Principles
in Practice

The
Family Support
Approach to
Family Work

NSW Family Services Inc

Principles in Practice

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Introduction

What is family support? For well over twenty years in New South Wales, and across Australia, numerous projects have worked with families under the banner of family support. Historically family support was often used to describe a model of service delivery where family workers provided a cluster of activities, often including case management, parent education, group programs and practical assistance with centre based and home visiting components. More recently in New South Wales there have been questions about whether 'family support' was the most helpful way to describe the work of projects that shared membership of the then Family Support Services Association of NSW. Concerns were expressed that a focus on 'support' promoted an outmoded view of services that encouraged dependence rather than promoting change and family autonomy. A name change several years ago to NSW Family Services Inc was intended to encourage a focus on the professionalism of agencies who shared a family-focused approach to intervention.

Seven years ago the Family Support Services Association of NSW published a document called *Standards in Family Support*. It was intended to promote the professionalism of member services, by setting a standard for service operation and delivery. The standards drew extensively on Guidelines for Family Support Practice, published by the then Family Resource Coalition of America, now Family Support America. The document was a hugely valuable resource, describing in detail the way services under the family support banner could work with families in professional and effective ways. The adoption of six principles of family support provided a core of shared belief about how to work with families in positive ways.

The 1998 *Standards in Family Support* promoted the credibility of family support. They promoted the idea that services could both 'start where the family was at' addressing a range of presenting issues and juggling complex agendas which included recognition of child protection responsibilities, working in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the need for financial and ethical accountability. The standards challenged services to demonstrate professionalism without compromising their family friendly approach. By providing standards from within the sector the claim was made that family support services should be seen on the same level as Supported Accommodation and Assistance Programmes (SAAP) and Out-of-Home Care Programmes, both of which had standards documents.

In 2005 member services of NSW Family Services Inc project greater confidence about their ways of working with families than ever before. New funding opportunities through Federal and State initiatives have expanded the work of many services. Core activities such as home visiting and case management have been supported by research and promoted by advocates from a range of sectors. The traditional family support approaches of 'starting where the family is at' and 'working on family goals' are now reflected in popular therapeutic models such as solution-focused work, and have increasing support in research.

In 2005 much has been achieved in establishing the credibility of NSW Family Services Inc member agencies. The focus on this new document is not on compliance, but on what is unique about the 'family support' way of working with families. At the heart is a shared vision drawn from the principles which remain just as relevant as they were in 1998, and which have since been extended with three additional principles which make clear statements about family violence, permanency planning and family diversity.

The aim of this new document, *Principles in Practice,* is to promote the vision of working with families contained in the principles. The intention is to go beyond a focus on compliance, and to challenge services to question every day and every way whether the way they work is consistent with the vision the principles promote. The expression 'family support' has been retained, no longer in reference to a program model, but as an expression of a tradition of working with families which now continues in a new millennium. The term family work is now used to refer to the program model which integrates a range of components including home based services, counselling, parenting assistance, referral, advocacy and group work. This also reflects partnership with a range of countries overseas in both developed and developing countries who have articulated their vision of working with families with similar principles under the same 'family support' heading.

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- *Getting Started: Orientation Kit for Family Workers* (NSW Family Services Inc)
- *Early Intervention Principles* (NSW Family Services Inc)
- *Standards for SAAP Services* (NSW Department of Community Services)
- *Standards in Out of Home Care* (NSW Children's Guardian)
- *Women and Domestic Violence: Standards for Counselling Practice* by Jan Seeley and Catherine Plunkett and published by the Salvation Army Crisis Service, Victoria.

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Using this document

Principles in Practice: The Family Support Approach to Family Work describes the work practice that reflects the nine principles endorsed by members of NSW Family Services Inc.

This document was developed in 2005 to sit beside the Generic Standards produced by the NSW Department of Community Services. These Generic Standards were developed in consultation with representatives of non-Government Peak organisations and pilots involved non-Government services. They provide a core set of standards that can be applied to a range of human service organisations that receive funding from the Department. They are intended to support continuous quality improvement across the non-Government sector.

Principles in Practice complements the Generic Standards. While the Generic Standards provide a framework for compliance and accountability, *Principles in Practice* aims to promote approaches to practice that are consistent with the Generic Standards, but are more specific, drawing on several decades of experience in the family support approach to delivering services to families. *Principles in Practice* reminds practitioners that the way they work at all levels of the organisation can have profound implications for the experience of the families using their services.

The Generic Standards are intended to simplify compliance obligations for organisations receiving funding from the NSW Department of Community Services. *Principles in Practice* in its current form, is not intended to be a compliance framework. Instead, its role is to encourage reflection about practice, and to support practitioners in their attempts to implement family-centred practice. Trivette and Dunst[1] have demonstrated that positive family-centred practices, as reflected in the principles, directly and indirectly influence the development and expression of parenting abilities and functioning. How families experience services, not just the components that are delivered, can have a significant impact on the outcome for family members.

For each of the nine principles a series of practices is outlined, with accompanying practice examples. Not all practice examples will be relevant to all projects, depending on funding criteria and available resources, but they provide illustrations that will enable practitioners to reflect on the extent to which they demonstrate the practices in their work, and to identify strategies for enhancing practice in practical ways.

Practitioners may find it useful to use *Principles in Practice*:

- As part of the orientation of new staff, students and board/committee members.
- To inform evaluation processes.
- To inform discussions with families e.g. exit interviews.
- During staff or team meetings, working through several of the practice statements at a time.

It will be common for practitioners to find variations in their consistency in applying the principles, and different practitioners may have different experiences. Sometimes it may be helpful to assess the practices and practice examples against a scale like the one below, although in many contexts there will be no need to record formal ratings.

Never	Some of the time	About half the time	Most of the time	All the time
1	2	3	4	5

Practitioners should feel free to use the document in any way which they find enhances practice. As long as practitioners experience the application of *Principles in Practice* as consistent with the principles themselves, they can be assured that their practice, and the families and communities with whom they work will benefit.

1 Trivette, C. and Dunst, C. *Evaluating Family-Based Practices: Parenting Experiences Scale in Young Exceptional Children*, 7, (3) 2004

Statement of Premises

1. **Assuring the well being of families is a hall mark of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.**

Families have multiple forms, not necessarily biologically based. All families, regardless of race, composition, ethnic background or economic status, need and deserve a support system. Support can be provided through informal networks as well as services and programs. Family services should be accessible and available on a voluntary basis to all.

2. **Family well being is linked to adequate economic and social supports.**

The level of support needed will vary from family to family in response to their unique needs and circumstances. Poverty, social isolation, family background, illness and disability may make some families more vulnerable to stress. Services that support families should take need into account when making decisions about priority of resource allocation.

3. **Families exist as part of an ecological system.**

An ecological approach recognises that child and family development is embedded within broader aspects of society. This includes local communities with cultural, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics as well as the values and policies of the larger society. This perspective assumes that families are influenced by interactions with people, programs and agencies as well as by values and policies. These interactions may help or hinder families' ability to promote their members' growth and development. Strategies to support families must take into account the context in which families operate.

4. **Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of all members of the family.**

Family services should promote the development of competencies and capacities that enable families and their members to have control over important aspects of their lives and to relate more effectively. By building on strengths, rather than treating deficits, projects assist families to deal with difficult life circumstances as well as to achieve their goals.

5. **The power of families to take action to improve the well being of their members is increased when they have access to information and resources.**

Family services should recognise that families are best able to exercise choices in enhancing their family environment when they have access to information and high quality services. Meaningful participation in projects and experiences in influencing policies can strengthen existing capabilities and promote the development of new competencies in families, including the ability to advocate on their own behalf.

Definitions of terms used in this document

Some terms commonly used in family services can have a range of meanings. This glossary provides definitions for key terms used in the context of this document.

Activity

A specific component of a family service such as a playgroup, counselling session or an information stall.

Family Service 'Project'

An organisation or part of an organisation that offers family services. A Family Service has an individual identity and includes management and administration functions that relate to its work. A Family Service may be an autonomous organisation or part of an organisation where Family Services are offered as part of a wider range of service models.

Family Work

The range of activities undertaken with families by practitioners in a family-focused manner.

Statement of Purpose

The statement that defines the operation of the project. May also be called a mission statement.

Principles of Family Support

The nine principles which underpin this document.

Practitioners

Staff in Family Services who have a designated role to:

a.   be an advocate providing practical as well as emotional support and

b.   offer specialised knowledge and skills concerning family and child issues and

c.   facilitate families' ongoing access to information and resources and

d.   enable parents to develop the skills they need in order to be advocates for themselves and their children and

e.   provide avenues for families to contribute to the life and development of their community.

Project Participant 'Participant'

An individual who is participating in activities provided by the project.

Staff

All personnel, employed and volunteer who have contact with families.

Principle One

Staff and families work together in relationships based on trust and respect.

Relationship building is a dynamic and on-going process that begins with the family's first encounter with the project and with a staff member's first day on the job. Building and maintaining relationships based on equality and respect takes time and effort. It is a process of continually seeking to understand assumptions and to share meanings and expectations. It requires a mutual recognition of the role each partner plays and a recognition that these roles change over time.

Practice 1.1 – Projects create a family friendly environment where stigmatising experiences are avoided.

Practice examples:

1.1.1 The project provides a welcoming environment.

■ Each person arriving at or contacting the centre is greeted warmly.

■ People answering the phone have necessary information and skills to deal with inquiries from the public with efficiency, courtesy and warmth.

■ Recorded messages for callers give clear details of times of operation and the time frame for returning calls.

■ Messages left for staff are addressed promptly.

■ The premises can be accessed by people with limited mobility, by people using wheelchairs or with prams or strollers.

■ The waiting area is provided with comfortable seating, refreshments and play space and equipment for children.

■ The centre is decorated in a way that includes all potential participants e.g. Visual images include both men and women in a range of family structures, different cultures and abilities, using different languages.

Further considerations: The environment of every project sends a message to families from the moment they make their first contact. An inviting, casual and relaxed (rather than corporate or institutional) atmosphere is important, but this will be achieved in different ways according to the setting of the project. It must reflect the community context in which is situated. Respect for families is conveyed when it is obvious that care has gone into making the surroundings attractive and welcoming.

Practice examples:

1.1.2 Staff are either representative of the community being serviced by the program or have knowledge which enables them to validate the experiences of families living in the local community.

- Staff are recruited representing a cross-section of the local community population e.g. women and men, specific cultural and language groups.
- Attitudes of all potential staff members are assessed at interview to ensure they are open to learning about other cultures and are respectful of differences.
- Training opportunities are provided to all staff on openness to cultural and other differences.
- Mechanisms are in place for project participants to take part in staff recruitment and selection.

Further considerations: Families are comfortable walking into a project when they are met by staff members with whom they can identify. Though it is not necessary or possible that all potential participants have someone who shares their culture or language on staff, all staff must be sensitive to the culture, values, practices, history and language of the families who participate. Including people from different backgrounds on staff indicates an openness to diversity. This can make it easier for potential participants to trust and relate to staff.

Practice examples:

1.1.3 The project takes families' schedules, time commitments and other needs into account in organised activities.

- Provision is made for staff to work flexible hours, including out of normal business hours.
- Families are consulted about ways in which activities can be made accessible.
- Families are offered choices regarding the locations of service delivery e.g. home visiting, centre based, public spaces.
- Time-saving services are provided to enhance families' access to programs e.g. child care, transport and/or meals provided for activities.

Further considerations: Central to building relationships of respect is recognising family constraints and conveying the message that family needs are important.

Practice 1.2 – Practitioners understand family members' values and perspectives.

