DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION

FAMILY SUPPORT
(RESPONSIBLE PARENTING)
FRAMEWORK

February 2012
OVERVIEW

The role of the Department for Child Protection encompasses the following three service areas:

- Service area 1 - Supporting young people and children in care of the CEO
- Service area 2 - Protecting young people and children from abuse.
- Service area 3 - Supporting individuals and families at risk or in crisis.

Family support services constitute the Department’s response to families who are at risk or in crisis.

Families who are at risk or in crisis also expose children to risk of immediate or longer term harm. Family support is a way of strengthening families both to overcome their problems and to respond to child needs. It aims to improve family functioning and is likely to be part of the response to families where issues are entrenched, as is the case with many of the families that come to the attention of the Department. For these families, family support may form part of the action taken to protect young people and children from abuse when young people and children have been brought into the care of the CEO, and to prevent children and young people coming into care.

Child Centred Family Support (CCFS) is the intervention that is used when an assessment of concern for a child has indicated that further action is required to promote or safeguard the wellbeing of a child, but the child is not currently in need of protection as defined in Children and Community Services Act 2004 (Section 28). This approach is the appropriate mode of engagement when a child’s wellbeing needs to be safeguarded and promoted, the parent/s are able and likely to protect the child and are willing to engage in services.

The community sector is contracted by the Department to provide Intensive Family Support Services (IFS) which target families with children aged 0-17 years where a range of issues impact on the family’s ability to care for the children. These programs, which are limited to referrals from the Department, utilise a case management approach which includes intensive in home practical support; parenting and child management education; teaching/modelling of protective behaviours; and teaching/modelling of personal and social skills.

Earlier intervention with family support services, that are most effectively provided early in the life of a child, early in the development of a problem and early in the formation of a family, are contracted through community sector services.

The interaction between family support services and protecting children and young people from abuse and caring for children and young people in the care of the CEO is illustrated in the model below.

The model highlights family support as part of all the Department’s actions and support services. It indicates that the extent to which family support constitutes the response with a family, relative to taking action to protect children and young people from abuse and taking children and young people into the care of the CEO, will be determined by the
degree to which the family is protective of the child, as assessed through the use of the Signs of Safety framework.

If a family is assessed as having a low protectiveness and there is danger to the child then a child protection response dominates, while family support is also provided. Where a child may be taken into the care of the CEO, family support is a means by which the family may address the protection issues to the extent necessary for reunification to be viable. If the child’s family is assessed as having a high protectiveness and danger to the child is low then the response of the Department will emphasise family support while the safety of the children and young people continues to be addressed.

The model recognises that assessment is a continuous process and that a family’s level of protectiveness can change requiring a commensurate change to the Department’s approach and the balance between the services.

Where child protection concerns related to parenting of the children are clearly identified, family support cases will be worked with by CCFS and IFS services.

Where children’s behaviour is severe and is the prominent presenting feature, and parents are not abusive and generally protective though difficult to engage, Responsible Parenting Services (RPS) will work with the families.
FAMILY SUPPORT RESPONSES

The Department’s duty system is the first point of contact for members of the public or agencies on a range of matters including enquiries about services, reporting concerns about the wellbeing of children, requests for services and support for individuals or families at risk or in crisis.

The extent of the Department’s direct involvement in providing family support will vary depending on the level of risk and crisis the family is experiencing and the protectiveness of the family. As a general rule, as the severity of risk to children and young people increases so too will the extent of the Department’s involvement.

Family support can consist of a range of different actions and processes and will extend from providing information on available services to actively case managing and co-ordinating interagency services. As such a family support response by the Department may include:

- referral and facilitating access family support services provided by community sector agencies,
- direct provision of a one off service by the Department such as financial assistance,
- ongoing services provided by the Department such as support by a youth and family support worker or community child protection worker,
- case management of a family by the Department to provide Best Beginnings, Parent Support or child centred family support services,
- coordination of action and services provided by a range of agencies, through for example, Strong Families.

The Department provides key family support services for those families who are experiencing a relatively high level of risk and crisis and for whom there may be child protection concerns. These services may be provided singularly or as part of a suite of responses delivered by the Department alone, or in collaboration with community sector and other government agencies.

