

**FIELD GUIDE FOR  
STRENGTHS-BASED INTERVIEWING PROTOCOLS  
FOR USE IN:**

- 1) CPS Investigations and Safety/Service Planning, and**
- 2) CPS Follow-up Contacts**

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**State of Michigan  
Children's Protective Services**

# **Family Independence Agency**

# Children's Protective Services Initiative on Incorporating Strengths-based Interviewing into Child Protection

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Partnership for Safety pilot project of FIA began developing a strengths-based-interviewing (SBI) protocol for use in investigations. Believing that strengths-based principles should apply as much to the way in which new practice tools for Child Protective Services (CPS) as to actual practice with customers, the project sought to interview CPS workers about what their experience in the field had taught them about how to work with customers most effectively. They were asked how to engage customers effectively in conversations about allegations of abuse and neglect and how to set the stage in a strengths-based way for added work with families in cases when there is sufficient evidence to substantiate. Workers in the pilot counties of Clinton, Jackson, Kent, Shiawassee, and Wayne contributed to initial work on a protocol for investigations.

In 2001, a project commissioned by Children's Protective Services whose purpose was to incorporate SBI into the Children's Protective Services Manual joined energies with Partnership for Safety to further develop SBI protocols. The goal was to develop and refine through field testing, SBI protocols for use in 1) investigations and safety/service planning, and 2) follow-up contacts drawing on the practice competencies and wisdom of CPS workers and supervisors. The CPS staff and customers of Saginaw County, with the support of the county director and program manager, gave countless hours to this effort. Workers, supervisors, and current and former customers first were interviewed in focus groups about what made for effective investigations and follow-up visits. Workers then were interviewed in detail about what they do, step-by-step, when they go out into the field to conduct investigations and follow-up contacts in substantiated cases. Persuaded that workers are competent and have learned a great deal through experience, they were asked to share tips about how to do each part of the interviews in the most effective and strengths-based way. The interviews with the focus groups and workers were recorded and transcribed so that none of the wisdom from the field would be lost. This wisdom is included in the protocols in the workers own words.

Once formulated, the SBI protocols were refined further by using them in the field. Members of the Partnership for Safety team and the consultant on SBI to Children's Protective Services accompanied workers on home visits and used the protocols. Based on these experiences, the protocols were revised to be most useful to workers, both in the field and as a device for helping to obtain the information necessary to complete structured-decision-making (SDM) and other required documentation. As these tools continue to be used, we expect further refinements will be made to them so that they will be even more useful in the field and their relationship to CPS documentation more seamless.

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## **FIA MISSION AND CPS PROGRAM: FOCUSING ON STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS**

As part of the Family Independence Agency, CPS does its work under the overall mission statement of the agency which states:

Through community leadership, the FIA helps to improve the Quality of Life in Michigan by protecting children and vulnerable adults, delivering juvenile justice services, and providing support to strengthen families and individuals striving for independence.

The CPS program similarly focuses on helping families by focusing on strengths:

... the ultimate objective of CPS is to protect children by stabilizing and strengthening families whenever possible through services, either direct or purchased, to the parents or other responsible adult to help them to effectively carry out their parental responsibilities....

This approach acknowledges the integrity of kinship care networks as described by families, respects family strengths and diversity, builds upon family resources, and works to strengthen families by preventing the unnecessary separation of children from their families. Family members are viewed as collaborative partners in service delivery with interventions offered to strengthen and, when necessary, increase the ability of kinship care family networks to care for children by achieving family connectedness. (Children's Protective Services Manual, CFP 711-1, p. 2)

In order to respect the strengths of families and kinship care networks, and to work with families as collaborative partners, the FIA prepares its workers to use SBI procedures with the families it serves.

### **ASSUMPTIONS OF STRENGTHS-BASED INTERVIEWING**

Berg and Kelly (2000, p. 62) outline these assumptions with respect to the families encountered in CPS work:

- Most parents do care or want to care for their children.
- Most parents, when they decide to, can change their behavior when provided support and adequate resources.
- CPS should provide respectful, individualized intervention.
- Customers should be directly involved in their case plan and decisions about their families.
- CPS services should be the least intrusive possible.
- The safety of the child and family must be at the heart of each CPS intervention.

Implicit in these assumptions and the program objective of CPS is the belief that through strengths-based conversation with CPS workers, at-risk and

even abusive families can choose to make changes that improve the safety and healthy development of their children. The extent to which positive change occurs is partly dependent on how the CPS worker interacts with the family. CPS workers can simultaneously gather information necessary to substantiate or deny child abuse or neglect according to CPS policy (see CPS Manual 712, 713) and, when policy-based safety concerns are present, build safety interventions with families by respecting and drawing on their strengths, diversity, and resources so that children are protected from further physical or emotional harm.

The importance of how workers relate to customers was brought home again and again by the FIA focus groups in Saginaw County invited to discuss their respective views of effective CPS work. Separate focus groups of current and past CPS customers, workers, supervisors, and managers were conducted. All groups emphasized that it is the careful and respectful exploration of the allegations of abuse or neglect combined with the respectful gathering of information about family strengths, diversity, and resources that is the single most important force for promoting change that ensures the safety of children and strengthens those families in which abuse or neglect has been substantiated. Customers, for instance, stated that they are positively impressed when CPS workers treat them with respect, listen carefully to what they say about their families, address their basic needs, as they understand them, and go the “extra mile” for them. In their own words, they made the following comments about workers they believe to be most effective:

- ...she understood where I was coming from...
- ... he did not holler or treat us like dogs or like we're nobody...
- ...she worked with me instead of just pulling my kids.
- ... he got me a refrigerator when he didn't have to...

Workers themselves most consistently mentioned the same themes, saying effectiveness is increased when workers respect customers and offer services that fit for them:

- ... (it is important) to use good people skills, have them be at ease with you enough to share real information and not a bunch of phony lies.
- You have to respect a person, respect their household no matter what the allegations are, you got to respect them because that's their home.
- ... your having a heart for them; just by the fact that you care for them, it motivates them, gives them self esteem to do it.
- ... what (would) work for me and my children may not work for you (the customer) and your (the customer's) six kids; so I have to adapt my perspective to accept and offer what will work for (the customer)....
- ... (it takes) being dedicated to kids, customers, and quality services.

Similarly, supervisors and managers said they could tell workers are effective when:

- ... the family lets them (workers) in the front door.
- ... (there is) quality interaction with the family.
- ... they (workers) call the kids by name.
- ... there is respect there (for the family).
- ... (workers and customers together develop) creative solutions like non-court placements ....
- ... (workers) connect (the family) to services that (fit for the family)....

## THE PROCESS OF CUSTOMER CHANGE AND SOLUTIONS IN CPS

Whenever a CPS worker substantiates child abuse or neglect or is thinking a family might benefit from services, the worker's task is to be thinking about how to promote change in the customer and her or his family. In a real sense, any solutions that are achieved will be grounded in *what the customer is able and willing to do* (De Jong & Berg, 2001). There is no change unless the customer does something different and customers will not do something different on a lasting basis unless they are able and willing. Being able and willing, in turn, is most clearly tied to *what the customer might want*. Consequently, the process of promoting change begins with listening carefully for what is important to the customer and what the customer might want. [This observation is supported by recent reviews of the professional literature in social work about how most effectively to work with involuntary customers (De Jong & Berg, 2002; Ivanoff, Blythe, & Tripodi, 1994; Rooney, 1992).]

This reality of customer change is sobering. It means that the CPS worker needs a more sophisticated way of working with customers than simply assessing the problems that put children at risk and then recommending or insisting upon compliance with services that, in the workers mind, could be useful provided the customer follows through and puts his or her heart into getting the full benefit from these services. While this approach would make CPS work less challenging if only it were the case, experienced workers know customer change does not work that way. As the CPS workers in the FIA focus groups mentioned again and again, customers in substantiated cases early in the relationship with their workers are often at their lowest and do not want anything except for their problems and CPS workers to go away. Similarly, one former customer speaking for several others in her focus group put it this way: "The only reason I made it was because my CPS worker believed in me; she believed in me when I didn't, and she wouldn't give up on me."

While some customers are able to be clearer about what they might want than others, all customers can benefit from workers who respectfully ask them to clarify and think about the implications of what they might want for their children and themselves. In other words, in large part, what customers want is something that *is built* between the worker and themselves. The more clear what customers want comes into focus, the easier it is for them and workers to begin to explore what related past successes, strengths and resources they have that can be put to service in making what they want happen. As the strengths and resources come more clearly into focus, what customers are able and willing to do also become more clear. As these pieces come into place, customers and workers can begin to figure out together what additional community services at the disposal of FIA might be useful. This way of working is a more respectful

and sophisticated way of working with customers than assessing problems and then simply recommending or requiring services. It is also more likely to engage customers and lead to collaborative and effective CPS outcomes.

Of course, in CPS, working collaboratively around what customers want must be accomplished according to the requirements of child welfare law. Workers must be respectfully clear with customers about safety concerns, legal requirements, and FIA procedures. These legal requirements are set forth in the CPS Manual. Interestingly, the same sources cited earlier about the state of the art in working with involuntary customers indicate that customers want this clarity from workers. . These sources state that customers want honest, clear information about legal requirements and agency procedures so that they (customers) can make informed choices about what to do in their situations (De Jong & Berg, 2002; Ivanoff, Blythe, & Tripodi, 1994; Rooney, 1992). The creative ways in which the experienced CPS workers who collaborated on the development of this field guide blend the requirements of child welfare policy with customer-focused, collaborative CPS practice are described later in this field guide by these workers in their own words.

If we think, then, of customer change in CPS as a wheel that has gotten rolling toward a solution of greater safety for a customer's children and a strengthened family, the hub of that wheel is what the customer wants developed within the limits of the law. The rim the wheel rolls on is what the customer is able and willing to do. Given FIA's commitment to working collaboratively with its customers in ways that respect their diversity and strengths, the spokes are the strengths-based ways the worker interacts with the customer or, more specifically, the use of SBI procedures.

