

# Training **MATTERS**



A PUBLICATION OF THE NC DSS FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILD WELFARE SERVICES STATEWIDE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

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- N.C. Division of Social Services
- N.C. Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Appalachian Family Innovations at Appalachian State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- N.C. State University Department of Social Work
- N.C. A & T State University Department of Social Work
- Resources for Change, Inc.
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

#### **We Want To Hear from You!**

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#### **Visit Our Website**

Go to <[www.trainingmatters-nc.org](http://www.trainingmatters-nc.org)>.

This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

## **Update on Child Welfare Training in North Carolina**

In the past ten years the NC Division of Social Services and its partners have transformed child welfare training in North Carolina. In 1993 the training offered by the state was modest—a dozen or so courses at a few locations. Today child welfare workers and supervisors have access to a training system that features 50 training courses, five regional training centers, a web-based information management system where people can learn about and register for courses, educational conferences, and much more. All of this is offered with no registration fees to child welfare staff from county departments of social services.

The chart below offers an illustration of the accomplishments of North Carolina's child welfare training system since 1998.

<b>Child Welfare Training in NC, 1998 - 2002</b>					
	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>
Courses offered	24	34	43	47	50
Training events offered	170	222	285	285	252*
Days of training delivered	717	1,078	1,162	1,281	1,127*
Pre-Service events	20	43	39	44	41*
Registrants from County DSS's	5,959	6,390	6,419	5,262	4,657
Registrants from other agencies	342	651	1,112	983	950
*Reduction due to inclement weather and budget cuts					

All of these efforts are made to fulfill a vision shared by the Division and its partners: *A North Carolina child welfare training system that guarantees competency-based, job-relevant, accessible, affordable, consistent, timely, and thorough training for children's services workers.*

#### **To learn more**

- Visit <[www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrenservices/training/index.htm](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrenservices/training/index.htm)> for a report on the Division's child welfare training activities in 2002.
- Visit <[ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/training\\_schedule/trainsched\\_welcome.htm](http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/training_schedule/trainsched_welcome.htm)> for the current child welfare training calendar, with information about training laws and requirements.
- Visit <[www.ncswtrain.org](http://www.ncswtrain.org)> to access North Carolina's online child welfare training information system.

# Tips for Child and Family Team Meetings

Child and family team meetings are gatherings of family, extended family, friends, community members, and agency service providers to discuss difficult issues related to child abuse, neglect, and dependency. They are also one of the central family-centered strategies of North Carolina's Multiple Response System (MRS). Although their purpose—planning and decision making—is familiar to child welfare professionals, child and family team meetings are also a radical departure from previous practices, in that they actively involve the family in the creation of a plan to ensure children's safety and well-being. Because they are so different, some child welfare workers are uncertain how to conduct these meetings effectively. To help, we present the following tips, which were developed by social workers based on the things they learned when they held family meetings.

## Prepare ahead of time

Find out who will be there. Make notes to yourself about what you will say (i.e., concerns, strengths, synopsis, issues that must be addressed).

## Greet everyone

Speak to everyone who comes in. Since family members may be uncomfortable with you, reach out to them in particular.

## Seat yourself strategically

Sit next to a child or someone with whom you are trying to build a relationship. Do not sit next to the person facilitating of the meeting.

## Identify your concerns and family strengths

Be sure to have these balance each other out. Talk about concerns as a human being, not as an expert social worker (although you surely are one!). Avoid jargon. Keep it brief. Be sure to bring up concerns the family has not already identified.

## Provide a relevant case synopsis

Prepare ahead of time for sensitive issues or confidentiality. Act as though this is a group of your friends or family members. Be respectful.

## Present the framework for decision making

When the facilitator asks you, be prepared to list the *essential issues* that must be addressed in the plan. Do not prescribe the plan.

## Stay for entire meeting

No phone calls, etc. Stay nearby during breaks and private family time so that you can answer questions or provide feedback if the family needs you.

## Don't gossip about the family

Avoid the "Us versus Them" dynamic. If you must, talk about others during breaks and before and after the meeting. Avoid assessment activities.

## Give immediate feedback to plans and decisions

Ask the family to clarify things. Provide as much feedback as possible. Approve of as many things as possible. If you cannot approve of an item in the family's plan, explain why. If you need to check with someone else for approval (e.g., supervisor, judge) tell the family when you will do so and when you will get back to them.

## Do not prescribe the plan!

Remember that this is the family's meeting. It is not the time to be directive. Think about "offering options" rather than telling people what to do.

## Be prepared for criticism

There are two "hot seats" at family-centered meetings. Yours is one of them. Since you represent the agency and the family's entire history with it, you are likely to be blamed or criticized.

## Don't be defensive

Not everyone will like you or your ideas. Listen well. Acknowledge feelings or ideas that are different than you own.

## Be ready to feel captive to big feelings of sadness, grief, and anger

Family-centered meetings can be very emotional. You will witness the expression of feelings you don't always see. You may feel like a captive audience to the family's loss and pain. Plan to have someone to talk to afterwards. Be sure to schedule a time to debrief with the facilitator one-on-one.

## To learn more about family meetings, consult:

- *NC Family-Centered Meetings Project*  
<[www.ncsu.edu/chass/SocialWork/fcmp/index.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/chass/SocialWork/fcmp/index.htm)>
- *Practice Notes 8(2)* at <[www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)>
- *N.C. Division of Social Services Children's Services Manual*  
<[info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/index.htm](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/index.htm)>