

Alabama Department of Human Resources

Comprehensive Assessment Project

Abstract

Project Objectives

The Department will apply an evidence-based approach to project implementation in three pilot sites to achieve four principle objectives: (1) substantial evidence-based results in case practice and case outcomes; (2) evidence-based implementation of family-centered assessment methods as part of a comprehensive assessment process for children, youth, and family; (3) implementation of a rigorous evaluation of the relationship between comprehensive family assessment and improved case outcomes; and (4) the initiation of a statewide implementation plan based upon evaluation findings.

Project Activities and Intermediate Outcomes

The project objectives are intended to be achieved as a result of the following activities and associated intermediate outcomes:

- Design and implement a fidelity-driven implementation approach that includes necessary steps to effective evidence-based practice (EVP) implementation that involves the community and stakeholders in relevant and meaningful ways and that anticipates implementation challenges, pitfalls, and barriers and how to effectively manage them;
- Refine assessment methods throughout the life of a case which assure that the eight (8) key components of the *Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines* are effectively contained and followed;
- Refine and deliver extensive competency-based training and consultation strategies with rigorous practice and decision-making components for CPS concerned with the comprehensive assessment;
- Create a collaborative inclusion process with resources and agreements within the pilot counties that identifies, organizes, and prepares key stakeholders;
- Bring about integration between various initiatives and efforts within the Department associated with the CFSR and PIP; and
- Create an accessible and active information dissemination strategy which effectively represents the assessment approach, the implementation experience, and evaluation findings available to the child welfare field and, in particular, to other states implementing similar assessment processes.

Major Components of the Comprehensive Assessment Process

A principle objective for the project is to effectively implement a comprehensive assessment process for children, youth, and families. The Department's proposed comprehensive assessment process is comprised of four highly integrated assessment methods which form a cohesive standardized continuum of intervention with children and parents. The design of the comprehensive assessment process includes: Intake Assessment, Family Functioning - Safety Assessment, Protective Capacity Family Assessment - Individual Service Plan, and Protective Capacity Progress Assessment.

Alabama's comprehensive assessment is a structured intervention process that is consistent with the steps in the *Comprehensive Assessment Guidelines*. The Alabama comprehensive assessment process fundamentally involves the following practice objectives and decisions:

- ☑ To gather sufficient information regarding family functioning, child functioning and caregiver performance in order to determine who CPS should serve based on a decision that children are unsafe and in need of protection;
- ☑ To engage caregivers and children in an assessment approach that seeks mutual understanding and agreement regarding what must change in order to address safety threats and enhance caregiver protective capacities;
- ☑ To develop individualized service plans (case plans) that include strategies for change that will address the needs of children and restore caregivers to their protective role; and
- ☑ To measure progress related to enhancing diminished caregiver protective capacities and establishing a safe and permanent home environment for children.

The comprehensive assessment process considers the cultural context of the family when engaging and interacting, gathering and analyzing information and reaching decisions. The context in which the behavior occurs within families will be considered in order to understand the meaning of the behavior and its impact on the children. The comprehensive family assessment actively involves all family members including fathers, other household members and absent parents. The information standard for decision making in the assessment process is highly dependent on inclusion of all family members who have a vested interest in the safety and permanency of the children.

The Department's goal is that the implementation of the comprehensive assessment will result in a system of intervention that includes the CPS functions (i.e., screening, initial assessment, and ongoing CPS) and associated intervention activities and tasks (i.e., information collection, safety assessment and planning, family assessment, and case planning) operating together in a cohesive, progressive manner that works toward the achievement of specific intervention outcomes.

Evaluating Implementation Effectiveness

The achievement of the goal(s) and objectives for the comprehensive assessment will be judged based on the following:

- Design and implement a process evaluation that: (a) assesses the implementation of the eight key components of the *Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines*; (b) assesses the linkages between child-serving systems that will help ensure that identified needs of children and families are met.
- Design and implement a practice evaluation that determines how the practice of comprehensive and ongoing assessment improves over time including assessing the fidelity of the practice (i.e., the degree to which the assessments are conducted as intended).
- Design and implement an outcome evaluation that compares the achievement of child welfare outcomes between families served in pilot counties and families served in comparison counties.