## **INTERVIEWING PROCEDURES**

Once a complaint of child abuse or neglect is assigned for CPS field investigation (see CPS Manual, 712-1 through 712-9), the worker heads out into the field to gather information in order to deny or substantiate the allegations. The several policies and FIA forms to be used in the process are described in the CPS Manual (713-1 through 713-13). It would seem that much of this investigative information is factual information that could be gathered by straightforward "who, what, when, and where" interviewing questions if only those being interviewed would cooperate. However, as experienced CPS workers, obtaining honest and useful information from customers in CPS investigations is truly a daunting challenge and an art. Many CPS customers are not pre-disposed to tell everything they know. Neighbors, other family members, and friends may have reported bad experiences with CPS. They, themselves, may have had a prior open case with CPS in which they believe their point of view was not heard and their needs not addressed. So, regardless

of the extent to which their perceptions are justified, from the point of view of getting honest and useful information, it is important, right from the moment of first contact, to begin to talk to CPS customers in ways that build trust and a cooperative working relationship. As Weakland and Jordan (1990, p. 53) observed already several years ago:

The only avenue toward lasting protection of children—except the extreme measure of permanently removing them from the home—depends on establishing a cooperative relationship between the parent(s) and caseworker.

It is not possible, then, to separate listening for and respecting what is important to customers and what they might want from gathering honest and useful information to substantiate or deny allegations of abuse and neglect. For this reason, CPS workers going out on investigations are to be customer-focused and strengths-based from the outset. This means, most of all, taking a “not knowing” attitude to the customer. This term, coined by Anderson and Goolishian (1992), when applied to CPS investigations, involves always approaching customers with an open, genuinely curious attitude that sends the message of wanting to hear their understandings of the allegations and what they might be able and willing to do to reduce and remove any policy-based safety concerns. It is the opposite of approaching customers with preconceived ideas about their problems, needs, and what should be changed. In other words, workers who are not-knowing ask their questions in ways that always seem to respectfully put their customers in the position of informing workers about their situations, themselves, and their families. Such workers are humble and realistic recognizing that ultimately it is customers and not themselves who will have the final say in whether they (customers) decide to do something different that reduces or removes safety concerns and leads to greater protection of children.

SBI is built on the foundation of this respectful, not-knowing attitude toward customers. SBI can be used equally and simultaneously to gather information from customers and others about allegations, what customers might want for themselves and their families, what they are able to do by virtue of their strengths and resources, their level of motivation regarding possible action steps, and how they think the services FIA can make available to them might be useful. SBI is also consistent with and is to be used as a supplement to FIA’s Forensic Interviewing Protocol for interviewing children about allegations of abuse and neglect. In cases where safety concerns are substantiated through forensic interviewing (FIA Pub. 779-8/98), children must be interviewed using SBI to obtain their understandings of their family situations, their perceived level of safety, what it would take to increase that level, whether they think that could happen, what they might contribute to their own safety (when appropriate), their related strengths, and so forth. Many of the same SBI questions used with adults can be adapted and asked of children, and children who are able to answer forensic interviewing questions are also capable of answering SBI questions.

The customer-focused, SBI procedures used by the CPS workers who helped in the development of this field guide are the same procedures used in FIA's other programs (egs. FIM and PSF), although adapted to fit the responsibilities of CPS practice. Consequently, in the process of investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and, when substantiating policy-based safety concerns, doing safety and service planning, CPS workers will interview for and document:

- Customer's understandings of their situations
- Who and what are important to customers
- What customers want for their families
- Specific strengths, past successes, and resources of the family related to what they want through asking exception and related questions
- Specific action steps the family is willing and able to take (in CPS, regarding safety concerns)
- Timeframe agreed upon for completion of action steps
- Customer's view of progress, confidence, and motivation through asking scaling and related questions
- Results of follow-up (for customer and CPS action steps)
- Acknowledgement of how hard deciding to take action steps and make changes is

The Child Welfare Training Institute (CWI) of FIA trains CPS workers in these elements of SBI, tailoring them to the requirements of CPS policy and the realities of CPS practice. Two SBI procedures that workers and trainers believe are especially useful in CPS work are asking scaling and exception questions. These and their application to CPS work are discussed below.

### **Scaling Question**

This versatile question has many applications and is understood by children and adults alike (Berg & de Shazer, 1993; De Jong & Berg, 2002; de Shazer, 1988). It is based on the familiar 1 through 10 scale where the questioner defines the 1 and the 10 and then asks where the responder is at on the scale. For example, a mother might be asked how confident she is on a scale of 1-10 (1=no confidence and 10 = every confidence) that she can keep her child safe in her current family situation. Once she gives a number, the worker can ask what tells her that her situation is the number she gave, what would be different if things were a 10, what would be different if things were one number higher, what would it take to move up one number, and so forth.

The great usefulness of the scaling question is that it can open up the frame of reference of customers to workers quickly, naturally, and respectfully. Once customers locate themselves on the scale, it is natural to follow-up with: "what is happening that tells you it is \_\_\_\_ (customer's number)?" As

customers answer, they can do so in their own words which gives the sense that they are more in control of and have “some say” in how they are perceived by the worker in the sensitive and potentially volatile situation of investigating allegations of abuse and neglect. Scaling is one of the easiest ways for workers to maintain a not-knowing attitude toward customers and build a cooperative relationship.

At the same time that the question allows workers to stay not-knowing, it also allows them to hold customers accountable for what they say, again in a natural, less confronting way. For example, when a customer gives a number and the worker asks what makes it that number, the worker is respectfully putting the customer “on the spot” to provide the information about his or her children and family situation that makes sense of the number. The extent to which the customer can provide meaningful information helps the worker begin to make an estimate of the safety of the children and the strengths and resources of the family.

Workers can easily expand on the scaling question with customers to invite customers to look at their children’s safety and family situation from the perspectives of important other people. For example, when scaling the perceived safety of her children with a mother, once the mother has given her number and the worker has followed up with questions for details, the worker can ask what number her children would give and what they would say is happening that led them to give that number. This sort of expansion of the scaling question offers customers a chance to think about their situations from multiple perspectives. This can help generate new possibilities in their minds for useful changes and what it would take from them and CPS to make those changes a reality.

Lastly, the scaling question and its follow-up questions allows workers to address all the necessary ingredients of change (Berg & Kelly, 2000; De Jong & Berg, 2002; Turnell & Edwards, 1999). For example, suppose a worker is working with a mother on increasing the level of safety of the mother’s child. In asking a scaling question where 1 equals “not at all safe” and 10 equals “as safe as you can imagine,” the worker can get a baseline by asking the mother for a number that best gives the child’s level of safety right now. And, by asking the mother for details about what makes her child as safe as the number she gives, the worker gets the mother’s estimate of her current strengths and resources in meeting these needs of her child. The worker can also get information about the mother’s conception of “as safe as imaginable” by asking her for details about what “10” would look like in her situation. The worker can then begin to get at the next steps on the way to greater safety by asking: “What would one or two number higher than the number you gave for today look like?” Once the mother has given details about those numbers, the worker can ask these additional questions: “What will it take to move up one number or two?” “What will it

take from you?" "Who might be helpful to you in making this happen?" "How might they be helpful to you?" "How can CPS be most useful to you in moving up one or two numbers?" Once the customer has answered these questions, she and the worker have generated key elements of service plan that includes a current assessment of safety and strengths and resources contributing to that level of safety, the mother's long-range vision of an ideal level of safety for her child, and some "next-steps" leading to greater safety along with the customer's own resources and additional resources from CPS that she thinks would be useful to her.

Almost anything can be put on a scale, anything from peoples' reactions to the last movie they saw, to their children's safety, to their progress getting free of illegal substances, to how much confidence they have that they can make changes. In the protocols for interviewing presented in this field guide, scaling questions are used to get customers' perceptions about the safety of their children, their family situation, and progress on goals in CPS service plans. The CPS workers who collaborated in developing these protocols said that these three applications were the most useful and the ones they most consistently used.

### **Exception Question**

This question asks about past successes or "times when things were better" (de Shazer, 1985). Opening a conversation about an exception time turns a person's thoughts to a less problem-filled time and one when they were feeling stronger and more competent. It is a way to get at a person's strengths and resources. It also often creates hope (De Jong & Berg, 2002; Saleebey, 2002).

In cases of substantiated abuse or neglect, customers often, even though some may cover it with angry responses, are feeling discouraged and lack the motivation and confidence that they can make necessary changes. The CPS workers who collaborated on this field guide say that it is important to get at customers' strengths and resources as they begin to plan for change in order to create hope, motivation, and confidence. Thus, for example, when a customer who has physically punished and left marks on his teenage daughter is venting about how disobedient and frustrating she is including especially her defiance of his curfew for her, it can be useful to ask whether "there are any times at all when things go better between himself and his daughter after she has broken curfew and he is so frustrated?" When he identifies, as most customers can, an exception time such as one month ago when his daughter broke curfew and he did not lose his temper, the worker can ask follow-up questions about what was different at that time. The worker can ask what he did differently to stay calm, who else might have been present that helped him, what it would take for what

he did to happen again, and so forth. As the customer and worker together build a greater joint awareness of the customer's past successes along with the strengths and resources that produced them, both become more hopeful and confident that the successes could happen again provided certain conditions are met. Exception questions and their related questions for more details, then, are an effective way to turn "a lemon into lemonade."

The CPS workers who helped develop the protocols say it is most useful to weave exception questions into the discussion of safety and family concerns. The way they do it is given on the SBI protocols. . As with scaling questions, exception questions help workers stay not knowing and hence are more likely to engage customers.

## **THE SBI PROTOCOLS**

The remainder of this field guide contains the two protocols. The first is for use in investigations and safety/service planning. CPS workers and supervisors have laid out and field-tested both the components of this protocol and the general sequencing of topics. This first protocol proceeds from preparing for the investigation visit, what to do at the front door, how to cover the allegation information, and, in cases of likely substantiation, assessing and responding to safety concerns and the related needs of the family.

The second protocol is for use in follow-up contacts. It addresses re-clarifying the customer's situation with the customer, continuing safety/service planning as needed, scaling progress on the goals of the plan, and planning for next steps. This protocol addresses situations when the customer is making progress and when little or no progress is being made.

Both protocols contain concrete observations and suggestions of CPS workers about how to do CPS field work. Most of these comments are directly from workers in their own words (called "Worker Wisdom"). Guidelines usually follow each set of workers' comments. These guidelines either expand on or add additional points to the workers' comments. The guidelines are the work of FIA's consultants on SBI and are based on their many hours of shadowing and participating in CPS investigations and follow-up visits with CPS workers and their expertise about SBI procedures. The CPS workers participating in developing these protocols have reviewed and approved these guidelines. While in practice no interview perfectly fits a protocol; according to the workers, the layout of these protocols best fits CPS practice situations.

