

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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April 2006

Domestic Violence and the Family Assessment Response

- Domestic violence is the establishment of control and fear in an intimate adult relationship through the use of violence and other forms of abuse.
- Research indicates that 30% to 60% of families served by child welfare agencies also experience domestic violence (Edelson, 1999).

North Carolina's MRS policy about domestic violence is clear. It states that it is appropriate to use the family assessment response to respond to maltreatment reports that involve allegations of domestic violence, **as long as those reports meet the designated definitions of neglect and/or dependency.** The policy also emphasizes that when using the family assessment response, at no time should DSS place non-offending parents / adult victims in danger by requiring them to be interviewed with, develop service plans with, or meet with the perpetrator of violence against them. In these situations children should also be interviewed outside the presence of the violent adult.

Counties continue to have the option to decide how these reports will be handled, and that option is being used across the state. This is true even among the counties that started using the family assessment approach in 2002. Many counties start out assigning domestic violence-related reports to the investigative track. Some, such as Brunswick County, continue to do this even after they have lots of MRS experience under their belts. Others, such as Alamance, eventually switch to family assessments for domestic violence-related reports. Still others decide on a case-by-case basis.

Ultimately it is up to each individual county to decide how it will respond to domestic violence-related reports. No one else can say what the right

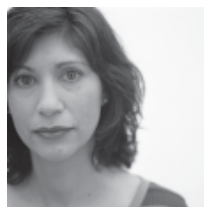


Photo illustration

To protect the children we must do all we can to support mothers who choose to stay.

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MRS Meetings

Meetings will be held from 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

May's meetings will focus on System of Care

Eastern

May 26, 2006
Wilson County DSS

June 29
Pitt County

Central

May 25, 2006
Alamance County

June 28
Stanly County

Western

May 24, 2006
McDowell County
Community College

June Meeting
TBA

For further details about meeting locations and directions, look for an email from NCDSS Policy Consultant Holly McNeill.

Questions? Contact Holly directly (828/757-5672, Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net)

Training Dates

Shared Parenting

May 10-12
Fayetteville
Contact: Amy Campbell
910/677-0406
(fax) 910/677-0468

May 31-June 2
Asheville
Contact: Lou Decker
828/670-5050
(fax) 828/670-5053

June 14-16
Kinston
Contact: Betty Williford
252/520-2413
(fax) 252/520-2417

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Comments?

Contact Holly McNeill, Family Support and Child Welfare Services, NC Division of Social Services, 2408 Mail Service Center, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27699-2408, Courier: 56-20-25, 828/757-5672, Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net

Online

www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs

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policy or practice is for your county. However, if you are still struggling with this issue, the following points and suggestions may be useful.

- MRS policy and procedure must be used in conjunction with all other state policy, including Chapter 1409 of the Family Services Manual.
- If you use the family assessment in domestic violence cases, always meet with the non-offending parent in private and ask whether she or he would like you to interview the family together or separately.
- Some counties choose to use investigative assessments whenever domestic violence-related reports involve weapons or extreme substance abuse.
- Nash County has a “red dot” system. If in the past a family has threatened someone at the agency, the agency puts a red dot on the family’s file so the agency can factor that in when responding to future reports.
- It can be helpful to talk to staff from counties that handle these reports in different ways. If you’d like to speak to someone from another county about responding to domestic violence, contact Holly McNeill (828/757-5672, Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net).

Implementation Tip

If your county is trying to decide how to handle DV-related reports, it can help to talk several other counties to see how they respond.

Domestic Violence-Related Factors to Consider when Reaching a Case Decision

In families experiencing domestic violence, the following factors may indicate a need for substantiation or a determination that the family needs services:

- Children have attempted to intervene in the domestic violence (whether injured or not)
- There is an established pattern of domestic violence that is chronic or severe
- Children exhibit extreme emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs as a result of living with domestic violence
- Substance abuse and domestic violence coexist in the home
- The non-offending parent is threatened or injured in front of the kids
- The non-offending parent has been hospitalized for injuries resulting from domestic violence

When Can You Cease Family Assessments?

Once you initiate a family assessment you must complete the risk assessment (DSS-5230), the strengths and needs assessment (DSS-5229), and the safety assessment (DSS-5231) with the family. Why? Because the family assessment is a global assessment. You are not focusing your attention on a single incident; rather, you are looking at the safety and well-being of the family as a whole. If you can complete these assessments and say that the report is simply untrue you do not have to call collaterals.

Monthly MRS Meetings Are Worth Your While

by Holly McNeill



Despite my efforts to publicize them, there are a few people out there who continue to resist the siren call of our monthly MRS meetings. (*How do they do it?*) In fact, I can actually hear them grumbling. They're saying, "Hey, give me one good reason why I should attend!" Actually, I can do better than that. Here are five.

REASON 1: You'll Be Heard. These meetings are where, with guidance from folks from the Division, the 10 original MRS counties wrote the first MRS policy. Today our MRS policy continues to evolve, and it continues to be written in these monthly meetings. If your county is not happy with the current policy, this is where you can make your voice heard. There have been no changes in the MRS policy that weren't discussed at these monthly MRS meetings.