Practice examples:

1.2.1 Practitioners are aware of the priorities, beliefs and expectations of each family member with whom they are working.

■ Family members are asked about the reason for and expectations of the family's contact with the service.

■ Family members' past experiences of seeking support and resources are acknowledged and used to guide the development of plans and delivery of services.

■ Practitioners consistently seek to understand and respect the family's point of view throughout their work with the family.

Further considerations: Values, beliefs and expectations vary widely among individuals, families and cultures. Each family has a unique situation and context which is to be respected. The level of confidence which family members bring to a program, and their expectations of the program will be affected by a number of factors including cultural norms and past experiences. Understanding these factors and encouraging communication about them strengthens the bonds between staff and participants.

Of course, families are made up of a number of different individuals. This means that within a family there may be a range of values, beliefs and expectations. The practitioner must take all of these into account when working with a family.

Practice examples:

1.2.2 Practitioners take time to get to know the family.

■ Practitioners spend time learning about each family's concerns and resources to ensure that activities offered are relevant to the family.

■ Project activities are structured to include informal moments between practitioners and participants e.g. drop-in times, support groups, play groups, 'kitchen table chatter'.

■ Project activities include opportunities for participants to talk to practitioners privately.

■ Activities provide sufficient flexibility for practitioners to respond to unanticipated opportunities to work with families.

Further considerations: Identification of a family's strengths, needs and goals comes through building relationships over time. Family members need to feel trust before they can talk about issues that are difficult or painful to discuss. Family members have the right to choose the person with whom they feel best able to share sensitive information, and to choose the time when they are ready to do this. Building trust is an ongoing and important part of the process of family work.

Practice examples:

1.2.3 Goals for family work reflect the family's priorities and concerns.

■ Family members are encouraged to set goals by naming the actions and results that are important to them.

■ Record keeping formats and tools support family involvement in setting and reviewing goals.

■ Regular opportunities are provided where families are able to review and revise their goals.

Further considerations: Family services should be purposeful and directed to achieve positive change in the family situation. Effective change is achieved when it is the family, not staff, who sets the agenda for the interaction so that it is relevant and meaningful to family members. Services need a capacity both to assist families to respond to crises, when goals may not yet be clear, while promoting every opportunity for family members to identify and pursue goals of their choice.

Practice 1.3 – Practitioners and families develop collaborative partnerships.

Practice examples:

1.3.1 Practitioners respect the resources, rights and responsibilities that each partner brings to the relationship.

- Respect for the family is modelled in all interactions with representatives from other agencies.
- Family members are recognised as experts in their own lives in the way they are consulted and involved in decisions.
- At the beginning of their contact with the project, family members are given information verbally and in writing about how their privacy will be protected. This includes clear statements about sharing of information between team members, and as part of internal or external supervision. Limitations on privacy provisions including mandatory reporting and exchange of information are explained.
- Parents' permission is requested and given before any information about the family is shared with other agencies, except where confidentially is limited by legal responsibilities.
- At the beginning of their contact with the project information is given verbally and in writing about record keeping policy, including how and why records are kept, access to records by family members and how long records are kept.
- Participation in record keeping is supported e.g. by writing records in the family member's presence or by opportunities for family members to write their own records.
- The contents of the file are regularly reviewed with family members and access to records is provided on request.

Further considerations: Practitioners have knowledge and experience about family functioning and resources needed by families. Families bring first-hand knowledge about their children and the realities of their community setting. It is the right of parents to advocate for their family's needs and desires, and it is the right of staff to uphold reasonable professional and project standards. Both partners are responsible for maintaining a productive relationship.

Practice examples:

1.3.2 Participants have opportunities to give formal and informal feedback which is acted on by project management.

- Strategies are present for ongoing communication with the project e.g. feedback box, group evaluations, exit interviews.
- Formal channels are used at least once a year to obtain feedback from participants e.g. focus groups, interviews, surveys.
- There is a written complaints policy which is understood by project staff and participants. The policy is comprehensive, recognises the value of complaints as a form of feedback, sets out time frames and processes, protects complainants from victimisation, ensures complainants are consulted about the outcome they want and includes steps to facilitate resolution of complaints and to address situations where complaints have not be resolved.
- Parents' perspectives are represented to management through parent participation and/or advocacy by designated staff.
- Childrens' perspectives are represented to management through childrens' participation and/or advocacy by designated staff.

Further considerations: Participants feel respected when it is clear that their judgment and opinions are taken seriously. Different strategies may be used in response to the context of the project.

Practice examples:

1.3.3 Participants have opportunities to contribute their leadership, time and skills to the project.

- Participants and staff work together on planning and implementing activities e.g. in group projects, celebrations, fundraising, community action.
- Participants are encouraged to share their time and skills e.g. representing the agency, practical support for groups such as morning tea rosters or room set up, barter systems between participants.

When families and staff are engaged in a collaborative partnership, families know their value and the importance of their contribution. Promoting the capacity of family members to enhance the project encourages family members to recognise and share their abilities and talents. Opportunities should be available in response to the participant's desire to participate. There should be no pressure or obligation on family members to volunteer their time or effort at times or in ways which may feel uncomfortable to them.

Practice 1.4 – Staff demonstrate positive, responsive caring towards families with whom they work.

Practice examples:

1.4.1 Genuine interest in and concern for families is demonstrated.

■ An ability to relate to families in a positive way is an essential requirement for staff selection.

■ Training is provided to strengthen staff members' natural tendency to relate well to families.

■ Staff consistently ask about the well being of family members.

■ Staff are readily available to family members e.g. through designated office times, or efficient telephone access.

■ Staff spend time with and pay attention to children when parents are present.

■ Staff speak respectfully about families in informal and formal settings such as staff meetings and interagency settings.

■ Staff challenge disrespectful communication and practices relating to families.

■ Participants are consistently referred to by name or as families or parents and stigmatising or bureaucratic labels are avoided (e.g. cases, referral, victim).

Further considerations: Most people can see through a façade, but genuine concern builds trust and enhances respect. It reduces concern that a family will be judged or shamed.

Practice examples:

1.4.2 The cultural identity of participants is validated and supported.

■ There are formal and informal opportunities for cultural celebrations and exchange e.g. participation of cultural performing groups at service functions, participation in events celebrating cultural diversity, or celebrations of significance to specific client groups such as national days, Mardi Gras, International Women's Day, NAIDOC week (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee).

■ Staff recognise and seek to counter the negative effects of discrimination and social exclusion on families.

Further considerations: Understanding the richness that culture contributes to an individual's identity as well as the costs of being seen to be different, enables practitioners to relate to families in ways that make them feel respected, supported and validated.

Practice examples:

1.4.3 Project participants are celebrated and appreciated.

■ Family milestones and achievements are recognised e.g. through cards or, with the participants' consent, in newsletters.

■ Adult accomplishments and contributions are recognised e.g. through awards, cards or certificates, or special events to mark the accomplishment of significant goals or on completion of contact with the project.

Further considerations: Although every interaction is a step in the relationship-building process, there are many intentional opportunities to recognise project participants.

Practice examples:

1.4.4 Staff persevere.

■ Practitioners engage in active outreach, recognising that vulnerable families may miss appointments, while having realistic expectations about worker responsibility for engaging families.

■ Where action plans are not followed by families, staff work with them to identify and address barriers.

■ Staff can be relied upon to keep appointments and follow up any agreed actions.

Further considerations: Building relationships may not be a smooth process. Family members may be cautious about making commitments to participate in project activities, or may exhibit challenging behaviours. Demonstrating patience and making efforts to maintain contact reinforces the development of a trusting relationship.

Practice 1.5 – Staff communicate responsibly and effectively with families.

Practice examples:

1.5.1 Staff listen with empathy and pay attention to family members' responses.

■ Staff ask questions to clarify and to invite family members to contribute.

■ Staff pay attention to verbal and non-verbal responses.

■ Staff pay attention to the messages they convey to families, whether overtly or covertly e.g. through non-verbal means.

■ Staff recognise and confront their own value judgments.

Further considerations: Careful listening is the primary way practitioners obtain the information they need to validate a family's values, beliefs and experiences, and to identify their key concerns.

Practice examples:

1.5.2 Supportive, accepting interactions are balanced with open, honest communication about concerns and disagreements.

■ Practitioners recognise and discuss disagreements with families.

■ Practitioners challenge families on issues which affect the safety or well-being of family members.

■ Practitioners assist families to explore alternatives.

Further considerations: There will be situations where a family's actions or decisions will conflict with the knowledge, values and experiences a staff member brings to the relationship e.g. child rearing practices. A positive outcome is promoted when the staff member remains accepting of the family while exploring the issue where the staff member and one or more family members may have different views.

Principle Two

Projects enhance families' capacities to support the growth and development of all family members – adults, youth and children.

The role of projects is to help families identify, enhance and utilise their existing skills, knowledge and resources in the ongoing task of promoting a healthy environment for their family members.

Practice 2.1 – Practitioners develop, with family members, a full understanding of a family's strengths.

Practice examples:

2.1.1 Practitioners work with family members to identify their existing competencies and past successes.

- Practitioners ask open-ended questions so that families have a chance to tell their own stories.
- Practitioners look for strengths in every interaction with family members.
- Practitioners have opportunities to observe family functioning and interactions, through home visits and involvement in informal activities.
- Questions about family strengths are routinely included during intake and referral processes.
- Questions about family strengths are routinely included in conversations with family members at the beginning of contact with the project, and through assessment processes.

Further considerations: All family members have things they do well and past experiences of achievement. Identifying strengths is a prerequisite for building on strengths. Involving families in articulating their strengths gives demoralised families hope for the future, and challenges problem saturated views that may be held by both families and professionals.

Practice examples:

2.1.2 All family members are encouraged to participate.

- Participants are asked to identify who they regard as family members.
- Appointments are planned for times when it is possible for all family members to attend.
- Practitioners specifically invite all family members to participate.
- Where family members do not attend sessions, strategies are used to take account of the perspectives and attitudes of absent family members.

Further considerations: Projects are often only in direct contact with mothers and their children. It is important to make opportunities to include and involve fathers and other significant members of families. While domestic violence may preclude active work with fathers, this should not undermine efforts to affirm the involvement of many men who are not violent in the lives of their families.

Practice examples:

2.1.3 Families are helped to identify and acknowledge networks of informal support.

- Practitioners ask families about the traditions and affiliations from which they draw support and a sense of connection.

- Practitioners ask questions about the arrangements families have made in the past with people in their neighbourhood e.g. babysitting, assistance with shopping or transport, help in an emergency.

- Practitioners work with families to identify people in their social network and strategies for enhancing relationships and overcoming barriers to accessing informal help.

- Practitioners use tools such as ecograms, questionnaires or genograms to identify family connections and sources of help.

Further considerations: Informal support is vital to any family's ability to function well. Such support can come from other people and from social, cultural, recreation and religious groups. Reducing feelings of isolation and promoting a sense of connectedness can help families feel stronger and safer.

Practice 2.2 – Projects create opportunities to enhance family relationships and personal development.

Practice examples:

2.2.1 A variety of resources are provided to inform parents about child development, the parent- child relationship and parenting issues.

- Formal parent education opportunities meet parents' expressed issues.
- Informal opportunities are provided for parents to learn from staff and from other parents e.g. playgroups, support groups.
- Practitioners working with families at home include a parent education component.
- All practitioners working directly with families have knowledge of child development and parenting issues.
- Practitioners model healthy parent-child relationships by promoting praise and positive feedback, setting clear boundaries and having age-appropriate expectations.
- Parenting resources are available in a range of languages and formats, taking into account differing literacy levels e.g. pamphlets, books for loan, audio-visual material.