After the full versions of each protocol complete with Worker Wisdom and Guidelines is presented, abbreviated versions for use in the field are given. These abbreviated versions are one-page summaries of the key topics, worker suggestions, and interviewing questions for each protocol.

Finally, before presenting the SBI protocols, it is important to clarify their relationship to CPS policy as contained in the CPS Manual. CPS policy

mandates the use of SBI while conducting investigations and responding to substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect. The SBI protocols, while consistent with CPS policy, are not to be regarded as inclusive of policy. They are meant to clarify what the CPS Manual means when it states that CPS workers will conduct investigations and work with customers and their families using SBI principles and procedures. The full statement of policies governing CPS investigations and follow-up contacts is given in the CPS Manual.

## SBI Protocol for use in CPS Investigations and Safety/Service Planning

- *Preparation – Review referral; check customer's CPS history; be thinking: "be respectful and clearheaded"*

### **Worker Wisdom**

(Arrowed points are the observations and suggestions of CPS workers; words in quotation marks belong to CPS workers; other words are summaries of CPS worker comments.)

- "Review referral, think of alternative things that could have happened to set your mind open to any of many possibilities."
- "Prior to going out, I review the case history if there is one and armed with this past history and the result of past investigations, I try and determine if the family is going to be honest with me, if I'm gonna have to decipher every evasive response or if they are going to be open and honest about things. It kind of gives me a way of gauging how much cooperation I'm going to have."
- "I read the referral at least two, three times and circle or square off the actual allegations, cause a lot of it is extraneous garbage, but it's leading up to what the actual thing is, you know, the kids are left alone or the house is dirty or it's a fire hazard or whatever it may be."
- "Get a coke on the way to calm yourself and relax."
- "Listen to your favorite CD in the car."
- "Remind yourself to look at the total picture."
- "When you're not feeling good about a referral, do whatever it takes lower yourself down and say: 'Okay, I'm ready to go up in here now.' Pray, deep breathe."

### **Guidelines**

(These either expand on workers' wisdom or are additional guidelines.)

1. Consistent with the spirit of FIA policy (CPS Manual 712-5), these workers believe it is a good idea for you to check the background history and any CPS case record involving individuals mentioned in the referral accepted for CPS field investigation. An existing case history can give you important information about how the persons interacted with previous CPS workers. If a previous worker is still on staff, often you can share impressions with her before going out. Of special importance, of course, are past patterns of violence toward CPS workers and any additional history of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse and/or domestic violence. While past patterns and history of any person are predictive of future behaviors, the predictive value of anyone's history is not foolproof. It is important for you to be prudent and take necessary precautions especially when a person has a history of violence, but in the large majority of cases, as later comments by experienced workers in this protocol make clear, it is best not to make assumptions and approach the customer with an open, not-knowing attitude. While customers may have a history of certain problems, as human beings they are always much more than their problems. They also are likely to have wishes for the future of their families, strengths, and resources that can be brought out with effective interviewing.
2. It is important for you to know CPS policy. People who call in allegations, aside from their different and sometimes questionable motivations for doing so, are unlikely to know the details of CPS policy. It is a good idea before going out to take a few moments to think about how the allegations stack up against policy and what would have to be happening for this particular allegation to be substantiated.

3. Going out in the field is emotionally demanding. You can never know exactly what you will encounter in the field. These workers make it clear that it is useful to do whatever works for you to calm and center yourself so that you can be open, fully aware, and best prepared for any situation. In most cases, of course, respectfully listening and taking a not-knowing attitude is the best way to keep most CPS investigations under control.
- *At the door, be alert and careful, clarify who you are and why you are there – “to discuss a referral with them”; explain your role – “to ensure the safety of children”; be personable and humanize yourself; request permission to come in to discuss the referral*

#### **Worker Wisdom**

- “You have to be careful; for safety’s sake always stand to the side of the door after you knock because you never know who might come through the door and with what in their hands!”
- “Identify yourself and give them your business card.”
- Be pleasant, say and ask: "Hi, how are you today, my name is Jane, I'm from Children's (Protective) Services. Can I come in and talk to you for a couple minutes?"
- Put them in control, ask: "Do you have time to talk about this now, or should I come back later?"
- Be respectful by "not using their first names; use 'sir' or 'ma'am', and 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.'"
- Adopt the attitude that, "You're a person, I'm a person; we have a piece of work to do and how can we work this out together?"
- "When possible, give just enough information about the referral on the porch to dispel fear and tension, but don't go full-fledged on the porch; you wanna give them enough information so they will say that they wanna talk to you about the situation."
- "... explaining our role can be helpful, that we're here to make sure your child is safe."
- "It's almost a given that you're going to get some kind of defensive response. I think that what else might be helpful is to humanize yourself, saying that, 'well, it's difficult for me to come and talk about this (referral information), but it's my job and I only care about children and the state cares about all children and we're required to investigate needs,' trying to establish, you know, a helping relationship rather than someone who's there with a hammer."
- And when they say you are here to take their children, say, "I'm not saying that that could never happen, but that is last thing, the very last thing any of us would want to do. I'm here to talk with you and see if there is any reason for getting into that stuff or can we just work this out amongst ourselves."
- Let them know, "I can't just walk up in your house and take your children, the police have the authority and the power to do that but I don't.... And then you can go on, then they kind of relax and you can go on and talk about the complaint."
- "When it's an emergency, you have to get in and do what you have to do--like check for the bruises, but you gotta build up to that and always preserve their dignity and be respectful."

#### **Guidelines**

1. The first comment is a grim but realistic reminder that CPS work can be dangerous. While the great majority of investigations are not dangerous, danger can be present and you must be alert and take the reasonable steps presented in your training to prevent even the unpredictable and relatively rare occurrence mentioned in the first

worker's comment above. In most investigations, following the suggested practices included in the other comments presented above will do the most to keep you safe, alert, and confident.

2. These workers recognize that their opening moves set the tone for the rest of the interview. It is best to make sure your tone of voice is soft, relaxed, calm, friendly, and not rushed. Even though you might feel tense, try to relax and be ready to smile.
3. Most of the above workers' comments make it clear that, from the moment of first contact, you must be thinking about how to respectfully engage the customer if the investigation is to be most effectively completed. Consistent with policy, you must first establish that you are speaking to the parent, caretaker, or child cited on the allegation. Once that is established, the engagement process begins by your identifying yourself in a professional and respectful manner and stating in a general way why you are at the door. Here is one way to begin:  
"Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Is Ms/Mr. Jones at home? Thank you. Ms Jones, I understand that you are Johnny Jones' mother, is that correct? Good, thank you. I am from Children's Protective Services (show picture I.D. to customer). I have been sent out to find out whether a complaint about Johnny's care that has been phoned in to us is true or not true. May I come in and talk to you about this so that we can try to clear this up right away?"  
Wait for the customer's response and what you say next will depend on what kind of response you get. Be prepared to repeat yourself and explain more about your role as a CPS worker.
4. Always be observing the customer's non-verbal cues and adjust your comments and questions accordingly.
5. Since it is you that is initiating the contact, describe the purpose of your visit in simple, conversational language avoiding professional jargon. Here are some ways of getting started that workers have found useful:  
"Real briefly, the complaint says \_\_\_\_\_. I would prefer to go over it carefully and in private with you so that I can get the best information possible and keep our conversation as confidential as possible."  
"I would like to get your side of the story very carefully so that we can sort things out as clearly as possible. May I come in and talk with you privately so that we can work on sorting this out?"  
"The job of Children's Protective Services is to make sure that all children of this county are safe. When we get a complaint, the law requires someone to come out and make sure your child is safe. I'm not saying the complaint is true or untrue; that is what I am here to clear up by talking with you."  
"I'm sure this is a big surprise for you and I realize that I am interrupting what you were doing. I'm sure you want to try to clear this up as quickly as we do. May I come I and talk to you privately so that we can try to clear this up quickly?"  
"I realize you may have questions about how Children's Protective Services does things. Is there any question that I can answer about me being here that will help you understand why I'm here and that will make this easier for you?"
6. As these workers indicate, an effective engagement tool is to be thinking about ways in which you can give customers as much choice as policy allows because giving choice is a fundamental part of respecting another person. For example, if there is not an emergency and policy allows and you could come back later in the day, you could ask about talking now or later. You can also always ask permission for the

next thing you would like to do, such as asking permission to enter the home to review the referral information with the customer. If the customer says “yes,” you can proceed as you think best at that moment and with the assurance that both you and the customer know that you want to conduct your investigation as respectfully of the customer and the customer’s wishes as possible. If the customer says “no,” you can calmly explain why you prefer to discuss the referral inside and how you believe that doing so would be in the customer’s best interest and then make the request again. As the above, experienced workers suggest, building cooperation is done step by step always carefully attending to the customer’s responses each step of the way.

7. As the comments of the last worker above indicate, you always have to follow policy in CPS investigations. If policy states it is mandatory to make immediate contact and make the necessary investigative observations, you have to comply with investigative policy and “get in and do what you have to do...” Even so, as this experienced worker stated, you can “build up to that” and one of the most effective ways to do that is to explain what policy requires of both you and the customer and then ask permission to do it. If the customer refuses, you can ask about and attempt to respond to the customer’s reasons for refusing. If another request for permission is refused, you can explain what will happen next according to policy and ask if that is the way the customer prefers things to be handled. Even if the customer continues to refuse and you must impose policy such as returning with law enforcement, the customer still knows you did ask and did try to take the customer’s wishes into account. And even though cooperation was not achieved at this point in the relationship, going through the process of trying to build it likely increases the chances of cooperation at the next stage of CPS work.
  8. Although not common, it is possible that this deliberate and respectful way of building cooperation is rejected by the customer. Regardless of what you do, the rare customer may become agitated or there is something else in the situation (such as someone else who is threatening to you) so that you feel unsafe. Clearly, when that happens and you feel unsafe, you must leave.
- *As you enter notice and compliment something positive about the person or home*

#### **Worker Wisdom**

- Find something to compliment, “Find something, ‘you have a nice carpet, I like this wall paper. Even if you have to struggle, find something.’”
- "Recognize that small talk and compliments right away don't always work; some people just want you to get to the point."

#### **Guidelines**

1. As you enter the house, behave as a guest in someone’s house would. Be polite, friendly, and find a positive about the children, home, or parent.
2. Respecting the customer's turf and giving credit to them helps the customer to be more aware of her own abilities and resources.
3. All people respond differently to stressful situations and some customers may just want you to be gone and may be brisk and curt with you. It is important not to take offense and be flexible and adjust yourself to different circumstances.