REASON 2: You'll Get Support. The changes required to implement MRS are sweeping and at times difficult. MRS meetings are a place where you can talk to people who are experiencing—or who have overcome—the barriers you face. It's wonderful to receive support from people who understand your challenges.

REASON 3: You'll Find Solutions. An MRS meeting is not just a feel-good event. It is a place where you can get answers. The counties present all get a chance to share how they solved a particular problem. If you are shopping for solutions, you can pick the one that works best for your county, or you can pick the best parts of several strategies to come up with one that really meets the unique needs of your county. With MRS, counties continue to polish ideas and make them better, leading to better services—and outcomes—for families.

REASON 4: You'll Be Energized. Recently I asked one county partner what she thought of the MRS meetings. She said she found the meetings incredibly energizing. She stated that hearing the new ideas being tried around the state renews her own enthusiasm for the changes we continue to work toward. Enthusiasm and energy are contagious. Come share yours!

REASON 5: Be Present at the Creation. Some counties have been at this for quite a while now, and have helped the newer counties in countless ways. But who knows when a new county is going to come along with a great idea that will address a concern we all have? New ideas are born at these meetings all the time. You don't want to miss that, do you?

MRS encompasses seven strategies, all of which are in different stages of implementation in different counties. Staff from each county will find an opportunity to learn from other counties in the areas where they may be moving slower. MRS meetings are a great opportunity for people from across your agency at every level to share their experiences and learn from others.

Please contact me (828/757-5672, Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net) to discuss meeting topics. Also, if you would like an MRS meeting held in your county, find me a place and let me know. See you at next month's MRS meetings!

Training Dates

MRS Policy Training

Contact: Holly McNeill
828/757-5672
Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net

May 3

Rowan Co. Library
Salisbury

May 9

Black Mountain Library
Black Mountain

May 10

Edgecombe Co. DSS
Rocky Mount

May 16

Robeson County Library
Lumberton

Cornerstone III: Partners In Change

For info. see next page

May 3-5

Onslow County
Contact: Judy Prophet

May 15-17

Fayetteville
Contact: Donna Pearson
828/433-7187
(fax) 828/430-8762

May 15-17

Dare County DSS
Contact: Judy Prophet
704/545-9512
(fax) 704/573-4802

May 17-19

Pitt County
Contact: Judy Prophet

May 23-25

Marion
Contact: Donna Pearson

May 31-June 2

Statesville
Contact: Donna Pearson

June 12-14

Greensboro
Contact: Judy Prophet

June 13-15

Concord
Contact: Donna Pearson

Training Dates

Family-Centered Meeting Learning Events

There are a great many events being offered this fall to train counties in the use of child and family team meetings. Specifically, the Family-Centered Meetings Project at NCSU is offering:

Setting the Stage for Family-Centered Meetings: An Agency and Community Orientation

Caution: Family Meeting Ahead! A Guide for Social Workers Attending Family-Centered Meetings

Anchors Away! How to Navigate Family Meetings: The Role of the Facilitator

The ABC's of Including Children in Family-Centered Meetings

Widening the Circle: Family-Centered Meetings and Safety Issues

County-Specific Transfer of Learning Activities in Support of Family-Centered Meetings

For a complete listing of the dates and locations of these course offerings, consult the Division's training calendar at www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/training/

Important Changes to Cornerstone III

To improve its support of county departments of social services, the Division has made some important changes to *Cornerstone III: Partners In Change*.

As you know, *Cornerstone III* is a foundational training on the principles, knowledge, and skills related to family-centered practice, the "cornerstone" of MRS reform. In the past, *Cornerstone III* has been offered in two different versions: *Cornerstone III-A* for workers doing family assessments and *Cornerstone III-B* for all other child welfare and Work First staff.

However, effective April 15, 2006, the Division will offer a single version of *Cornerstone III* that will meet the training requirements of all child welfare and Work First staff.

In addition, if you or your staff have previously taken *Cornerstone III-B* and now find yourself conducting family assessments, we have developed a comprehensive **self-study guide** that will help you gain the skills and knowledge you need to conduct family assessments without having to repeat *Cornerstone III*. This self-study guide is designed to be completed under the guidance of the social worker's supervisor or an agency child welfare trainer, who would be available to answer questions, review assignments, and discuss lessons learned through the self-study process. This guide can be found at www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs/. The Division strongly urges you to use the self-study guide to ensure your staff are adequately trained in the family assessment approach.

If you have comments or suggestions about the Division's MRS training please contact Teresa Turner, Manager for Staff Development (919/733-7672, teresa.turner@ncmail.net). If you have questions about specific courses or registration, please contact the registrar of the course in question.



STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES: "Real Social Work"

At the February 2006 central regional MRS meeting, Montgomery County DSS shared the following story about an experienced child protective services worker who was new to family assessments.

Two reports came in at about the same time, and both were assigned to the family assessment track. When the assessor learned the names of the families involved, he felt a wave of dread—he had worked with them before as an investigator. They had been very difficult clients.

Despite his reservations, he went ahead with the assessments. When he came back to the agency the assessor expressed amazement. He said the families had behaved like different people! He said that with the family assessment process, he felt he was finally doing "real" social work.