

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: EXPLORATION OF ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IN-HOME SAFETY PLANNING LEARNING COLLABORATIVE



## FEBRUARY 2024 VALUES AND BELIEFS RELATED TO SAFETY PLANNING

**Negative bias:** the preference against a person or group of people, is noticeable in the formation of risk aversion around safety planning.

**Risk aversion:** describes the avoidance of decisions that may feel uncertain. Most people dislike ambiguity and when faced with a tough decision, they'll generally go with what feels less risky.

Minority families, especially those living in poverty and low-income communities, are the least likely to be offered safety plans to keep the family intact.

How can child welfare professionals protect themselves against knowingly, or unknowingly, letting personal bias impact their actions or decisions around safety planning?

### 1 Become aware of your own biases.

- The first step to addressing bias is knowing the biases you have, whether positive or negative. Increasing awareness enables you to consider how the bias may impact a decision to consider if you're being fair. Educating ourselves by attending trainings, reading books, listening to podcasts, and having productive discussions that disrupts bias, can lend itself to gaining new perspectives to think about objective decision-making.

### 2 Raise consciousness.

- Child welfare professionals must raise consciousness of bias in practice. The stakeholders, such as schools, medical and service providers, and attorneys we work with can impact the children and families served by child welfare. CW professionals must advocate for access to tools, resources, and fair representation.

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## 3 Deliberate, reflect, and educate.

- To reduce or eliminate our own biases, we should take time to reflect on reasoning and facts before making a decision. Bias is likely to infiltrate decisions during times of high stress, when things need to be done quickly and/or there's a high level of uncertainty. This is when our brains are most likely to fill gaps with stereotypes or prior experiences with families we have encountered.
- Some tips:
  - Write it down – writing typically induces time to deliberate and causes you to consider the justification for the decisions.
  - Explain your reasoning to another person – This alternative may provide an opportunity to slow down to vocalize your critical thinking. Taking time to reflect, write down your perspective, or discuss decisions with colleagues and/or your supervisor, can uncover when and how your bias is impacting the risks you take (or don't take) when safety planning.

## 4 Change perspectives.

- Working directly with families can foster an “in their shoes” approach. When you have formed an effective partnership, the topic of the 2023 Learning Collaboratives, you are more likely to meet the parent/caregiver where they are and truly understand what they want and need. Building trust and open communication to the shared pool of meaning can build cultural empathy, meaning appreciating and considering the differences and similarities of another culture compared to your own.





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## Reflection on Content

Are there previous experiences that may have shaped your views on safety planning?  
Is it plausible that these experiences have increased feelings of uneasiness or uncertainty around safety planning with specific groups of people?

## Action Item

Take action to raise awareness around bias and the impact on the child welfare system. Connect the information to potential steps to reduce bias in your own practice and/or have conversations to reduce bias in your county.

**Step 1: Review your county's information on the Putting Families First Data Dashboard and reflect on possible rationale for the percentages:**

**Step 2: Review literature or You tube:**

**Our Hidden Biases (Picture Alternatives, Project ABC)**

**To transform child welfare, take race out of the equation (TED, Jessica Pryce)**

**Implicit/Unconscious Bias in the Human Services (UCDavis CPE-Human Services)**

**Addressing Disproportionality (Child Welfare Information Gateway)**

**How Racial Bias Facilitated the US Child Welfare System's Targeting of Black Communities (Lit Hub)**

**Implicit Bias in the Child Welfare, Education, and Mental Health Systems (National Center for Youth Law)**