



# Engaging Families in Child Welfare



# Welcome!

Your Trainers:

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## Learning Objectives:

- Realize the impact trauma has on many of our children and parents within the Child Welfare system, including barriers related to behavior change and engagement.
- Demonstrate how to have more meaningful discussions with parents utilizing the six principles of partnership
- Recognize that behavioral change is a process and does not occur overnight.
- Identify solution focused language techniques to use with parents and children inside and outside of the courtroom.
- Apply solution focused techniques in the courtroom and within the child welfare system outside the courtroom.

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**Barriers:** What are the challenges and barriers that get in the way of families changing their behavior?

# Barriers to Families Changing their Behaviors

- ⊙ Unclear expectation and feelings of disrespect
- ⊙ Trauma
- ⊙ Cultural Differences and family system dynamics
- ⊙ Treatment Issues (mental health, substance use)
- ⊙ Criminal charges pending
- ⊙ Mistrust of authority
- ⊙ Incarcerated parent
- ⊙ Family disruption



## Childhood Trauma

An event that a child finds overwhelmingly distressing or emotionally painful, often resulting in lasting mental and physical effects.

**2x**  
more likely to develop  
**DEPRESSION**

**3x**  
more likely to develop  
**ANXIETY DISORDERS**

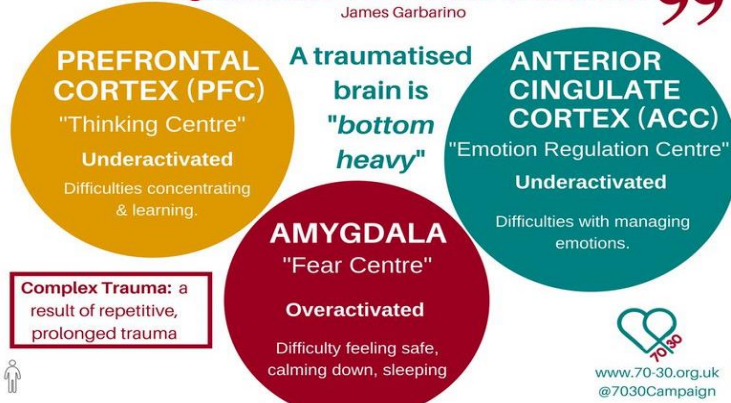
### Common causes:

Child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual)	Grief
Witness/victim of violence	War/Terrorism
Neglect	Medical trauma
Substance misuse	Mental illness
Bullying in school	Separation from loved ones

### LONG-TERM IMPACTS:

Affects perception of reality	Takes away sense of safety
Wires brain to expect danger	Increases stress hormones flowing through the body
Triggers fight, fright or freeze response	Creates a sense of helplessness
Creates relationship problems	Results in serious behaviour problems