Child Centred Family Support

CCFS is a function outlined in the Children and Community Services Act 2004 Section 32(1), where the CEO determines action should be taken to safeguard or promote a child’s wellbeing: specifically to (a) provide, or arrange for the provision of, social services to the child and, if appropriate, a parent or other relative of the child.

CCFS is therefore 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 safety plan in place. CCFS offers interventions with families which are rigorous, supportive and focused on the child’s safety and wellbeing.

CCFS provides an intensive way of working with significantly at risk children and families where there are not sufficient concerns to immediately take the child into care - but enough to warrant keeping the case open to actively build safety.

Dedicated CCFS teams are an important strategy in keeping children from entering the care of the CEO by providing a service area two (child protection) function and also 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 a significant component of the Department’s service area three family support services, operating in all metropolitan and regional districts. These services are focussed on working with at risk, hard to reach and/or difficult to engage families. These families are typically disengaged and resistant and present with significant risks to their children. Generally these families have fallen through the gaps in parenting and counselling services provided through universal services. The challenge for the Department is to engage these ‘hard to reach’ families to work toward change.

This framework has been revised in line with the outcome of a comprehensive review to re-focus RPS on these ‘hard to reach’ families where children and young people are demonstrating criminal and/or anti-social behaviour and/or chronic truancy. Referral for chronic truancy alone is outside of the criteria and needs to be occurring in combination with a child or young person’s criminal and/or anti-social behaviour.

RPS teams comprise workers delivering the Parent Support and Best Beginnings Services, Youth and Family Support Workers (YSFW’s) and Community Child Protection Workers. These workers operate collaboratively across the team to provide comprehensive services that meet and address the diverse support needs of at risk families.

Working closely with the Department’s front end child protection teams, RPS workers help parents deal with their children’s behaviours and build appropriate parenting skills that enable them to provide better supervision and control of their children. Supporting families in these ways helps build more resilient families and reduce the need for children to come into care.

**Parent Support**

Parent Support works with hard to reach and/or difficult to engage families to increase their capacity to parent and establish parental responsibility where children are:

- displaying anti-social behaviour, and/or
- becoming involved in criminal activity; and/or
- engaged in chronic truancy in combination with one or both of these behaviours.

Underpinning the operation of Parent Support is legislation that:

- acknowledges and supports the primary role of parents in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children; and
- supports and reinforces the role and responsibility of parents to exercise appropriate control over the behaviour of children.¹

The *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* (PSR Act) supports RPS. This legislation is currently subject to review and amendment consistent with its use outlined below.

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¹ The *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* is under review. It is likely that Responsible Parenting Orders will be repealed in this process and new legislation developed.
Responsible Parenting Agreements (RPAs), outlined in Part 4 of the PSR Act, are used by the Department to help parents identify their children's problem behaviours, and with support, to work on issues and develop parenting skills to enhance their capacity to exercise appropriate control over their children. The RPA forms a basis for agreement with parents on what tasks will be undertaken, by whom and the timeframes to achieve them.

The Department has reformed and revised the practice guidance and processes for the development of RPAs with families and is expanding their use in line with current legislation.

Where parents are unable to be engaged through an agreement, and where there are protective concerns that would most usually be characterised as neglect by virtue of the parent’s lack of action to address the risk behaviours of their children, the Department will consider whether action should be initiated under the Children and Community Services Act 2004, including the seeking a supervision order.

The Departments of Education and Corrective Services also have the capacity, provided for within the legislation, to undertake a RPA with a family.

Working with hard to reach and/or difficult to engage families is complex and requires persistent attempts, using a variety of methods, to establish relationships and successfully involve these families. The diverse nature of the Responsible Parenting Services team provides for a range of skills, engagement methods and culturally appropriate approaches to engage parents.

Given the focus on children’s anti-social, criminal and truanting behaviours as the target for intervention, it is most likely work will be directed to, and undertaken with families with older children. There is no age limit for the Parent Support service. However many families have several children, which means that older and younger siblings will also benefit from the improvements and changes made in parenting.

Youth and Family Support Workers
Youth and Family Support Workers (YFSW) have a significant role as part of Responsible Parenting teams to pursue innovative ways of engaging families to address their children's behaviours, facilitate families' access to services such as Parent Support, Best Beginnings and Strong Families and provide ongoing support to families engaged with these services.

The role of the YFSW more broadly is also to engage with Aboriginal young people at risk and their families across family support, child protection and children in care areas – with a focus on co-working and mentoring.