- *Go over referral information “line by line” asking for the customer's understanding of the situation; stay calm; allow the customer to vent; stay “not knowing”; take your time*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- “I think it’s that a lot of people need to discharge. It’s sort of like, you’ve brought a lot of things to a head when you walk in, there’s the frustrations with the boyfriend, there’s the kids that are sick, there’s, you know, the school getting at them, it’s all those reasons maybe that the place is a mess or that they did lash out and you’ve brought it right now to a head and they’re so angry at everything. And I think just letting them discharge, you might have to listen to an awful lot of blabber completely unrelated to really what you would like to ask, but you recognize that they’re so pent up, let them go, you just let them go and agree and so on and just take what they’re saying, those morsels that have to do with what you’re there for, and then finally when they seem spent, then start addressing the issue. Yeah, I found that venting, allowing them to vent is an actual part of the protocol.”
- “... if it’s a new worker it scares them because they’re venting, they don’t realize that they’re just venting and they’re going around in there, you know they may bang the wall, and you just stand there and listen. But some of us get excited, ‘I gotta run, I gotta get out of here, they’re going to get violent with me,’ but they have to be able recognize that situation where they’re not being violent with you, they’re taking it out on the wall, and as long as they’re doing that there’s not a problem. Nine times out of ten they’re usually not going to come at you. I mean, you always try to be safe about it, you watch what they’re doing, but, if it’s there, allow the customer to vent because when you show up at the door with allegation information, it’s like dropping a bomb on them, so a very natural thing for some people would be to vent.”
- "Use empathy and humility; don't throw your authority at them"
- Adopt an approach of "I'm not here to say what you did or didn't do, so let's talk about this situation."
- “If it's something that doesn't have to be done right now and they seem uncomfortable," ask: "Is there a better time to talk, or if you're more comfortable talking to me at my office, do you want to come see me there?"
- "When customers are really scared, you can reassure them by telling them that a referral does not mean that a law was broken or that we are taking their kids; tell them that if you have any worries you will be clear with them and up front; this helps them relax and more able to focus on what you're saying."
- “I’ll read them the referral and I’ll say, ‘this is what is being told to us and I’m here to see if there is or isn’t truth to it,’ and I read it to them and then right away they respond and say da da da dah. And lots of times they’ll say, ‘well, you can see my house is not dirty or whatever, and I don’t have any fire hazards. Then you can get specific, I mean if there is very specific things in your referral you can say, ‘well, you know, there’s supposedly clothes by the furnace,’ or whatever; and you say, ‘where’s your furnace at, may I see it?’ And they take you in and they say, ‘well, see there’s my furnace and there’s no clothes there,’ or whatever, maybe there is a pile of clothes there and they’ll say, ‘okay I’m guilty of that,’ and then they’ll pick them up and it sometimes can be resolved right away just like that.”
- “I take my time with whatever the allegations are to try to clear things up. Because sometimes you’ll have a whole bunch of stuff in a whole allegation, and only one thing is true. And when you find out what that one thing is, and if they do need to work with you a little more on clearing that up, you’ve already established a rapport with them; they’re not afraid to let you back in the next time you come by, they’ll talk to you on the phone, you know.”

- “One of the things that often is part of the initial contact is about the source of the complaint. And I always feel this is a really good opportunity to kind of focus on our role and that we take that information in good faith, and we don’t care where it came from, it’s protected information, that “it’s not something I can discuss but, you know, we’re here on it and we’re going to take that information and look into it because that’s what the law established. I think that kind of helps.”
- “Sometimes people think they know who made the referral, and they’re angry, ... and I always tell them with that, ‘be careful about making assumptions and then you say, that’s part of what we do, we’re not making assumptions about you, we’re going to talk to you about these things so you shouldn’t make assumptions about somebody else that they called this in on you because you might be wrong.”
- “Sometimes they will tell you about that person (who they thought made the referral) , they’ll tell you while they are sitting there, ‘when you leave I’m getting ready to go do something to that person,’ and if you know the name of the referral person and you know it wasn’t that person, I have always told them, ‘I can’t tell you who made the referral but I can tell you that this person didn’t make it.’ Sometimes that will calm them down.”
- “Incorporate some compliments at times. You know, ‘you have good housekeeping standards, your children are great – they’re very, very articulate. “
- When there is a documented significant injury, "... try to figure things out and stay open as you explore them because things aren't always the way they seem at first -- work it through"
- "Don't accuse people because you don't know and they may not know either; say ‘I don't have any reason to disbelieve you but we have this significant injury and we have to figure out what happened to cause this injury.’"
- “Do not get into that power struggle about how severe the abuse was or try to change their minds when they say, ‘Well that’s how I was raised and that’s what I’m gonna do’; rather than argue, just point out changes in the law and (that) that’s how things maybe were when I was a kid too, and the schools used to – an example I use a lot – use paddles; so avoid that arguing about it and just try and proceed on some constructive plan.”
- Be thinking, “... these are the circumstances and what they’re willing to do about it really says more about them than what’s happened in the past.”
- “Don’t come down on them as a bad person because they’re in this situation.”
- “I know one thing that I do, like a lot of times the people feel like they’ve lost power, they’re embarrassed at a lot of things and, as far as respect issues, when I go up to homes, for example, if there is a complaint of there’s no food, I tell them I need to see the food supply and I’ll ask them, ‘will you please open the cupboards, and will you open the refrigerator,’ trying to give them a little bit of power back, a little bit of the control ... but still be focused on what you need to do.”
- “On some things you don’t need to force the issue, for example if I need to see the bedroom and they don’t want to show me that particular bedroom, that’s okay, I say, ‘Can I come back and see it later?’; you know, you don’t have to force them on some things.”
- "When customer refuses to participate, there may be times when you say, 'it may be necessary for us to go to court and let the court take a look at it as opposed to me looking at it here with you,' that usually brings it down to a level where we can then talk."
- "If they still don't want to talk and it's a really bad referral, you can say: 'I'm not gonna blind side you with anything; I may have to go to court on you'; I let them know that court's only one way of dealing with things and there are other creative ways I'd rather try with them, but court's always there if necessary."
- "Basically you keep them in conversation and you stay open."

## Guidelines

1. Experienced workers, recognizing the influence of their knock on the door to a customer, realize that customers need assurances and a chance to express their surprise, shock, frustration, and dismay. Even while the customer is venting, you can listen for small indications of existing safety, sensitivity to the needs of their children, and awareness of safety issues and measures they have taken. When a worker acknowledges these small successes, the customer slows down on her own and the need to defend herself decreases.
  2. Ability to discriminate between expression of anger toward an object versus aggression toward a person is different and important to recognize. When you encounter an angry or hostile customer, stay calm and talk in soft, quiet voice. Do not escalate the anger by raising your voice. Always keep your voice and the inflection of your voice even and calm. Take a deep breath a few times before you do anything.
  3. Anytime you notice anything positive about the children, compliment the child and give the credit to the parents. For example, say "I can see that your child is calm; some children at that age gets very frightened when there is a stranger." Or, "I can see that your child listens to you when you tell her to stay away from the stove. It's good that you taught her to listen to you."
  4. Complimenting a parent does not wipe away the problems. In fact, it makes engaging the parent easier and the parent becomes more motivated.
  5. Experienced workers know that each situation and each customer is different but the principle of cooperating in calm and firm manner carries more weight than "throwing your weight around."
  6. These workers give a reminder that in all this careful, respectful engagement of customers, you need to focus on the safety concerns based on the allegations and not get sidetracked by side issues.
  7. Keep the bigger family picture in the back of your mind as you ask about the specifics on the allegation. Even if the allegation is "no food in the house," you should be paying attention to what might be contributing to the "no food ..." situation, perhaps it is related to drug or alcohol abuse. The bigger picture of the entire family situation will give you a more comprehensive assessment of any safety concerns.
- *Respectfully gather information to start making a decision of denial or substantiation based on the criteria contained in the DSM Safety Assessment*

### Worker Wisdom

- "I think there's probably things you just automatically go through. There's no flags anywhere, I mean, they're routine things you just look for depending on the referral: ... looking at the child and seeing if there's any physical, obvious physical concerns; when you're in the home, looking at the condition of the home; ... looking at the condition of the parents; ... if there is an immediate concern, seeing if there is an immediate hazard."
- "... what your allegations are is number 1, (for example), if it says there's no food in the home and the parent is a substance abuser and the kids are being neglected or being left home alone, and you go in and you see there's very little food in the home, and mom looks a little bit glassy eyed, maybe not totally high or she looks very wiped out or dad looks wiped out and it gives you an indication that, yeah I

think something is going on, and then you talk to the parent and maybe they admit that they're doing some of these things."

- "With each situation, each allegation varies and I think there's no standard way of really digging at the truth depending on the allegation."
- You approach the allegations differently "... if (for example) you have three people over here saying, 'yes it happened, yes she did throw her down the stairs and I saw it'; but (on the other hand) if you've got someone saying, 'well I didn't see anything,'" and you ask if they heard anything and they say, 'well I heard but I didn't see, I heard yelling and it sounded like somebody had gotten bumped into the wall, but I didn't see anything,' you get a (different) sense of how you're going to approach it."
- "I think you get a sense of how you're gonna approach those questions by when you first talk to the children. After having first spoken to the children and gotten information from them, you get a sense of where the consistency is."
- "And some people will be truthful about certain things whereas they won't be about others. If you, I know that the consequences behind some sexual abuse is going to be prison, as opposed to, you know, a dirty home. You know that's much more of a difference than if you were going to a situation where there's going to be some serious, serious consequences."
- "... the grey area, you know, is reduced somewhat by the (CPS) manual in the mandated responses that we have to take. So, a lot of our actions as far as removal are going to be those mandated responses. (For example), if you have a sexual predator in the home, he has to go; if you have domestic violence and you have no sense that the child is safe with them, the child may have to go or may have to be a relative placement; or if the person that you're talking to drugs, the person is so into their cocaine or their alcoholism that they're not able to respond apart from their addiction ... And those typically are the ones that's the reason for the safety assessment, (that is, you ask yourself), 'can I leave this home and know that this child is safe and if the child is not safe what am I going to do?' And I think more and more we're getting away from removal when they are not mandated. I think we're getting to a majority of removals are the mandated ones right now."
- "... and that goes back to what do we do about addressing the issues that we see. The (question) is will (the child) be safe with intervention and that's the area that we're most concerned about ... as far as engaging the family in getting something going, that is what is going to give use some peace of mind, knowing when I leave the home that the kid is going to be safe."

