SEPARATION, PLACEMENT AND REUNIFICATION IN FAMILY-CENTERED CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

COMPETENCIES

The "Universe of Competencies" is Ohio's comprehensive listing of all the knowledge and skills required for child welfare staff to do their jobs. This "Universe" is the essential driving force behind the OCWTP's comprehensive, competency-based in-service training (CCBIT) system.

"What knowledge and skills do I need to proficiently perform my job?" and "In which of these do I need further development?"

At this time, you are not expected to have all the knowledge and skills needed to be "competent" in your work with children in placement and their families. You are beginning the journey and will continue to build your level of learning in the foundational Caseworker Core series. You will learn about working with children in substitute care, their families, and their caregivers in Caseworker Core Module VIII, "Separation, Placement, and Reunification in Family-Centered Child Protective Services." The following is to help you get ready by identifying what you will eventually know, understand, apply, and accomplish on the job.

Skill Set #1: Ability to recognize children and families suffering from separation-induced trauma and stress

1. Knows circumstances of placement that typically create stress and crisis for children and their families

2. Knows typical behavioral indicators of stress and crisis in children of different ages, and in family members of placed children

3. Understands the caseworker's responsibility to minimize the trauma experienced by children and their families during placement

4. Understands the potential serious negative impact of separation, out-of-home placement and impermanence on attachment, child development and family emotional stability

5. Understands how children's developmental level affects their level of stress, their ability to cope, their perception of the experience, and their susceptibility to crisis
6. Understands how traumatic effects of separation are exhibited emotionally and behaviorally, including anxiety, depression, regression, withdrawal and oppositional or destructive behavior

7. Knows strategies to reduce stress and strengthen coping capacity in children of different ages and developmental levels

8. Can identify when children or family members are in crisis, and can determine when separation trauma is a significant contributor

**Skill Set #2: Ability to plan and implement placements that reduce stress, prevent trauma, and promote placement stability and permanence for children**

1. Knows agency and community factors that create pressure to place children in substitute care, even when there is no imminent risk of serious harm

2. Knows benefits of relative placements in sustaining involvement of family members with children in care

3. Knows rationale for placing siblings together and the potential traumatic impacts of separating them

4. Knows the value of foster and kinship caregivers as potential permanent placement resources for children in their care

5. Knows factors to be assessed when considering relative homes as placement resources for children

6. Knows how to apply principles of family-centered, neighborhood-based placement to maintain children’s connections to their neighborhoods, schools, cultures and communities

7. Knows factors to be considered when identifying the most appropriate placement resource for children

8. Knows the scope and type of information about the child and the family situation needed by caregivers to meet the needs of children in care

9. Understands how children of different ages experience significant changes in home environment and caregivers, and the implications for placement planning

10. Understands the concept of transitioning and the importance of structuring and staging placement activities to prevent psychological crisis
11. Understands the value of involving parents and other family members in all stages of the placement process, including identifying placement resources, preparing children and accompanying children on pre-placement visits.

12. Understands the necessity of immediate and frequent post-placement contact between children and their families to prevent immediate and long-term separation trauma.

14. Knows strategies to work with parents to identify potential placement resources within the extended family network and neighborhood.

15. Knows necessary steps to fully prepare children, their families and caregivers for placement.

16. Knows how to use crisis intervention methods to reduce stress, strengthen coping ability and help children and their families accurately interpret the experience.

17. Knows strategies to engage and support kinship and foster caregivers to work collaboratively with family members and agency staff to minimize trauma to children.

18. Knows how agency barriers can interfere with effective child placement casework, and knows strategies to address these barriers.

21. Can identify potential caregivers within the child's own extended family, neighborhood and community.

22. Can design an individualized placement strategy that considers children's developmental needs, need for immediate protection, level of stress, the family's strengths and capacities and the availability of appropriate caregivers.