Further considerations: Support with parenting is one of the most common initial reasons that parents come to family services. Programs need to have a well-developed capacity to respond to initial concerns and to undertake sustained work to enhance parenting.

Practice examples:

2.2.2 Projects maximise opportunities for parents and children to work and play together.

- Project activities are provided where parents and children interact.
- Where activities have a child-care component opportunities are provided for parents to be included at the beginning and/or the end.
- Staff model comfortable and positive examples of playful interactions with children.
- Space and materials are available for parents and children to use together e.g. toys, children's books.
- Project activities include strategies for enhancing the availability of low-cost play materials and books for children at home.
- Sessions are available which promote the importance of play e.g. parent education sessions focused on play, low cost play activities or strategies for involving children in routine household activities in playful ways.

Further considerations: Parent-child relationships are enhanced when families have positive experiences working or playing together. When parents' time, energy and resources are limited, opportunities for positive parent-child interaction may be curtailed. Some parents have had little personal experience of play, or don't understand the importance of play. Projects can create opportunities to promote positive parent-child interaction and play opportunities.

Practice examples:

2.2.3 Opportunities are created for parents to experience personal development and learn new life skills.

- Groups and workshops are offered in response to parents' needs and requests e.g. home and financial management, communication and stress management, health issues, English classes, workforce preparation skills.
- The project takes into account how adults learn, that is, engagement in activities that build on their experiences and strengths, maximise their participation and relate directly to immediate goals and needs.
- Learning resources are provided in a variety of forms and take into account a variety of literacy levels.

Further considerations: Acquiring new information and developing new skills, assists parents to cope with life situations and relate positively to their children.

Practice 2.3 – When family members express a desire to take action to resolve problems or make changes in their lives, practitioners work with them to develop a realistic plan that is tailored to their strengths, needs, priorities and resources, and support them during the process of implementing and evaluating that plan.

Practice examples:

2.3.1 Practitioners addressing family change have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake this work.

■ Practitioners are aware of the range of frameworks that can underpin practice promoting family change.

■ Practitioners can identify the key elements of a framework which guides the change oriented work they do with families.

■ Training is provided to ensure that practitioners continue to develop skills in working with families towards change.

Further considerations: It is very important that practitioners have a clear understanding of why and how they work with families. Effective family work strategies are based on frameworks that support thinking about how change happens in families. These frameworks ensure that work undertaken to develop relationships with family members is complemented by a focus on change that builds on family's strengths, pays attention to positive signs, however small, and promotes a sense of hopefulness.

Practice examples:

2.3.2 Services employ practitioners who have knowledge and skills about the range of issues facing families.

- Knowledge and skills in working with families affected by domestic violence.
- Knowledge and skills in working with families affected by child protection issues, including child sexual assault and adult survivors of child sexual assault.
- Knowledge and skills in working with families affected by alcohol and other drugs.
- Knowledge and skills in working with families affected by issues related to mental health.
- Knowledge and skills in working with families affected by disability.
- Knowledge and skills in working with refugees and other families affected by immigration experiences.
- Opportunities to increase their understanding of issues that affect families.

Further considerations: Family work should be comprehensive. Family issues are not compartmentalised, with an expectation that families must work with a range of specialists if their concerns are to be addressed.

Many families participating in family services are experiencing a complex range of concerns and are seeking change in a number of different, often overlapping areas of their lives. They may also be hesitant about seeking specialist help. Practitioners need the capacity to understand and deal with the impact of a range of issues on families.

Practice examples:

2.3.3 Practitioners work with families to set realistic outcomes when they seek to make changes in life situations.

■ Practitioners consciously work with families to identify their strengths, needs and resources.

■ Practitioners acknowledge the value of concrete resources and services for families.

■ Practitioners have knowledge and experience about strategies that assist families to identify preferred outcomes e.g. goal setting, externalising, prioritising.

■ Project tools such as client data and record keeping forms support the process of identifying strengths, needs and resources.

Further considerations: Effective work with families requires a focus on outcomes that are important to the family, and ensure that the process of change allows family members to experience success. In many instances an initial focus on concrete outcomes (e.g. accessing resources or services) provides a platform to build trust so that family members will feel safe enough to consider the possibility of change in other aspects of life.

Practice examples:

2.3.4 Practitioners help families identify and access networks of informal support.

■ Practitioners ask families about their contacts and networks and explore how these could be used to build solutions and promote change.

■ Projects provide opportunities for families to extend their informal networks, and so have opportunities to give and receive practical help e.g. playgroups, family outings, craft groups, parenting groups.

Further considerations: Informal associations are a primary source of support for families. They are important because using such networks provide opportunities for mutual reciprocity that does not stigmatise or label people. Family services seek to build up and support such networks.

Practice examples:

2.3.5   Practitioners help families identify and access networks of formal support.

■   Practitioners have access to current information about community resources.

■   Practitioners develop and maintain co-operative relationships with agencies that provide or regulate resources useful to families.

■   Families' previous experiences with relevant services are explored and taken into account when possible referrals to other agencies are considered.

■   Practitioners affirm families in making informed choices about the process of making referrals or sharing information with other agencies.

■   Clear procedures ensure that the family makes decisions about whether to accept a referral, the desired outcomes, and the information to be shared with the other agency.

■   Family members have opportunities to develop the skills necessary for accessing formal services independently e.g. through role play, modelling, mentoring by other participants.

Further considerations: Family services are comprehensive, but also acknowledge the value of specialist information and expertise. From the base of a trusting and respectful relationship with project practitioners family members may have more information about the role of specialist services and more confidence in their relevance and value.

At the same time, more service delivery is not necessarily better in terms of family outcomes. Many families are overwhelmed by the involvement of a number of different agency personnel in their lives, and are uncertain about the reason for their presence. Involving the family throughout the referral process increases family members' sense of ownership of their engagement with additional services, and their understanding of what involvement can achieve.

Sometimes referral to another agency may be considered because practitioners feel uncertain about their capacity to assist family members effectively. While specialist assistance may be warranted, referral to another agency should not be made as an 'easy' way of concluding contact with a family.

Practice examples:

2.3.6 Family strengths are affirmed while families address challenges or work towards goals.

■ Practitioners normalise the process of incremental change and fluctuations in progress.

■ Regular progress reviews highlight achievements and what has been learnt in the process.

■ Reviews enable families to adjust goals and priorities, and to change action plans in response to changing understanding of their needs and interests.

■ Family achievements towards goals are celebrated.

■ Client record forms facilitate the process of focusing on strengths and assessing progress towards goals during family reviews.

Further considerations: Change is a process, not an event. Fluctuations in motivation, frustration with the pace of change, periods of little or no progress and temporary setbacks are part of the usual pattern. A practitioner's ability to maintain confidence in the family and to consistently highlight positives may be critical in family members persisting as opposed to giving up during stressful times.

Practice examples:

2.3.7 Families are assisted to 'move on' when their needs have been met, or when they need something that the project does not offer.

■ Closure is anticipated from the beginning of contact with the family.

■ All activities have 'exit points' e.g. time frames, regular reviews measuring achievement of goals.

■ Opportunities are available for former participants to maintain contact with the project in a new capacity e.g. newsletters, reunions, involvement in management.

■ The project promotes information about other services relevant to families.

■ The project encourages families to develop networks beyond the service delivery system e.g. through friendships, contact with neighbours and links with extended family.

Further considerations: Creating dependence is inconsistent with an approach that builds on family strengths. Projects promote family members' ability to control their own lives. A realistic time-frame for graduation will depend on the project purpose and capacity, and the circumstances of individual families, but projects need to continually be alert for ways in which project operations inadvertently encourage dependence.

Practice 2.4 – Projects work to ensure the well being of children.

Practice examples:

2.4.1 The project has clear policies and procedures for child protection.

- ■ A written policy guides staff in identifying and responding to children at risk of harm by addressing roles and responsibilities, responses to disclosures, making reports and ongoing service delivery to families where risk of harm is identified.
- ■ The policy identifies practitioners' statutory responsibilities regarding child protection.
- ■ The policy is regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with legislative requirements.
- ■ The policy is consistent with recommendations from relevant bodies e.g. Interagency Guidelines, Ombudsman.

Further considerations: The well being of children is of central concern to families and this must be reflected in the priority this is given by projects. Projects are responsible for ensuring staff have guidance based on current legislation and standards of good practice.

Practice examples:

2.4.2 The project gives families clear messages about the priority of meeting children's needs.

- ■ The project provides a safe physical environment for children.
- ■ Resource material stressing the importance of children's safety and well-being is displayed throughout the project e.g. posters, pamphlets.
- ■ All participants are advised that information relating to children's safety cannot be treated as confidential, and action will be taken to protect children from harm.

Further considerations: Child protection is core business for family service practitioners. Enhancing family capacities can never occur at the expense of a child's well being. The project's commitment to safeguarding children as the highest priority should be communicated clearly at all times to all participants.

Practice examples:

2.4.3 All staff have appropriate skills in child protection for their role and responsibilities.

■ New staff members receive orientation to the project's child protection policy and procedures before they have direct contact with families.

■ Staff members receive training to support their implementation of the policy and procedures and to ensure that they can carry out their statutory responsibilities.

■ Practitioners receive opportunities for skills development in relation to effective work with families where there are child protection concerns.

■ Staff actions are monitored through observation, staff reports, consultation and supervision to ensure they comply with best practice in child protection.

Further considerations: Written policies are only effective where they are translated into practice. This requires an ongoing commitment to ensure that staff activities do enhance child safety and well being.

Practice examples:

2.4.4   The project has the capacity to address the complex issues raised by work with families where there are child protection concerns.

- ■   Staff members have the opportunity for immediate consultation where they identify possible grounds of risk of harm.

- ■   Families are encouraged to take an active role in addressing child protection issues e.g. through self-reporting, attendance at protection planning meetings.

- ■   Practitioners are able to tell families clearly when and why there are concerns about risk of harm.

- ■   Child protection policy states that families will be advised before child protection concerns are reported to statutory authorities except where there are concerns that this could endanger the child or others.

- ■   Practitioners use the development of trusting relationships with family members as a platform for exploring the impact of harmful child rearing practices.

- ■   Practitioners seek to implement strategies which will reduce harm to children, recognising that where children are experiencing serious harm they cannot wait for adults to make long-term changes.

- ■   Practitioners have opportunities to consult representatives of religious and cultural groups regarding child protection concerns occurring in the context of cultural norms and expectations.

Further considerations: Practice in child protection is complex and it is often not immediately obvious how best to ensure a child's safety and well being. Practitioners must be alert to avoid minimising concerns about child safety while engaging adult family members.

Principle Three

Projects affirm and strengthen families' social, cultural and racial identities and enhance their ability to function in a pluralist society.

Family services work in many different ways to assist families to prepare their children to grow up in a society that is increasingly diverse. Australian society also carries the legacy from past and present policies and attitudes that discriminate against certain groups, in particular, although not only, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Such discrimination has had a destructive effect on family and community well being. Family services have an important role in countering the effects of discrimination and oppression and so building stronger family and community bonds.

Practice 3.1 – Projects affirm and strengthen families' social, cultural and racial identities.

Practice examples:

3.1.1 The cultural beliefs and practices of families are affirmed.

- Staff are encouraged to learn about the cultures and/or religious traditions of the families who attend the project.
- Families are encouraged to identify and articulate values of importance to them.
- Group activities address cultural needs and incorporate an understanding of a range of cultural expressions.
- The project recognises and celebrates the holidays and special events of groups represented among centre participants.
- Staff are trained in the use of interpreters and suitable interpreters are accessed as needed by families.

