

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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December 2009

Looking Back on the Year's Gifts

While I know many of us have missed in-person meetings, North Carolina's MRS/SOC conference calls have been a huge success. We've had amazing participation and I have heard wonderful stories about how the information being shared in the meetings is being used in the actual work being done with families.

With that in mind, I thought now would be a good time to look back over this year's calls. Below you will find just a few of the many "gifts" provided by the conference calls. I hope each of you finds one that you can unwrap and use yourself!



Documentation Tips

Keeping up with documentation requires attention, discipline, and creativity. A few of the ideas counties shared:

- Laptops can be used while waiting in court, or at the doctors, or in the car between visits
- Allow a work day at home, paired with a work plan and accountability for what is expected to be turned in at the end of the day
- Schedule "out of rotation" days for assessment workers, paired with a plan to get certain goals met during those days
- Supervision is key to preventing staff from getting too far behind
- Protected time can work, especially if it is customized to the needs of the worker and supported by the supervisor, who can make sure the worker isn't disturbed
- Require documentation to be turned in on a weekly or monthly basis
- Avoid expressing personal judgments in dictation; record behaviors and observations in a clear, factual way

From: April 2009
MRS/SOC call

MRS Meetings

MRS and System of Care meetings take place three times monthly via conference call. Dates and call-in information are listed below.

January 7, 14, & 22

Call times: 10-11:30 a.m.
Call-in number:
(219) 509-8020
Access code: 956303

MRS Questions?

If you have questions regarding the implementation of any aspect of MRS, please contact Holly McNeill 828/757-5672 holly.mcneill@dhhs.nc.gov

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Training Dates

Adoptions in Child Welfare Services

January 12-15
Kinston

January 19-22
Greensboro

Effects of Separation and Loss on Attachment

January 7-8
Charlotte

February 8-9
Kinston

March 15-16
Greensboro

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>

Vol. 5, No. 2 • Dec. 2009

MRS! is published quarterly by the NC Division of Social Services and the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work. This issue was created by Patrick Betancourt, Holly McNeill, Mellicent Blythe, and John McMahon.

Comments?

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Online

www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/mrs

The Year's Gifts *from page 1*



- **Substance Abuse and Service Agreements.** When using Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous in a Service Agreement, talk with the client about the topics discussed at the meeting, their thoughts, how they will put it into action, etc. This may be a better way to track attendance than sign in sheets that could be signed by anyone. Attending the first AA/NA meeting with a client can also be helpful.
- **Responding to Reports on Foster Homes.** Agencies must respond to maltreatment reports on foster homes and child caring facilities using Investigative Assessments and notify the appropriate licensing agency.
- **Changes to Safety Assessments.** The Safety Assessment is a living document; changes that occur during the assessment can be made to the original, especially if a different color ink is used. All updates should be done in concert with the family. Reasons for changes may be documented on the assessment itself or in the ongoing documentation.
- **Shared Parenting Meetings** can be held on the day of removal in some cases; this starts the partnership off on a positive note.
- **Switching Tracks** from Investigative to Family Assessment (when appropriate) can improve engagement.
- **Case Decisions and Adjudication.** If you have filed a petition during an assessment, you do not have to delay your decision until the adjudication; make your case decision when you have gathered the necessary information.
- **Read notes from October** (<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/mrs/docs/MRS%20Conference%20Calls%2010-09.pdf>)—there might be something there you want to try in your county!

Webinar for Supervisors on Working with Substance Abusing Families

The Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work will host a 90-minute webinar for supervisors from county DSS Work First and Child Welfare programs on January 21, 2010 from 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. The webinar will feature Marty Weems, a substance abuse clinician, and Billy Lee, who has worked extensively with Family Drug Treatment Courts. Participants will also have the opportunity to brainstorm with colleagues across the state about case planning and supervision with substance abusing families.

Registration for this event will open on December 14 and closes January 8. To register, simply log in to your account on www.ncswLearn.org, select Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP), and select the Webinar option. For questions about how to apply or to suggest a specific substance-abuse related question you'd like to see addressed during this webinar, please contact Vilma Gimenez at vgimenez@email.unc.edu.



