



Department for Child Protection and Family Support

Family Support (Responsible Parenting) Framework

Revised Version December 2013

Overview of Family Support

The preferred way to safeguard and promote a child's wellbeing, as outlined in the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act), is to support parents and families to care appropriately for their child. Family support is the work undertaken to strengthen families to overcome problems, care for their child safely and respond to their child's needs.

Family support aims to improve family functioning and can form part of the action taken to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect where families are experiencing difficulties. Family support may be a component of a safety plan, when harm or danger has been identified through the *Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework* (Signs of Safety).

Family support also provides a service response where safety issues have not been resolved and children have come into the care of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department). This work is important in assessing and planning for reunification, to assist the family to address the issues identified by the Department through danger statements and safety goals.

In undertaking family support, the principles, disciplines, processes and tools of Signs of Safety are relevant and should be utilised across all teams. Strong and trusting working relationships; being open and fostering a stance of inquiry; and holding high aspirations for what can be achieved will result in better outcomes for families.

Continuum and integration of Family Support

Family support responses are delivered by both the Department and funded community sector agencies across a continuum of primary, secondary and tertiary services. Intervention through provision of family support services are most effective provided early in the life of a child, early in the development of a problem and early in the formation of a family and these type of services are largely provided by the community sector.

The Department provides family support targeted to significantly 'hard to reach' families and children experiencing more extreme difficulties. The community sector has an important and expanding role in providing services in partnership with the Department to support families and prevent children entering care.

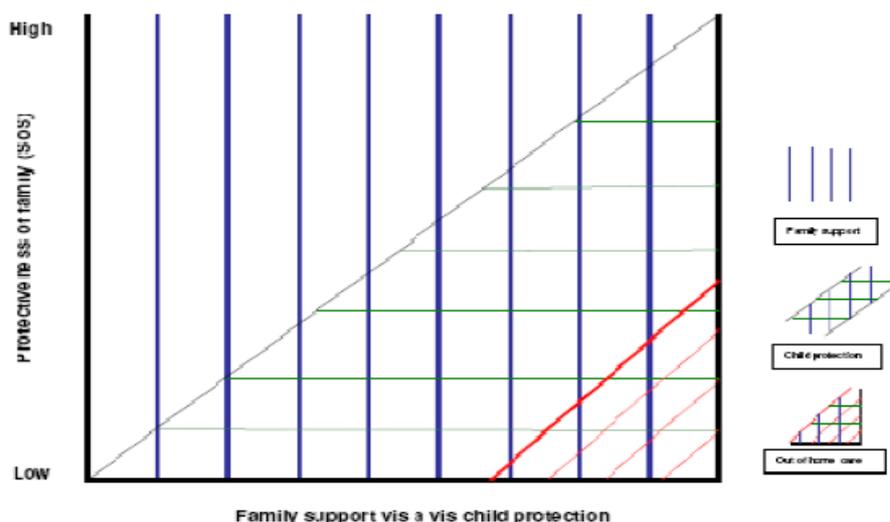
Figure 1 below outlines the continuum of family support provided.

Figure 1 – Family support continuum

Increasing child safety and wellbeing concerns							
Category	Primary/ universal	Secondary	Tertiary		Tertiary		
	All families and children	Those at risk, in crisis or vulnerable	High risk or need, problems occurring		High risk or need, problems occurring		
Service	Universal parenting and family services	Secondary Family Support Services	Intensive Family Support (IFS) Services	Family Support	Child Protection	Children in care	Intensive Family Support (IFS) Services
Response	Varied parenting programs Parenting and family helplines	Family Enhancement, Indigenous Family Program, counselling, FDV, homelessness, youth, financial counselling	Tertiary Family Preservation Service	Child Centred Family Support	Short term intervention	Children in care reunification	Tertiary Family Reunification services
Target group	General population	Children and families with needs too complex for universal services and require a targeted secondary service to prevent entering the child protection system	Families with children at immediate risk of being taken into provisional protection and care as a result of child protection concerns/neglect	Families where there are already child protection concerns (placement prevention) and is also used in reunification	Children and young people who require protection from abuse and neglect	Children and young people in the CEOs care	Children and young people where reunification is planned
Delivered by	Varied organisations	Community service sector	Community service sector	CPFS	CPFS	CPFS	Community service sector
Responsible Parenting Services Parent Support, Best Beginnings, Youth Family Support Worker and Community Child Protection Worker At-risk, complex and/or hard to reach families needing parenting or family support. Delivered by CPFS -All areas utilise the <i>Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework</i> -							

The interaction between family support and child protection and the responses provided for families where the children are in the care of the CEO are indicated in Figure 2 below. This model illustrates the extent to which family support is used as a response to a family, which is relative to the degree that family is protective of the child, as assessed and mapped through the use of Signs of Safety.