**“The initial trauma of a young child may go underground but it will return to haunt us”**  
James Garbarino

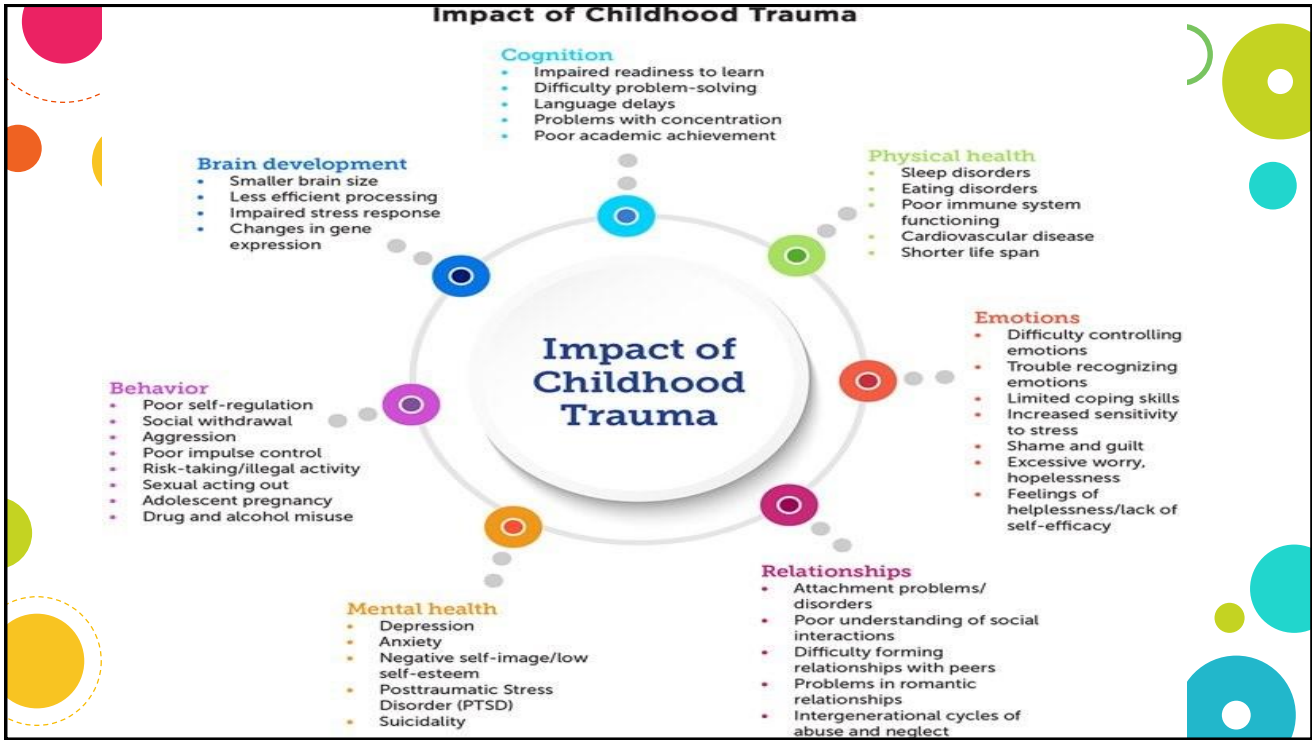


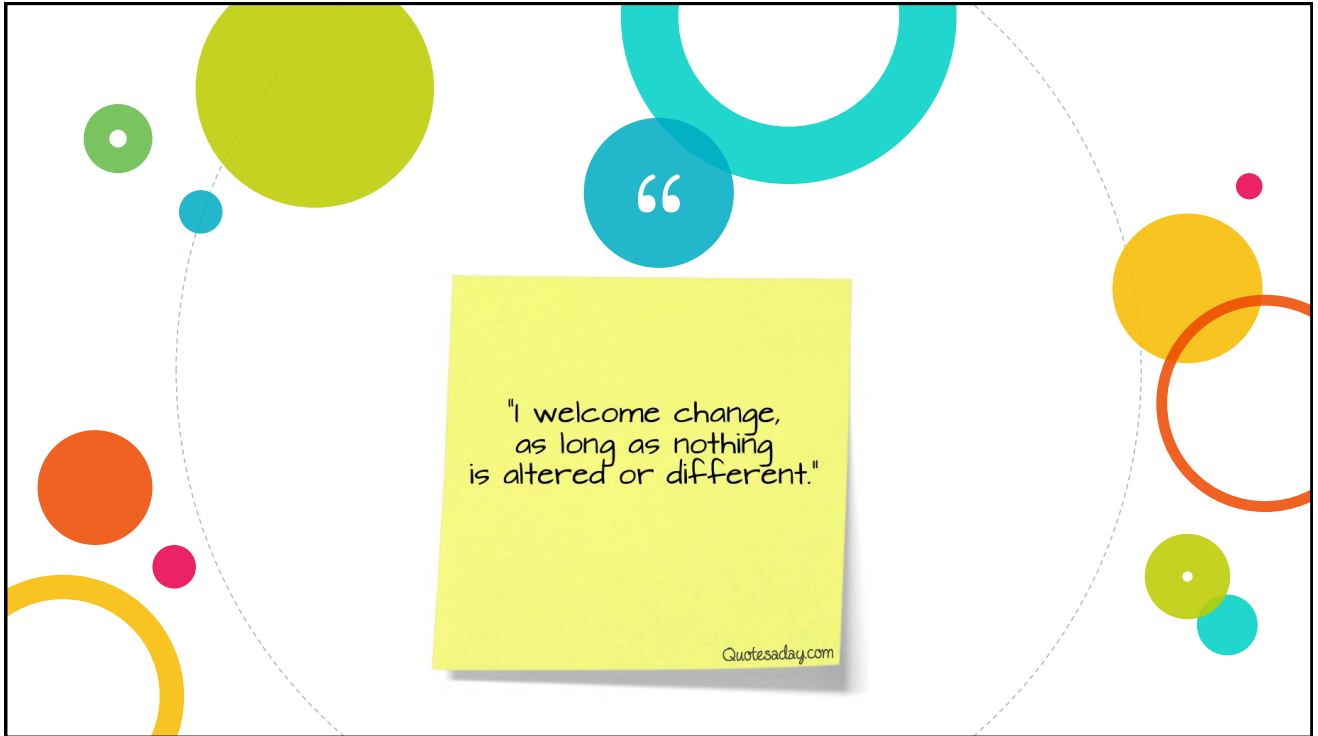
**Trust:**  
Individuals with a history of trauma exposure may have difficulty trusting others, even those in a position to help

