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Strategies for Increasing the Effectiveness of Individualized Service Planning (Wraparound) Teams

INTRODUCTION

Around the country, children's mental health organizations are using parent-provider collaborative teams to address the needs of children with emotional and behavioral challenges and their families. This team process is most commonly known as wraparound, but also called by other names such as family networking or child and family team planning. Because we want to consider the planning process inclusively, we refer to it as individualized service planning (ISP). ISP provides a mechanism for families whose children are involved with multiple systems to meet with formal and informal providers of services and supports in order to plan. The planning process is intended to reflect System of Care (SOC) principles, in being family-centered, culturally competent, strengths-based, and needs driven. ISP should also be a creative process and should incorporate natural and community supports and services into the planning process as well as into the services and supports provided.

The ISP process can change the dynamics between the family and the service providers from one that is provider-driven to one that is family-driven. The goal for the team is to listen to the needs of the family in order to place the family's perspective at the center of the planning process. Because the ISP process is a different approach, some families may at first feel distrustful of the process - they are used to being told by service providers what to do and what they need. However, after experiencing the process, many families who have a successful experience begin to believe in it. In turn, these families can introduce and support new families for the ISP process.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Many families have found that the ISP process helps them meet their needs in a family-centered, strengths-based, and culturally competent way. However, ISP teams face special challenges because they need to enact SOC principles *while also* building effective plans. Based on our interviews with facilitators, observations of ISP teams, and our study of the research literature, we have found that truly collaborative group planning is difficult under the best of circumstances. In our presentation, we

1. summarized the findings from our interviews with ISP team members and observations of ISP teams;
2. described ways to increase team effectiveness including the use of tools, processes, and structures; and
3. proposed ways to use this information to develop (affordable) strategies to increase team effectiveness agency-wide.

RESEARCH ON GROUP AND TEAMS

We reviewed research literature on groups and teams in order to identify characteristics of effective teamwork. This research—coming from a variety of professional fields including business, education, and organizational behavior—offers some guidance for ISP teams in addressing the challenges many teams face. According to the literature, there is robust evidence describing the need for teams to

- ◆ reach agreement on long-term and intermediate goals,
- ◆ consider multiple alternatives for strategies to achieve team goals,
- ◆ seek and use feedback on progress towards goals, and
- ◆ develop a clear decision-making process by creating guidelines and ground rules on how the team will work together.

INTERVIEWS

With the research literature serving as a guide, we interviewed 30 “expert” team members including

parent partners, facilitators, and parent facilitators from 12 different states. Each interviewee was recommended to us as being a teamwork expert at their site. We asked them to focus on how they kept meetings going, how they did planning, how they knew when work was going well, and what strategies they used to face challenging situations.

Our interviews with the team members revealed that they are committed to the values and principles of ISP, yet they feel under-trained and under-supported. Many spoke about the frequent need to advocate for the values with other team members. Team members also mentioned the barriers they faced *implementing* the ISP process. They spoke less specifically about the concrete strategies they used to help make meetings successful. When they did talk about strategies, team members focused mainly on work they are doing outside of the team meetings. Lastly, team members rarely mentioned their use of effective processes related to the nuts and bolts of teamwork.

OBSERVATIONS

In addition to the interviews, we observed “average” teams around the country. We have observed 20 teams, 9 on multiple occasions, amounting to 54 meetings. These teams represent a range, from those teams recommended because they were well-organized and supported, to those teams that have received far less training and support.

FINDINGS

When we look at the meetings, there are several areas where most teams are performing in ways consistent with ISP principles. We found many teams discussing strengths. In addition, most teams changed services in order to be responsive to the family’s wishes. For example, teams would increase therapy sessions to once a week, instead of every other week. Lastly, on over half the teams, family members besides the identified child(ren) were receiving services such as family therapy.

Our observations show that a number of teams are struggling in the areas of structure and process. For example, only a quarter of the teams observed used a

meeting agenda and an even smaller number of teams maintained a team plan. However, teams *with* plans created goals with associated outcome measures.

Two other areas where teams are struggling are in considering multiple possible strategies and in including natural supports. While many teams are responsive to family needs, these needs are rarely addressed through considering multiple strategies or by using a creative activity such as brainstorming to come up with a variety of possible solutions or ideas. This may be related to a lack of a plan. If team members don't know what they are working towards, they may not be able to consider multiple strategies to reach team goals.

Also, less than a fourth of the teams had more than one natural support present at the meeting. This is a common challenge among teams. Some families find it difficult to identify natural supports while other families do not wish to bring in extended family or community members to be a part of their meeting.

INCREASING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

The research on groups and teams has also uncovered elements of a process to support team development. These elements are

1. selecting concrete indicators or hallmarks of good practice;
2. providing adequate training and coaching on structures and strategies consistent with indicators; and
3. ensuring that supervision includes key processes such as goal setting relative to selected indicators, observation, and feedback.