Figure 2 – Integration of family support and child protection functions



A family’s level of protectiveness can change and a commensurate change to the Department’s approach and service response may be required.

Family support responses

Department for Child Protection and Family Support

Short-term intervention

Family support can be provided through a duty interaction where there are insufficient child protection concerns for the Department to become involved, but families would benefit from services to enhance the wellbeing of children. This may be determined with the assistance of the *Signs of Safety Duty, Intake and Assessment Prompts*.

Short-term interventions can include the provision of the following supports to referrers or families:

- information on parenting support services;
- information on counselling services to address family conflict; and/or
- information on financial counselling services.

Child Centred Family Support

Child Centred Family Support (CCFS) is used when an assessment of concern for a child has indicated that further action is required to promote or safeguard their wellbeing, but the child is not currently in need of protection as defined in the Act (Section 28).

CCFS is provided where a Safety and Wellbeing Assessment has identified concerns for a child, but there is potential for the child to remain in the care of their family with a Signs of Safety - safety plan in place. CCFS provides an intensive way of working with rigorous, supportive interventions focused on the child's safety and wellbeing.

Dedicated CCFS teams are an important strategy in both keeping children from entering the care of the CEO and working with families where reunification is the plan. In country districts the ability to establish a dedicated team will be limited, but all districts will establish a child centred family support function in some form.

Responsible Parenting Services

Responsible Parenting Services (RPS) are composed of the Parent Support and Best Beginnings services, youth and family support workers (YFSW's) and community child protection workers (CCPWs). RPS works to build resilience in families to prevent children coming into the care of the CEO or prevent further engagement in the youth justice system.

A specialist RPS team provides services in each district with line management from the assistant district director and RPS team leader. The diverse nature of the RPS team provides for a range of skills, engagement methods and culturally appropriate approaches.

RPS is focused on 'hard to reach' families who may:

- be disengaged and resistant;
- present with significant risks to their children; and
- fall through the gaps in parenting and counselling services provided through universal or secondary services.

Working with these families is challenging, complex and requires a skilled, strength-based and persistent approach.

RPS uses specialised 'matrix' tools to engage with these hard to reach families and to measure levels of change. Staff are required to be skilled and confident with the tools, which are outlined in more detail in the Department's casework practice manual (CPM).

Signs of Safety is used extensively in the RPS teams, through:

- services delivered in line with the core principles: working relationships; thinking critically, fostering a stance of inquiry (always being prepared to admit you may be wrong); and landing grand aspirations in everyday practice (families and practitioners are the arbiters of what works);
- use of the discipline of plain language;
- use of the discipline of observable behaviours to describe matrix scores;
- use of three column mapping as a way of generating conversations with parents and young people (along with the matrices);
- using , words and pictures and three houses when working with children and young people;
- utilising scaling questions as an engagement tool with parents and children; and
- mapping and safety planning with families that are co-case managed by RPS and CCFS, child protection or children in care teams.

Parent Support

Parent Support works with hard to reach families to increase their capacity to parent and establish parental responsibility. The service was based on evidence of 'what works'. The target group is parents of school-aged children and young people who are involved in:

- criminal activity;
- anti-social behaviour;
- truancy (in combination with the above behaviours).

Given the focus on anti-social, criminal and truanting behaviours, Parent Support is usually involved with families who have older children. Some children will be younger, with early stages of anti-social and criminal behaviour, whilst many will be older with more entrenched behaviours. Parent Support works with a range of these families and responds to local community need, as identified in collaboration with partner agencies.

Parent support matrices are used to guide and support work with families as well as track the progress of both the parents and the young person. The Parent Support matrices consider the young person's behaviour, the young person's environment and the parent's wellbeing.