- *If clearly a denial, thank the customer and be on your way*

#### **Guideline**

1. Compliment all the positive things and strengths you observed and the reasons for why you are closing the file. Provide some concrete examples such as: "You certainly are making sure that your children have a balanced meal, and they look well fed and happy. Obviously you are doing lots of things right." This encourages the parent to continue the successful things she is already doing and makes it easier to repeat the successes. Many customers tend to undermine their own successes and pointing these out is an important prevention strategy.

- *If thinking substantiation, gently but clearly level with the customer about your concerns for the child(ren)'s safety. State your desire to work cooperatively with him.*

*Assure him you will listen carefully and always keep him informed of your actions. (Qualify this assurance as needed and give examples about situations of immediate, extreme danger to children as required by the CPS Manual.)*

**Worker Wisdom**

- “Once the safety issues have been identified talking with the family and asking them if they see that as a concerned area and what their recommendations would be, what are they willing to or what are they capable of or what are they interested in?”
- “ That would go to a scaling question; a scaling question could get asked at that time... (about) how willing are they to do something, and where do they see themselves at, and what would it take to be where they want to be. The answers to a lot of those questions lead up to your decision in whether to remove or not.”

**Guideline**

1. When your thinking heads toward substantiation, slow down and think about your selection of words. Putting things in carefully chosen words is important because customers may interpret things in a way that you did not mean. Therefore, using simple, clear, ordinary language is much more reassuring to the customer. Using professional jargon or three-dollar words places distance between you and customers. Engaging and connecting with customers takes time and effort.
- *Scale customer's/child's/others' sense of child(ren)'s safety (10 = safest imaginable, 0 = unsafest imaginable)*

**Guidelines**

1. If the parent's scale does not fit with your observations and seems unrealistic or exaggerated, make sure to ask for more information. For example, ask: "What tells you that it is at 8?" "How long would you say you've been at 8?" "Now that you are at 8, how is that different than when you were at, say, 5?"
  2. Another important piece of information that you need to obtain is the parent's perception of what the child would say on a same scale, whether it is a scaling of safety, contentment with life, feeling close to the parent, or whom the child feels closest to and most loved by. For example, “What number would your child would give on the same scale about how safe she feels at home?” And, “What would she say is happening around home that would lead her to give that number?”
- *As needed, do safety planning with the customer; use cooperative language*

**Worker Wisdom**

- Realize that “... overwhelmingly they (customers) want us out of their lives and that is more or less a given. ... second to that would be being heard ... and to give them that sense of being heard (in planning) is very important.”
- Ask them what they need because “... you don't wanna put all your ideas out there to them”; be thinking “give them what they are comfortable with doing at the pace that they want to do it.”
- “Ask how they want things to be in their family one week, one month, three months and one year from now.” Get details about that.
- “Usually what people want to talk about is what they want, financial needs a lot of times, for shut-offs or evictions or section eight referral ... but (also) there'll be needs associated with child care, like a difficult child and (a) parent admitting they're not able to control him and looking for help (and) how to do that.

Sometimes it's more personal needs like feeling overwhelmed and needing mental health treatment or something like that."

- In "developing a treatment plan, ... if it's their choice then they're probably more likely to be involved."
- If they do not have any ideas about what they want or what would help, "the community resource page that we have is a good ice breaker as far as what's available, different agencies for different needs."

### **Guideline**

1. Experienced workers recognize that using cooperative language throughout with customers makes it possible to collect good quality information that will make the task of developing a safety plan easier and quicker. Some examples of useful phrasing are:  
"I can see that you have lots of things to sort out (put up with, to worry about, etc.). So, to make your life a little bit easier (calmer, slowed down, less stressful), I would like to talk about immediate things that you can take care of yourself right away."  
"Having cleaned up your house 6 months ago, what do you have to do to make sure that your house will meet the standard of safety again?"

*When customer seems unmotivated, resistant, confused, or is minimizing your safety concerns.*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- "That's probably the biggest challenge, especially when there is a real need to engage the family to keep them unified and there is resistance. I guess that is where the risk assessment comes into play in terms of the response you know, the cooperation, do they see a problem with the same degree as we do, or are they glossing things over and just want it to go away, in fact that is a challenge."
- "Sometimes you divert their attention for a minute, if you have discussed their problem and they're pretty blatant and it's not registering with them, then sometimes you'll say: 'Do you know your neighbors around here?' And they'll say, 'Yea.' 'Well, how do they treat their kids?' And they say, 'Oh they're terrible, you know, they're the junkies, they're in and out of the house and their kids are running around outside ...' And I say, 'But that's what people are saying about you. But you're saying it's not true here, but it's true over there?' And then I say, 'We already saw (established earlier in the interview) that this is true, we already know it's true.' And they say, 'Well, yeah.' And it gets them thinking for a minute about viewing the neighbor's kids and saying these things, and it's like somebody's saying the same thing about me. And it just diverts them for a minute and then it kind of comes back into the issue and then sometimes they don't realize it but then they're talking about it."
- "Try to depersonalize it when they get right at you, and I say, 'Look, if it were not my job to come in here (I have to feed my kids too), I would not be in your house. It's not me to go into a house and ask a bunch of very personal questions, but I have to do this because somebody has to do it; if it's not me it's going to be somebody else, because society thinks it's important to check on kids. So if we can just get through this together, give me some answers,' sort of that generalized appeal ... I think it's calming for them to know that I'm not a person to just go charging into peoples' lives, that is not my nature at all."
- "And a lot of times, just listening and being silent, people just keep talking when it's quiet and a lot of times they just roll, yeah. And it's almost like sometimes they'll confront themselves; yeah, it's like first, 'no, no, no, I would never do that, I do this and do that,'; then finally they say, 'well, okay, yeah, sometimes I do this or sometimes I do that. Yeah, okay.'"

- Sometimes, "... the starting point has to be what your view of the situation is. You have to start with a frank acknowledgement to the parent that your job is make sure children are safe and this home is not safe, 'you've got wires, you've got rat poison, you've got vermin, you have sexual predator in the home, you're blasted and what can we best do for your kids?' We don't want to upset them because it's their family but something has to change to protect the children. So I say, 'who can we call that can help you?' And then you're assessing, do they agree with that or not; they're still in denial that their boyfriend beats the hell out of the kids because the kids are shooting off their mouth, or it's okay for the predator to occupy the same room as the daughter, or I really don't think I'm that drunk even though nothing has been done in the house. I mean their response cues the worker to the next step, or like there's an acknowledgement that, 'Yeah, I can see where you find this unsafe for my child.' And I think that's the starting point for some agreement as to the next step."
- "I initially try to remain as objective as possible, but stress the fact that I am here based on the safety of the kids, see if there are any risk factors and if we find that there are risk factors, 'how can we help? What can we do differently?' When you incorporate that word *we*, it's like, okay, 'we're going to work together on this, you're going to have input, I'm going to have input, I'm going to be someone more or less who guides you.' And with that type of approach and the not-knowing approach, helps you to compose the service agreement. And when they have that input into it and you continue to go with the not-knowing approach, it makes for better results in my opinion."
- If they do not have any ideas, "...sometimes I look at them and say, 'why am I here,' ... 'why do I have to be in your home,' -- just that single question and then let them talk... And they have to stop and think about it, and they really do because then they say, 'well, you know, cause my husband (got violent) cause he was drinking and ...' and then they sit there and rattle off all these things. Just that one question can build a relationship with them because they just told you everything ... and you say, 'okay, that's fine, so what do we have to work on?' Sometimes they will generate the whole program."
- "If they haven't been involved in the system, I might make some suggestions and give them some choices there."
- "And then, it happens sometimes where they keep venting their hostility, and because you've looked at all these things and nothing is matching up, get the hell out of the house; leave, do not return alone! And that happens sometimes even with experienced workers. You run into something no matter what you do, and it is not working, so you say goodbye and say, 'I'll see you at another time when you're not so angry and come back in and say (to co-workers), 'I need some help, they're not jiving with me at all,' and Mary will go, whatever, and they will just love the hell out of her. Sometimes it's as simple as that, they don't want to talk to a male or they don't want to talk to a female and they're not going to change their mind about that. But sometimes it's not that simple, it could be their emotional stability and they've got psychiatric issues."
- "Again that just points out what we encounter everyday, could be from A to Z, and you got to think on your feet and not hands, that's number 1. And remain calm, always be respectful, don't panic, stay objective as possible, and stay with that not-knowing approach - it's nothing like saying to them, 'you gotta do this,' it's a different approach."
- "I always try to put myself in the customer's shoes and always think about how I might react to me if I were them, and this helps me be patient with them."

## Guidelines

1. It is important to remember how surprising it is that a large portion of your customers are as willing to talk to you as willingly as they do. From the customer's perspective, your unsolicited and unexpected home call can be easily experienced as intrusive and encroaching on their privacy.
  2. Therefore, it is helpful to view the customer "resistance" and lack of motivation as normal and understandable under the circumstances, especially if she feels her ideas are not respected. It also is important to encourage the customer to explain her point of view, rather than assuming that the customer must think like you.
  3. The real skill of a competent investigator is to help the person to want to admit the problem of her own volition. This usually takes just the right mix of subtle coaxing and following the customer's ideas with phrases such as "I'm sure you want your child to be safe," or "You seem like a very concerned mother," when you see evidence that the customer wants these things.
  4. Rather than confronting the customer directly, at times it is useful to help the parent assess the safety issues from his best friend's perspectives. For example, "What would your best friend say about how well you've been taking care of your children lately?"
  5. Include the child's perspective, even in cases of young children. Say, for example, "I know that your child is young and cannot explain things in words. But just suppose I could ask your baby how safe she feels living here with so many things going on, what would she tell me, if she could talk?" This approach educates parents about the importance of viewing the child as having an opinion, mind, and interests, separate from the mother.
  6. When the customer minimizes the seriousness of the safety issues, you need to point out the factual data, for example, the presence of wire coat hangers, a knife, scissors, garbage, dirty diapers within easy reach of a young child. Clear, factual information is difficult to dispute.
  7. In rare situations, you and a customer just will not hit it off well and it may be nobody's fault -- just bad chemistry. In that situation it is better to have someone else on your team help you out such as by going out with you.
  8. Recognizing what sort of people you connect well with and those you do not is a great asset when used well with your supervisor's help.
- *Listen for who and what are important to the customer in this situation; summarize these back to the customer and get details about them*

## Worker Wisdom

- "Notice and acknowledge what they care about even though they don't tell you directly because they are afraid of you: for example, the customer who every couple of sentences says 'I don't want to lose my kids'-- when you hear this leave the referral for a bit and say that you hear that her kids are important to her."
- "When they are mad, try to figure out what stands behind that -- like they might want to find a way to stop their X from calling in on them; then ask some more about that."

