Kansas Child Welfare Practice Model: Working Alongside Families
A Family-Centered, Safety-Organized Approach
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Presenters

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SafeGenerations

- Based in Chanhassen, MN (near Minneapolis)
- Practitioners, trainers and consultants
- Started as contracted provider agency learning and implementing **Signs of Safety** and **The Resolutions Approach** in 2005 with Andrew Turnell & Susie Essex
- Practice model development and implementation consultancy
- 100+ jurisdictions in North America
- Approximately 5,000 child welfare professionals each year

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
- Context & Background
- Core Principles
- Key Practices
- Basic Tools
- Resources & Expectations
Background
Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) strategies create a foundation of resiliency and prevention networks, timely exits to permanency, and health care and wellbeing coordination. Strategies are supported by a practice model with principles and approaches linked to better outcomes, engagement, equity and inclusivity alongside families in communities.

Core Principles

Image by John Hain from Pixabay
Core Principles of the Kansas Practice Model
(Munro, 2011; Turnell, 2014)

**Practice being driven by what works for families and social workers**
- Feedback loops
- Creating common language
- Appreciative Culture (AI and Appreciative Moments)

**Munro’s maxim: thinking critically, fostering a stance of inquiry**
- Remain curious
- Admitting you might be wrong
- Rigorous and balanced risk assessments

**Constructive working relationships**
- Transparency
- Humility
- Collaborative safety process with families and professionals

**Initiative overload... People at 27,000 feet imposing theory on practice**

**“Knowing the truth” being the expert and solving problems based on deficits.**

How is the Kansas Practice Model Different?

**Traditional Child Welfare Services**
- Social Workers and other professionals are the experts.
- The Agency and social worker usually take responsibility for children's safety.
- The work is anxiety-driven.
- Families often feel forced or coerced to “do services.”
- The focus is often on “fixing” what is wrong.
- Cases are closed when families complete the agency’s list of services.
- Threats of placement and court orders are commonplace.
- The work is “noisy” and complex.

**The Kansas Practice Model**
- Family members are the experts on their own situations.
- Responsibility for children's safety is with the family and their natural network.
- Anxiety is reduced.
- Families decide how they will overcome the agency’s and other’s worries.
- Casework focus is on building from what is right.
- Cases are closed when families, networks, and professionals are confident about future child safety.
- Authority is used skillfully.
- The work is simple and concrete.
Key Practices

Principles and Approach

Family Finding
Extensive Search for Family Resources
- Family and youth engagement
- Healing and Development
- Sustained Placement Stability
- Create Lifetime Networks

Team Decision Making™
Families & their Networks Actively Involved
- Facilitated meeting model
- Families alongside support network and DCF
- Inclusivity
- Decision transparency

Child Protection Framework
Collaborative, Balanced Assessment and Critical Analysis
- Caregiver and safety network engagement in assessments
- KPRC Intake Structured Decision Making®
- Safety and Risk Structured Decision Making®
- Signs of Safety®
- Reliability, Equity
Children Placed with Family...

...are less likely to runaway, cut themselves, get into a physical altercation or be assaulted by an adult.

(Roberts et al., 2018, p.15)

Children Placed with Family...

...do better on well-being indicators including academic achievement, physical health, mental health and social development.

(Roberts et al., 2018, p.17)
Children Placed with Family...

...have stronger relationships with adults who are reliable and committed to them throughout their lives

(Roberts et al., 2018, p.18)

Extensive Search for Family Resources

Most recent relational permanency according to CANS

Children Placed with Family...

... have a substantially better chance...(3 to 11 times!)...of obtaining legal permanency.

(Roberts et al., 2018, p.19)
“Child abuse is a syndrome of secrecy.”

Tilman Furniss, 2013

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Abuse
- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

Neglect
- Physical
- Emotional

Household Dysfunction
- Mental Illness
- Incarcerated Relative
- Mother Treated Violently
- Substance Abuse
- Divorce
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)  
(Wave Trust, n.d.)