Parent Support is also able to access other tools and strategies to create safety and appropriate care of children, including:

- child protection income management – which aims to assist a parent meet their child's basic needs by having income managed funds spent on necessities including food, housing utilities clothing and medical care. The Department uses CPIM in the metropolitan districts, Peel, West and East Kimberley, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the Laverton Shire.
- Liquor Restricted Premises application – taking out, or supporting families to make an application to have the home made alcohol free, due to safety, wellbeing or risk of harm concerns due to excessive drinking; and
- Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy – working closely with Department of Housing where families' tenancies are at risk as a result of disruptive or anti-social behaviour and rental arrears.

Responsible Parenting Agreements (RPAs) are used by the Department to help parents identify their children's problem behaviours, establish goals and develop parenting skills to exercise appropriate control over their children. A RPA is developed or attempted with every family opened to Parent Support. The Department of Education and the Department of Corrective Services also have the ability to undertake a RPA with a family. Parent Support may be engaged; however this involvement is not essential for a RPA to be developed by the agency.

Where parents are unable to be engaged through a RPA and where there are protective concerns, the Department will consider action under the *Act* to seek a protection order.

Parent Support complements other functions of the Department through:

- complex cases being managed to achieve good outcomes through effective integration of Parent Support, child protection and Strong Families interventions;
- providing an intensive casework approach which actively pursues parent's engagement and builds parenting skills, complementing the work of the child protection worker in building safety and setting bottom lines;
- supporting relative carers who meet the target group criteria; and
- a timely referral pathway to child protection responses if concerns are identified.

Responding to criminal, anti-social and truancy behaviour requires a multi-agency approach. Strong partnerships are in place between the Department, the Department of Corrective Services (both diversionary and statutory teams), Department of Education and Western Australia (WA) Police at senior and service delivery levels.

Co-location arrangements with youth justice are in place throughout country regions while formal case consultation and allocation arrangements are in place in the metropolitan area. The Western Australian Police and Department of Education are active participants in most districts. These processes are outlined in the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and Department of Corrective Service for the Collaboration of Service Delivery*.

Best Beginnings

Best Beginnings is a voluntary home visiting service, delivered over two years for families with specific risk factors making their child vulnerable to poor attachment, developmental delay and poor life outcomes. The program seeks to improve child health and wellbeing, parent wellbeing, family functioning and social connectedness. It is an evidenced based service, jointly delivered with the Department of Health and three community sector partner agencies in a multi-disciplinary approach.

The service accepts families referred ante-natally or before the baby is three months of age and targets parents with specific risk factors that include:

- depression/anxiety;
- being under 20 years of age;
- experiencing financial stress;
- being a single parent;
- experiencing domestic violence;
- low education level; and
- being socially isolated.

Best Beginnings is delivered through 22 structured home visits, over four phases within the two year period. Best Beginnings complements the work of other teams, providing:

- advice on child development;
- a connection to child health nurses within the health system; and
- co-working opportunities with assessment and intervention teams, CCFS, child protection teams or children in care teams, particularly if there are safety and wellbeing concerns which would benefit from joint work.

Youth and family support workers

YFSWs work with Aboriginal young people at risk and their families to increase safety and wellbeing. This work is targeted, innovative and includes partnering with other agencies. YFSWs are located within RPS teams and work across family support, child protection and children in care, through consultative, co-working and mentoring activities.

Specific activities may include:

- working with Parent Support, Best Beginnings and/or Strong Families to:
 - facilitate Aboriginal family engagement and accessibility;
 - pursue innovative ways of engaging Aboriginal families to address their children's behaviours; and
 - support young people whilst parents engage with Parent Support;
- working with at risk young people in contact with all areas of the Department;
- working intensively with isolated and vulnerable young people;
- building relationships with young people and their families who are disengaged from the Department and other services; and
- assisting in Signs of Safety mapping and safety planning, particularly representing the voice of Aboriginal young people.

Community child protection workers

CCPWs build relationships with Aboriginal at risk children and families and are generally located in RPS teams (depending on the district) and available to work across teams. Their role will vary in accordance with district operational plans and involve:

- up to 50 per cent case work, with the balance of time focused on meeting other district priorities through community child protection work;
- connecting families who have disengaged from the Department;
- providing important information on local issues affecting Aboriginal families;
- having extensive knowledge of Aboriginal family structures;
- assisting to build a positive image of the Department with Aboriginal families; and
- assisting in Signs of Safety mapping and safety planning for Aboriginal families.

