

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



JULY 2024 ENGAGING PARENTS IN CONVERSATIONS TO DISCUSS NEGOTIABLE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE ASPECTS OF SAFETY PLANNING

Non-negotiable aspects of safety planning include clear directions on what must happen to ensure safety of the child(ren) in the home. The assessment of underlying dynamics, triggers, or characteristics of parental behavior will assist to identify the critical times and circumstances in which a safety response must be involved to protect the child(ren) from the identified danger.

We can summarize the non-negotiables as the **WHAT** must happen and **WHEN** a safety response is required.

The negotiable aspect of safety planning can be summarized as the **HOW** the safety of the children will be ensured, or which strategy is best, and **WHO** will provide the safety response.

Engaging parents in conversations regarding the potential options for the safety control responses and utilizing the family's informal network of people and/or community resources increases the likelihood of the plan's success. In a partnership, both parties (Child Welfare and the Family) provide their insight, input and ideas creating buy-in. Empowering the parents to negotiate ensures the plan is realistic. For any child with American Indian heritage, the tribe must be contacted and a part of the collaboration and negotiation of a safety plan.

Partnering during safety planning to discuss negotiables and non-negotiables can be difficult. The concept of "partners" in most scenarios insinuates equal power, equal say, equal responsibilities, and liability. In Child Welfare, we cannot negotiate the need for safety intervention, thus tipping the scale and creating a power imbalance that is undeniable.





JULY 2024

ENGAGING PARENTS IN CONVERSATIONS TO DISCUSS NEGOTIABLE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE ASPECTS OF SAFETY PLANNING

Tips to Negotiate with a Power Imbalance

A true partnership means that both parties (the CW professional and the parents) contribute to the safety plan. All parties have invested interest in a plan that will work.

1 Recognize and acknowledge the power imbalance.

One of the most challenging aspects of ethical negotiation is how to deal with power imbalance. Power imbalance can arise from various factors, such as differences in resources, authority, expertise, or influence. When one party has more power, it can be used to coerce, manipulate, or potentially threaten (if we can't safety plan, I'll have to remove your children). The goal is to address the power imbalance in a way that respects the dignity and interests of both parties to come to a mutually beneficial agreement. The CW professional must be aware the parents may be feeling intimidated, insecure, and resentful and that holding the power can sometimes cause a person to feel overly confident, entitled, or arrogant. By recognizing that these thoughts and feelings may exist, efforts can be made to avoid them – level the playing field. The CW professional can utilize strategies to empower the parents such as allowing them time to gather more information, helping them build a family team, supporting them to create alternatives for safety responses. When the CW professional can responsibly use their power by being respectful, transparent, and cooperative, it opens doors to vulnerability in conversations and conveys to the parents the intent is honesty and is less about potential repercussions and more about the sufficiency of information for safety planning.



JULY 2024

ENGAGING PARENTS IN CONVERSATIONS TO DISCUSS NEGOTIABLE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE ASPECTS OF SAFETY PLANNING

Tips to Negotiate with a Power Imbalance (con't)

2 Focus on the interests, not the positions.

Positions are the specific demands that the parties take during negotiations; We can only use (blank) as a provider, CPS will offer you (blank) if you go to treatment/take your medication/stop using illegal substances. The parents may feel pressured to do whatever the stronger party (Child Welfare) is offering to appease them, even if internally it's not something they want or agree with. To avoid this, both parties should pay particular attention to open-ended questions; What do you think about this? What concerns do you have about the plan? How can we make this work for both of us to achieve the goal of child safety? Open-ended questions are more likely to reveal where there is connection, or disconnect, in common interests.

3 Seek a win-win outcome.

There's a lot on the line for everyone when it comes to safety planning. A win-win outcome is possible, even when there's a power imbalance, as long as both parties are willing to cooperate, communicate, and compromise. The parents add value by asserting their needs and rights and by negotiating what they are truly comfortable with for their children and family. The CW Professional adds value by offering support or resources to aid in the plan being successful. If the outcome is believed by both parties as a "win-win", there should be mutual feelings of trust and respect rather than concerns and mistrust.



JULY 2024 ENGAGING PARENTS IN CONVERSATIONS TO DISCUSS NEGOTIABLE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE ASPECTS OF SAFETY PLANNING

Reflection on Content

What are your thoughts and feelings about giving parent's choices when it comes to safety planning? As you consider areas of negotiations, reflect on where you land between feelings of risk aversion and/or risk tolerance.

Action Item

Negotiation is a skill that can always be improved. One method for professional growth is to reflect on the negotiation. Think of a negotiation you had in your practice. What did you do well? What surprised you? How can you prepare better next time?