Further considerations: Family services find ways to ensure that their environments, activities, staff and ways of delivering services are congruent with the cultural values, beliefs and practices of the families participating in the project.

Practice examples:

3.1.2 Families of the same cultural or linguistic group have opportunities to spend time together.

■   Opportunities are created for parents of similar cultural or linguistic groups to meet in a safe and supportive environment.

■   Families have opportunities to use diverse languages in the context of project activities.

■   Programs are included that acknowledge cultural styles relevant to a particular cultural or linguistic group.

Further considerations: Many families experience affirmation through the provision of opportunities to meet with members of the same cultural or linguistic group. Provision of such opportunities demonstrates respect for diversity and an appreciation of the particular experiences of minorities. Meeting in such groups can highlight the shared aspects of the immigrant experience, and can challenge beliefs that difficulties are due to individual deficiencies rather than larger social and political issues. Group experiences can also encourage participants to challenge beliefs and practices that have been supported by experiences of oppression and discrimination.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that some individuals will not wish to participate in culturally or linguistically specific groups. Sensitivity is also needed to the particular community context so that potential conflicts between different cultural groups are anticipated and addressed.

Practice examples:

3.1.3 Families receive support to pass on their culture and language to their children.

■   Families have opportunities to participate in planning for children's activities so that aspects of beliefs, traditions and history can be incorporated.

■   Staff who work with children have training in the development of children's sense of cultural identity.

■   Parents are supported where they speak to their children in languages other than English.

■   Traditions, symbols and languages of a variety of cultures are incorporated into activities.

Further considerations: Socialisation is a primary way by which cultural identity is fostered. Programs can assist parents to pass on language, beliefs and practices to children, and as a result parents can experience their culture as valued.

It is important to remember that parents will make their own individual decision about what they wish to pass on to their children from their own cultural experiences, and different parents will have different preferences in relation to this.

Practice 3.2 – Projects work to combat discriminatory and racist attitudes and to promote the development of positive identities among children.

Practice examples:

3.2.1 The project environment reflects positive images of different groups and avoids negative portrayals.

- ■ Diverse positive images are contained in artwork, toys, story books and music.
- ■ Material such as books, electronic media and program outlines are reviewed to ensure they contain authentic information about diverse groups.
- ■ Respectful relationships are modelled so staff do not make, tolerate or excuse derogatory comments or ethnic slurs or stereotypes.
- ■ Practitioners are trained to recognise bias and prejudice such as racism and homophobia, and related discriminatory practices.
- ■ Family diversity is recognised in the structure of information collection systems e.g. provision to record extended family, same sex couples.

Further considerations: An essential part of developing a positive identity is creating a context in which differences are recognised without discrimination, diversity is celebrated and bias and stereotyping are actively discouraged.

Practice examples:

3.2.2 Projects provide opportunities for people from different cultures to have positive experiences together.

■ Practitioners encourage a diverse range of family members to attend group programs.

■ Programs include opportunities for participants to explore and affirm diverse experiences and traditions.

■ Food served to participants reflects diverse cultures.

■ Staff from different cultural backgrounds work together in providing activities.

Further considerations: One strategy for combating discriminatory and racist attitudes is for family members from different cultural backgrounds to have positive experiences together. These experiences can challenge stereotypes and encourage family members to identify common elements in their experiences. Projects can play an important role in providing safe opportunities for families to mix which may not occur in the wider community.

Practice 3.3 – Projects work to ensure that families have access to mainstream organisations.

Practice examples:

3.3.1 The organisation has a written access and equity policy.

■ The policy includes a position statement affirming diversity and valuing a pluralist society.

■ The policy includes strategies for ensuring that agency staffing reflects the diverse cultures, backgrounds and abilities of the entire target group of families.

■ The policy includes strategies to ensure that the composition of the Governing Body/Management Committee reflects the diverse cultures, backgrounds and abilities of the entire target group of families.

■ The policy includes ways of addressing conflicting values regarding participation and diversity.

■ The policy addresses the physical constraints of access to the project e.g. access for those with limited mobility or with prams.

Further considerations: The starting point in facilitating access to mainstream organisations is for each family service to be accessible. This means services must address barriers, both physical and psychological, that can impact on the participation of those of particular cultures, backgrounds or of differing abilities to participate.

The principles envision a society that recognises, values and celebrates cultural and social differences. To reach this ideal will be a learning process for all. Challenges include addressing institutional discrimination, and conflicting values that may be held within families, between families, between families and staff, within staff, and between staff and management. Services that operate within the framework of a specific ethnic or religious orientation may experience particular challenges.

Practice examples:

3.3.2 Families are assisted to understand and negotiate the mainstream culture and social systems.

■ Families are provided with relevant information and skills to enable them to use the resources of their local and wider community e.g. through information sessions, displays of current resources in community languages.

■ Translated materials are provided to assist families access relevant information.

■ Families are assisted to exercise their power as citizens and consumers and are provided with practical support when negotiating with institutions.

Further considerations: Families have an important role in advocating for themselves and their children. The provision of support, encouragement, skills, information and allies can assist families in undertaking this. Information should include consideration of the implications of cultural norms in Australian society.

Family services have an important role as bridge builders between families and community institutions, agencies and service providers.

Practice examples:

3.3.3 Action is taken to challenge institutional discrimination.

■ The program provides specific suggestions to other agencies about strategies that would enhance access.

■ Staff members are trained in an understanding of Anti-discrimination legislation and processes that can be used by families.

■ The agency is involved in community activities promoting social and economic justice.

■ Projects provide a voice in the wider community to promote and value cultural and linguistic diversity, involving both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and other cultural groups.

Further considerations: Family services have an opportunity to ensure that social structures and individual agencies are responsive to all families in the community. Their experience with individuals and groups may give services particular credibility in this role. Project activities could range from challenging practitioners to question discriminatory assumptions to participating in community campaigns for social change.
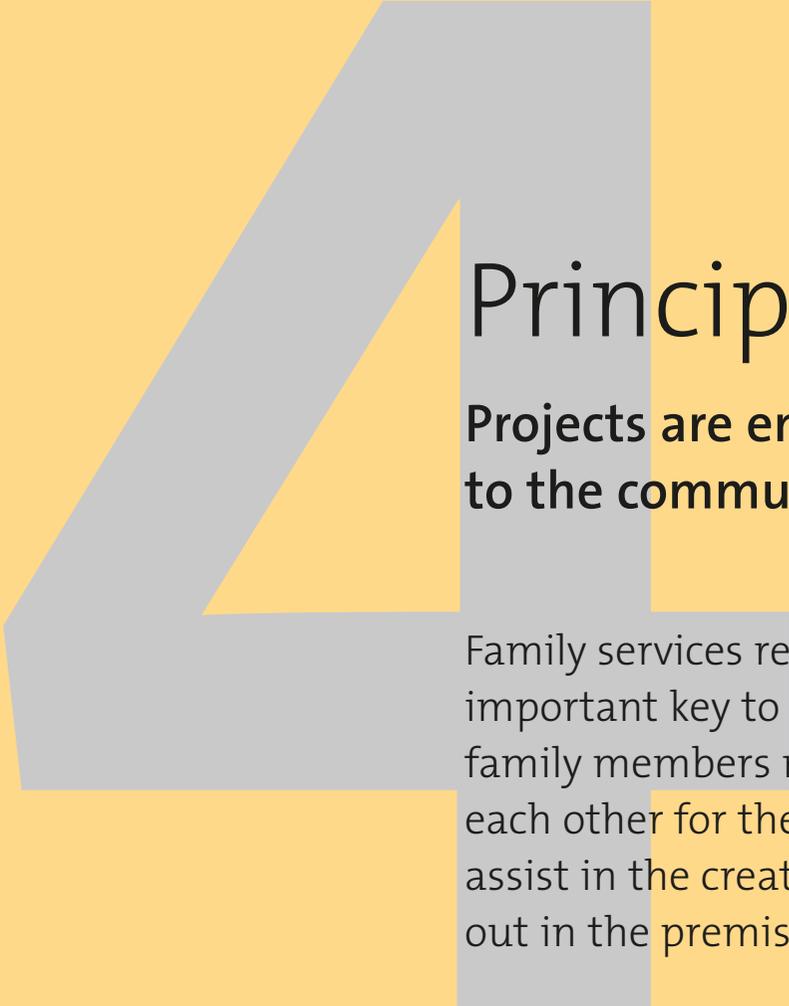
Principle Four

Projects are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community building process.

Family services reflect a broad outlook that sees community building as an important key to supporting family life. Projects can serve not only as places where family members meet their own needs but as places where families can support each other for the good of the whole community. This means that projects can assist in the creation of the 'social capital' necessary for family well-being, as spelt out in the premises underlying the principles.

Practice 4.1 – Projects facilitate a sense of belonging and a connection to the community among program participants.

Practice examples:

4.1.1 The project's location is easily accessed by families.

- ■ The project is located near facilities regularly used by families e.g. schools, shopping centres.
- ■ No groups of families are alienated by the location of the project.
- ■ Families' transport needs are addressed by the project location e.g. located near public transport and/or with car parking facilities/ provision of transport to and from activities/located near community housing/provision of mobile services.

Further considerations: By occupying a location that is convenient and free of negative associations for families, programs identify themselves positively in the community and increase the likelihood that residents will participate in activities.

Rural projects servicing large geographical areas will obviously have different measures of accessibility. The focus may be less on centre-based delivery with more emphasis on the provision of mobile services.

Practice examples:

4.1.2 Participants have opportunities to identify with the project.

- ■ A regular newsletter is produced and distributed to participants.
- ■ The project has a website which includes opportunities for participants' perspectives.
- ■ Families are involved in organising and participating in special events e.g. anniversaries, annual general meetings, centre openings.
- ■ Families contribute to the development of program logos and advertising material.
- ■ Program resources are available at cost to participants e.g. photocopying, toy/book library, use of space for family functions.

Further considerations: Community building is a key element to supporting family life. Community building starts with projects modelling a supportive community characterised by trust, mutuality and reciprocity. Families can build on their sense of ownership within the project to participate in other community organisations and to advocate more effectively for their needs and the needs of their community.

Practice examples:

4.1.3 Participants are encouraged to take part in community activities.

- Advertising for community events is prominently displayed in the centre.
- The project is involved in planning community events.
- Family involvement in community events is facilitated by the project e.g. provision of transport, child care, organising group attendance.

Further considerations: Projects recognise that families are significantly affected by their interaction with the community. Involvement in community events e.g. fairs, show days, performances can help break down social isolation and assist families to have a sense of positive identification with their community.

Practice 4.2 – Projects use volunteers in ways that reinforce community building.

Practice examples:

4.2.1 The project identifies tasks that can effectively be undertaken by volunteers.

- Opportunities for effective volunteer involvement are identified.
- Information is provided to the community about the range of tasks that can be undertaken by volunteers in the project.
- Assessment criteria for volunteers include demonstrating values and attitudes that are supportive of family well-being.
- Volunteers are provided with adequate training for their tasks.
- Volunteers are monitored and supervised in relation to their designated tasks.
- Volunteer performance is reviewed and supported as necessary.
- Processes are available to end volunteer involvement in a specific task if their performance is not satisfactory.

Further considerations: Volunteers are widely used in family services. Using volunteers from the project's local community can often be a very effective way of accessing local informal networks of information and resources.

The project's context will determine the extent to which volunteers are used. Using volunteers to make up shortages in paid staff hours is not recommended. Volunteers cannot substitute for the long-term commitment, professional skills and accountability of employed staff.

Volunteers are often best utilised in tasks requiring time limited commitments of relatively low intensity where performance can be easily monitored. Volunteers must share the same commitment to family well being and supportive practice as all other staff.