N.C.'s Teen Pregnancy Rate Hits 30-Year Low

Experts Credit Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies

North Carolina's teen pregnancy rate fell to a 30-year low in 2008 according to data released in October. Teenage girls in North Carolina had 217 fewer pregnancies in 2008 than in 2007.

The new data, compiled by the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), shows that 58.6 out of every 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19 became pregnant in 2008. The new rate reflects a 7% decrease from the 2007 rate of 63 per 1,000 girls. A small portion of this decrease can be attributed to a change in the way the state demographer calculates total population.

Teen pregnancy rates in North Carolina have consistently decreased since 1991 following a spike in the late 1980s. Pregnancy rates fell across all age, racial and ethnic categories, as well as in all but 25 North Carolina counties. Abortion rates also decreased in all categories.

While teen pregnancy rates declined across the board, significant disparities still exist between racial and ethnic groups and between rural and urban residents. The pregnancy rate among white teens was 47.8 per 1,000 girls, while the corresponding rate for minority teens was 77.7. The rate specifically for Hispanic teens was 147.5. North Carolina's underserved rural counties typically saw higher rates of teen pregnancy.

Evidence-Based Strategies Credited

Experts credit the trend toward targeted implementation of evidence-based approaches to pregnancy prevention as one cause of the improvement in pregnancy rates. Evidence-based approaches are rooted in behavioral research and have been evaluated for proof of their effectiveness.

The Anson County Partnership for Children has positively impacted their teen pregnancy rate by implementing the Adolescent Parenting Program (APP), a program created by NC DHHS's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives to reduce the number of repeat teen pregnancies. Repeat teen pregnancies account for approximately 30% of teen pregnancies each year. APP increases the self-sufficiency of young mothers, and has a multi-generational impact by improving the long-term health and success of both mother and baby. Due in part to APP, Anson County's teen pregnancy rate fell by 32.9% in 2008.

For more statistics go to <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/> or www.appcnc.org

Pregnancies Among NC Adolescents Aged 10 to 19, 2000-2008

Year	Pregnancies	Live Births
2008	19,774	15,363
2007	20,019	15,299
2006	19,597	14,931
2005	18,727	14,175
2004	18,615	13,840
2003	17,883	13,430
2002	18,457	14,052
2001	19,377	14,600
2000	20,492	15,678

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of NC

Training Dates

Structured Decision Making Training

January 4

Guilford Co. DSS

January 5

Orange Co. DSS

January 12

Mecklenburg Co. DSS

January 15

Guilford Co. DSS

January 27

Wilson Co. DSS

To register, go to http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-05/man/CWS_AL_08_09.pdf. Complete the attached registration form and fax it to Clarence Lamb at: 919/334-1173 or 919/334-1174. A confirmation notice, driving directions, and other instructions will be sent to you via e-mail.

CPS Assessments in Child Welfare Services

February 2-5

Charlotte

March 8-11

Greensboro

Staying Power! A Supervisor's Guide to Retaining Child Welfare Staff

February 22-24

Greensboro

April 21-23

Fayetteville

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>

Training Dates

Methamphetamine: What a Social Worker Needs to Know

This self-paced online course is always available. To take it, simply log on to <http://www.ncswLearn.org> and access this course via the Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP) / Online Courses section of the website.

Introduction to Supervision for Child Welfare Services

Starts March 24

Asheville

Starts March 29

Greensboro

Child Development in Families at Risk

Upcoming sessions of this online course start on the following dates:

January 6

February 11

March 19

April 27

May 4

June 2

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>

New Study Sheds Light on Workplace Gossip

Gossip in the workplace can be a weapon in reputational warfare or a gift and can offer clues to power and influence not found on organizational charts. New research from Indiana University details how the weapon is wielded—and its influence muted—in a rare study that catches this national pastime on video.

The study, published in the October 2009 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, identifies subtle ways that people who are targets of gossip are negatively evaluated during formal work meetings, including veiling criticism with sarcasm or talking up another colleague for comparison. It also discusses how efforts to embark on negative gossip can be effectively—and again, subtly—derailed by changing the subject, targeting someone else for criticism, or by pre-emptive comments that are positive.

