizations seeking to partner to support families in their programs. The first simulation has been specifically designed to include non-traditional social service partners, such as neighborhood association leaders and housing personnel. The case studies have been written to suggest opportunities to partner with groups like law enforcement and community development organizations to devise solutions to issues identified by families. The goal of these exercises is to help participants learn to understand and appreciate the distinctive resources that diverse partners can each bring to solving a family situation.

The Simulation Process

Simulations such as the ones that follow are generally best utilized during staff development or extended supervisory sessions. Be prepared with copies of the description of the roles to be handed out to participants. For the simulation to be effective, participants should not know one another's roles.

It's not unusual for a simulation to get off to a slow start. Give participants time to "own" their roles. When debriefing, focus on some of the issues related to having diverse agencies in the room. Which partners were easy to work with? Which were more difficult? Why? Use these debriefings to identify areas requiring further staff development or discussion.

The Case Study Process

The four case studies included here have been adapted from actual situations that emerged in the Head Start organizations who participated in the Free To Grow national demonstration. It's often helpful to have staff members work in pairs or small groups to discuss each case study, with reporting back to a larger group. This process allows for a greater number of persons to provide input, and to express differing views about how the situation might best be handled. Urge staff to be specific about how diverse partners might be able to assist in resolving identified issues, paying particular attention to helping participants think beyond the "usual suspects" to identify partners capable of instituting changes that could help not only individual families, but the larger community of families as well.

COLLABORATIVE CASE CONSULTATION SIMULATION

The players in the situation

Family members & Friends (not present for the case consultation)

Mother – Mary, age 22
Child in HS – Jadah, age 4
Grandmother – Phyllis, age 37
Neighbor across the street – Barney, age unknown

Staff and Partners

Family Advocate – Clair
HS Supervisor – Reuben
HS Teacher – Jean
MH Consultant – Beatrice
Family Resource Center Manager – Jeanine
Apartment Manager – Patrice
Neighborhood Association President – Karen

Description of the situation

After working with a family for three months, the HS Advocate Clair has become frustrated that the family has done nothing from their Family Partnership Agreement. The goals of the FPA included:

- Improve her reading – Mary
- Getting a GED – Mary
- Finding reliable transportation to get around – Mary and Phyllis
- Making new friends – everyone
- Reducing smoking – both Mary and Phyllis
- Getting apartment cleaned up and free of mice
- Control Jadah’s temper tantrums

Every time the Advocate makes a home visit, there is some “crisis” that needs to be taken care of, so the Advocate never can get to the FPA goals. They had their electricity shut off; the child support checks have not been sent, so had to go to food and clothing banks; Phyllis’ sister passed away and they all had to go to the funeral across the state; Jadah has been sick during this long, cold winter. Twice the Advocate came for a visit and no one was home. Phyllis has been sick for a while, with severe coughing and difficult breathing. Clair is fairly new as a Family Advocate, and she is not sure what to do, other than to ask her supervisor to talk it over.

The Supervisor, Reuben, decided to use this situation as an opportunity to have a collaborative case conference, since there are so many issues and everyone needs to be in on the discussion. He asked Clair to prepare for a Case Consultation. Reuben will help Clair prepare, and he will facilitate the consultation.

Clair

You are the Family Advocate, and you have been working with this family for three months. You get along well with Mary, and you found out that both of you attended the same elementary school across town, giving you an immediate relationship with her. You realized that too often you and Mary get caught up in talking about the school and teachers you both had while attending, even

though you were 6 years ahead of Mary. You have been very helpful to Mary and Phyllis when all the crises pop up, including taking them to several agencies for help and donations.

You are concerned that Jadah has been sick a lot, but the teacher hasn't said anything about it, so maybe it's not so bad. Phyllis tells you that winter colds are something in the family for generations. You've suggested taking Jadah to the doctor, but they have not followed up on your recommendation. You know they have really made no progress on the goals in the Family Partnership Agreement. You know they have an old car that needs repairs, but you forget to mention that until very late in the consultation.