Practice examples:

4.2.2 The project promotes a sense of reciprocity in relationships with volunteers.

- Volunteers' contributions to the project are regularly acknowledged.
- Volunteers have opportunities to identify what they have gained from involvement with the project.
- Opinions of volunteers are sought in project planning particularly regarding activities in which they have specific responsibilities.
- Volunteers are included in appropriate staff activities.

Further considerations: Reciprocity is an important aspect of community building. Relationships with volunteers work well where both the project and the volunteers gain from their involvement.

Practice 4.3 – Projects respond to community issues and engage families as partners in this process.

Practice examples:

4.3.1 The project is informed by an understanding of community strengths, needs and resources.

- Community consultations routinely address community strengths and resources.
- The project has developed, or accessed, a current assessment of community needs and resources e.g. Council Social Plan.
- Project participants are consulted about the needs of their community.
- Staff participate in community forums and planning processes.

Further considerations: Project staff develop an understanding of what is happening in the community through the eyes of families. Programs can only be responsive to community needs by being aware of the community issues that families face daily.

Focusing exclusively on community deficits is stigmatising for local residents, and overlooks significant experiences within communities. Any examination of community needs should be accompanied by a rigorous assessment of community strengths.

Practice examples:

4.3.2 The project takes action in response to needs and priorities identified by community members.

- The project is represented on working groups and coalitions addressing community needs.
- Planning for service delivery takes into account emerging issues in the community.
- The project responds to community crises e.g. participates in emergency service planning and disaster responses.

Further considerations: Projects need to seek out and respect the knowledge of community members when identifying needs and priorities so that the project provides relevant services and has the confidence of community members.

Practice examples:

4.3.3 Parents are trained to be advocates and leaders around community issues and are supported in these roles.

- Practitioners work with parents to make the connections between personal experience and public policy explicit.
- Leadership training is provided to parents through their roles in the project e.g. organising events, serving on management committees, participating in consultations and representing the project publicly.
- Staff provide assistance for parent involvement in advocacy opportunities e.g. letter writing campaigns, visits to politicians.

Further considerations: Parents can be their own best advocates and the most effective spokespeople for their own needs. They have the most to gain from advocating for the needs of the community such as better services for themselves and their children and a better environment for families.

Practice examples:

4.3.4 The project collaborates with the general public and other community agencies and institutions to promote awareness of and to respond to community issues.

- Relationships are formed and maintained with people of influence within the community.
- The project is represented at forums where issues affecting the community are discussed e.g. parliamentary inquiries, public meetings.
- Media e.g. local newspapers, television, radio are used by the project to promote community needs.
- The project participates in actions as part of wider advocacy campaigns run by peak bodies and special interest groups.

Further considerations: Community issues and challenges are usually beyond the capacity of a single program to address and resolve. Public awareness and consensus around issues are necessary for progress to occur. It is important that projects are seen to be concerned with a range of family issues, not just with the need to secure more project funding, although that may be one legitimate focus for advocacy.

Practice 4.4 – Programs work to develop a co-ordinated response to community needs.

Practice examples:

4.4.1 The project participates in a co-ordinated response to community needs.

- The project contributes to the development of service provider directories and web-based resource tools.
- Project staff are involved in interagency forums and opportunities.
- Members of other organisations are involved in the program's planning processes.

Further considerations: Families require a range of resources and services throughout the community. Collaborative planning and partnerships assist in the identification of service gaps and avoid duplication. Such processes are also an opportunity to educate other service providers about the project and the principles which underlie it.

Practice examples:

4.4.2 **The project collaborates with other community institutions and agencies in tangible ways.**

■ Protocols for referral and exchanges of information are established and followed.

■ Opportunities are developed for joint training with staff from other agencies.

■ Staff members have access to training to enhance their capacity to work collaboratively with other agencies.

■ The project actively explores opportunities for partnerships and other forms of collaboration with other agencies.

Further considerations: Effective relationships between service providers are vital to promoting the interests of families in the community and ensuring families can access needed services. Collaboration makes more opportunities available to families.

Practice examples:

4.4.3 **The project initiates action in the community to support families.**

■ The project monitors data from individual families to identify trends that may be addressed by community in addition to individual advocacy.

■ The project promotes issues in the local community related to the needs of families.

■ The project seeks to engage other groups in the community to work on issues where the project has identified impacts on families.

Further considerations: Family services are well placed to identify new issues impacting on families because of the close relationships between families and practitioners. Projects need to be prepared to take the first step in launching community campaigns. This will often involve educating other stakeholders in the community about the issue as well as forming strategic alliances to run campaigns.

Principle Five

Projects are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community needs.

One of the reasons for the effectiveness of family services is their capacity to start where families are and to respond to their needs rather than offering an inflexible set of services. Family services are designed to respond in a holistic way to the multiple needs of whole families. They must be open to implement what they learn through their contact with families into their activities and project design. Family services are also in a strategic position to advise the wider community about family needs.

Practice 5.1 – Project planning and implementation are flexible and continually respond to the concerns of families.

Practice examples:

5.1.1   Staff are creative and flexible and prioritise the well-being of families and children.

■   Criteria for selection of all staff require staff to hold values, attitudes and beliefs that are supportive of families.

■   Periodic staff evaluations screen for attitudes, values and beliefs that are compatible with family support principles.

■   Program practices promote flexibility and creativity, so that while staff members operate within clear guidelines, there is room to experiment and make independent decisions.

■   Practitioners are encouraged to develop their capacity to make their own judgements when implementing policies and procedures.

Further considerations: The most important resource of family services is their staff. Projects achieve responsiveness in part by hiring staff members that demonstrate a disposition to embrace the philosophy underpinning the family support principles and then by providing training in the application of the principles to further develop staff capacity.

Practice examples:

5.1.2 The project design is dynamic and responsive to family needs.

- The project has a range of entry points so that families have choices about the way they engage with services.
- Families have a genuine option to choose not to be involved with the project.
- Where families are referred by another agency, follow up of the referral ensures that family members have the opportunity to make their own decision about involvement with the project, and establish their own expectations for involvement.
- Families identify the type of service they wish to receive, the issues they want to work on and the processes they wish to follow.
- Families are consulted about the effectiveness of the project e.g. through reviews, exit interviews.
- The project's links with other organisations working with families in the community are used to ensure that duplication is avoided and priority community needs are addressed.

Further considerations: Flexible projects provide a range of choices about how services are delivered. Projects are targeted so that families recognise their benefits and make positive choices to participate. Projects are identifiably 'family friendly'. The practitioner style can be characterised as 'professionals working informally'.

Practice 5.2 – The project is aware of family and community needs.

Practice examples:

5.2.1 The project assesses information about family and community issues.

■ The project collects information to indicate trends and issues such as patterns in referrals and inquiries, changes in family characteristics and needs and the outcomes of interactions with families.

■ The project is involved in relevant state or nationwide data collection programs.

■ Staff members participate in regional, state or national networks and attend conferences concerned with family issues.

■ The project is a member of relevant peak bodies that analyse and provide representation of family issues.

■ The project subscribes to relevant newsletters or journals that cover family issues.

■ Data from within and outside the project is regularly analysed, reported and incorporated into planning.

Further considerations: Effective family projects draw on the experiences of the wider community, and incorporate information from other organisations and groups which are working on family issues.

Practice examples:

5.2.2 The project identifies and disseminates information about family perspectives and effective strategies.

■ The project is involved in the preparation of papers or conference presentations to inform the wider community of practitioner and family experiences and perspectives.

■ The project responds to requests for information in relation to community and family issues. e.g. surveys, parliamentary inquiries, research projects.

Further considerations: Family projects are well positioned to communicate first hand knowledge of family issues and concerns. Projects have an important role in communicating what they have learnt from families to other bodies, to assist them in delivering appropriate services that address family needs.
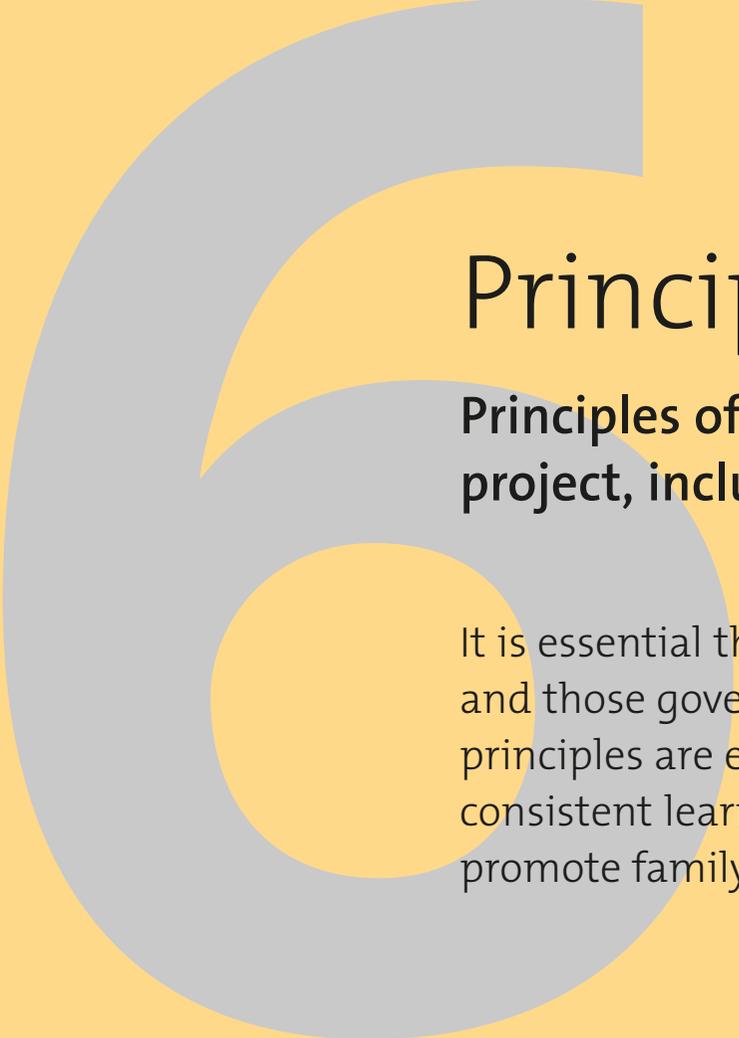
Principle Six

Principles of family support are modelled in all aspects of the project, including planning, management and administration.

It is essential that there is congruence between the principles that govern practice and those governing all other aspects of the project's operation. Where the principles are expressed through all aspects of the program the stage is set for consistent learning for both staff and families as they pursue outcomes which promote family well being.

Practice 6.1 – The purpose and goals of the project are consistent with family support principles.

Practice examples:

6.1.1 **The project has a written statement of purpose which refers explicitly to family support principles.**

The statement refers to:

- Ways in which the project builds on family strengths.
- The development of collaborative relationships with family members based on trust and respect.
- The impact of the project on children, both through work with parents, and directly with children.
- Ways in which the project prioritises safety in work with families.
- Affirmation of diversity.
- Ways in which the project is embedded in its community.
- Affirmation that family support principles are modelled throughout the organisation.
- The statement is written in clear and simple language.

Further considerations: The statement of purpose may take different forms depending on the context of the project. Where projects can provide a clear statement of their purpose and goals this provides focus and direction. This helps to prevent inadvertent drift in the program and keeps all stakeholders true to the project vision.

Practice examples:

6.1.2 **The project's operations are consistent with the statement of purpose.**

- The statement of purpose is available to families and others.
- Staff and management are familiar with the statement of purpose.
- Staff and management refer to the statement of purpose in the course of program development.