23. Can implement emergency out-of-home placements in a manner that minimizes trauma to the child and family.

24. Can fully prepare family members to participate constructively in placement activities.

25. Can fully prepare caregivers to receive and support children in placement.

26. Can modify the type, sequence, pace and duration of pre-placement activities, and can strengthen supportive interventions, in response to children's emotional distress.
27. Can empower families and sustain their emotional involvement with their children during all phases of the placement

28. Can encourage and help children express their needs and distress, and can elicit, clarify and help them manage their feelings

**Skill Set #3: Ability to engage and support mothers, fathers, and family members to keep them involved with their children in placement**

1. Aware of the nature and intensity of maltreated children’s attachments to their primary caregivers

2. Aware of benefits of consistent positive attachments on children's development and mental health, and the importance of sustaining attachments while children are in substitute placement

3. Aware of the caseworker's responsibility to help family members remain invested in and involved with their children in placement

4. Understands how the caseworker's attitude toward parental involvement can affect a family's willingness to collaborate in placement planning

5. Understands how insufficient pre-placement preparation can increase family members' resistance to the placement plan

6. Understands how placement-induced separation trauma and grief are manifested in angry, hostile, belligerent or withdrawn behaviors in family members

7. Understands how placement can negatively impact family members' confidence, self-esteem and commitment to remain involved with their children in care

8. Knows strategies to involve parents in their children's activities, including school activities and conferences, birthday celebrations, medical or counseling appointments; and to participate in case planning and critical decisions about their children's well-being and future

9. Knows strategies to strengthen and sustain children’s attachments to important family members while they are in placement

12. Can plan, promote and support regular and frequent visitation between children in care and family members
Skill Set #4: Ability to collaborate with and support foster and relative caregivers to strengthen and sustain placements and meet the needs of children in care

1. Knows the importance of supportive services to strengthen and sustain placements

2. Knows the importance of including foster and kinship caregivers as collaborating members of the case planning and delivery team

3. Knows roles and responsibilities of caregivers in assessing children’s needs, establishing service priorities, implementing case plan activities and participating in staffing

9. Knows how to access agency and community programs and services to support caregiving families

12. Can assist foster and relative caregivers to manage conflicting feelings about supporting reunification while agreeing to adopt or assume legal guardianship

Skill Set #5: Ability to assess family strengths and needs, develop case plans, and implement case activities that promote reunification and provide post-reunification services to children and their families

1. Aware of the importance of careful reunification planning, preparation, and ongoing supportive services in preventing recidivism

2. Recognizes worker’s pivotal role in helping families successfully complete case plan objectives toward reunification

3. Aware of the importance of teamwork and collaboration among community resources in achieving successful reunification

4. Knows characteristics and elements of a successful case plan with reunification as the goal

6. Knows psychological, environmental and social barriers to reunification of children with their families and the importance of helping family members overcome them

7. Knows factors that must be assessed to determine each family member’s readiness for reunification, and the factors associated with low likelihood of successful reunification

8. Understands typical emotional reactions of mothers and fathers whose children have been placed and how these impact parents’ behavior and willingness to reunite with their children
9. Understands how family visits and other contacts with children in care can result in emotional distress and trauma for family members

10. Understands the value of a strengths-based approach and developmental model of intervention in promoting successful reunification

11. Understands why some parents may choose not to be reunited with their children, and how they can be engaged to develop alternative permanent plans

12. Knows necessary steps to prepare families for the stresses and challenges they may face during reunification activities

13. Knows how to help families identify and access services and build support systems within their extended families and communities to help prepare them for reunification, maintain family stability after children are returned and to prevent recidivism

14. Can keep families engaged and emotionally invested with their children throughout the reunification process, and after children are returned home

15. Can provide feedback to families on the reunification process, help them predict areas of stress or conflict and help design strategies to prevent or overcome these

Skill Set #6: Ability to use supplemental case planning to develop alternative permanent homes for children who cannot be reunified with their families

1. Knows the importance of achieving timely permanence for all children served by child welfare agencies

2. Knows the range of permanency options available to children who cannot be reunited with their families and knows criteria to select the most appropriate permanent placement for a child in care

3. Knows the importance of maintaining environmental, social, cultural, and psychological stability and continuity for children in care, and of choosing permanent placements that minimize further change and loss

4. Knows the value of seeking recommendations from family members of potential permanent placements for their children and involving them in developing a permanency plan
5. Knows risks and disadvantages of Planned Permanency Living Arrangements (PPLA) as a permanent placement option for children in care

6. Understands the emotional and practical dilemmas faced by relative and foster caregivers in working toward reunification when they have committed to providing a permanent home for a child

7. Knows how to engage families to consider permanency options for their children early in the service delivery process without negating either the importance of, or the agency's willingness to promote reunification