**Control:**  
Lack of control and power can be a major trauma reminder

**Survival Mode:**  
Further decreases the ability to focus, process information and engage in effective decision-making

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## Stages of Change

Pre-contemplation	<i>I'm not thinking about change</i>
Contemplation	<i>I'm considering change</i>
Preparation	<i>I'm planning to change</i>
Action	<i>I'm doing things to change</i>
Maintenance	<i>I'm working to keep my new behavior</i>
Recurrence	<i>I've gone back to my old behavior</i>

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### Pre-contemplation

The individual is not yet considering change.

- Establish rapport and trust
- Raise doubt about whether their behavior is working for them
- Explore the circumstances that led to CPS involvement
- Elicit individual's perception of the risks and problems with current behaviors
- Offer information about consequences
- Move the individual to thinking about the need to make changes

## Stages of Change

### Maintenance

The individual has achieved initial goals and is working to maintain gains.

- Help the person identify and use strategies to prevent recurrence of old behaviors
- Support making and maintaining lifestyle changes
- Maintain supportive contact
- Identify and plan for challenging circumstances
- Review long-term goals

### Preparation

The individual is committed to and planning to make a change in the near future but is still considering what to do.

- Help the person determine the best course of action in seeking change
- Offer resources and services for the individual to engage in to make the change
- Discuss a plan while considering barriers
- Ask what has worked in the past
- Assist with what is needed to ensure a successful change

### Contemplation

The individual acknowledges concerns and is considering but is ambivalent and uncertain.

- Help the person tip the decisional balance scale towards change
- Provide support that the individual can change their behavior
- Emphasize the individual's ability and choice to make the change
- Strengthen the individual's self-efficacy for change
- Elicit the individual's perception of self-efficacy and remove barriers to change

## Stages of Change

### Action

The individual is actively taking steps to change but has not yet reached a stable state.

- Help the person take steps to implement the change
- Provide resources and supports
- Acknowledge difficulty and plan for challenges to implement change
- Reinforce positive changes
- Check in on the change process
- Help the person build a support system that supports positive change

### Recurrence

The individual has reverted back to old behavior and must cope with the consequences and decide what to do next.

- Help the individual renew the process of change without becoming stuck or demoralized because of the recurrence
- Ask about challenging circumstances, barriers to change, and necessary supports to assist with positive change
- Remain supportive and encouraging

Change is a process.  
The individual may resist change.

### Resistance

Resistance is a predictable and natural emotional reaction to feeling forced to change or when facing a difficult situation. Resistance occurs as a response to feeling vulnerable, out of control, or threatened by change.

<h4>Anger/Hostility</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats</li> <li>• Aggressive Posturing</li> <li>• Blaming</li> <li>• Using Authority</li> <li>• Getting Loud</li> <li>• Amped-up Behaviors</li> </ul>	<h4>Passivity</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silence</li> <li>• Excuses</li> <li>• Denial</li> <li>• Blaming</li> <li>• Rationale</li> <li>• Feigning Ignorance</li> </ul>	<h4>Avoidance</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically Flee</li> <li>• False Compliance</li> <li>• Illness</li> <li>• Substance Abuse</li> </ul>
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Children's Court Improvement Program and the Department of Children and Families Conference on Child Welfare and the Courts - Engaging Families in Child Welfare

# Resistance

**Resistance is a predictable and natural emotional reaction to feeling forced to change or when facing a difficult situation**

**Resistance occurs as a response to feeling vulnerable, out of control or threatened by change.**

#### Avoidance

- Physical
- False compliance
- Illness
- Substance abuse

#### Passivity

- Silence
- Excuses
- Denial
- Blaming
- Rationale
- Feigning Ignorance

#### Anger/Hostility

- Threats
- Aggressive Posturing
- Blaming
- Using Authority

“

People don't change their behavior when other people yell at them, shame them, or send them away to be alone.  
People change their behavior when they feel heard, understood and loved. Growth and change require connection and compassion.

