



Framework and Policy Tools for Improving Linkages Between Alcohol and Drug Services, Child Welfare, and Dependency Courts

The ultimate goal of the professionals who work with children and families affected by substance use disorders and involved in the child welfare system is to facilitate positive outcomes for these families. Ideally, the parent will receive effective treatment for the substance use disorder so that the child can remain with the parent, while the well-being of the child is fully supported throughout the parent's recovery process. Achieving this outcome requires intensive collaboration by multiple agencies working with the family.

NCSACW helps child welfare agencies, substance abuse treatment providers, and dependency courts to establish cross-system collaboration that sets the stage for positive outcomes. To carry out this work, NCSACW has developed a ten-element framework for collaboration and a set of three policy tools that support the framework.

The Framework: Ten Elements of System Linkages

For cross-system collaboration to be effective and sustainable, each system - child welfare, substance abuse treatment, and the courts - must be engaged in each of these ten areas:

- ***Underlying values and principles of collaborative relationships***
- ***Daily practice: client screening and assessment***
- ***Daily practice: client engagement and retention in care***
- ***Daily practice: services to children of substance abusers***
- ***Joint accountability and shared outcomes***
- ***Information sharing and data systems***
- ***Budgeting and program sustainability***
- ***Training and staff development***
- ***Working with related agencies***
- ***Working with the community and supporting families***



Why Are these Ten Factors Important?

- **Underlying values and principles of collaborative relationships**
The partners in cross-system collaboration must create effective relationships with one another. The values held at the organizational level and by individual participants affect the likelihood of agreement on critical issues. The discussion of values is the cornerstone of a collaborative relationship.
- **Daily practice in AOD screening and assessment**
Each of the collaborating agencies must be aware of screening and assessment issues. Relevant agencies must determine whether the parent has a substance abuse problem, assess the nature of the problem and the most effective treatment, and determine what information should be communicated to the other agencies.
- **Daily practice in engaging and retaining parents**
Each of the collaborating agencies has the opportunity to encourage the parent to stay in the recovery process and meet the requirements imposed on them. Many obstacles confront parents who want to keep their families together while they deal with substance abuse. Judges can respond in a way that supports continued engagement in recovery and the court process; the parent's attorney can make sure the parent knows the consequences of their actions.
- **Daily practice in services to children**
A family systems approach is necessary when substance abuse services are provided to parents with children in the child welfare system. A parent's substance use disorder has a tremendous impact on the children, who need continuing skilled support. When residential care is warranted, it must be a priority to

keep parents and their children together, if appropriate. Without effective intervention, the children of substance abusers may repeat the parent's pattern. The special needs of children of substance abusers must be addressed in prevention and intervention programs.

- **Joint accountability and shared outcomes**
The collaborative partners need to establish joint accountability and agree upon goals. The outcomes that they develop together guide the work of the collaborative; they demonstrate that the collaborative has achieved interagency agreement on desired results. Without agreement on shared outcomes, each of the partners is likely to measure its own progress as it did prior to collaboration, focused on its own perspective.
- **Shared information systems**
Shared information is the prerequisite for joint accountability. Joint information systems form the basis of communicating across systems and are necessary to track progress toward shared goals. Effective communication and information sharing provide the guideposts that gauge the effectiveness of the collaborative's programs.
- **Budgeting and program sustainability**
The collaborative partners must tap the full range of funding resources available to the state or community so that it can develop stability over time for its innovative approaches.
- **Training and staff development**
Cross-training at all levels - administrative, management, and line-level staff - is essential to ensuring cooperation between key players in the systems.
- **Working with other agencies**
Many parents with alcohol and other drug problems also require the assistance of services other than substance abuse and child welfare to address the complex issues affecting their families. The primary partners must form relationships with mental health, domestic violence, primary health, housing, legal, and employment-related services.
- **Working with the community and supporting families**
Community-based organizations have been shown to be great resources. They can mobilize community members and have a role in preventing child abuse and substance abuse, as well as providing on-going support after formal services have ended.

Policy Tools

- *The **Matrix of Progress** in Building Linkages Among Alcohol and Drug Agencies, Child Welfare Services, and the Dependency Court is a tool for assessing collaboration across systems. The Matrix of Progress identifies benchmarks for improving the system linkages by specifying the fundamentals of improved practice, good practice, and best practice for each of the ten elements in the framework.*
- *The **Collaborative Values Inventory (CVI)** is a questionnaire that serves as a neutral, anonymous way of assessing how much a group shares the values that underlie its work. The CVI is designed to identify issues that may not be raised if the collaborative begins its work together without clarifying the underlying values of its members.*
- *The **Collaborative Capacity Instrument (CCI)** is a self-assessment tool designed to elicit intra- and interagency discussion about progress in addressing specific issues and about prioritizing programs and policy plans.*
- ***Screening and Assessment for Family Engagement, Retention, and Recovery (SAFERR)** provides guidance for using efficient screening and assessment tools and communication strategies that support sound and timely decisions about the safety of children and about the treatment and recovery of parents. It also includes methods for developing collaborative relationships between the systems to help improve outcomes for these families.*

These tools are available on the Children and Family Futures website (<http://www.cffutures.org>) for use by States and communities. This Framework and Policy Tools was published in the SAMHSA Publication No.SMA-04-3930, *Navigating the Pathways: Lessons and Promising Practices in Linking Alcohol and Drug Services With Child Welfare, Technical Assistance Publication (TAP) Series #27, April 2002.*