- "When you notice what they care about, they often say they'll do whatever it takes; just file that away and come back to it later when you and they are deciding what to do about this referral."

### **Guideline**

1. We are all selective about what we take in and let go. This is a perfectly normal process. In addition to building a positive relationship with customer, listen for what seems to be important to the customer and check out with the customer if you are hearing him correctly on this. This is crucial because discovering what is important to the customer will give you clues about what the customer is most motivated to do and where his energy is at. So, even with two customers with a similar problem, for example, of lashing out at his child instead of talking, your approach to reinforcing and explaining why the customer should handle his child differently will be different. For example, father A might say it is important to be a "different kind of father than my father was," while father B says it is important to him that his "child grows up not scared like I was all my life." When you listen carefully to what each says, you will have a good idea of how to approach each father. With father A, you can say, "Because you want to be a 'different kind of father' than your father was to you, I would suggest . . .," while with father B, you would say, "I think you recognize how important it is for a 'child to grow up' with a feeling of safety; therefore, I suggest ...." Remember how useful it is to incorporate the customer's own words and phrases for what is important. Since they are his words for his idea, you are less likely to meet with resistance and more likely to keep right on building a cooperative working relationship with him.

- *Listen for what the customer might want to do about the situation*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- After getting details about what's important to them, say, "Well, from talking with you I can see that you really do want to do whatever you can to help your family."

### **Guidelines**

1. Some useful questions to use at this point are:  
 "So what do you think would be most helpful to your family right now?"  
 "What difference would \_\_\_\_\_ (the helpful things) make for your family? ... your children? ... yourself? ... in your life generally?"
2. Compliment how much the customer cares about his family.

- *Ask about exceptions and strengths*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- "I think asking exception questions is very natural at those times (when customer is focused on problems): She says, 'He comes in, he drinks, uses all the damn money, what am I supposed to do, I don't have anything to buy anything with, that's why the house looks the way it looks or I don't have food ...' So I ask, 'Okay so you have been seeing this man. Well, when he wasn't with you, was it any better then? So you're getting at there was maybe (a better time), then you start asking, 'how can we get it back to when you did have money, when he wasn't drinking at all, when he wasn't beating on you?' I think it brings attention to the fact there's a situation here that they can do something about and you're willing to help them with that."
- "Sometimes I flat out ask them about strengths, like 'what do other people see as your strengths?'; and then use silence. I've asked them what their children would

see as their strengths. Or, 'what would others say about you and what would your best friend say is your greatest quality?'; that type of thing. Those lines of questioning have a tendency to bring forth what they see as their strengths."

- "I think that if you've identified a problem and you say, 'what do you think you're able to do about this? What can you do to make this better for yourself?'; I think that's a way of getting at their strengths too, and to bring out resources like relatives or things like that."
- "Or do the routine questions, I mean, like lots of times I'll just say about something (that is difficult for them) like getting food in the house, 'how do you get to the store, how are you able to grocery shop?' And she says, 'Well, I walk to the store.' And then I say, 'You have five kids, how do you carry all that stuff; it must be real drudgery?' She says, 'Well, I make it a family outing, I take all the kids with me ...' And I'll say, 'that's real good, you know, it's hard to walk in the sun, or in the cold winter and do that.' And so that's how you start getting into their strengths. Then they'll start telling you a lot more."
- Look for signs of safety as well as risk. Compliment strengths and signs of safety.

### **Guidelines**

1. Ask: Has there been a time when your family was more like what you would like it to be? Get details by asking: When was that time? What was different about it that was better? Who was doing what to make it better? How did you know to do that?
2. Not only is asking about exceptions useful for a balanced assessment of the family, it is also a great tool to build customer/worker relationships. When you ask about exceptions, notice how customers light up, become more relaxed, smile more easily, and seem more and more confident as they talk about their successful periods of life. Expect to hear, for example, when the mother could have lost her temper but was able to walk away, or the father who thought about suicide but decided against it because his children needed a father, and on and on.
3. Exceptions to a problem indicate customer strengths, resourcefulness, and amazing ingenuity. Until we ask about these exceptions, we will never learn about them because customers often are not aware of them or do not view them as successes but just something they do everyday. Asking about them gives the customer a chance to persuade herself and you of how good a parent she is, how important it is for him to support his children, and so forth. When you remind yourself that good parenting or supporting a family requires repetition of successful strategies day in and day out, it will be easy for you to remember to ask about exceptions and give your customers every chance of putting their best foot forward.
4. For many CPS customers, hearing someone complimenting them on their successes is an eye-opening experience. You will be amazed at how often they break into tears because this is the first time they heard anybody saying anything positive about them

## *Scaling Progress Toward Desired Future*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- “Use scaling to get ideas” for service planning. Ask them to describe, “where it (their situation) is now (“0”) (and) what it would be like when the situation is resolved (“10”). And get into what they might need in order to raise it to that level.”
- “I pay particular attention if they suggest something like, ‘Well I was with this counselor back then and I wouldn’t mind going back there.’ Ask how that would be helpful to them and what difference that would make for their children and their situation.

### **Guidelines**

1. Scaling questions are a very practical and useful way to do collaborative assessment. Scaling will help you to listen to customers’ ideas about how their lives are going for them.
  2. Remember that scaling is not a set of objective questions that will tell you where the customer fits on the bell-shaped curve of all CPS customers. Scaling is simply designed to assess customers’ subjective views so that we can understand and appreciate their views of their lives and situations. This understanding is so important because it helps us develop effective ways to cooperate with them.
  3. You can use many adaptations of scaling, particularly with those customers who have limited language skills, such as young children or persons with limited ability to use abstract concepts. You can use a line drawn on a piece of paper, your pen, a rope laid out on the floor, a picture of a ladder, and even blown up to deflated balloons or smiley to sad faces with small children. One worker, for example, held up the back of her hand with very young children who could only count to five.
  4. You can use scales with any concerns and issues you may have about the customer. Examples include: how much alcohol she drinks, more or less than before; how depressed the mother is; how angry a father can become; the seriousness of the problem a person has with a relationship; how often a customer hears voices, from all the time to never; and any issues that may affect a parent’s functioning.
  5. Instead of pushing right away for making positive changes, make sure you first discuss how the customer will **MAINTAIN** the current level of success (however small it maybe). This along with compliments reassures the customer you are not, first of all, going to push or pressure them. After hearing about how the current level of success is being maintained, you can move on to asking: “Suppose things were one number higher than they are right now, what would be different in your family?” “What difference would that make ... for your children? ... for yourself?” “What would it take for that to happen?” And so forth.
- *Ask customer about how FIA might be helpful to her/him and family?*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- Recognize that "you're going to the home can be just the extra motivation to do something"

- Sometimes after you've gotten all their ideas, "there's still a family that just doesn't get it – they may be so used to living or disciplining kids a certain way that's unacceptable and they just don't see it -- so you may have to point that out to them."
- "Educating them about our services is probably the most helpful thing that I've done as a worker. Many are uninformed about resources available to them, especially with new cases."

### **Guidelines**

1. Ask: "So how can we be useful?" This is the most important question you can ask when doing safety and service planning! But, it is best asked after you have helped customers to talk about their understandings of their situations, what is important to them, and what they want in the current situations. Listen carefully to their answers. Even if the answers do not make sense at first, be patient and ask customers to elaborate further about their wishes.
  2. When a customer has a response, continue with: Suppose that was in place (or, was happening), what difference would that make for your family? ... your children? ... yourself?
  3. Even if the customer says unreasonable things such as, "Find me a nice guy to marry with lots of money and who will take care of me and my kids." Learn to use questions like, "How would that be helpful?" "What difference would it make?" Or even, "You must have good reasons to . . ." Answers to these questions are a gold mine of good information to establish goals that are meaningful to the customers and also meet our goal of insuring child's safety.
- Negotiate the next steps, being respectfully clear about what you think CPS will need to see different and possible useful services – ideally related to what the customer wants for her or his family. (On services, be sure to explore what difference the customer hopes the services might make.) Bottom line: Negotiate what the customer is able and willing to do to reduce the concerns and what FIA can do in the process to be most useful.

### **Worker Wisdom**

- "Sometimes it's a matter of what their insurance will pay, so I give them an opportunity to make those calls and we meet again to formalize that."
- "Sometimes they wanna do something on their own, substance abuse treatment is one (example) where they don't wanna go to Odyssey. That's long term ... and residential; they would rather go to (NA) meetings or AA. Sometimes I'm willing to go along with that ... if there can be some kind of verifications and maybe some urine screenings."
- "In the more severe cases that you're on the verge of going to court, I would say get an evaluation and follow through on the recommendation. And sometimes they're willing to (get the evaluation), if you're not saying, 'You're gonna go to residential unless....'"
- "We're going out and talking about the situation, I'm not going out and saying, 'You're gonna do this, this, and this.' Allow them to have some input. In a case where it's not a life or death situation, let them make the choice . . . and then you get to the follow-up and see how it's working. And there might even be an agreement, 'Well if this doesn't work, what about doing this?' And a lot of times they'll agree with that. So trying it their way ...."
- "And then offer some things too. If they're willing to participate in these programs or this counseling and try and improve that situation, then 'what can I do for you as

far as section 8 housing or financial assistance, or food, clothing, other community resources.’”

- “And let the person or agency know that you’re referring to them to what you’re really wanting to accomplish, what type of customer they’re getting ready to work with so they’ll know.”
- In developing the plan, “that’s the other thing, to (be clear about) how long you’re gonna be in that person’s life and they’ll cooperate a lot better.”
- Recognize that: “Most parents want their children with them . . . and will do whatever is needed to keep their children with them. . . . Oh, I would say at least 75%. I mean it’s a huge number that really do want to change, that are willing to work. I would say maybe only 5 percent would just say, “Forget it. I’m not doing a thing.’ It really is not the norm.”