It is a problem, though, when you go out for a home visit and they are not at home. You can't help, and it takes you 40 minutes round trip, time you don't really have to waste. You've tried calling ahead, and even when they say they'll be there, they are getting worse at not being home. You are even suspecting they may be home, but are not answering the door. You're stuck, not knowing what to do. You've prepared your presentation to the group, and you will present that information and what you'd like from the consultation.

Reuben

You are Clair's supervisor, and you have been pleased with her work since she was first hired. You've been a supervisor for three years, after being a HS teacher for a year. You've not gone out on too many home visits, and never with Clair to this family. You knew there were some missed sessions, but that information hadn't really sunk in, especially knowing about the death in the family recently. When Clair came to you about everything, you were surprised, yet saw this as an opportunity to use the agency's new collaborative case conferencing approach. You were in on the planning of this strategy, so you know a great deal about how to make it work.

However, you also know that you sort of missed the boat, by not attending to what Clair was telling you, and what she was not telling you. You want to be very helpful when the group meets, so you dominate much of the conversation, often giving members of the group their tasks to help the family. You don't see that as dominating, just being helpful and really focused to get a plan in place.

Jean

You have Jadah in the classroom, and you see Mary frequently. They live close enough to walk to the center. Mary is always talking about how tough it is to get around, to have enough money, to get more schooling for her GED. You've told her about the GED class in the evening here, but she has not wanted to start the classes while all this other stuff is going on. Just recently, you've wondered if Mary can read well enough to get her GED. When you did your home visit at the first of the year, you thought this might be a solid family, but you now see the tough conditions in their lives.

Jadah is a hard child sometimes. She can be very loving and fun to be with, and she can also be quite oppositional and even defiant. She doesn't sit still for long periods, and you have referred her for some observation and testing by the MH consultant.

Beatrice

You are the HS Mental Health consultant and have been for several years. You do child observations in the classroom, assessments of children, and consult with staff and parents about behaviors and behavior change. Recently, you have begun doing work directly with the parents, as a member of the case consultation team. You have seen Jadah in the classroom, and you, too, have raised concerns about her physical well-being and her oppositional behavior. You met with Mary one time, and you are quite glad this consultation is being done today. You believe there are some significant problems that are not being addressed, wondering about mild depression and her lack of bonding with Jadah.

Jeanine

You are the Family Service Center Manager, located across the street from the elementary school. This is a city-funded program for families in the neighborhood. Over the years, funding has been reduced, so the center is only open between 2:30-6:00 pm. As a result, the programming is mostly for elementary children after school. Your charter includes family services, but all the services once co-located there have pulled out and are now back in the agency offices.

You have been trying to develop informal supports for the families in the neighborhood. You started a Time Dollar reciprocity program a year ago, and it is still operating, though with fewer members than you'd like. Even so, there are some members who might be of some help in this family, if Mary would become a member herself. You know Mary, and had even tried to recruit her once, to no avail. When Barney's name is mentioned, you let everyone know that he is a Time Dollar member.

Patrice

As the apartment manager, you've been asked to join this consultation to help with some of the housing concerns with this and other families. You are new to this complex, and frankly appalled at the nasty conditions in many of the apartments. You did an inspection of all apartments a month ago, and Mary's was one of the worst—mouse tracks all over, mold, chipped paint, and clutter all over. Since there were other complex issues in progress, you've not been able to get back to Mary to deal with the mice and the paint.

Your maintenance budget is paltry, and you have to be very careful to not overspend. This means you are already finding yourself having to prioritize who gets what help. The owners are in another state, and you feel they are only concerned about profit.

Karen

You are the President of the local Neighborhood Association, and have been a member of the case consultation team since the beginning. Your association is made up of both homeowners and tenants, since you know that they both are important to the neighborhood. Recently, the association has been putting more attention to the deteriorating apartment buildings in the area, since you are concerned both for family safety and health, as well as property values. The building Mary lives in isn't the worst, but it is bad from your perspective. Your association has pretty good relationships with the city officials, but the recent cutbacks in staff due to budget reductions has hurt their ability to actually get out and do their job on the streets. You see this situation with Mary and her family as only a drop in the bucket, and your attention is focused on getting the entire complex up to standards. Barney is a member of the association.