"When you're sitting in that business meeting, be attentive to when the talk drifts away from the official task at hand to people who aren't present," said Tim Hallett, assistant professor in IU Bloomington's Department of Sociology. "Be aware that what is going on is a form of politics and it's a form of politics that can be a weapon to undermine people who aren't present. But it also can be a gift. If people are talking positively it can be a way to enhance someone's reputation."

The Study

Hallett's study, co-authored by Indiana University sociologist Donna Eder, a leading authority in gossip research, and Brent Harger, a sociologist at Albright College, is based on a two-year ethnographic study of workplace politics at an urban elementary school. The school was undergoing an uncomfortable managerial transition as a new principal began her first full year. Relations with teachers had soured, and when the teachers were unsuccessful in their efforts to lodge complaints through official channels, they resorted to gossip.

The study initially was not intended to study gossip, but researchers soon saw that gossip was considered important to school staff and that teachers described what happened at meetings as "gossip."

Hallett observed meetings and classrooms, shadowed administrators, and hung out in the teachers' lounge. In addition to interviewing teachers and administrators, he also videotaped 13 teacher-led meetings. The meetings all were considered formal, with the level of formality varying depending on whether administrators were present.

In these 13 meetings, which usually lasted 40 minutes, Hallett recorded 25 episodes of gossip that occurred during the business part of *continued next page*



Gossip: unsanctioned evaluative talk about people not present

Gossip Study *from page 4*

the meeting—not in the chit-chat leading up to the meeting or after the meeting adjourned. With the video, researchers were able to watch the power dynamics involved as the gossip unfolded, often with nuances that would be hard to record in mere field notes. Hallett said this record is important because scholars discuss the importance of understanding covert organizational politics but the research is hard to conduct empirically because of its covert nature.

Study Findings

The researchers found that gossip in a formal setting was both similar to and different from informal gossip. Both were almost always negative, yet informal gossip was more direct than formal gossip. Once informal gossip begins, the negative evaluations typically continue with a negative tone, but for a shorter duration than the formal gossip.

Gossip in a formal setting is more likely to involve veiled criticism and can be redirected from its negative path by nuanced efforts to change the subject or choose another target for criticism. Hallett says the nuances can be insightful to others in the room.

"If you're interested in learning how an organization works, you can look at the organizational chart, which can be useful," Hallett said. "But often people say, 'I still can't tell how things get done, who the prime movers are.' If you're attentive, you can see who has the informal status, which isn't on the formal charts. It can help you understand how work actually gets done."

For a copy of the study, contact Tracy James, Indiana University Communications (traljame@indiana.edu).

Reprinted from Indiana University <<http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news/page/print/12357.html>>

Managing Office Gossip

Although some supervisors and managers have tried to ban gossip altogether, study author Tim Hallett believes it is more realistic to try managing it. Here are some techniques that worked for subjects in Dr. Hallett's study:

The "Pre-Emptive Positive Evaluation." If you sense a co-worker is about to disparage one of your absent colleagues, try to stop the attack by speaking up on the absent person's behalf ("Isn't she doing a great job?").

Politely Ask for Clarification. If the person responds to your "positive evaluation" with indirect sarcasm—"Oh, yeah, a super job"—calmly and pleasantly ask what that means. Dr. Hallett found this simple question often silences sarcastic gossips.

The Old Reliable. If the person persists to speak negatively about your absent colleague, try a technique that can be used in any workplace. Just ask: "Don't we have some work to do here?"

Adapted from Tierney, J. (2009, Nov. 3). Can you believe how mean office gossip can be? *The New York Times*. Accessed November 3, 2009 from <www.nytimes.com>

Training Dates

Building Awareness and Cultural Competency

January 12-14

Greensboro

January 26-28

Kinston

February 1-3

Raleigh

February 9-11

Fayetteville

February 23-25

Charlotte

February 8-10

Raleigh

March 9-11

Asheville

Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents Through Teachable Moments

February 9-11

Greensboro

Step-by-Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams

January 5-6

Oxford

January 20-21

Kenansville

January 26-27

Thomasville

Adult Mental Health Issues Which Impact Families Served by Child Welfare [online course]

Starts January 7

Starts February 19

Starts March 1

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>