### **Guidelines**

1. A good plan is a plan that the customer can realistically follow through on, that is, is able and willing to do. Demanding something that the customer cannot follow through on realistically is setting them up to fail. Therefore, be realistic and ask about the details of child care, transportation, and any other matters related to handling the referral and recommendations. Find out about the what, when, who, where, and how of the customer’s intentions, ability, and willingness to follow through.
2. Woven right in to any steps taken to protect a child(ren), a realistic safety/service plan will include the following:
  - a) Something that is important to the customer and that the customer wants such as finding ways and resources to help her teach her children “to mind” her so she does not become “so angry with them,” or “keeping her children together” because the mother herself was a foster child. This is first learned from having listened for what is important to the customer as you went over the referral information with the customer. Remember, often customers reveal what is important to them indirectly by talking about their difficulties such as children who do “not mind,” or “the system that breaks up families.” By asking customers to describe what they would rather have instead of these difficulties, they often naturally will start describing what they want.
  - b) Something small and simple enough so that the customer can get started immediately. For example, instead of “the customer will never use drugs again,” accept the customer’s willingness “to go for a drug screening.” Starting with something small and simple increases the chances of an early success that gives a sense of accomplishment and breeds confidence.
  - c) Concrete details about what the customer wants. This comes from having asked the customer about the details of what his or her idea is of, for example, “how to be a better parent” or “how to cut down on the drinking.” Wishful thinking alone does not change people. Doing something different is more likely to create change and a customer knowing the details of what she or he wants can help the customer to take steps toward that. These details come from having asked the customer scaling questions about their child(ren)’s safety and their family situations as well as what going to higher numbers on these scales will look like in their parenting, lives, and homes.
  - d) Information that indicates that the customer has the realistic means to accomplish the goal(s) and action steps. For example, if the customer is to “go for a drug screening,” be sure you have asked the customer about what it will

take for him or her to “make it happen.” The customer may talk about “getting an appointment” or “child care” or “transportation.”

e) Information about the strengths and resources of the customer that are related to what the customer wants different. This comes from having asked exception questions related to what the customer wants. For example, with a customer who wants to find ways to teach her children “to mind,” having asked questions like the following: “Have there ever been times when they were not minding when you got them to mind, even a little bit better?” “How were you able to do that?” “Has anyone been helpful to you in figuring out how to teach them ‘to mind’?” “Who?” “What did they do that was so helpful?” Expect customers to mention strengths and resources like “a love for my children,” “a desire to be a better parent than my own parents,” “a supportive family,” and “good friends.”

2. Before leaving make sure to ask the customer how and what kind of changes are likely to follow when they take the first small steps toward what she or he wants.
3. Also, before leaving, always compliment one or two things you notice the customer is already doing. For example, say “I can see how attentive you are to your baby’s needs.” Or, for example, say “Your house looks much cleaner than the last time I was here. It is clear you have a good start on tackling the mess in the house.”

- *Record goals/activities.*

#### **Guidelines**

1. Write down customers’ words for what is important to them, what they want, their ideas about how to make those things happen, their strengths and resources, and any additional needs and services from FIA or the broader community that they say would be helpful to them and their families. Incorporate these words into the CPS case documentation.
2. Use the hidden text in the templates for CPS case documentation to transfer the findings of your interviews with customers into the CPS documents.

- *Ask if the customer has any other questions. Thank the customer and leave.*

## SBI Protocol for use in CPS Follow-up Contacts

- *Re-clarify situation with customer; carefully answer any questions about the customer's case; provide information about how the system works*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- Be thinking how you can "treat them with respect"
- "Go back over how far you came last time; usually you're going back over the initial complaint and what the investigation found and what your preliminary agreement was about what the customer and you were going to do about it"
- "There have been times when somebody's just too agitated to do anything constructive at the time, but that's usually on a first contact. (If they are too agitated,) just redirect that or reschedule at another time. On the follow-up contacts, they're expecting you and they're usually not as agitated or upset."
- Often they have questions and you should be ready to give information about "preponderance of evidence" or "due process notices" or being on "central registry" and its consequences.
- "The main thing is just to be honest with them, (to) tell them what the situation is and what that means, usually (they) are not familiar with the system and I try and explain step by step what's going on and that what happens depends on what's done about it, what progress is made."

### **Guideline**

1. Know where you are at on the case, be thinking about what might be on the customer's mind now that (some) time has passed since you saw him or her.
  2. After going over the key points, ask them if that is their understanding too.
  3. Based on what you know so far about the customer's situation, be thinking what useful information you might provide.
  4. Ask if they have other questions you can answer.
- *Continue safety/service planning as needed (see the Protocol for CPS Investigations and Service Planning). (If the plan is in place, proceed to scaling progress.)*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- "Often when you go back you and customer already have a pretty clear plan from the first visit (investigation) about what they and you are going to do to take care of things; if so, ask what they have done so far and what is better."
- If they already had "initial contact with an agency" ask what was their "first impression," how useful was it, has it made a difference for them, and "when is their next appointment."

### **Guidelines**

1. Make sure to reconnect with customer: compliment any changes you notice: how the children look cleaner, house is picked up, mother looks washed, dressed better, garbage is gone, etc.
2. When you have gotten any report of customer progress from a referral source, make note of it and be sure to ask for details from the source. Ask about any successful

strategies that seem to be involved – both on the referral source’s part and the customer’s. Compliment the referral source for their hard, successful work. Be sure to bring up the success with the customer when you see him and ask lots of questions about whether he sees it the way the referral source does, how it happened, what it will take to keep it going, and so forth. Compliment the customer.

- *Scale progress on the goals/activities of the safety/service plan (10 = goal accomplished, 0 = no progress)*

#### **Worker Wisdom**

- “At this point we should have a written plan with changes (specified) and I’m making contact to discuss how that is going. I usually review the agreement or the plan before I go out there and see what we need to discuss.”

#### *Asking about and reinforcing progress*

- “I think the follow up (scaling) works just fine on the home call ... It seems to give her (the customer) ... a sense of importance or ... empowerment. When I was asking her those things (what was better) and she was able to talk about things that maybe she wouldn’t normally be talking about with anyone, I think it helped ...”
- “The scaling is extremely helpful to us as workers ... because it lets them (customers) say it in their own way. It’s like a fill in the blank – ‘you tell me what the five means?’ It also gives a sense of the cooperative, a kind of *we* working together.”
- “I think people that realize that they need some assistance or wanna be in counseling (are) realistic and scale at about what I would as far as where (they) are at and where (they) need to be... I (then) ask, ‘What makes you say you’re at that level? What gives you that indication?’ Then usually they’ll discuss certain things that are going on that (are going well) and certain things that they still need to do that put them at that level.”
- When asking about the number, sometimes customers “... tell me something personal about themselves that I’m totally unaware of that has changed their situation (such as) a godmother or someone that has befriended them and was helpful, but in general the progress is from services.”
- “You will see progress because a lot of times they will tell you that they feel better. You will see it and they will tell you. They will definitely tell you. The kids in particular will perhaps notice a change in their parents (and will) comment, ‘Well, mom doesn’t yell as much as she used to.’”
- “And they’ll learn a routine. Once the parents learns what routine they should be using with their children as far as discipline, the kids will remember that and they’ll also tell you, ‘Mom gave me a time out’ or ‘she didn’t let me go to that football game.’ So you will hear and you will see the changes.” Be sure to ask for details about the positive changes and how they happened.
- “I’ve used it in custody cases, (asking the kids) on a scale of 0 to 10, how comfortable do you feel living with each parent? In one particular incident I had a father who was abusing the kids by asking, ‘Who’s over at mom’s house? What is mom doing?’ And they realized that ... they were being manipulated. In that type of incident you find out on a scale of one to ten, time with mom was 8 and with dad was 5.”
- When you see the positive changes, compliment the customer by saying: “I’m glad (for you)! The change is something that you see that it can happen and that you can do it! And, you know, you can continue doing it even after I’m not involved.”

- When customers are making progress, “I back off. I let them make their progress and I act as more of an assistant to them as opposed to helping direct them. I let them direct it themselves.”
- “But I think that people do much better when they come to the ideas on their own . . . and so people that make progress usually have that already going for them. They decided, ‘Yes, I don’t like this past behavior. I want to change it. How do I go about doing that?’ And we have those all the time.”

### **Guideline**

1. Ask them to scale their progress where 0 means where they were at the first time you met together and 10 means the goal in the service plan is accomplished. Get a number for each goal.
2. When something is better, get lots of details about it and how it happened; be sure to compliment the customer for taking any positive steps no matter how small.
3. The investigative role of CPS is only a part of the job. The other big important part is to encourage, give hope, and affirm the dignity of the customer, validate their ideas and opinions and good work that they do in big and small ways to be good parents. Therefore, the other big part of the job is to be a cheerleader, nurturer, and encourager of positive changes.

*Finding out about strengths.*

- “You can learn them from talking with them (customers) or looking at the household itself. Perhaps (observing) some of the material things or just (noticing) in the conversation with the parent – they’ll tell certain things like, ‘I won’t let my children go without certain things.’ The other thing is that you can talk with the children and they’ll say, ‘Oh no, I always have plenty to eat’ or, ‘I have decent clothes’ or, ‘My grandmother gives me money to go on field trip.’ As long as they have resources, they feel the comfort, the strength within their own family, you can find that out. (And) the schools will tell you (and) other agencies will tell you, people that have been involved with the family or are still involved with the family.”

*Working on the next step . . .*

- When things are at, for example, a 5, and you have explored what is happening that makes it a 5, do as this worker does: “Normally I go to, ‘What would make it a 6?’ It’s been my experience that they can usually answer that without too much difficulty.”
- “I ask them about things that they would like to see changed yet . . . um, how that can be accomplished and let them do more of the thinking as we back off and then offer the options to them if they don’t come up with it on their own. But I think people do much better when they come to the ideas on their own. ”

*Scale other goals/activities and record next steps.*

- *When the customer is at unrealistically high scaling numbers*

### **Worker Wisdom**

- “I’ve had several intellectually limited customers and even when their situation is not good, they rate their progress as ten, as (unrealistically) high. (After asking what makes it ten and the customer cannot identify progress), “I try and indicate to the

customer what it would be like if those (difficulties and deficiencies) were corrected.”

### Guidelines

1. Rather than disputing the customer’s scores, ask about other person’s perspectives on the same scale. For example,  
“Suppose I asked your child (son, daughter) the same question about how safe she thinks she is, what number would she give me?”  
Or, “Suppose I asked your best friend (mother, boy friend) the same question, what number would she give?” And, “What would tell her that your child is at that level of safety?”
2. Make sure that you take a posture of curiosity instead of a judgmental one. The customer might have a good reason for thinking a higher number than what you might think and, when given a chance to explain, may persuade you the higher number makes sense.