A particular strength of the YFSW is the ability to work intensively with isolated and vulnerable young people. These workers assist in building relationships with those young people and their families who are disengaged from the Department and other services. This work is targeted, innovative and focused on increasing the safety and wellbeing of at risk young people and includes partnering with other agencies.
Community Child Protection Workers
The Community Child Protection Worker (CCPW) role is to build relationships with at risk children, young people and families and work to connect families who have disengaged from the Department.

These workers:
- provide important information on local issues affecting Aboriginal families;
- have extensive knowledge of Aboriginal family structures; and
- assist in building a positive image of the Department with Aboriginal families.

CCPWs are located in RPS teams, but available to work across all service areas, with key areas of responsibility in each. The role will vary in accordance with district operational plans but will involve up to 50% case work, with the balance of time focused on meeting other district priorities through community child protection work.

Best Beginnings
Best Beginnings is jointly provided by the Departments of Health and Child Protection. It is a voluntary home visiting service run over two years for families with specific risk factors making their child vulnerable to poor attachment, developmental delay and poor life outcomes. Best Beginnings empowers parents/carers to make positive changes in their lives enabling them to provide a secure and nurturing environment for their child.

The service accepts families referred ante-natally or before the baby is three months old and works with them until the baby is up to two years of age. The program seeks to improve child health and wellbeing, parent/carer wellbeing, family functioning and social connectedness.

The program targets parents with specific risk factors that include:
- suffering 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.

Strong Families
Closely connected with RPS, the Strong Families service, works with a similar client group. The client directed Strong Families approach works well to engage Aboriginal families and adds diversity to the different ways parents may be engaged to make changes to achieve positive outcomes for their children.

Strong Families is a planning and coordinating process for families with complex issues who are receiving services from two or more agencies. The process brings together the family and relevant agencies to share information, identify goals and develop plans to help meet the family’s needs. The Strong Families process identifies a lead agency and coordinates the range of services in partnership with the family and, if necessary, escalates the provision of essential services.
PRACTICE APPROACHES

The Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework (SoS) needs to be embedded across all service areas, including RPS. All teams require knowledge of the language and tools, with a common understanding of danger and safety.

RPS connects with SoS through:
- being provided mapping information on referral from child protection;
- participating in SoS meetings when co-working cases; and
- using the tools where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children.

Along with SoS, RPS use a range of tools and skills to engage families and help them identify areas of strength, what that they are worried about, and develop action plans to address areas that need to change.

The Child Environment matrix is available to engage and monitor progress with families at risk.

Signs of Safety and the Child Environment matrix will be used as the common approaches to connect practice for all workers within RPS, providing Caseworkers, Youth and Family Support Workers and Community Child Protection Workers with a greater range of practice tools for supervision and planning.

The Child Environment matrix is across all services and may be useful in some child protection and children in care cases.

The Child Environment matrix identifies six key domains of home, community, physical care, supervision, communication of love, and behavioural boundaries. The use of this matrix assists in a comprehensive assessment of the family situation and areas needing focus for change.

Consultation with Aboriginal community members has led to the development of a culturally appropriate and simplified version of the child environment matrix. This Aboriginal Child Environment matrix is widely used and is helpful in providing a more visual concept around the development of change and progress in the child and families circumstances. A version has also been developed with Noongar language.

The Child Behaviour matrix focuses on the specific behaviours which need to be addressed. This matrix considers how parenting practices can respond to particular behaviours to assist parents to take back control.

The elemental version of the Signs of Safety assessment and planning tool, the child environment matrix, the adapted Aboriginal version of the child environment matrix and the child behaviour matrix are included in the appendix.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

Providing assistance to families who experience difficulties in parenting and managing their children’s problem behaviour is a shared responsibility of a range of government
agencies and the community services sector. The Department has a key role to play in partnership with these other agencies.

Collaborative approaches are required to address issues and for effective delivery of child safety and family support services. Some of these issues and the agencies that the Department is likely to collaborate with, are outlined in the table below.

Responding to truancy, anti-social and criminal behaviour of children requires a multi-agency approach. Strong coordination mechanisms have therefore been established between the Department, Corrective Services, Education and Police to ensure the agencies are working collaboratively at senior and local levels.

This includes local coordination groups that are able to identify those families that have multiple problems and are therefore a focus for most or all of these key agencies.