Katie Hurley, LCSW

## 6 Principles of Partnership

- Everyone Needs to Be Heard
- Everyone Desires Respect
- Everyone Has Strengths
- Judgements Can Wait
- Partners Share Power
- Partnership is a Process



## Principles of Partnership



### Everyone Needs to Be Heard

- Giving each party an opportunity to speak or contribute to the conversation
- Listen with intent to understand
- Summarizing what a parent said for validation and to make them feel heard
- Making eye contact when someone is speaking
- Acknowledging that behavior change is difficult
- Attorneys should tell parents that the judge wants to hear from you so don't be afraid to speak up when asked if you have any questions or anything to add

### Everyone Has Strengths

- Begin with positive progress
- Acknowledge parent's progress and what is going well
- Ask parent if they have anything additional to share
- Mention we hope to hear about additional progress and accomplishments at the next hearing or meeting
- Discuss next steps for parent to work on

### Partners Share Power

- All stakeholders should be working together
- The judge is not the only partner in power
- All partners are supporting change and want to hear about the parent's progress
- There is a shared vision to help parents so children can be reunified
- Child welfare proceedings should be a rehabilitative environment, similar to drug court.

### Everyone Desires Respect

- Address each parent individually by name
- Use a calm tone of voice
- Be patient if families have questions about the CHIPS court process
- Speak directly to the parent instead of through their attorney
- Involve parents in discussions to ensure they understand

### Judgments Can Wait

- Don't jump to conclusions
- Try not to assume the worst
- Ask what happened? What has been going on?
- Encourage honesty so we can help you
- Try to understand what happened or what else the individual is facing
- Acknowledge their struggles and offer solutions

### Partnership is a Process

- Explain the next steps of the CHIPS court process
- Emphasize progress will be monitored at upcoming court hearings
- Keep in contact with the social worker
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or support
- Reiterate the 3 main priorities that each parent should be working on
- Asking if parents need anything to get started on their conditions
- All stakeholders are here to help

## Everyone Needs To Be Heard

### Tools for this principle:

- Slow down
- Focus on your purpose
- Intend to really listen
- Seek first to understand

### Know when to use empathic listening:

- Engagement
- Conflict/resistance
- Goal setting

"Genuine listening means suspending memory, desire, and judgment – and, for a moment at least, existing for the other person.

Michael Nichols



## Everyone Needs to Be Heard

- Giving every party an opportunity to speak or contribute
- Making eye contact when a party/parent is speaking
- Listen with intent to understand
- Summarizing what a parent said for validation and to make them feel heard
- Attorneys should tell parents that the judge wants to hear from you so don't be afraid to speak up when asked if you have any questions or anything to add.
- The simplest aspect of feeling heard can go a long way!
- Quality vs quantity

## Everyone Desires Respect

### Tools for this principle:

- Model the respect you would like to receive
- Meet people where they are
- Look for positive intent
- Respect and incorporate ideas
- Move slowly and make small adjustments where possible
- Don't use legal and child welfare jargon.

"I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me... All I ask is that you respect me as a human being."

- Jackie Robinson

## Everyone Desires Respect

- Address each parent individually by name instead of referring to them as mom and dad
- Utilizing a sign in sheet or a diagram if there are many parties involved
- Using a calm tone of voice with parents
- Being patient with parents if they have questions about the CHIPS court process
- Acknowledging that the social worker is the expert on the case and has been working with the family the longest
- Asking the social worker directly for clarification instead of through an attorney
- Speaking directly to the parent instead of through their attorney
- Involving the parent in the discussions to ask if they understand what's going on

## Everyone Has Strengths

"It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is."  
- Hermann Hesse

Be intentional and genuine in your search for strengths:

- Observation
- Ask the right questions
- Have a broad definition

Utilize the strengths you find to build solutions.

Identify exceptions to the problem or issue.

