

Virginia Children's Services Practice Model

The Virginia Children's Services System Practice Model sets forth a vision for the services that are delivered by all child serving agencies across the Commonwealth, especially the Departments of Social Services, Juvenile Justice, Education, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Office of Comprehensive Services. The practice model is central to our decision making; present in all of our meetings; and in every interaction that we have with a child or family. Decisions that are based on the practice model will be supported and championed. Guided by this model, our process to continuously improve services for children and families will be rooted in the best of practices, the most accurate and current data available, and with the safety and well-being of children and families as the fixed center of our work.

We believe that all children and communities deserve to be safe.

1. Safety comes first. Every child has the right to live in a safe home, attend a safe school and live in a safe community. Ensuring safety requires a collaborative effort among family, agency staff, and the community.
2. We value family strengths, perspectives, goals, and plans as central to creating and maintaining child safety, and recognize that removal from home is not the only way to ensure child or community safety.
3. In our response to safety and risk concerns, we reach factually supported conclusions in a timely and thorough manner.
4. Participation of parents, children, extended family, and community stakeholders is a necessary component in assuring safety.
5. We separate caregivers who present a threat to safety from children in need of protection. When court action is necessary to make a child safe, we use our authority with respect and sensitivity.

We believe in family, child, and youth-driven practice.

1. Children and families have the right to have a say in what happens to them and will be treated with dignity and respect. The voices of children, youth and parents are heard, valued, and considered in the decision-making regarding safety, permanency, well-being as well as in service and educational planning and in placement decisions.
2. Each individual's right to self-determination will be respected within the limits of established community standards and laws.
3. We recognize that family members are the experts about their own families. It is our responsibility to understand children, youth, and families within the context of their own family rules, traditions, history, and culture.
4. Children have a right to connections with their biological family and other caring adults with whom they have developed emotional ties.
5. We engage families in a deliberate manner. Through collaboration with families, we develop and implement creative, individual solutions that build on their strengths to meet their needs. Engagement is the primary door through which we help youth and families make positive changes.

We believe that children do best when raised in families.

1. Children should be reared by their families whenever possible.
2. Keeping children and families together and preventing entry into any type of out of home placement is the best possible use of resources.
3. Children are best served when we provide their families with the supports necessary to raise them safely. Services to preserve the family unit and prevent family disruption are family-focused, child-centered, and community-based.

4. People can and do make positive changes. The past does not necessarily limit their potential.
5. When children cannot live safely with their families, the first consideration for placement will be with kinship connections capable of providing a safe and nurturing home. We value the resources within extended family networks and are committed to seeking them out.
6. When placement outside the extended family is necessary, we encourage healthy social development by supporting placements that promote family, sibling and community connections.
7. Children's needs are best served in a family that is committed to the child.
8. Placements in non-family settings should be temporary, should focus on individual children's needs, and should prepare them for return to family and community life.

We believe that all children and youth need and deserve a permanent family.

1. Lifelong family connections are crucial for children and adults. It is our responsibility to promote and preserve kinship, sibling and community connections for each child. We value past, present, and future relationships that consider the child's hopes and wishes.
2. Permanency is best achieved through a legal relationship such as parental custody, adoption, kinship care or guardianship. Placement stability is not permanency.
3. Planning for children is focused on the goal of preserving their family, reunifying their family, or achieving permanency with another family.
4. Permanency planning for children begins at the first contact with the children's services system. We proceed with a sense of urgency until permanency is achieved. We support families after permanency to ensure that family connections are stable.

We believe in partnering with others to support child and family success in a system that is family-focused, child-centered, and community-based.

1. We are committed to aligning our system with what is best for children, youth, and families.
 - Our organizations, consistent with this *practice model*, are focused on providing supports to families in raising children. The *practice model* should guide all of the work that we do. In addition to practice alignment, infrastructure and resources must be aligned with the model. For example, training, policy, technical assistance and other supports must reinforce the model.
 - We take responsibility for open communication, accountability, and transparency at all levels of our system and across all agencies. We share success stories and best practices to promote learning within and across communities and share challenges and lessons learned to make better decisions.
 - Community support is crucial for families in raising children.
2. We are committed to working across agencies, stakeholder groups, and communities to improve outcomes for the children, youth, and families we serve.
 - Services to families must be delivered as part of a total system with cooperation, coordination, and collaboration occurring among families, service providers and community stakeholders.
 - All stakeholders share responsibility for child safety, permanence and well-being. As a system, we will identify and engage stakeholders and community members around our *practice model* to help children and families achieve success in life; safety; life in the community; family based placements; and life-long family connections.
 - We will communicate clearly and often with stakeholders and community members. Our communication must reinforce the belief that children and youth belong in family and community settings and that system resources must be allocated in a manner consistent with that belief.
3. We are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that children with disabilities receive the supports necessary to enable them to receive their special education services within the public schools. We will collaboratively plan for children with disabilities who are struggling in public school settings

to identify services that may prevent the need for private school placements, recognizing that the provision of such services will maximize the potential for these children to remain with their families and within their communities.

We believe that how we do our work is as important as the work we do.

1. The people who do this work are our most important asset. Children and families deserve trained, skillful professionals to engage and assist them. We strive to build a workforce that works in alignment with our *practice model*. They are supported in this effort through open dialogue, clear policy, excellent training and supervision, formal and informal performance evaluation and appropriate resource allocation.
2. As with families, we look for strengths in our organization. We are responsible for creating and maintaining a supportive working and learning environment and for open, respectful communication, collaboration, and accountability at all levels.
3. Our organizations are focused on providing high quality, timely, efficient, and effective services.
4. Relationships and communication among staff, children, families, and community providers are conducted with genuineness, empathy, and respect.
5. The practice of collecting and sharing data and information is a non-negotiable part of how we continually learn and improve. We will use data to inform management, improve practice, measure effectiveness and guide policy decisions. We must strive to align our laws so that collaboration and sharing of data can be achieved to better support our children and families
6. As we work with children, families, and their teams, we clearly share with them our purpose, role, concerns, decisions, and responsibility.