



**Children's
Bureau**
1912–2012

100 years of serving our nation's children and families

Unannounced Home Visits – Critical Assessment Tool or Barrier to Family Engagement?

Centennial Topical Webinar Series

September 26, 2012



Unannounced Home Visits: Critical Assessment Tool or Barrier to Family Engagement?

GREAT QUESTION!

Complexity that challenges our concept of intervention with families in CPS and forces us to consider a fundamental question: Can you effectively assess a person or family situation without engagement?

Five key points I want us to consider:

1. Spirit of intervention
2. What we learned in kindergarten
3. Safety intervention
4. Purpose of assessment
5. Culture

Spirit of intervention

- Are we “pointing a finger” at a parent or are we “reaching out a hand” to help?
- What are the effects and meaning of government intrusion into a parent’s life?
- Does our assessment and intervention soften the intrusion to encourage independence or does it result in it’s own damage of increasing powerlessness?

Spirit of intervention

- Respect for privacy and fairness
 - Civil Rights
 - 4th Amendment = Freedom from illegal search and seizure
 - 14th Amendment = Due process
- Respect for human dignity
 - Human Rights [Some]
 - Personal privacy
 - Live, exist without interference
 - Have family and children
 - Property
 - Considered innocent

Spirit of intervention

- The point: CPS Assessment and Intervention should be influenced by a spirit of RESPECT.
- Any action taken or decision made as a part of our intervention should be grounded by that spirit.
- The necessity and reason for an unannounced visit should be judged and guided by that spirit.

What we learned in kindergarten

- Good manners
- Courtesy

What we learned in kindergarten

- Showing up unannounced at someone's home, someone you know or not, does not in general demonstrate good manners or courtesy.
- Should CPS intervention disregard courtesy; does that give the message that we believe they are less worthy than the people we value in our own lives?

What we learned in kindergarten

- Not saying that unannounced visits are ALWAYS unacceptable, there are legitimate purposes...stay tuned
- Effectiveness of assessment related to unannounced visits must be positioned first and foremost on respect and courtesy

What we learned in kindergarten

- Workload? Convenience? Efficiency?
 - May be the reason unannounced visits happen (saves time not setting up appointments, just fit them in as time allows)
 - Parents view as inconsiderate and disrespectful
 - How would you feel?

What we learned in kindergarten

- Leaving business cards....
 - Respect for privacy?
 - Is this how the parent learns of a CPS concern/report?

Safety intervention

- Present danger
- Safety management

Safety intervention

- Present Danger
 - Information about a family situation or behavior reported to CPS that constitutes an immediate danger of severe harm to the child
 - Requires an urgency to respond
 - Unannounced visit is necessary and justified
 - Purpose of unannounced visit is not to “catch someone at something”, but to take action to protect a child

Safety intervention

- Present danger
 - Being unannounced does NOT increase the effectiveness of the assessment of present danger because by definition, present danger is immediate, significant and clearly observable. Happening now!
 - Being unannounced is associated with timeliness, immediacy, emergency...

Safety intervention

- Present danger
 - Exceptions? Child in present danger but in the care of a responsible adult....such as a seriously injured child who is in a hospital.

Safety intervention

- Safety management
 - Implementation and oversight of in-home safety plans
 - Requires agreement and acceptance by parents about the expectations, requirements, activities, safety services...all part of the safety plan

Safety intervention

- Safety management
 - Delivery of safety services are scheduled with specific purposes...managing threats to child safety, substituting for lacking caregiver protective capacity
 - In-home safety plan can include an agreement that unannounced visits will occur; not related to the assessment, but monitoring how plan is going; assuring that the plan is working.

Safety intervention

- Safety management
 - Unannounced visits are above board, part of the agreement that has been reached. Developed based on trust established in assessment process.

Purpose of assessment

- Determine Who to Serve
- Determine What Must Change

Purpose of assessment

- Determine Who to Serve
 - CPS Assessment is essentially information collection and analysis to determine if the family will be served (policy, agency decision making criteria related to risk, safety)
 - Seeks to arrive at a “picture” of the family; revealing individual and family functioning

Purpose of assessment

- Determine Who to Serve
 - EMPHASIZE- Assessment is about gaining understanding not finding guilt or learning by catching someone unaware
 - Parents are the primary providers of information about themselves and how they and their family function
 - Parents enter assessment process with defensiveness....will only reveal themselves and their lives if they feel comfortable and safe

Purpose of assessment

- Determine What Must Change
 - How do we restore the caregivers to their protective roles and responsibilities?
 - Family assessments, needs assessments, caregiver protective capacity assessments help us determine what must change

Purpose of assessment

- Determine What Must Change
 - Engagement, rapport building are necessary to creating comfort and openness and reducing deceit and resistance
 - If overt or covert resistance and mistrust exist, how can unannounced visits contribute to the assessment process? Likely that result of assessment will reflect the process and not who the parent is if they were engaged and openly self revealing.