Strong Families

Strong Families undertake a planning and coordination process for families with complex issues receiving services from two or more agencies. The approach recognises that problems experienced by families are complex and inter-linked and may not be solved by one agency alone. Strong Families:

- brings together the family and relevant agencies to share information, identify goals and develop plans to help meet the family's needs;
- identifies a lead agency and coordinates the range of services in partnership with the family; and
- if necessary, escalates the provision of essential services.

Closely connected with RPS, Strong Families works with a similar client group and seeks to engage Aboriginal families to enable them to make changes and achieve positive outcomes for their children. Increasing integration of Strong Families with Parent Support and child protection teams is resulting in good outcomes for families with complex issues.

Community sector services

Secondary Family Support Services

Secondary family support services work with children, young people and families with complex needs who require a targeted service response to prevent their situation from worsening and possible engagement with the child protection system. These services include Family Enhancement Services, the Indigenous Family Program, counselling, family and domestic violence services, homelessness services, programs for young people and financial counselling.

Western Australian Family Support Networks

The WA Family Support Networks (FSN) model is operational in the Armadale district, with implementation of FSN's in Mirrabooka and the Midwest underway. FSN's are an alliance of community sector services and the Department, providing a common entry point to services, delivering earlier, targeted support to families. FSNs are central to the *Secondary Family Support State Plan* released in 2010, to increase integration, improve support for vulnerable families and prevent the need for child protection intervention.

The overall coordination of the FSN is provided by a lead agency. Families enter the FSN through a common entry point which uses a common assessment framework to determine the most appropriate service response. Assessment and Support Officers use the *Signs of Safety* three column approach with the family to summarise the assessment and identify the goals of the case plan. A coordinated services approach is then adapted to effectively respond to and meet the complex needs of families. A specialist child protection worker is also located within the FSN.

The Family by Family service connects families who are experiencing difficulties (seeking families) with families who have experienced difficulty in the past and now want to share their experience to help others (sharing families). As FSN's develop, options will be explored for linking a Family by Family operated by a local community sector service – with the first service located in Mirrabooka.

Intensive Family Support Services – Family preservation

Family preservation services operate in the metropolitan area and work with families experiencing complex issues, family dysfunction and poor parenting - to prevent children coming into care. This is achieved by providing intensive services to reduce the risk to the child and to enhance family safety, utilising Signs of Safety and its tools. This provides clear and straightforward language, joint non-negotiables, safety plans and goals, along with a common language between the family, service and the Department. Priority access is given for children aged 12 years or younger.

Intensive Family Support Services – Reunification service

Reunification is the planned process of reconnecting children and young people residing in out-of-home care with their families through the delivery of support. The service is delivered in the metropolitan area. Many community sector agencies use Signs of Safety to deliver reunification services.

Key Partnerships

The Department also partners with key government and community sector agencies to provide family support in response to a number of social issues. This work is operationalised through interagency protocols and contractual arrangements, and relevant areas outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Family support partnership agencies and sectors

Family issues	Agencies
Alcohol and other drugs	Drug and Alcohol Office and community sector service agencies
Mental health	Mental Health Commission, WA Health and community sector agencies
Juvenile justice and anti-social behaviours	WA Police, Department of Corrective Services and Department of Local Government and Communities
Domestic violence	WA Police and community sector service agencies
Education and truancy	Department of Education, independent schools and private schools
Housing and homelessness	Department of Housing and community sector service agencies
Disability	Disability Services Commission, community sector service agencies and Commonwealth agencies
Health	WA Health and community sector service agencies
Aboriginal community	Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal agencies, community sector service agencies and Commonwealth agencies

Learning and Development

Comprehensive learning and development structures are in place to support staff of the Department and funded community sector agencies to respond to the complexity of issues experienced by the families they work with. The People Development Framework outlines the 70:20:10 model and learning pathways.

Related References

- Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework
<http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Policies%20and%20Frameworks/SignsOfSafetyFramework2011.pdf>
- People Development Framework
http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Organisation/Documents/People_Development_Framework_2013-14.pdf
- Casework Practice Manual Entry 1.3 Signs of Safety – The Department's Child Protection Framework
<http://manuals.ad.dcd.wa.gov.au/manuals/cpm/Pages/03SignsofSafety-TheDepartment'sChildProtectionFramework.aspx>
- Casework Practice Manual Entry 13.8 Parent Support – Using the matrices
<http://manuals.ad.dcd.wa.gov.au/manuals/cpm/Pages/08ParentSupport-UsingtheMatrices.aspx>