Look for the positive intent

Exception-Finding Questions

## Everyone Has Strengths

- Beginning with the positive instead of what the parents are not doing
- Asking the social worker about each parent's progress
- Acknowledging the parent's progress and what is going well
- Stressing that a few steps is still progress
- Encouraging the parent to keep up the good work!
- Following up with each parent to see if they have anything additional to add that wasn't said.
- Their biggest strength or accomplishment may not have been mentioned
- Mentioning we hope to hear about additional progress and accomplishments at the next court hearing
- Discussing next steps for the parent to work on and what we hope to see at the next court hearing

## Judgments Can Wait

### Tools for this principle:

- Hold judgments lightly
- Seek alternative explanations
- Not knowing stance
- Utilizing scaling questions

"From a worldly point of view, there is no mistake so great as that of being always right."

- Samuel Butler

## Judgments Can Wait

- If a parent has only attended 2 out of 8 visits – ask the parent: You made 2 of your 8 scheduled visits. What happened on those days to make that possible?
- If a parent has only attended 4 out of 12 UA appointments, ask how were you able to make those 4 appointments?
- Don't jump to conclusions!
- Try not to assume the worst.
- Instead ask what happened? What has been going on?
- Encourage honesty so we can help the parent
- Try to understand what happened or what else the parent is facing
- Acknowledge their struggles and offer solutions such as a bus pass, gas card, service referral, etc.

## Partners Share Power

### Tools for this principle:

- Consider the power, both real and perceived, that you have in a family's life.
- Strive to share that power through your words and actions.
- Power differentials create obstacles to partnership.
- Parents will choose whether to cooperate but that choice is influenced by how we engage.

“Compliance isn't change.”  
- Richard Gelles

## Partners Share Power

- All stakeholders should be working together and collaboratively
- There is a shared vision to help parents so children can be reunified
- The judge isn't the only partner in power
- All partners are supporting change and want to hear about the parent's progress
- Court is similar to the dentist, no one is excited to attend a court hearing
- A parent may have been in the same courtroom or in front of the same judge for another proceeding or case before.
- Child welfare proceedings should be a rehabilitative environment similar to a drug court model where it's clear we're trying to help and support you.

Partnership  
is a process

Tools for this principle:

Commitment to build partnership can be difficult

Focus on what you can control – you.

Understand stages of change.

## Partnership is a Process

- Explain the CHIPS court process
- Progress will be monitored at Review Hearings and Permanency Plan Hearings
- Tell parents when the next check-in will be and that they will be asked about their progress
- Asking if parents need anything to get started on their conditions
- Re-iterate the 2-3 main priorities the parent should be working on
- Encourage parent to stay in contact with social worker
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or support
- All stakeholders are here to support you working towards reunification!

## Solution Focused Strategies



Questions that can be asked at Post-Disposition Hearings such as Review Hearings or Permanency Plan Hearings

### Solution Focused Strategies for Engaging Families in Child Welfare Proceedings



**Solution Focused Strategies**

**Open ended questions**

- What are 3 main priorities that you plan to begin working on?
- Help me understand your progress or struggles with...
- How can we help you with your conditions for return?
- Are there additional services that you need to assist you with your conditions?
- Have you tried to change this behavior or get sober before? What worked well during that time? What was difficult? What might you do differently this time?

**Open ended considerations**

- Ask open ended questions
- Expand the dialogue without leading
- Be thoughtful in phrasing the question
- Give families an opportunity to respond beyond a yes or no answer

**Exception Finding Questions**

- How can we plan so you don't run into that problem again?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to do ... (make your appointments, stay sober, etc)?
- You know what you need to do to change your behavior. How can we help?
- Think about a time you were sober. What was that like? How did you start? How can we get you back there?
- You have made some changes. How can we help so we continue to see progress?

**Exception Finding Considerations**

- Exceptions are times when problems could have occurred but did not
- Use when someone is stuck and cannot see beyond the problem
- Use instead to show the problem is not always happening
- Stating the positive rather than in the negative

**Scaling Questions**

- On a scale from 1-10, where are you today with... (condition, service, overall progress, etc)?
- What's keeping you from going up or down a point?
- How can we help you increase up the scale?
- Your priority was to make your AODA appointments. You started at 0, where are you today?
- Social workers could include the parent's scale number in the permanency plan so the judge can ask about progress at the next hearing. At the last court hearing, you were a 5 and today you're a 8!

