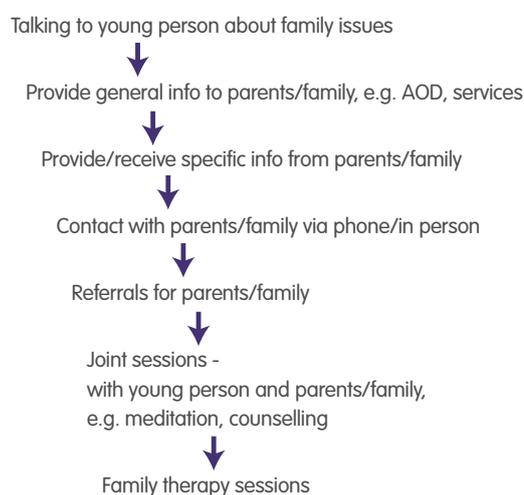


Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Workers: Agency Guidelines

Family Work Continuum

Family work can be undertaken at various different levels ranging from talking to young people about their family history and the current status of family relationships through to conducting joint sessions with young people and their parents, caregivers or other significant people in their lives.

The diagram below shows the many different ways youth workers can engage with families. Agency policies should clearly articulate how and when management expect workers to engage in family-work.



What needs to happen?

Most agencies that deliver services to young people with complex needs identify in their mission statements and agency policies that their work with youth includes a focus on family relationship issues and on building family connectedness.

Yet in practice some workers continue to feel they lack the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage in family work, particularly with families of young people with complex needs.

More attention needs to be given to how agencies can enhance worker responsiveness to family problems. Skills in family work need to be developed so youth workers can help to build scaffolding around young people that doesn't consist solely of professional contacts.

In order to achieve this managers and supervisors should ensure that agency policies, program procedures and manuals clearly articulate the need for workers to implement family-aware practice in their work with young people

with complex needs. They also need to provide training, supervision, case-work and evaluation tools that support family-aware practice. This practice should be intentional, not incidental to the work that is done with young people on a day to day basis.

Below are guidelines that if implemented can help agencies to achieve this shift in focus so that family-aware practice becomes a central component of youth work with young people with complex needs.

Policy and Practice Guidelines

Clarify expectations

- Clarify expectations of staff in relation to their work with young people and families.
- Clearly articulate that there is an expectation that family-aware (or family-sensitive) practice should be an integral part of each practitioners approach to their work with young people with complex needs – in induction, training, manuals and policies.
- Include language that supports family engagement and family work.
- Incorporate the workload implications of engaging in family work into assessments of staff workloads.
- Consider the needs of families including CLD families in all program design and development (see: Developing Cultural Competency - Workers help sheet).

Provide training

- Provide adequate training for all new and existing staff in family-aware or family-sensitive practice and include an introduction to this approach this as part of an induction for all new practitioners.
- Ensure that youth work supervisors are adequately trained in family aware (or family-sensitive) practice so they can then educate and support their staff in this aspect of their work.
- Provide staff training that includes a focus on risk and protective factor research and attachment experiences.
- Provide all staff with training to increase their cultural competence and to ensure that they are responsive to CLD families (see: Developing Cultural Competency - Workers help sheet).

Develop appropriate tools

- Provide youth workers with a comprehensive assessment tool that assists staff with the process of gathering information on: family background; current status of family relationships; alternative support systems.
- Ensure assessment tools include an assessment of risk in relation to contact with family members, particularly where there has been a history of abuse or serious conflict.
- Provide consent forms that include permission to contact family members where this may be helpful to the young person's progress and to building connectedness.
- Collect data in relation to contact with family members and changes in levels of family connectedness.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the approach in helping young people to achieve desired changes in their lives.

Establish partnerships

Establish partnerships with family counselling and family support agencies that can provide:

- Direct services to families of young people with complex needs in addition to services provided by your own agency.
- Training for your youth work staff.
- Secondary consultation as required.

Provide a family-friendly environment

- Ensure that the agency environment is set-up to be welcoming of parents and care-givers as well as young people.
- Improve the quality of the service provided by ensuring that youth work teams have at least one staff member who specializes in family counselling.
- Implement equal employment opportunity and multicultural policies to increase recruitment of CLD staff. If possible such engagement should reflect the ethnic mix in the communities the agency services.¹

¹Sawrikar, P and Katz, I (2008), Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, No.3.



Ideas from this Help Sheet

- Workers need to develop their skills in family work so they can help to build scaffolding around young people that consists of more than just professional contacts.
- Managers and supervisors should ensure that agency policies, program procedures and manuals clearly articulate the need for workers to implement family-aware practice in their work with young people with complex needs.
- Youth workers need to be provided with training, supervision, case-work and evaluation tools that support family-aware practice.
- Family-aware practice should be intentional, not incidental to the work that is done with young people on a day to day basis.



Related Help Sheets

Worker Help Sheets

- Family-Aware Youth Work Practice
- Confidentiality and Duty of Care Issues
- Effective Assessment of Family Information at Intake
- Developing Cultural Competence.
- Impact of Family Issues on Adolescence



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