Further considerations: The value of a statement of purpose is not just that it exists, but that it is a reference point when critical decisions must be made about program development and the allocation of resources.

Practice 6.2 – Organisation structures and processes reflect family support principles.

Practice examples:

6.2.1   The needs of families are prioritised in all decisions about project design and development and service delivery.

■   Comprehensive information about family needs is collected to inform all development proposals.

■   Priority is given to proposals and developments which will more effectively address priority family needs.

■   The impact of service changes on families is identified as part of any change proposal.

Further considerations: Sustained effort is required to ensure that the purpose of the organisation remains addressing the needs of families rather than existing for its own sake, or the benefit of stakeholders other than family members.

Practice examples:

6.2.2 The Governing Body or Management Committee is representative of the diverse needs of the community where projects operate, and members have knowledge of community needs.

■ Members of the Governing Body or Management Committee are committed to the project's mission.

■ Members of the Governing Body or Management Committee are committed to advocating and political lobbying to secure appropriate support and resources for families.

■ Members of the Governing Body or Management Committee represent relevant community groups and interests such as people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and people with disabilities.

■ The process of selection, election or appointment to the Governing Body or Management Committee is clear and transparent e.g. selection criteria, conformity to constitutional requirements, public advertisement, accessible process for membership of public bodies, declaration of possible conflicts of interest.

Further considerations: Consistency with family support principles is not only the responsibility of paid staff. The Governing Body or Management Committee play a critical role in setting direction for the project.

Practice examples:

6.2.3 Employment practices affirm staff and their contribution to the project.

- Employment policies are acknowledged and implemented.
- Practitioners and employed staff receive all entitlements under relevant industrial awards or agreements.
- Staff feedback about organisation performance and practice is welcomed and invited e.g. through planning days, evaluation processes, staff input into management performance reviews.
- There is a recognition of staff responsibilities to their own families e.g. flexibility in working arrangements so staff can attend children's school commitments.
- Projects affirm the cultural and racial identities of staff and implement policies which provide protection from discrimination.

Further considerations: Working with families is demanding and requires stable staffing with well-supported staff. Employment practices that are fair and clear in the context of a safe working environment will make significant contributions to staff well-being, which in turn impact positively on families.

6.2.4 The project has clear policies and procedures to ensure the safety of staff.

- Policy provisions address staff safety and security in centre based work and are acknowledged and implemented.
- Policy provisions address staff safety and security when conducting home visits and are acknowledged and implemented.
- Policy provisions guide staff in dealing with violence and potential violence in the workplace.
- Policy provisions ensure that staff are adequately supported after critical incidents in the workplace.

Further considerations: Violent behaviour in the workplace should never be minimised or excused regardless of the identity of the person who is violent. Promoting workplace safety is part of the process of challenging violence across society.

Because projects work with families where there are established patterns of violence staff may be exposed to violence in the workplace. These situations need to be anticipated and procedures put in place to address incidents that may occur. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the impact of exposure to violence on workers and a commitment to addressing this.

Practice 6.3 – Relationships between staff at all levels of the project are based on trust and respect.

Practice examples:

6.3.1   Interactions between staff model trust and respect.

- Staff interactions are positive and supportive.
- Staff have opportunities to talk about difficult work experiences safely e.g. debriefing with manager, peer supervision, external consultancy.
- Staff have opportunities to build positive relationships between team members e.g. use of lunch room, team days, social events.
- Policies regarding acceptable staff behaviour are acknowledged and implemented e.g. harassment, discrimination

Further considerations: Because relationships are fundamental to effective family work the same quality of relationships should be mirrored throughout the organisation. The quality of family work is undermined where relationships between staff and families are expected to be respectful, but relationships between staff are characterised by behaviour such as gossip, bullying, scapegoating and destructive criticism.

Practice examples:

6.3.2   Where conflict occurs between staff members, strategies are implemented to address disagreements and difficulties in positive ways which acknowledge the concerns of all parties.

- Grievance procedures are acknowledged and implemented.
- Grievance procedures deal with principles of natural justice, steps in addressing and resolving grievances, use of mediation, access to independent support or advocacy, confidentiality, and time frames.
- Staff are encouraged to address conflict directly and in a timely way.
- Conflict is addressed in a context of promoting better outcomes for staff and families.
- There are clear processes for addressing conflict at all levels of the project.
- Processes for addressing conflict between staff promote respectful behaviour.

Further considerations: Conflict is an inevitable part of family work. Different staff members will have different views about the best way to proceed in different situations. Even with the best of intentions staff will make mistakes, cause colleagues inconvenience or disruption and will have difficult days. What is significant in modelling family support principles is not whether conflict occurs, but in how it is addressed.

Practice examples:

6.3.3   The contribution of ancillary staff is recognised through opportunities to participate in regular project meetings and review and evaluation activities.

■   Ancillary staff participate in team meetings.

■   Ancillary staff are treated with respect by all team members.

■   There are clear expectations of ancillary staff regarding interactions with families e.g. confidentiality, respectful interaction.

■   Ancillary staff are provided with a safe working environment.

■   Ancillary staff have access to support if family members are aggressive or hostile towards them.

■   The contribution to and achievements of ancillary staff to modelling family support principles are recognised and affirmed.

Further considerations: Ancillary staff are often the first contact family members have with the project, either by phone or face to face. Their work is essential to the effective operation of the project, but its significance can be overlooked. For ancillary staff to effectively model family support principles they must understand how their work contributes to project outcomes and they must feel heard and respected within the organisation.

Practice 6.4 – Relationships with other organisations reflect family support principles.

Practice examples:

6.4.1 Staff work collaboratively with the staff of other organisations in ways which promote mutual respect.

■ Project staff meet regularly with colleagues from other agencies in a range of settings, both formal and informal.

■ Project staff work with other agencies ensuring co-ordinated service delivery to individual families.

■ Project staff recognise the strengths of local agencies and regularly refer families to them.

■ Projects have clearly understood protocols for making referrals and exchanging information which are acknowledged and implemented.

Further considerations: No one organisation can meet all the needs of families. Collaboration ensures that practitioners are aware of resources and can effectively link families with the best opportunity to achieve desired outcomes.

Practice examples:

6.4.2 Staff develop relationships with a diverse range of organisations.

■ Project staff have effective contacts with agencies which reflect the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the local area.

■ Project staff have effective contacts with agencies at all levels of government.

■ Project staff have effective contact with a range of organisations which impact on the lives of families e.g. schools, religious organisations, playgroups, community centres, self-help groups and service clubs.

Further considerations: Because of the diversity of families' needs and circumstances, many different organisations can contribute positively to families' lives. Projects need to look beyond agencies with a similar focus and structure to think broadly about the organisations which are relevant to families.

Practice examples:

6.4.3 Project staff welcome feedback from other organisations regarding their work.

- Staff routinely survey other organisations about their work.
- Program evaluations include opportunities for feedback from other organisations.
- Feedback from other organisations is addressed positively.

Further considerations: Other organisations are uniquely placed to provide feedback about the work undertaken by family services. Families may not feel able to tell practitioners how they really feel, and other agencies may sometimes be able to recognise issues that are not apparent to families. While positive feedback is always welcome, it is a mark of maturity when practitioners can accept critical feedback without being defensive, and can use this feedback to review their own practice.

Practice examples:

6.4.4 Projects address conflict with other organisations using strategies that promote respect and trust between colleagues and families.

- Agency policies and protocols regarding conflict encourage staff to address conflict with the person or project directly concerned in the first instance.
- Agency policies and protocols promote conflict resolution strategies.
- Agency policies and protocols are acknowledged and implemented.

Further considerations: Conflict is inevitable when organisations are working closely with families. It is easy for practitioners to have different priorities or to have different perspectives based on their particular contact with a family. Using constructive strategies to address conflict models a different experience to those families may have had previously.

Practice 6.5 – All supervision and learning activities are structured to enable staff members to learn from each other and to develop their skills.

Practice examples:

6.5.1 The project has a supportive orientation program for new staff.

- The orientation program provides information on family support principles and the organisation's statement of purpose.
- The orientation program provides clear information about the new practitioners' role and responsibilities.
- The orientation process encourages new staff to ask questions and contribute their perspectives and experiences.
- The orientation process is flexible, accommodating different learning styles and recognising previous experiences.
- The orientation process incorporates opportunities to build relationships with staff from the project and in the wider community.

Further considerations: Staff experience of orientation should mirror the experiences the project aims to provide for families. A commitment to family support principles should be evident in an emphasis on building relationships based on trust and respect. When orientation of new staff recognises personal differences in learning styles and provides sufficient time for the development of trusting relationships, a good example is set of effective work.

Practice examples:

6.5.2 Supervision provides effective and consistent support for staff members and ensures accountability at all levels within the organisation.

- Each staff member receives regular supervision.
- Supervisors can be relied on to keep supervision appointments.
- Supervision processes take into account the individual staff member's role and responsibilities, their individual learning styles and their level of experience.

Further considerations: Supervision is the process of providing support, ensuring direction and monitoring performance. Supervision is a vehicle for transmitting values, developing skills and potential, and ensuring quality. In the context of family support projects effective supervision goes beyond workload management to address the professional and personal implications of working with families. All staff should be included in supervisory processes to address accountability. Organisations need to ensure that supervisors have adequate personal and professional resources and sufficient time to sustain consistent and effective supervisory relationships. Supervision can be provided in various ways e.g. one to one, group or team settings, peer supervision. Supervision from an external consultant can supplement internal supervision, especially by enhancing professional development.

Practice examples:

6.5.3 Supervision is a collaborative process.

- Supervision arrangements are negotiated to ensure a clear and mutually agreeable understanding of roles, times, methods and the scope of supervision.
- Staff have access to different modes of supervision.
- Trust is promoted through clear expectations regarding confidentiality.

Further considerations: Supervision in family work occurs in the context of respectful relationships. While power is held mutually there is an acknowledgement of different roles and responsibilities. The supervisory experience mirrors the partnership between worker and family that is enhanced by mutual respect for each party's knowledge, experience and expertise.

Practice examples:

6.5.4 Regular opportunities are provided for staff to reflect on their work.

- Staff have opportunities for informal discussion with supervisors to complement formal supervisory sessions.
- Staff meetings include time for staff to jointly reflect on successes and challenges.
- Staff provide each other with constructive feedback regarding staff relationships and work responsibilities.

Further considerations: Reflection is both the means and the end of the supervision experience. Providing staff with opportunities to process experience helps prevent burn-out, encourages staff retention and promotes program quality. Reflection involves stepping back from the immediate, intense experience of hands-on work, to ask questions.

Practice examples:

6.5.5 Staff have access to workplace based training.

- Staff have opportunities to share their expertise within the team.
- Staff have the opportunity for in-house learning experiences which involve all team members.
- Staff have opportunities to identify their learning needs in the provision of workplace training.
- Workplace training includes opportunities to put new skills into action in the workplace, and then to reflect on the experience.
- Staff are able to incorporate their experiences of external training into the workplace setting.

Further considerations: Training that is directly linked to the workplace is more likely to have relevance for and a positive impact on the workplace setting. This is especially true if the entire team participates, so that all team members can reinforce and support attempts to change workplace practices. While electronic learning resources allow participants to learn individually at a convenient time, participants still benefit from opportunities to share experiences as a group.

Practice examples:

6.5.6 Staff development includes access to external training.

■ There is an identifiable budget for training and staff development.

■ There are clear expectations about staff access to external training.

■ Training priorities are reviewed in the context of the project's purpose and goals.

■ Planning takes account of the value of external training for the whole project.