**Scaling Considerations**

- Can be used to assess the level of change that has occurred
- Focus on working towards the goal
- Smaller increments - 1-2 points at a time
- Be realistic about moving up the scale

### Solution Focused Strategies for Engaging Families in Child Welfare Proceedings



**Solution Focused Strategies**

**Relationship Questions**

- What would your mother/father notice about your change?
- What would you want to say to your parent? (Ex: gratitude at a drug court graduation)
- If child is placed with a family member, what do you want to tell your family member that you're working on to have your child returned to the home?
- What will the judge, social worker, and attorney see the next time you're in court?
- What do you want to tell the court about your progress?

**Relationship Considerations**

- Think about oneself and needs from the perspective of another person
- Frame questions referencing individuals who have influence (parent, child, mentor, etc.)
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes
- Think about a global opinion

**Compliments and Affirmation Questions**

- You did.... Tell me how that went...
- How were you able to make that happen?
- Summarize what the parent said - What I hear you saying is....
- Thank you for telling me about your struggles, how can we help?
- Emphasize progress that has been made on the 2-3 main priorities

**Compliments and Affirmation Considerations**

- Begin with positive affirmations
- Avoid judgment, "lessons", or shaming
- Establish trust and engagement through positivity
- Don't begin the conversation about what the parent hasn't begun or completed

**Best Hope / Miracle Questions**

- If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?
- If CPS was no longer involved, what would that look like?
- What do you hope to see happen?
- What do you plan to work on after the court hearing?

**Best Hope / Miracle Considerations**

- Think towards the future
- Dream about what you want to happen
- Explore hopes and goals
- Look towards a solution

## Open-ended Questions

- ⊙ Ask open-ended questions
- ⊙ Expand the dialogue without leading in one direction
- ⊙ Giving parents an opportunity to respond beyond a yes or no answer
- ⊙ Be thoughtful in phrasing the question

## Open ended questions (but not too open!)

- What are the 3 main priorities you plan to begin working on?
- Help me understand your progress or struggles with...
- How can we help you with your conditions for return?
- Are there additional services that you need to assist you with your conditions?
- Have you tried to get sober before? What worked well during that time? What was difficult? What might you do differently this time?
- Avoid asking a very broad question. Be specific to allow the parent to answer the question.
- Don't regret or question why you asked a question in a certain way that gives you a very long winded answer.
- Be patient with their responses

## Exception Finding Questions

- ⊙ Exceptions are times when problems could have occurred but did not.
  - ⊙ What occurred so that the problem did not happen?
  - ⊙ What is different when the problem does not occur?
  - ⊙ What is happening during those "different" times when things are better?
- ⊙ Use when someone is stuck and cannot see beyond the problem.
- ⊙ When is the problem NOT a problem
  - ⊙ Stating the positive rather than in the negative or in the presence of something rather than the absence of something.
- ⊙ Use instead to show the problem is not always happening.



## Exception Finding Questions

- Stressing the positives when someone feels stuck and hopeless
- Reminding someone that not everything is horrible
- For drug/alcohol cases, think about a time when you were sober.
- What is the longest time you were sober?
- How did you start?
- What was it like?
- How can we get you back there?
- You used to (fill in the blank) but you're making a positive change.
- You know what you need to do to change that behavior. How can we help?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to make your appointments?
- How can we plan so you don't run into this problem again?
- Emphasize those times that are "different" or "better".
- Affirm strengths and/or parental protective capacities

## Scaling Questions

- Can be used to assess the level of change that has occurred
- Focus on working towards the goal
- Define the numbers of the scale
- Smaller increments – 1-2 points at a time
- Be realistic about moving up the scale



## Scaling Questions

- On a scale from 1-10, where are you today with ...(condition, service, overall progress)?
- What's keeping you from going up or down a point?
- What will it take to get you to increase 1 point?
- How can we help you increase up the scale?
- How will you know when you get there?
- Your priority was to make your AODA appointments. You started at 0, where are you today?
- On a scale from 1-10, where are you in your sobriety journey?
- Social workers could include the parent's scale number in the permanency plan so the judge can ask about progress at the next hearing.
- At the last court hearing, you said you were at a 5 and now you're at an 8!

## Relationship Questions

- ◎ Think about oneself and needs from the perspective of another person
- ◎ Frame questions referencing individuals who have influence (parent, child, mentor, etc.)
- ◎ Put yourself in someone else's shoes to look at the situation
- ◎ Think about a global opinion

## Relationship Questions

- If appropriate, what would your mother/father notice about your change?
- What would you want to say to your parent? (Example: gratitude at a drug court graduation)
- If child is placed with a family member, what do you want to tell your family member that you're working on to have your child returned to the home?
- What will the judge, social worker, and attorney see the next time you're in court?
- What do you want to tell the court about your progress?
- Is there anything you want your social worker to know?