- As the number of ACEs increase, so does the risk of negative health and well-being outcomes.
- Compared to those with no ACEs, people with 4+ ACEs are:
  - 2X more likely to binge drink and have a poor diet
  - 3X more likely to be a smoker
  - 4X more likely to develop depression
  - 5X more likely to have had sex before age 16
  - 6X more likely to have had or caused an unplanned pregnancy
  - 7X more likely to have been involved in violence in the past year
  - 11X more likely to have used intravenous drugs or been incarcerated
  - 14X the number of suicide attempts
- Prolonged exposure to ACEs causes “toxic stress” and alters brain functioning

Protective Factors & Relational Resilience
(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020; Susie Essex, personal communication)

The impact of ACEs can be mitigated by several protective factors, including:

- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Supportive Social Connections
- Concrete social support in times of need
- Social Emotional Competence of Children
...but now we’ve installed a whole new lighting system!

This light bulb still seems faulty...

If you were betting on a horse...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles</th>
<th>Successes</th>
<th>Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...which of these categories would you want to consider (about the horse, the jockey and the stable) before taking the risk?
If you are betting on a parent...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles</th>
<th>Successes</th>
<th>Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...which of these categories would you want to consider (about the parent and their network) before taking the risk?

Basic Tools

...designed for the job at hand
On a scale of 0–10 where 10 is, while there might be some worries for this family, you’re confident the kids will be safe enough staying where they are while the assessment is completed and 0 is things are so bad for these children that you worry they are likely to be seriously hurt if they stay in their current situation even for tonight, where would you rate it?
Three Houses (PPS 2019 for Kids)

- Brings the voice of the child to the assessment and planning process
- Connects parents to the child’s experience

Originated with Nicki Weld and Maggie Greening, New Zealand

The Kansas Immediate Safety Plan (PPS 2021)

- Worry Statement
- Prevention Plan
- Response Plan
- Safety Network
- Acknowledgment & Signatures

It takes a village to raise a child, but also to protect a child. It is impossible to create safety with just the same people who you were worried about in the first place…
Assessment Map (PPS 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worries</th>
<th>Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What has us involved?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What can we build on?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current &amp; Past Harm</td>
<td>Current &amp; Past Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened?</td>
<td>• What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (-) impact on child?</td>
<td>• (+) impact on child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Factors</td>
<td>Family Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Danger</td>
<td>Safety Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who’s worried?</td>
<td>• End game?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What might happen?</td>
<td>• Must be different for child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possible (-) impact?</td>
<td>• Anticipated (+) impact?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lasting Safety Scale:

0 - 10

Next Steps

Lasting Safety Scale: Risk

On a scale of 0–10, where 10 is the worries for this family are no more serious than for a typical family in our community and you’re confident the kids will grow up safe and well enough in their current situation without CPS involvement and 0 is things are so bad for these children that you worry they are likely to be hurt or suffer lasting/serious negative effects if something doesn’t change, where would you rate it?
“Safety is strengths demonstrated as protection over time.”

(Boffa and Podesta, 2004)
What is an Effective Safety Plan?

An effective safety plan is a detailed description of the way families and networks will provide everyday care to the children that is rehearsed, practiced, refined and demonstrated until everyone is confident the children will be safe in the future, especially during difficult times.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased parent and network engagement
- More detailed information
- Clear, organized documentation and decision-making
- Safe reduction in entries to non-relative foster care and congregate care
- Increased kinship care and earlier reunification
- Fewer CINC filings
- Reduced turnover of frontline staff
What to expect from us...

- An intense and lasting commitment to our new practice
- A focus on our own practice development first
- A learning curve
- Transparency
- To hear us using family-friendly language (worries, best hopes, worst fears, etc...)
- To be involved in mapping conversations
- To be asked to rate safety and to share your perspective

What we need from you...

- Engagement and partnership
- Feedback...both positive and constructive
- Encouragement
- Patience
  - Patience...
Learn more about the approaches that inform the Kansas Practice Model...

- Family Finding: [www.familyfinding.org](http://www.familyfinding.org)
- Signs of Safety: [www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net) and [www.knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net](http://www.knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net)
- Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: [https://www.amazon.com/Building-Solutions-Protective-Services-Professional/dp/039370310X](https://www.amazon.com/Building-Solutions-Protective-Services-Professional/dp/039370310X)
- Team-Decision Making and Structured Decision Making: under ‘What We Do’ at [www.nccdglobal.org](http://www.nccdglobal.org)
- Three Houses: under ‘Resources’ at [www.partneringforsafety.com](http://www.partneringforsafety.com)

Learn More about SafeGenerations...

Please visit us at [www.safegenerations.org](http://www.safegenerations.org) or email us at [info@safegenerations.org](mailto:info@safegenerations.org) to learn more about who we are and what we do!
References