Further considerations: External training and staff development provide opportunities for project staff to access new information, strategies and options, to validate aspects of their work, and to broaden their perspective. Where the expectation is that training attendance will promote changes in the workplace, a minimum of two staff should attend to provide support and encouragement in implementing outcomes within the project.

Practice examples:

6.5.7 The work environment facilitates learning and skills development.

■ Staff have manageable workloads.

■ Staff are acknowledged for their contribution to the project.

■ Staff have opportunities for career development e.g. study leave, acting in higher positions, mentoring.

Further considerations: Effective projects regulate expectations of staff so that they can allocate time for expanding their skills and understanding. As well as attending external training staff need time to reflect and experiment with new ideas.

Practice 6.6 – Project planning and evaluation is a collaborative, ongoing process that involves staff, families, management and the wider community.

Practice examples:

6.6.1 The project has a framework which ensures that evaluation processes are undertaken regularly and inform planning and review.

- Evaluation is seen as a learning opportunity.
- Clear procedures exist to ensure that all data and feedback collected within the project is reviewed as part of the evaluation process.
- Strategies exist to collect information from participants across all aspects of the project.
- Evaluation processes result in clear recommendations about project outcomes.

Further considerations: Evaluation is the mechanism by which projects remain responsive to changing circumstances and consistent with their mission, principles and goals. Evaluation has little or no values as an end in itself, so evaluation processes need to be linked with planning, review and decision making.

Practice examples:

6.6.2 All evaluation procedures, including those used by outside evaluators, are collaborative and involve families and staff from the beginning of the process.

■ Outside evaluators understand the principles and practices of family support and the purpose and goals of the project.

■ Evaluators have the opportunity to talk informally with families and staff.

■ Stakeholders are included in the process of planning the evaluation, and have the opportunity to discuss the purpose and scope of the evaluation and options for their involvement.

Further considerations: If evaluation processes are to make a difference they must be grounded in a full understanding of the program's principles, purpose and goals. Participation by the full range of stakeholders is essential to the success of the evaluation and involves establishing partnerships from the beginning of the process.
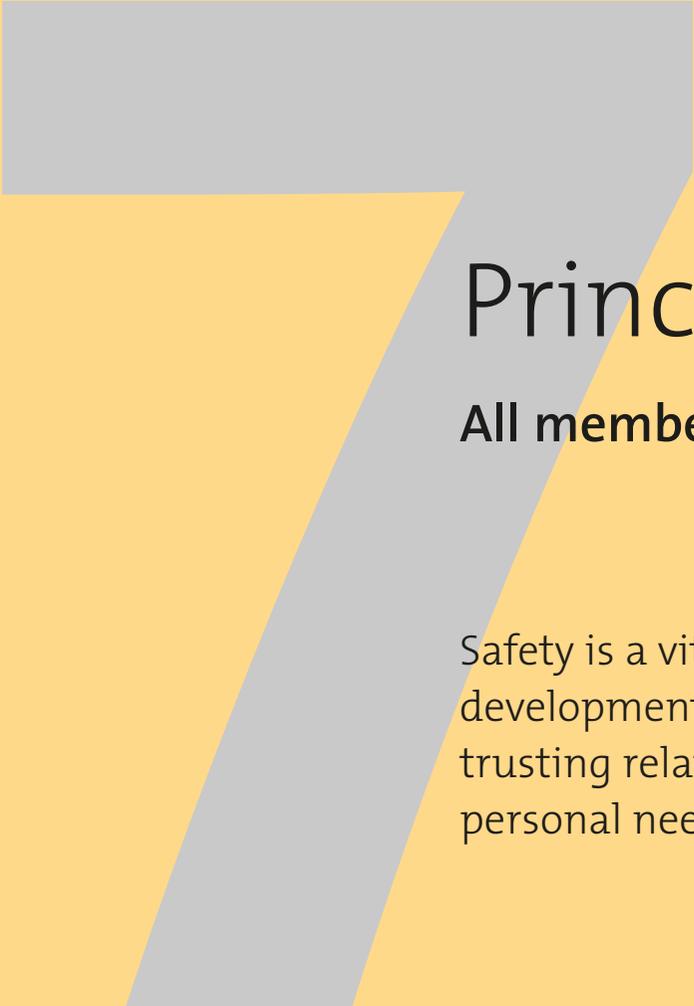
Principle Seven

All members of a family should be safe from violence.

Safety is a vital pre-requisite for positive family functioning and for the healthy development of children. Violence impairs the development of respectful and trusting relationships, and undermines the capacity of family members to meet personal needs and to promote positive change.

Practice 7.1 – Practitioners take a consistent position identifying violence as behaviour which includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse and which is never acceptable.

Practice examples:

7.1.1 Where practitioners identify violent behaviour, it is clearly named as such in interactions with family members.

■ Practitioners receive training to assist them to recognise and respond to domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

■ Practitioners talk to family members in ways which locate full responsibility for violence with the person who is violent.

■ In all settings staff avoid ways of talking which minimise the seriousness of violent behaviour.

■ Practitioners describe the harmful impacts of violent behaviour on family members.

■ Practitioners have access to resource material which can help family members to identify violent behaviour and recognise its harmful effects.

■ Relevant Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines are followed.

Further considerations: Violence in families is often dismissed or minimised especially by people who use violent means to exercise power and control in relationships. Naming behaviour as violent, and drawing attention to the harmful impact of violence are important means of making violence visible. Family violence includes domestic violence, but may also include violence exercised by parents against children, children of varying ages against parents, violence between siblings, and violence against older people.

Practice examples:

7.1.2 Practitioners support any available legal sanctions against violent behaviour in the home.

■ Where physical abuse or sexual assault have occurred, practitioners clearly identify the criminal nature of these behaviours.

■ Practitioners make reports to the police where serious injuries have occurred or serious risks are identified in relation to staff or family members e.g. threats to use firearms.

■ Practitioners make child protection reports where they identify children who are not safe because of violence in the home.

■ Practitioners support family members in the process of obtaining or enforcing Apprehended Violence Orders as a strategy for promoting family safety.

■ Staff members provide information and referral to assist family members in applying for Victim's Compensation.

Further considerations: Many barriers can exist to prevent family members from employing legal sanctions. These can include fear, guilt and shame. Legal sanctions play an important part as societal challenges to violence, but it is important to remember that they cannot guarantee safety, especially where the person who uses violence remains in the family home.

Practice examples:

7.1.3 Projects recognise that domestic violence and other forms of family violence occur across all Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.

■ Practitioners ensure that practices promoting family safety are used with families of all culturally diverse communities.

■ Staff challenge beliefs which support male power or which minimise the use of violence regardless of culturally based justifications.

Further considerations: Family members' expectations and choices will be influenced by their cultural identification, and within projects participants may hold a range of views about lifestyle and expectations. All families should be involved in discussions about safety, and respectful inquiry is necessary to ensure that a commitment to cultural diversity does not serve to excuse or justify beliefs which contribute to family members being unsafe.

Practice 7.2 – Projects work to ensure the safety of all family members and staff within the context of the family situation.

Practice examples:

7.2.1 Practitioners recognise and address the particular risks for women whose partners use tactics of power and control in intimate relationships.

- Practitioners routinely screen for domestic violence at intake and during assessment when working with women.
- During home visits or phone calls to women routine checks are undertaken to ensure that the woman is safe to talk.
- Where violence is identified women are assisted to assess their own level of risk.
- Women are encouraged to develop safety plans and to recognise the limitations of safety plans.
- Information and support is provided to enable women to access services which can promote safety such as legal responses, housing options and specialist domestic violence services.
- Staff challenge messages that blame women for their partner's violence.
- Staff challenge beliefs about gender and entitlement which contribute to the legitimising of male power and control.
- Staff encourage a focus on the woman's strengths and her right to safety.
- Staff have a duty of care to avoid referrals to services which may increase the risk of violence, or where the implications of violence are not recognised.
- Staff recognise the added risks where women are seeking assistance, alert women to the likelihood of increased danger and actively work to increase family safety.

Further considerations: Domestic violence is generally defined as partner violence which may include physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Generally this is violence used by men to control women, reflecting power imbalances between men and women and beliefs about men's entitlement. As well as overt physical assaults, tactics of power and control used in domestic violence include threats and intimidation, verbal harassment and belittling, social isolation and financial control. The seriousness of violence commonly escalates over time so that individual events should be assessed in the wider context of the pattern of violence. Women have detailed knowledge of their experiences of violence, and this knowledge is important in assisting women to identify strategies which will promote their safety.

Practice examples:

7.2.2 Practitioners identify and respond to the impact of violence on children.

■ Practitioners routinely draw attention to the impact of violence in the household on children living there.

■ Practitioners engage children in discussion about the impact of violence and about their concerns and preferences.

■ Practitioners provide information on the impact of living with violence on children to the adults responsible for their care.

■ Practitioners make reports to child protection authorities where children are at risk of harm because they are living in a household where violence occurs.

■ Practitioners take children's rights and needs into account in work undertaken with the family e.g. safety plans.

Further considerations: Domestic violence is associated with increased rates of sexual abuse and physical abuse of children. Living in a household where there is domestic violence can also harm children's psychological development.

Practice examples:

7.2.3 Practitioners prioritise safety in work with family members.

■ Practitioners recognise that progress cannot be made to address family functioning (e.g. household management, parenting, until violence in the household is addressed).

■ Practitioners provide referrals to relevant services where family members who are violent indicate that they wish to address violent behaviour.

■ Program models separate service delivery to family members affected by violence from service delivery to family members who are violent.

■ Practitioners receive support from the organisation to recognise and respond to the risks which may be faced in working with families where there is violence.

Further considerations: Effective family work is undermined where family members are living in a household affected by violence. Where violence is identified the focus needs to be on family safety. Where one partner (generally a male) is reliant on tactics of power and control within family relationships, these tactics will impact negatively on attempts to engage both partners collaboratively. Where a person using domestic violence indicates that they wish to change their behaviour, services need to be provided separately from services provided to their partner and children. People affected by violence must always have an opportunity to provide feedback about their circumstances in a context separate from work with the person who uses violence.

Practice 7.3 – Projects contribute to community action opposing domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

Practice examples:

7.3.1 Practitioners encourage mutual support opportunities for women and children affected by domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

■ Information is provided about violence which challenges myths and normalises experiences.

■ Practitioners facilitate opportunities for participation in group programs, either through direct provision of groups, or through active referral.

Further considerations: Isolation is a common tactic of control and a common consequence of living in a violent household. Mutual support activities assist women and children to recognise that they are not alone in their experience of violence, and provide opportunities for developing broader social networks.

Practice examples:

7.3.2 Project practitioners participate in community networks addressing domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

■ The project is represented on local committees addressing domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

■ The project participates in strategies to increase awareness of the impact of violence and supports available to people affected by domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

■ Data collected by the project includes information about the incidence of domestic violence and other forms of family violence.