An example

- Family Connections (Evidence based program developed by Diane DePanfilis, U. of Maryland)
- Change focused intervention; CPS families, weekly purposeful visits with parents. Visits expected and scheduled; partnership with parents.
- Relationship is the anchor

Culture

Every person in the world guards their privacy by assessing whether and when to share information with others. These judgments are made in ways dictated by culture, upbringing, and experience. We may judge whether to share information with others based on how they are dressed, how they speak, who initiated contact, their reputation, whether they seem friendly, whether and how they are related to us, whether they are corporations or individuals, whether they seem honest, and so on. There are as many ways of judging whether to share personal information as there are people. Privacy reflects individual, cultural, and social norms that resist being catalogued. Privacy norms can also change.

www.privacilla.org

Culture

- Important to recognize that many families in CPS have had experience with “the system.”
- Their experience may have left them feeling powerless, suspicious, untrusting.
- Everything we do either contributes to reinforcing that or altering it.

Thank you!

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CPS Program Information

SFY 2011

- 20,508 calls to Intake
- 8,712 protective reports sent to District offices
- 20,465 children served in any open assessment during the year
- 48,210 individuals served in assessment during the year (including children)

SFY 2012

- 21,439 calls to Intake
- 9,242 protective reports sent to District offices
- 21,758 children served in any open assessment during the year
- 50,883 individuals served in assessment during the year (including children)

Open Cases - August 2012*

822 open family service cases

1281 children in those cases

- 709 in out of home placement
- 572 in own home

* Point in time data



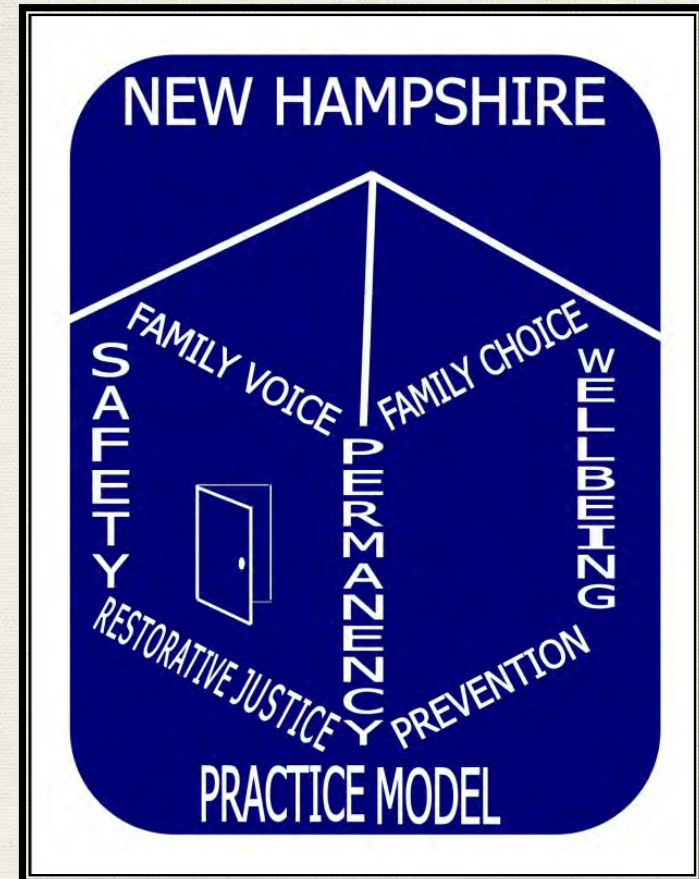
New Hampshire's Practice Model (PM)

❖ PM Development

- ❖ Began 2009 – 2012
- ❖ Involved staff across all bureaus within agency

❖ PM/PIP Strategies

- ❖ Improved family engagement
- ❖ Increased consistency in practice statewide
- ❖ Youth & Parent Voice



NH Practice Model links to the CFSR/PIP

- ❖ Prevention reduces child abuse and neglect
- ❖ Everyone deserves to be treated with courtesy and respect
 - ❖ (Items 17-20)
- ❖ All children/youth should be safe
 - ❖ (Items 1 – 4)
- ❖ All children/youth need and deserve permanency
 - ❖ (Items 5 – 16)
- ❖ All children, youth and families deserve a life of well-being
 - ❖ (Items 17 – 23)
- ❖ All families have strengths
 - ❖ (All items except 1 and 2)
- ❖ All children/youth belong with their family
 - ❖ (Items 3, 4, 7, 8, 11 – 20)

Practice Shift to Announced Home Visits as “Norm”

WHY CHANGE?