Questions for large group discussion

1. How clear and complete was the presentation from "Clair"?
2. What information came out later in the consultation that was not presented at the beginning?
3. How would knowing the information earlier impact the discussion?
4. Were Clair and Reuben prepared with the right partners at the table?
5. How would you assess Reuben's interaction with Clair to assist in her (attitude, skills, and knowledge) learning?
6. How did the consultation support "learning" among the partners?
7. How did the simulation strengthen the partnerships?
8. How did the simulation model the learning environment principles?

CASE CONSULTATION

Case Study 1

A 22-year old mother and 23-year old father have one son (4-years old) who just started in Head Start. The couple also has an 18-month old daughter. According to Head Start staff, the older child has missed multiple days of school because of colds and ear infections. The father has a history of alcohol abuse and is unemployed. The mother works occasionally helping a cousin with housecleaning jobs. The family lives in a neighborhood where unemployment rates are high as are crime rates. There is a police presence in the neighborhood, but attitudes about the police by community members are very negative.

The newly hired Family Advocate has had some difficulty making contact with the family to complete a family assessment – the family often does not answer the phone or is not at home during attempted home visits. Last week the advocate attempted a visit during the mid-morning and found the mother was in bed (the father did not seem to be at home). When the mother opened the door, the advocate thought she could smell marijuana and could hear the 18-month old crying in the background. The mother would not let the advocate in because it was “too messy.”

The advocate brings up the issue with her supervisor as she is very concerned for the health and safety of the children. The advocate is also frustrated with the problems in completing a family assessment.

Discussion questions:

1. What are the major issues present in this scenario?
2. What are some of the immediate steps the advocate needs to take?
3. What can the advocate do to successfully get into the home and complete a family assessment?
4. What can the supervisor do to help the advocate get into the home?
5. Because the advocate is new to the job, what can the supervisor do to ensure that this seemingly very sensitive case is handled properly?
6. Who are some of the potential partners that could help this family?
7. What roles will those partners play?
8. What could be done to help improve the relationship between the police and the community members?

CASE CONSULTATION

Case Study 2

During a Family Advocate's recent visit to the Head Start agency, the mother reported hearing gunshots relatively close to her home during the evening hours. She does not know exactly where they came from and is not aware of who might be responsible. She also reported to the advocate that she has noticed increasing numbers of people loitering on the corners. She suspects that there is drug dealing occurring at these locations. The mother expressed to the advocate that she is very concerned about the safety of her children as well as her's and her husband's.

When asked if she has talked to anyone else about these concerns and fears, she says that she has only talked to one other person about them – her next-door neighbor. The neighbor is also concerned that the neighborhood is becoming increasingly unsafe and violent. However, neither of them knows what to do.

The advocate reports on the woman's concerns to her supervisor. In response to the report, the supervisor tells the advocate she'll get back to her about it. Right now, everyone in management is preparing for the PRISM review coming up in two days. The advocate is not sure how to proceed – *either* to not pursue the issue until the review is over *or* move ahead in dealing with the woman's concerns some other way with some of their partners.

This scenario is designed to address internal relationships and workloads, as well as how key partners are in building the array of supports for families. Read the scenario, then begin your discussion by responding to each of the questions below, one at a time.

Discussion questions:

1. What happened between the advocate and the supervisor, and what contextual factors influenced that interaction?
2. How could the Advocate have presented the case more convincingly to the supervisor?
3. What should the supervisor have done at that moment?
4. What else needs to be known in order to better understand the nature of the problem and how that problem manifests itself in the community?
5. If the Advocate still believes that there are issues that need to be addressed and her supervisor is continuing to offer no assistance, who else can the Advocate talk to?
6. Who are the partners who can assist in this situation?
7. What role is there for partners in helping the Advocate directly? Indirectly?
8. What could the partners do to engage the supervisor, even with the PRISM starting?
9. Who might those partners be?

CASE CONSULTATION

Case Study 3

After a couple months following the new Head Start school year, a team of four Family Advocates have all been talking about not being able to get anything done with families in the “Bottoms” neighborhood. They believe that the main problem is that there are no resources in the neighborhood—there is no grocery store, no transportation, no agencies, and the list goes on.