- *When there is little or no progress*

### Worker Wisdom

- “I have found that ... the scaling to be real helpful in determining how far we had come, what had not been accomplished and how.... And it gives them more a working relationship with you as opposed to feeling as though, you know, ‘my worker is gonna take care of everything,’ you know, ‘I just have to do the minimum.’
- “... it’s important when we’re doing the follow up ... that you stay supportive, yet consequential, ah so there are no surprises and they get that real sense of urgency as well as you being an honest individual with them. I simply use situations like, ‘Well if you don’t make it over there (to the clinic for drug screening), that will be considered a positive screen anyway.’”
- “Some get really offended at the slightest consequence they face or the slightest criticism, but you try and do it in a constructive manner. With substance abusers you know, (I say) ‘it’s not something that you became addicted to overnight, I don’t anticipate it is something that we can fix overnight, however, there are consequences to you not complying and we have to work this out together – interjecting those kind of things that say *we* as opposed to ‘*you* didn’t do this’ and say, ‘well, I’d like to help you and see if we can continue to progress; I know that sometimes relapse is a part of recovery and if *we* ...,’ using those kind of terms allows them to hear you.”
- “I think there’s always some type of influence. You may not know it until much later (but) if they come back through the system they’ll remember what you or somebody else told them ... and they may be more willing to admit it.”
- “Just tell them, you know, ‘You think about it and if you think in the future you wanna talk to me, give me a call back.’ When (there is) little or no progress, give them some alternatives that they can follow through on without you hanging over them. Send them a list in the mail of different community services with a nice little short letter saying, ‘Hopefully this list will help you in the future if you decide that you need some help.’ So, unless there is an emergency, do not push too hard and always keep the door open because you never know what might happen.”
- “You also have to come to realize that some people are only gonna be able to go so far and that’s their point. And accept that. (Sometimes) you kinda know from their educational background or their mental status (or) family members will give you some insight into what that person is able to do or not able to do.”

- “If they have family support you’ll find out that the family is there to help them. So that also helps you-- to find out a lot about family.”
- “In court cases I’ve let them know when a review is coming up and I’ll be contacting counselors and getting progress reports and seeing if there’s anything they need to tell me or discuss. (However,) I don’t go in there and say, ‘Well, I found out you missed this and this session. And this is really bad. You’re not doing well at all and this is the consequences.’”
- “I think the key is that if parents choose to change . . . and that if a person chooses to change, there are tremendous services available to assist them in that. And that I’d be happy to engage them in those services. But I usually do put it on the parent. I say, ‘This is a choice. You can decide one way or the other. That is entirely up to you.’ It’s not about me or what I want.’ It’s entirely up to the parent on they think is a priority.”
- “I would like to think that most families that I work with know that I respect them and that I try to treat them as I would like to be treated. And I think that’s of the utmost importance because if you don’t do that, why should they consider anything that you’re talking with them about? . . . so that helps because I can offer them something rather than just some type of lip service. There are things we can actually do here.”
- “The risk level is key in all of this. So if were talking relatively low risk, . . . you continue to be supportive to the family and encourage them . . .”
- And, at some point, “I go back and I talk to them about the things that they had agreed to do and the things that they originally had said that they wanted to change and ask them if they’re still interested in pursuing these areas. If that’s changed, what has changed, how it changed, if those are still their goals, how can we achieve them? What can I do to assist them in achieving them? And that’s what I continue to focus on.”

### **Guidelines**

1. Because we all badly want the children’s lives to be better, we can easily become frustrated when there is no progress. When this happens, it is a good idea to assume first that the customer might have a “good reason” for not following through. This will help you to slow down and not become irritated or frustrated with the customer, and give you the ability to think of more useful approaches.
2. Make sure that the customer did not make a premature agreement just to get you out of the door.
3. Make sure the customer had understood all the steps that he or she needed to take in order to follow through and that all the pieces are in place.
4. Review the goals again and let the customer know that you are willing to listen to their suggestions for modifications.
5. Spend some time discussing the benefit of following through; that is, how the customer will benefit from carrying out the tasks.
6. Whenever the customer comes up with an idea, build on it by asking questions like: How might that be helpful? Suppose that were to happen, what would be different for you... between you and your children, ... between you and FIA, ... between you and the court? Could that happen? What would it take ... from you, ... from FIA? Who else might be helpful to you in making this happen? When was the last time you did something like that? Are you the sort of person who can make things happen when you decide to? What would it take to make the decision to do \_\_? Who or what might help in making the decision? Who knows you well? What

would they say it would take to make things better? If these questions do not help the customer to come up with any idea, as necessary, respectfully inform the customer of the likely consequences of insufficient progress. Unless there is an emergency, do not push too hard. Perhaps ask one last time: "What can I, you, or anyone else do differently to be useful? How might that be helpful?"

- *Compliment the customer on strengths and progress. Thank the customer for his or her time. Always try to finish on a positive, encouraging note!*

**Guidelines**

1. Close the case with a list of successful accomplishments the customer made and compliment how thoughtful and motivated she was in trying to improve her children's life.
2. Indicate that the FIA door is open if they need more assistance.

## SBI Protocol for use in CPS Investigations and Safety/Service Planning (short form for the field)

- Review referral; check customer's CPS history; think: "Be respectful and clearheaded!"
- At the door, clarify why you are there; explain your role – "to ensure the safety of children"; be personable and humanize yourself; request permission to come in and discuss the referral
- As you enter notice and compliment something positive about the person or home
- Go over referral information "line by line" asking for the customer's understanding of the situation; stay calm; allow customer to vent; stay "not knowing"; take your time ☺
- Respectfully gather information to start making a decision of denial or substantiation
- If clearly a denial, thank the customer and be on your way
- If thinking substantiation, gently but clearly level with the customer about your concerns for the child(ren)'s safety. State your desire to work cooperatively with them. Assure them you will listen carefully and always keep them informed of your actions. (Qualify this assurance as needed and give examples about situations of immediate, extreme danger to children.)
- Scale customer's/child's/others' sense of child(ren)'s safety (10=safest imaginable, 0=unsafest imaginable)
  - Ask: "What number are things at right now?" (Get details)  
"What tells you things are at that number?" (Get signs of both safety and risk)  
"What would be different if it was 1 or 2 numbers higher?"  
"What would it take for that to happen?" "What else might be helpful?"
- As needed, do safety planning with the customer
  - Use cooperative language: "We would like to work with you and be useful."
  - Ask: "Who else that you know might be helpful?"  
"Who has helped in the past and what did they do that was so helpful?"  
"Have you ever faced something like this in the past? What worked?" (Explore exceptions)  
"What else might be useful?"
  - Scale family situation (10=way you want things in your family, 0=worst ever):  
"What number are things at right now?" (Get details)  
"What would 10 look like?"  
"Has there ever been a time when your family situation was closer to what you want it to be?"  
"What would 1 or 2 numbers higher look like?"  
"What will it take for that to happen?" "What else might be helpful?"
- Affirm and reinforce customer strengths, resources, and cooperation.
- Negotiate the next steps, being respectfully clear about what you think CPS will need to see different and possible useful services--ideally related to what the customer wants for her or his family. (On services, be sure to explore what difference the customer hopes the services might make.) Bottom line: Negotiate what the customer is able and willing to do to reduce the concerns and what FIA can do in the process to be most useful. Record goals/activities.
- Ask if customer has any other questions. Thank the customer and leave.

## **SBI Protocol for use in CPS Follow-up Contacts** (short form for the field)

- *Re-clarify situation with customer; carefully answer any questions about the customer's case; provide information about how the system works*
- *Continue safety/service planning as needed (see Protocol for CPS Investigations and Service Planning). If the plan is in place, proceed to scaling progress.*
- *Scale progress on goals/activities of the safety/service plan (10=goal accomplished, 0=no progress)*
  - *Ask: "What number are things at right now on \_\_\_\_\_ (goal or action step)?"*  
*"What tells you things are at that number?" "What exactly did you do?" (Get details of the progress)*  
*"How has that been helpful ... to you ... to your children?"*  
*"Who else is noticing things are better?" "What are they noticing?"*
  - *Reinforce progress:*  
*"Has it been difficult to do?"*  
*"Did it surprise you that you were able to do it?" "How were you able to do it?"*  
*"What would the children say they notice different now?" "What do they like about the change?"*  
*"Does this progress make any difference in the children's safety?" "Would they agree?"*  
*"What will it take to keep this progress going?"*
  - *Work on the next step:*  
*"Suppose things were one or two numbers higher on \_\_\_\_\_, what would be different?"*  
*"What would you notice?" "What would the children notice?"*  
*"How would these differences be helpful?"*  
*"Could they happen?" "What will it take ...from you? ... from FIA?"*
  - *Scale other goals/activities and record next steps*
- *When there is little or no progress:*
  - *Ask: "Who knows you well?" "What would they say it will take to make things better?" (Get details!)*  
*"What could I do differently to be useful to you in this situation?"*  
*"What would your friend ... your children, ... your mother, ... etc suggest you do?"*  
*"Do you think that might make a difference?" "How so?"*  
*"Suppose you decide not to do what is on the plan, what do you think will happen?"*  
*"Would it be helpful, knowing the system the way I do, to tell you what I think will happen?"*  
*"Would it be useful if I told you some more about the services that I think might be useful?"*
  - *Whenever customer comes up with an idea, build on it by asking:*  
*"How might that be helpful?"*  
*"Suppose that were to happen, what would be different for you .. between you and your children, ... between you and FIA, ... between you and the court?"*  
*"Could that happen?" "What would it take ... from you, ... from FIA?"*  
*"Who else might be helpful to you in making this happen?"*  
*"When was the last time you did something like that?" (Get details about exceptions)*  
*"Are you the sort of person who can make things happen when you decide to?"*  
*"What would it take to make the decision to do \_\_\_?Who or what might help in making the decision?"*  
*"Who knows you well?" "What would they say it will take to make things better?" (Get details!)*
  - *If the above questions do not help the customer to come up with any ideas, as necessary, respectfully inform the customer of the likely consequences of insufficient progress. Unless there is an emergency, do not push too hard. Perhaps ask one last time:*  
*"What can I, you, or anyone else do differently to be useful? How might that be helpful?"*
- *Compliment the customer on strengths and progress. Thank the customer for his or her time. Always try to finish on a positive, encouraging note!*

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