Further integration with Corrective Services including placing a RPS Parent Support Caseworker with Youth Justice teams in line with the Department of Corrective Services agreement to work with families that are shared clients, and undertake case management, even where children are not subject to a current order.

These coordinated approaches will facilitate more comprehensive responses to families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key issues</th>
<th>Other key (and lead) agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Housing and Community Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of juvenile justice clients</td>
<td>Corrective Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Risk Youth</td>
<td>Community Sector Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unruly neighbours</td>
<td>Community Sector Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people with borderline disability</td>
<td>WA Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>Disability Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social behaviour by children and teens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>WA Police, Corrective Services, Community Sector Services, Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Drug and alcohol services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal community issues</td>
<td>Health, Mental Health Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Sector Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Department has interagency protocols in place with each of the government agencies indicated, and contractual arrangements and protocols with community sector services.
APPENDIX

Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning
Child Behaviour Matrix
Aboriginal Child Environment Matrix
Child Environment Matrix
### SIGNS OF SAFETY ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TOOL

When we think about the situation facing this family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are we Worried About?</th>
<th>What's Working Well?</th>
<th>What Needs to Happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? (If different judgments place different people's number on the continuum.)

0 ─────────── 10
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child's Behaviour</th>
<th>Parent Activity</th>
<th>Caseworker Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the situation were great what would it look like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing new patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing new behaviours, trouble shooting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Inventory Strengths and vulnerabilities Identifying goals and pathways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First small sign of positive change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour for which child is referred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Child’s Environment Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our Home</th>
<th>Our Relationship with Community</th>
<th>Physical care of my Child</th>
<th>Supervision of my Child</th>
<th>Loving my Child</th>
<th>Setting Behavioural Boundaries for my Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a home that we feel proud of and is a welcome and safe place for everyone. We feel we belong.</td>
<td>We support our community and participate in it. We also identify with our community.</td>
<td>I make sure that my child’s physical needs are met so they are as healthy as they can be.</td>
<td>I always know where my child is, and who they are with. My supervision is age appropriate.</td>
<td>I love my child. I listen, encourage and believe in them, and they know I love them.</td>
<td>My child always knows what to expect because I set clear and consistent boundaries. I can be flexible when I need to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ve got a home and it serves the purpose, but it doesn’t fulfil any dreams.</td>
<td>We use community supports but would like to feel even more involved.</td>
<td>My child’s physical needs are met, but some things could be even better.</td>
<td>I know where my child is, but I am not always sure what they are doing.</td>
<td>My child and I know we love each other, but I’m finding I can’t always let he/she know it.</td>
<td>I set clear and consistent boundaries and my child knows what to expect. I find it difficult to allow my child to explore and learn by their mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have our own place, but we’ve got somewhere safe to stay for now.</td>
<td>We are unsure about being involved in the community.</td>
<td>I mostly look after my child, but some aspects I don’t get around to.</td>
<td>My child is left alone or is looking after other kids too much.</td>
<td>I know that my child needs my love, but I can’t express it.</td>
<td>I do set boundaries but don’t always follow through with consequences. It depends on how I am feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have somewhere to stay but we don’t always feel safe.</td>
<td>We don’t feel part of the community.</td>
<td>I often find it difficult to manage my child’s physical needs because of other pressures.</td>
<td>I forget, or I don’t think about supervising my child too much.</td>
<td>I find it difficult to receive and give my child the love they need.</td>
<td>I set boundaries, but they are inconsistent and I tend to reinforce them through threats and manipulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have to move around a lot and we are not safe.</td>
<td>Others in the community cause problems that impact upon us and our home, and we can’t stop it.</td>
<td>My needs get in the way of making sure my child’s physical needs are met.</td>
<td>I leave my child with people, or in places where they may not be safe.</td>
<td>I focus on the bad stuff and very seldom tell and express affection and love.</td>
<td>I set boundaries and consequences that are harsh and unrealistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless we don’t have anywhere to go and we are not safe.</td>
<td>We are involved in destructive activities that have caused problems for us in our community and home.</td>
<td>My child is not healthy because I can’t meet their physical needs.</td>
<td>I have no control over where my child is, or with whom.</td>
<td>I worry that I don’t love my child.</td>
<td>There are no set boundaries and punishments are severe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parent: ________________________________  Caseworker: ________________________________  Date: ________________________________