The team of Family Advocates reports that the residents talk often about the “outsiders” who come in to their community and say they are going to help, but leave having done nothing or creating something that doesn’t last. Often, this is also without the help of the community.

Meanwhile, the police ignore the area with a “what happens, happens” attitude, even though they are aware of the serious problems with drug use and crime in the neighborhood. All 57 families are poor, but most people know each other and even try to help one another with their limited means.

For the first time, there are seven families living in the “Bottoms” who have children in Head Start. These seven families all report that they are too scared to let their children outside their homes. The team of Family Workers asks for this issue to be addressed at the next Team Meeting with their supervisor.

As a group of Family Workers and their supervisor, discuss the questions below with a goal of finding the help needed to provide support and services to the HS families, as well as the other residents in the Bottoms.

Discussion questions:

1. What are the family and community risk and protective factors in the “Bottoms”?
2. What are the community building issues that must change in order to help the families?
3. Who are the *formal* partners needed to provide integrated family and community building?
4. Who are the *informal* partners needed to provide integrated family and community building?
5. What roles could those potential partners play in this situation?
6. How are potential partners approached and who does this?
7. What role does the supervisor play in bringing all the different concerns from the four Family Workers to the table?
8. What can the supervisor do to ensure that the Family Workers do not get overly frustrated with the situation?

CASE CONSULTATION

Case Study 4

The family advocate and her supervisor are making a home visit to a Head-Start family, whose advocate had quit a couple weeks ago. This is her first year as an advocate and she is still a little timid about her job. She has lived in the neighborhood surrounding the HS center and knows a number of the residents. The supervisor is accompanying the advocate, in order to observe and assess further training needs. The advocate is bi-lingual (English and Spanish) and has been assigned to this family who are mostly monolingual Spanish. The supervisor has only rudimentary Spanish speaking skills and knows it'll be tough for her to understand everything.

The mother is unemployed, and her husband is a day laborer in the construction business. He is sometimes home and sometimes away on jobs for a while. He is out of town at the time of this visit, leaving the family without transportation.

The appointment is scheduled at noon. As the advocate and supervisor enter the apartment, they notice that the three small children – twins age 2, and infant 6 months old – are wearing winter coats inside the house, that the apartment is cold, and the heating unit is covered with a piece of fabric and is being used as a table with some religious statues.

As they start talking, the advocate explains that they came to get to know each other and to talk about how their plan is going. The mother shares that she is happy for her child, and she couldn't wait for her oldest child to get into HS, so she would have only three small children to take care of all day.

During the conversation, the advocate notices that she is becoming very cold and asks the reason why the heater is not turned on, since the weather outside is below 40 degrees. The mother shared that the unit is not working and they have been living like this for the last 2 years. Also, the heater is the only place in the apartment where she can put her religious statues. At this point, the advocate asks the woman if they have approached the landlord to have the heater fixed and her response was that she could not do that because they do not have papers. They are afraid that they can be deported to Honduras and they would rather live like this than the way it used to be back in their native country. They are used to the cold she says.

The advocate explains to the family that although they do not have papers, they still have rights and that HS could help them correct the problem without jeopardizing their staying in this country. At this point in the conversation, the supervisor started to notice some hesitation from the advocate while doing the translation. When questioned by her supervisor about what is going on, the advocate indicates that she is not feeling comfortable with the situation, first because she feels it is not their role to talk about heating system and second that her concern is the legal status of this family. As a resident, she knows how scared the people are who are here without papers.

Discussion and problem solving

As a group, discuss and respond to the questions below.

1. What are the problems this family is facing?
2. What are likely additional problems that were not discussed?
3. What additional questions would you ask of the family?
4. What additional observations would you make of the family, home and neighborhood?
5. As a Family Advocate, what would you do in this situation, while still in the apartment?

6. As a Supervisor, what would you do in this situation, while still in the apartment (remembering your role in this visit was to observe the advocate to determine additional training needs)?
7. Once back at the center, what would be the next steps in addressing the factors that were observed and reported? Particularly, what additional partners would need to be engaged for what purpose?
8. What lessons have been learned from this scenario?