



Communicating Practice Standards How Supervisors Can Support Their Workers

In addition to your own Practice Standards, your workers have their own set of core activities and Practice Standards. It is important that you help support your workers as they implement their best practice behaviors. Below are some strategies you can use to support your workers as they implement their Practice Standards. These strategies are different and more effective than telling or directing your workers, because they give your workers a "hands-on" approach and experience to see how the Standards should look in practice. As a supervisor, it's also important to complete the Worker Practice Standards training yourself, so you are familiar with the Practice Standards as you support your workers.

Modeling

- Model best practice in your written communication with your workers, such as agendas for unit meetings and emails to families. Be sure to re-read what you have written to correct any errors or statements that may be confusing and minimize the use of acronyms.
- Model effective and clear communication during consultation and unit meetings, as well as active participation in meetings with families. During meetings with families reflect what the family has said and ask clarifying questions.
- Model positive non-verbal body language, such as keeping eye contact, leaning in, and nodding your head.

Coaching

- Set aside specific time during consultation to answer questions and provide guidance to workers as they implement the Practice Standards.
- Consistently provide feedback to staff on their communication, including using clear language, minimizing the use of acronyms, and ensuring documents provided to families are tailored to the family's needs.
- Remember that feedback should be oriented to the experience level of the worker.
- Actively listen to your worker and ask insightful and open-ended questions to encourage your worker to understand the situation from the family's point of view. This encourages your worker to problem solve the situation.
- If your worker has a policy-related question, encourage them to first find the answer themselves. This helps workers learn how to utilize policies. After the worker finds the answer, meet with them to ensure clarity. This ensures consistency in worker understanding of policy.
- Describe and explain to your workers the 'why' behind requirements and directives, such as policy or statute. When workers understand the 'why', it builds their confidence in talking about requirements with children and families.
- Talk with your workers about being mindful in how they talk about families in all interactions and situations, regardless of whether the family is present, to minimize negative talk. This sets their mindset about families, so they are positive and strengths-based in all interactions with and about families.
- When you hear your workers talking to families, take note of what you hear and see and then provide feedback in real time.

Field observation

- Regularly observe your workers in the field for real-time coaching and feedback on communication skills with families, courts, tribes, service providers, and others.
- Field observation is especially helpful for new staff to provide coaching and set expectations.
- After observing your workers in the field, provide feedback through an immediate staffing about their performance.

Skills practice

- Facilitate skills practice, such as a mock training, with your entire unit to help your workers prepare for interactions with families. During skills practice your workers will be able to hear and see how others communicate and interact with children and families. You will also be able to step-in to provide feedback and alternatives.
- During unit meetings, set aside time for your workers to practice the skills of communicating. This should be a specific agenda item for the unit meeting with the goal of developing your workers' communicating skills through implementation of the Worker Communicating Practice Standards. During this time, you will listen intentionally and provide feedback on what went well and areas needing improvement.

Courageous conversations

- Be honest, transparent, and consistent in your conversations with workers.
- Model courageous behaviors during difficult conversations with families and in conversations with your workers.
- Talk to your workers about the importance of discussing the "bottom line" with families and where the case is headed while also allowing the family the opportunity to provide input.
- Support workers in having courageous conversations with families, including preparing for and debriefing after these courageous conversations occur.

Preparing for and debriefing after interactions

- Help your workers plan before they meet with a family. If they are aware of specific concerns, help them prepare to have those conversations.
- Review case files including assessments, plans and goals, and case notes with workers prior to meetings with families.
- After your workers meet with families, attend court hearings, talk with service providers, and others, schedule a staffing to discuss the meeting and identify any support, coaching, or professional development they may need.

Case staffing and unit meetings

- Provide case-level assistance when needed and model the Practice Standards when doing so.
- Ask clarifying questions during supervision and unit meetings to ensure workers understand what is being said.
- Provide structure to staffing and unit meetings, by creating agendas and giving your workers tools for taking notes.
- Offer flexibility and be worker driven regarding identifying the worker's needs. Some workers may need staffing more regularly than others based on their level of experience and performance.
- Support your workers in staffing and unit meetings as they implement the Practice Standards. Check in with workers to see if they have questions or areas where they are struggling.
- Review your worker's Practice Standards self-assessment with them and together identify areas where additional guidance is needed.
- Provide reminders about confidentiality in unit meetings.
- Support workers as they discuss confidentiality requirements with families.

Culture and environment

- Create a safe learning environment by admitting when you don't know the answer, make mistakes, and have misunderstandings. This creates an environment where workers feel safe doing the same.
- Be conscious of and adjust to workers' individual learning styles to ensure your feedback is most likely to be received. Tailor your modeling, coaching, field observation, and staffing practices to address the specific situation and needs of your worker as challenges and opportunities for development arise.
- Illustrate willingness to be vulnerable by sharing your Practice Standards assessment(s), or consider a 360-degree evaluation of your communication skills and share areas where improvement may be needed with your staff.