- Agency’s decade long shift towards focus on family engagement
- Came about “naturally”
 - “Why would we do an unannounced visit?”
- Inefficiency of unannounced visits
 - Time that could be spent WITH the children, youth and families
 - Time to be building community collaborating and service array
 - Impact on fiscal resources
 - Staff time and mileage

Current use of unannounced home visits

- Unannounced visits are the exceptions
 - Report of imminent danger
 - Joint investigation with law enforcement precludes CPS 1st contact
 - Notifying parent would put child at greater risk of harm
 - No contact information for parent
 - Unsuccessful scheduled visits

Family response

- **Unannounced Visits**

- **“GOTCHA”**

- ❖ Anger, confusion, disbelief, distrust & fear
- ❖ Here to take my kids?
- ❖ Shame and blame

- **Announced Visits**

- **Demonstrates respect**

- ❖ Sends message we want them involved
- ❖ Helps them to prepare
- ❖ Gives them voice in scheduling visit
- ❖ Family feel heard & recognized as partners in process



Staff response

- Ability to schedule with family is a time saver
- Families engage quicker and initial first meeting to safety plan is more productive
- Less punitive approach
- Can increase ability to meet required face-to-face time frames
- Case planning is more productive



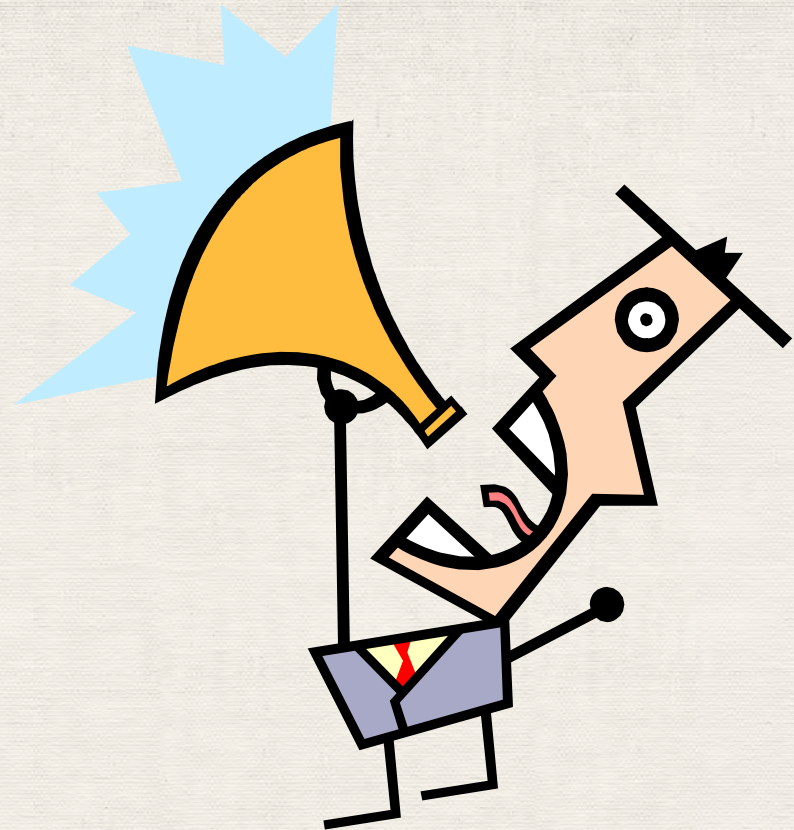
Community response

Pro:

- Helps strengthen CAN prevention
- Reduces fear of all “social services”

Con:

- Should not be alerting the family
- Not going to “catch them in the act”
- “They’ll clean it up”
- “They won’t be truthful”



Challenges & Next Steps

Keeping the pendulum from swinging back

Maintaining staff “buy-in”

Practice Model and Solution-Based Casework (SBC)

Case management, policy, training, mentoring, coaching

Maximizing youth and parent voice

Educating community

Family-Centered, SBC approach to engagement can improve safety

Families taking action to “fix things” demonstrates they have functional capacity to do so

Announced visits provide opportunities for planned, meaningful interactions

Discussion

For more information

(including a copy of today's slides and a webinar recording)

<http://cb100.acf.hhs.gov/webinars>

Please remember to complete the webinar survey that appears on your screen when the webinar concludes!