Establishing Concrete Indicators

The first element, establishing concrete indicators, will aid teams in measuring their effectiveness and help them identify what they are doing that is working well. There have been a number of tools developed that measure concrete indicators in ISP teams:

- ◆ The Wraparound Observation Form (WOF) (Epstein, et al., 1998) is thirty-four item checklist looking at eight elements of a wraparound meeting

ranging from community-based services and involvement of family members, to management of team meetings.

- ◆ Our own ISP meeting observation checklist (available from the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health later this year) was developed to note a variety of elements and procedures of meetings such as the attendance of natural supports, the presence of goals and agendas, the types of services family members are receiving, the existence of ground rules.
- ◆ The Child and Family Service Team Meeting Process Outcomes Form from North Carolina is a fourteen item checklist noting strengths-based planning, attendance, and community resources that gives space for the observer to note the strengths of the service coordinator/service team and space to note the barriers (O'Donnell, et al., 2000).

It is possible to create a checklist based on the needs of individual sites. Sites must first decide what are the most important concrete hallmarks of effective ISP practice and develop a tool that will measure if these hallmarks are in evidence. The above-mentioned tools can be used as a guide.

Providing Adequate Training and Coaching

The second element is providing adequate training and coaching on structures and strategies that are consistent with the identified indicators. While there are a variety of trainings addressing the elements of the ISP process, examining the impact of what was taught in these trainings is lacking. Research on teacher professional development conducted by Joyce and Showers (1995) found that training transfer varies widely depending upon the training strategies used. As Table 1 shows, when comparing the training components of demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching, combining these components resulted in the highest gain in knowledge, skill, and training transfer. In particular, the use of coaching, when combined with the other components, showed a

significant increase in trainees' amount of knowledge, skill and training transfer. People may successfully digest the information presented to them at trainings, but feel too overwhelmed to successfully implement what they learned. Thus, including the component of coaching can increase the usefulness of trainings. In fact, it may be the only way to realize substantial training benefits.

Table 1: Transfer of Training into Practice

Training Components	Knowledge	Skill	Training Transfer
Theory	0.15	0.50	0.00
Theory + demonstration	0.66	0.86	0.00
Theory + demonstration + practice	1.15	0.72	0.00
Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback	1.31	1.18	0.39
Theory + demonstration + practice + feedback + coaching	2.71	1.25	1.68

Joyce and Showers (1995)

The use of coaching in ISP teams can help ensure that facilitators are putting into practice the elements and procedures they were taught in the trainings. Coaching can take several forms. Supervisors can serve as coaches, observing the facilitators in meetings and providing feedback and recommendations for improvement.

Another way to institute coaching is to form peer-learning teams, which require only peer observation and group discussion. These teams are non-evaluative and potentially quite cost effective. The peer learning teams share strategies as well as gain insight into their own facilitation as they observe each other.

Effective Supervision

The third element, effective supervision, can help to ensure that what is learned in the ISP trainings is carried out in practice. Our interviews revealed that

few facilitators are receiving structured supervision. However, structured supervision can be an effective tool for improving ISP team practice. Research shows that structured supervision is effective when it includes goals, observation, and feedback. Supervisees receiving structured supervision are more satisfied with supervision, report better working alliances with supervisors, and report higher confidence in their practice. In addition, supervisees feel more supported and efficacious when supervision is structured (goals, observation, feedback). Comparisons of “best” and “worst” supervision experiences consistently find these as important differences.

IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS

Sites using the ISP process are beginning to realize the importance of these three elements. Some sites have begun developing strategies to improve ISP team practice. For example, Clark County Public Mental Health in Clark County, Washington conducted a fidelity study. This study examined wraparound teams to determine if they included important elements of the process, such as strengths-based activities and the inclusion of natural supports. It revealed that most teams did not incorporate many elements. However, the teams with identified elements were most successful in terms of reaching their outcomes. This study also found that ongoing support and follow-up with a consultant who was an expert in the wraparound process helped teams to be successful. Creating a certification process for facilitators can also help improve ISP team practice. A children’s mental health provider in Pierce County, Washington implemented a facilitator certification process with the help of a national consultant. This certification process focused on team preparation, facilitation, documentation, and management of a team plan. Facilitator certification can serve the important purpose of spreading the expertise to facilitators throughout a site.

CONCLUSION

The ISP process requires specific skills from those facilitating team meetings and support from the organizations that are implementing the ISP process. A circle of accountability needs to form to ensure

that the practice is being successfully implemented.
In this circle

- ◆ organization and supervisors hold facilitators and others accountable for progress toward practice indicators,
- ◆ organization and facilitators hold supervisors accountable for implementing structure in supervision, and
- ◆ facilitators and supervisors hold organization accountable for providing sufficient training and coaching opportunity and support.

The ISP process provides a potentially effective way to meet the needs of families with children with emotional and behavioral challenges. High-quality implementation of this process can increase its effectiveness. When teams establish concrete indicators and facilitators receive ongoing training and supervisory elements discussed in our presentation, the ISP process has a better chance of successfully meeting the needs of the family.

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