Further considerations: Because family violence is so widespread in the community, strategies to address violence must have an impact beyond work with individual families. The impacts of family violence are more than any individual agency can address, so that interagency partnerships are an important aspect of challenging family violence.
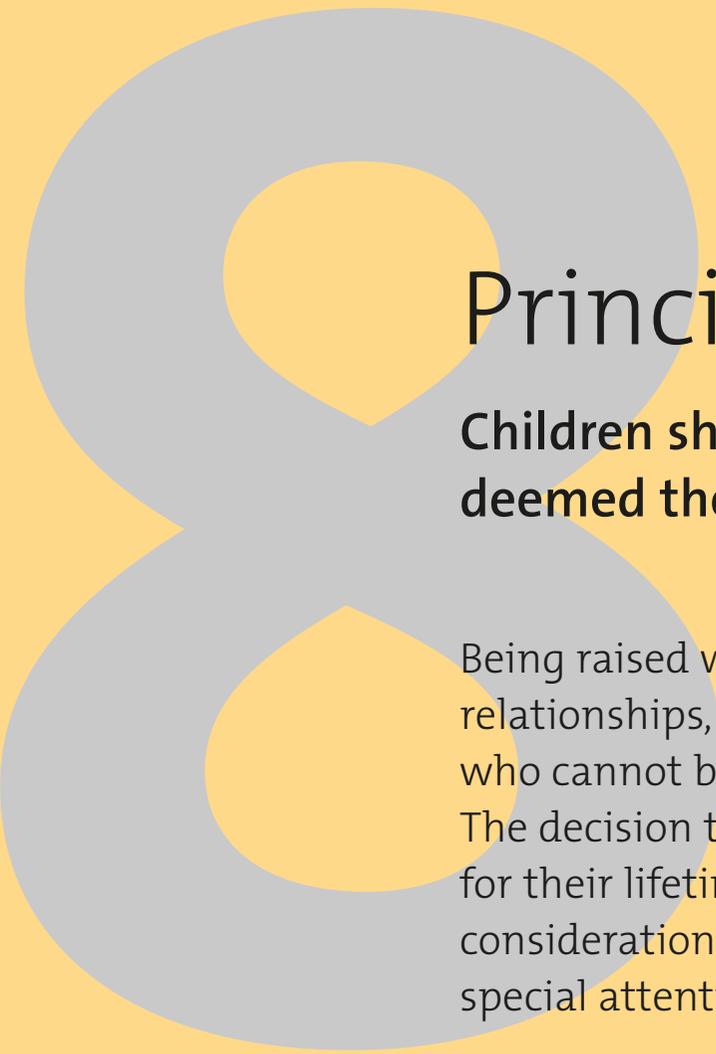
Principle Eight

Children should be provided with safe quality alternatives if it is deemed they can never live with their birth family.

Being raised within their birth family provides children with continuity of relationships, a sense of identity and links with other family members. Any child who cannot be raised within their family experiences a very significant loss. The decision that a child can never live with their birth family has consequences for their lifetime, and should only be made after the most careful, albeit timely, consideration. Children who cannot be raised within their birth family are owed special attention to ensure the provision of high quality alternative care.

Practice 8.1 – Projects assist families to work towards the restoration of children in out of home care where there are reasonable prospects for successful restoration.

Practice examples:

8.1.1   Projects can be accessed by families working towards restoration of children.

- Project criteria are inclusive of parents working towards restoration.
- Parents working towards restoration are welcomed and included in ways which avoid stigma and protect confidentiality.
- Children can attend project activities as part of contact arrangements e.g. playgroups.
- Specialised services for parents working towards restoration of children are provided where parents have specialised needs e.g. parenting programs.

Further considerations: While families of children in out of home care may need specialised support to address particular concerns (e.g. parental mental health or substance use issues) families also need to address issues which will be very similar to those faced by parents whose children are still in their care. Families benefit from the opportunity to share experiences with a range of families, and to develop networks with other families that may continue after children return to their care.

Practice examples:

8.1.2 Practitioners make decisions about the prospects of restoration on the basis of careful assessment that takes into account the needs of the child.

- Practitioners take into account any available information about the reasons for the child's placement in care.
- Practitioners take into account the child's age and individual needs, time the child has already spent away from their family and the need for timely decision making, especially for young children.
- Practitioners take into account their assessment of family strengths and areas of difficulty including previous work undertaken with the family and previous care placements.
- Practitioners take into account any gaps in available information in making recommendations.

Further considerations: Decisions about restoration will generally be made by courts or child protection authorities but practitioners will often be asked to give opinions about the prospects of restoration. Recommendations about the prospects of restoration should be made taking into account the circumstances of the individual child and family, not by applying generalised positions. In some circumstances the risks to children will be so great that there will be no prospect for restoration. Because children need stability and security for healthy development decisions about restoration need to take into account the child's age, the length of time they have already spent in care and the quality of their current care experience. If previous efforts to restore a child have been unsuccessful this will often indicate that a child's future will need to be outside the care of their birth family.

Practice examples:

8.1.3 Practitioners provide honest and respectful feedback to family members about the prospects of restoration.

- Practitioners provide information about the strengths and limitations of the family in relation to restoration.
- Practitioners provide information to parents about their assessment of the prospects of restoration before sharing this information in reports or at case meetings.

Further considerations: Families generally want to understand the basis on which significant decisions are made even if this causes distress. Concealing information or giving families false hope is disrespectful.

Practice examples:

8.1.4   Practitioners provide assistance to parents during court and planning processes.

■   Practitioners ensure that parents have been prepared for court hearings and that a support person is available to them.

■   Practitioners explain the contents of court reports and other relevant documents.

■   Practitioners ensure that parents have been prepared for planning meetings and that they have access to support.

■   Practitioners provide information about the outcomes that need to be achieved before children can be restored.

Further considerations: Families often find formal meetings and court processes are confusing. This is especially so where family members have limited literacy skills or are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Practice examples:

8.1.5   Projects continue to assist families after children are restored.

■   Project staff continue to provide assistance after children are restored.

■   Wherever possible challenges are seen as learning opportunities.

■   Families continue to receive feedback about progress taking into account the needs of the child.

■   Reviews recognise family progress and plan for enhanced outcomes.

■   When contact with the project ceases families have access to information and networks so that they can access assistance if it is required.

Further considerations: The period after children return to parents' care can be critical in ensuring stability. Small crises can escalate more easily where family members have limited resources or where they have difficulty asking for help.

Practice 8.2 – Practitioners participate in an honest and respectful way in statutory processes and proceedings.

Practice examples:

8.2.1   Practitioners prioritise the needs of the child in their participation in statutory processes and proceedings.

- Practitioners make reports of risk of harm to child protection authorities consistent with legal requirements.
- Court reports include information about the child's needs and experiences.
- Practitioners provide accurate and comprehensive information within the context of their role and responsibilities.

Further considerations: Decisions about the permanent care of children will generally be made within a legal framework. Practitioners may feel pressure to take sides in this context. It is important to focus on the needs of the child where practitioners are required to participate in statutory processes.

Practice 8.3 — Practitioners are available to and supportive of families where children will not return to their parents' care.

Practice examples:

8.3.1 Practitioners recognise the grief and loss experienced by parents where it is deemed that children cannot live with their birth family.

- Practitioners maintain contact during at least the initial period after decisions are made about a child's future.
- Parents' feelings and behaviour are understood within a framework of grief and loss.

Further considerations: Regardless of the circumstances that have led to a child's removal from their care, parents generally experience overwhelming grief at this loss. They may respond in ways that can further prejudice others against them, perhaps with anger, or detachment. It can be helpful to remember that parents do generally try to do the best they can for their children, although this may not be enough to meet their child's needs.

Practice examples:

8.3.2 Practitioners assist parents to recognise and address rights and responsibilities in relation to children who will not return to their care.

- Practitioners provide accurate information about parents' rights and responsibilities, taking into account the needs and circumstances of the child.
- Practitioners encourage positive responses to contact visits, recognising the needs of the child.
- Practitioners encourage parents to provide information that can assist children to develop an understanding of their background.

Further considerations: Parents may have only limited rights in relation to children if they are permanently unable to live at home. Their opportunity to exercise rights will be determined at least in part by their capacity to exercise responsibilities in a child-focused way e.g. by making contact visits a positive experience for the child. Parents may have very limited family and community support at this very difficult period in their lives.

Practice 8.4 – Projects recognise and respond to the needs of kinship carers i.e. family members who are caring for children who cannot be cared for by their parents.

Practice examples:

8.4.1 Projects can be accessed by kinship carers.

- Project criteria are inclusive of kinship carers.
- Kinship carers are made welcome and stigmatising practices are avoided.

Further considerations: Members of extended families, especially grandparents are especially relied on to provide care for children who are unable to live with their parents.

Practice examples:

8.4.2 The particular needs of kinship carers are acknowledged and addressed.

- Information is provided about support available to kinship carers and to the children in their care.
- The needs of older carers are taken into account in planning and providing services.
- Practitioners recognise and respond to the special needs of children who cannot live with their birth family.

Further considerations: Kinship carers can provide care without the stigma of formal welfare involvement, and while maintaining the child's identity as part of a family and wider community. They are often recruited into informal care arrangements with limited legal, financial and social support. Children may have experienced significant challenges because of the impact of parental drug use, disability or mental health issues.

Practice examples:

8.4.3 Projects recognise and respond to the particular needs of Aboriginal families.

■ Staff members recognise and respond to the particular concerns of Aboriginal families taking into account the past history of removal of children from families and communities.

■ Staff members affirm culturally appropriate practices for the care of Aboriginal children who cannot live with their birth families.

■ Staff advocate for the application of the Aboriginal Placement Principle in the placement of Aboriginal children who cannot live with their birth families.

Further considerations: The majority of Aboriginal children in care are placed with extended family. Keeping Aboriginal children within the Aboriginal community is especially important because of the impact of previous practices that separated large numbers of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. The Aboriginal Placement Principle gives priority to placement of Aboriginal children with their own families and local communities, or where this is not possible, within other Aboriginal communities.

Principle Nine

There is recognition that families have multiple forms not necessarily biologically based.

Projects recognise that people make meaningful relationships beyond limited biological ties and that many different combinations of people can provide the safe, secure and committed web of relationships children need to grow and develop. Projects allow families to define what family means in their context, and avoid placing barriers that could limit the effectiveness of outcomes for family members.

Practice 9.1 – Projects are respectful of and welcoming to all families.

Practice examples:

9.1.1 Practitioners invite family members to identify their unique understanding of their family composition.

- ■ Intake processes anticipate that families will have multiple forms.
- ■ Paper and electronic forms used by the project provide flexibility for recording different family forms and care giving arrangements.
- ■ Assessment outlines anticipate that families will have multiple forms.
- ■ Delivery and consultation strategies will be flexible, involving family members of all ages and genders and will include consideration of the roles and responsibilities of all family members.

Further considerations: Projects should anticipate that families may include sole parents, blended families, extended families in one household, same sex partners sharing parenting or foster and kinship carers. Projects should recognise that family obligations and involvement of separated parents and extended family in sharing parenting can occur across different households. It should be recognised that families may change their patterns of relationship and care giving over time. Projects should take into account the cultural context of family obligations.

Practice examples:

9.1.2 Projects are welcoming to all families and to the range of family members.

- ■ Project publicity shows visual images of different family forms.
- ■ Project publicity uses inclusive terminology.
- ■ Specific project publicity is developed where appropriate to address issues of social exclusion.
- ■ Staff selection strategies assess the capacity of candidates to welcome families to the project and to work with them respectfully.

Further considerations: Visual images can give more powerful messages than written or spoken ones. Where images of families are used, care should be taken to use a range of family images, or images which are applicable to a range of family forms.

Practice examples:

9.1.3 Projects recognise that different individuals will have different preferences for general or for targeted activities or for workers who share important characteristics with the individual.

■ Projects recognise that individuals may have a preference regarding the gender of their worker.

■ Projects recognise that individuals may have a preference regarding the culture or language of their worker.

■ Projects recognise the family members may prefer to attend generic activities, or activities with other individuals who share characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, family role (e.g. grandparents) or culture or language.

Further considerations: Projects will not necessarily be able to meet the preferences of all family members regarding activity or worker characteristics. However taking time to discuss preferences may assist projects to refer family members to another service who can provide targeted activities, to respond to demand by establishing new activities or recruiting specific workers. Where preferences cannot be met, information can be used to better accommodate the needs of individual family members in generic activities.