## Compliments and Affirmations

- ◎ Begin with positive affirmations.
- ◎ Avoid judgment, "lessons", or shaming
- ◎ Empower parties
- ◎ Establish trust and engagement through positivity

## Compliments and Affirmations Questions

- You did.... Tell me how that went...
- How were you able to make that happen?
- Summarize what the parent said - What I hear you saying is....
- I heard what you said, how can we help?
- I appreciate you telling me your struggles in getting to the drug testing location. How can we help you?
- Emphasizing progress on those 2-3 main priorities

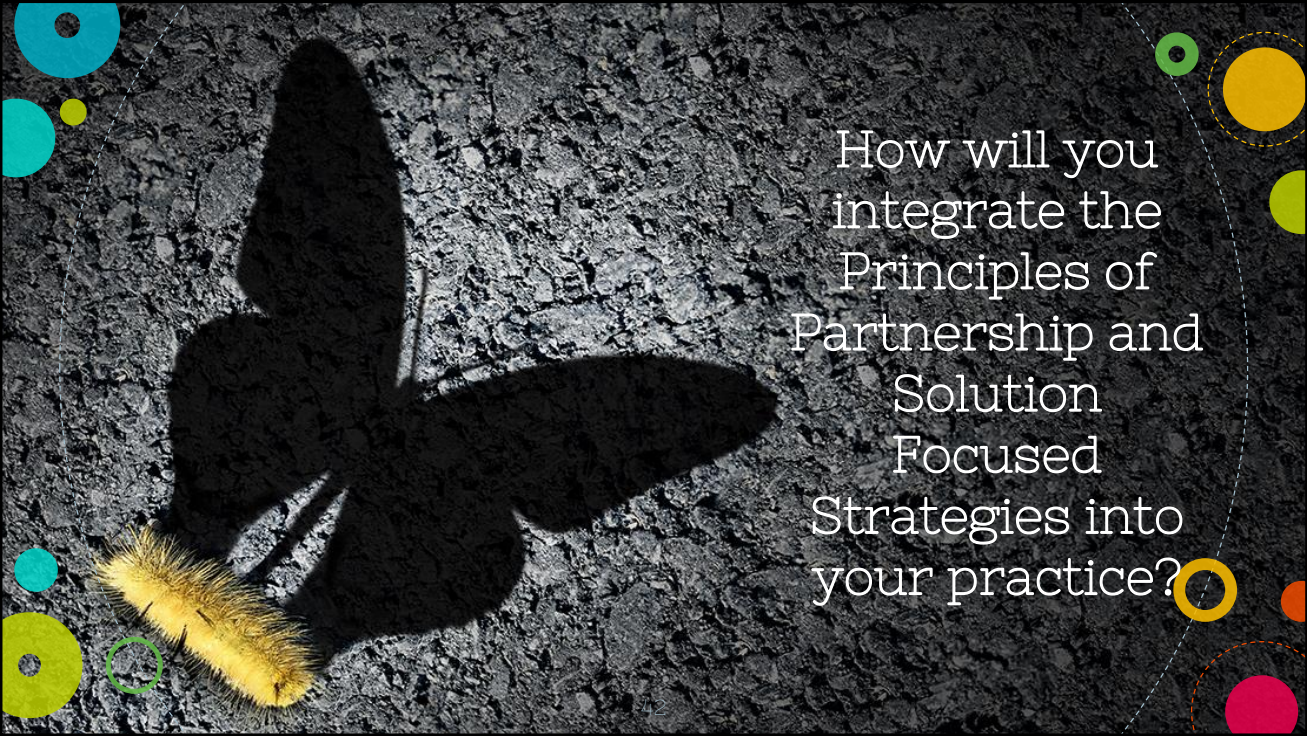
## Best Hopes / Miracle Questions

- Think towards the future
- Dream about what you want to happen
- Explore hopes and goals
- Look towards a solution
- Think about the possibilities



## Best Hope / Miracle Questions

- ⦿ If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?
- ⦿ If CPS was no longer involved, what would that look like?
- ⦿ What do you hope to see happen?
- ⦿ What do you plan to do after this court hearing?



How will you integrate the Principles of Partnership and Solution Focused Strategies into your practice?

Thank You!



Any questions?