

Trauma Informed Practice Strategies (T.I.P.S.) for Caseworkers

As much as is safe and possible, the following is suggested:

1. Plan investigations, assessments, possible removals ahead as much as possible; reduce the element of surprise.
 - Slow down, plan out investigations and removals.
 - Let the family know an assessment is going on, that removal is a possibility. Suggest they keep a school aged child at home so the child doesn't have to be interviewed at school.
 - Work with the parents to identify support individuals for their children during the assessment and/or for placement resources – relatives, friends, etc. Ask the parent and the child – Who does this child know and trust?
 - Collaborate with other agencies, especially law enforcement.
 - For example, in Multnomah County the Child Abuse Team police detectives are housed in the same building as the child abuse hotline.
 - The hotline sends people to police academies to educate and train – How can they better collaborate out in the field? Clarify roles and expectations.
 - If possible, identify a placement before removal.
 - If the child needs to wait at the DHS office while a placement is found, try to find a comfortable place for them to wait, away from your phone conversations with prospective placements (to avoid hearing rejections), and perhaps with something to do to entertain themselves.
 - Ask the child if they are hungry or thirsty.
 - Follow current placement policy and procedures – e.g. in order of preference: placement with relative, someone the child knows and trusts, same culture, same language, same school, etc. If diligently followed these can reduce the impact and trauma of removal for many children.

2. Try to keep things calm during the investigation, assessment and removal. Engage the parents in helping the child.
 - Remain calm. Move slowly.
 - Talk down the parents. Calm the parents to calm the child.

- Separate children from the chaos of arrest, interrogation, or resistance on the part of the parents.
- Let the parent put child into the car seat, say good-bye, assist in the process of removal.

3. Provide sensory comfort, familiarity, help with settling in.

- Ask the parent, or the child, to gather together some familiar things before taking them away.
- If picking a child up from school to remove, create a chance for the the child to go home and pick up some things from home. Perhaps a relative or friend could meet them there or go with them to help pack some belonging.
- Ask children if they are hungry or thirsty. Provide comfort food. Ask them what they would like.
- Ask the parent and the child about medical conditions, allergies, medications.
- Especially for babies and very young children, ask the parent for information about feeding, schedules, routines.
- Take time to help the child transition into the foster home. The child may have connected to you during the removal. They have already had one abrupt separation. It may be reassuring to the child to know that the worker knows the people and place where they will be staying. Be a constant in the child's life until visits with parents can start.
- If at all possible avoid moving the child, even from shelter care to foster care.
- Ask the foster parents to meet with the bio parents to exchange information about the child and the child's living situation.

4. Empathize, connect, and try to understand the child's perspective.

- Be open to listening if they want to talk.
- Acknowledge their feelings and the difficulty of what they are going through.
- Acknowledge their love for their parents and their parents love for them.

5. Provide information

- To the child:
 - Explain what is happening. Tell them where they are going.
 - Assure them that this is not their fault.
 - Assure them that they are safe and will be cared for.

- Assure them that their siblings, if separated, are safe and will be cared for.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- To the foster parent:
 - About the child – medical conditions, allergies, medications, known behavioral and emotional issues, important people, anything that will help them to understand the child and to help them feel safe and comfortable.

6. Support child's relationships and family connections

- Place siblings together, even if only in a temporary setting (e.g. the receiving center) until a placement can be found where they can be together.
- Visitation is extremely important. In addition to their own trauma of being separated, children may worry about the safety and well being of those family members from whom they are separated. Seeing that they are OK can ease that worry.
 - If siblings are placed separately, arrange for sibling visits ASAP, and/or ask foster parents to allow and arrange for sibling contact.
 - Set up visitation between child and parents as soon as possible.
- For cross cultural placements, do a cultural assessment. NOTE: There are numerous unofficial cultural assessment forms throughout the agency. Some thing more standardized is suggested.
- Notify the child's school so they can be supportive, if the child remains in the school, or to provide classmates the opportunity for closure or continued connection if the child is to attend a different school.
- Allow the child to resume attending school as soon as possible. School may have been the one place where they felt safe.

7. Provide services aimed at healing and well being as soon as possible, including trauma informed services.

- For the child:
 - Make sure the child has someone to talk to about what's happening that they feel comfortable with.
 - Mental health assessment
 - Counseling and/or other trauma informed therapy
- Provide training, information and support to the foster parents to help them care for the child and to address the child's particular needs.

8. Ongoing training for caseworkers

- Workers may be uncomfortable with removals where a child is distressed and crying. They need more training about what they might experience during this process and how to help a child through it.