

Interdisciplinary Teams

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The Value of an Interdisciplinary Team:

- An **Interdisciplinary Team** of an Attorney, Social Worker, and/or Mentor **work together** to defend the client. The Team operates under the attorney's confidentiality and privilege as non-lawyer assistants. *OK Rules of Prof. Conduct Rule 5.3*
- The Interdisciplinary Team **meets with clients outside of court** and identifies the client's strengths and needs.
- The Interdisciplinary Team **understands that out-of-court advocacy** is just as important as in-court-advocacy.
- The Interdisciplinary Team **advises** the client **how to navigate** within the child welfare and court system.
- The Interdisciplinary **Teams are exceptionally trained and well versed** in the law and community resources.

**Attributes of High-Quality Legal Representation for Children and Parents in Child Welfare Proceedings, Family Justice Initiative, <https://familyjusticeinitiative.org>*

Interdisciplinary Teams represent their Clients by:

working together to:

Gather information – the social worker and mentor gather facts via out-of-court advocacy, while also supporting the client emotionally and mentally.

Communicate – the social worker and mentor communicate with the attorney to ensure the attorney is well informed of case related issues prior to court.

Advocate – the attorney zealously advocates in court for the client, the social worker and mentor advocate and assist the client to advocate for themselves in DHS meetings, Court staffings, and Service provider meetings.

Share - Personal experience – the parent/youth mentor brings their own lived experience to the client's situation which develops a *trusting relationship* with the client and the Interdisciplinary Team.

An Interdisciplinary Team *engages* the client.

When a Social Worker and/or Mentor are assigned to a client they begin client engagement very differently than the Attorney.

- A Social Worker (“SW”) is trained, educated and experienced in social systems, issues, and justice.
- The Mentor (“M”) is an expert in the mysterious environment of child welfare and connects with clients – Mentors are also highly trained – many are certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists.
- SW and M meet one on one with the client immediately after assignment and complete the following:
 - Conduct client assessments, determine client’s strengths and *needs!*
 - SW and M explain the “next” steps in the case .
 - SW and M help the client understand the “next” steps . *Freeing up the Attorney’s time.*
 - SW and M explain DHS’s expectations to the client.
 - SW and M de-escalate the client’s emotional responses.
 - SW and M explain the Team’s focus on the 5 Cornerstones of Advocacy .
 - This focus will be the roadmap to the Client’s desired outcome for the case.



The Roadmap to Improved Case Outcomes

– The 5 Cornerstones of Advocacy*

1. **Placement:** should support a child's connection to their family; the people and community the child is bonded to; familial placements keep parents engaged and supports reunification.
2. **Services:** should address parent and child strengths and needs, should be meaningful, manageable and move the family towards reunification.
3. **Conferences:** provide opportunities for parents and their Interdisciplinary Team to meaningfully participate in case planning and decision-making.
4. **Visitation/Family Time:** meaningful visitation is the single best predictor of safe and lasting reunification; it should be frequent and lengthy; in settings that mimic the family's life and their unique cultural beliefs and activities.
5. **Coaching:** teaches clients to advocate for themselves; to use their voice and to speak up for themselves in meaningful and respectful ways. So they will be heard.**

*Cornerstone Advocacy in the first 60 days: *Achieving Safe and Lasting Reunification for Families*. By Jill Cohen and Michelle Cortese, Volume 28, No.3, ABA Child Law Practice (May 2009).

** Tulsa Parent Representation Defense Program added the 5th Cornerstone of "Coaching."





An Interdisciplinary Team continues to engage the client.

After a Social Worker and/or Mentor connect with a client they continue client engagement.

- The Social Worker and/or Mentor continue to work with the client throughout the case by:
 - Engaging DHS, gaining an understanding of DHS's expectations of the client; they find out what DHS has identified as the safety threat.
 - Making sure the client understands what the Attorney is advising. They break down the language into smaller pieces of information that the client can understand.
 - Provide as much information to the client as possible! MORE INFORMATION = SUCCESS!
 - Identifying miscommunications which is the downfall of our cases.
 - Identify bias and how it influences decisions.

Social Worker & Mentors help you represent your clients

SW carry some of the Attorney's burden by being proactive with client engagement, client preparation and client communication

SW acts as a liaison between DHS and the client.

SW don't replace the DHS caseworker or provide "reasonable/active efforts"

SW and M assist the Attorney with:

Getting information timely

Identify reasonable/active efforts or lack of efforts

SWs unravel contention between DHS and clients and de-escalates situations!

Assist the client to advocate for themselves in healthy ways

Being present at DHS meetings when family decisions & goals are made

Communicate All information gathered to the Attorney

Identify appropriate services

Intervenes to eliminate duplicate and non-related additional services being requested

Identifies and Resolves conflicts before they become an issue

The Team is comforting to Clients

The Team empowers the Parent

Benefits of a Mentor:

Mentors **can**:

Support clients by attending DHS Family Team Meetings, DHS case worker meetings, Court Staffings, Service Provider meetings and Attorney meetings

Promote client ***engagement*** in their case and with their ISP

Encourage, outreach, and connect with clients to provide hope and inspiration

Assist the client ***understand*** the changes to be met to achieve the goal of reunification and/or assist with understanding an alternative permanency goal

Help maintain family connections by supporting the client to ***advocate*** for themselves and their children

How will I know to ask for an interdisciplinary team for a client?

Does your client have any of the following characteristics?



If yes – ask for a Team!

Client has communication challenges

Client is being bullied

Client may need GAL

Client is distrustful

Visitation is Problematic

Safety or Treatment plan needs to be reviewed

Client has complex trauma history

Problems with Client's behaviors

Client has multiple relapses

Lawyer needs support

Problems with Client's boundaries

Removal was traumatic

Client is Pregnant

Client has non-traditional beliefs

Family dynamics are an obstacle

Client has multiple treatment interventions