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## What is Trauma?

- "A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic. This is particularly important for young children as their sense of safety depends on the perceived safety of their attachment figures."
- "Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event. Children may feel terror, helplessness, or fear, as well as physiological reactions such as heart pounding, vomiting, or loss of bowel or bladder control. Children who experience an inability to protect themselves or who lacked protection from others to avoid the consequences of the traumatic experience may also feel overwhelmed by the intensity of physical and emotional responses."

*Definitions from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network <https://www.nctsn.org/>*

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## In other words.

- Trauma affects perception of self and self-worth (conscious and unconscious).
- Effects can start new traumatic relationships, repeating patterns.
  - Clients/parents/caregivers
  - Quick to fight, yell
  - Quick to run
  - Quick to shut down
  - Quick to please
- Life seems unpredictable and always disappointing, not to mention scary.

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## So, what do you do?

Act and communicate in a clear, consistent and empathetic manner.

- Will lower anxiety and show there are different behavior possibilities
- Will hopefully limit triggers
- The first steps to show you're not a threat and in fact an ally
- Consistency, consistency, consistency



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## Trauma Screening and Assessment



- "Trauma Screening refers to a tool or process that is a brief, focused inquiry to determine whether an individual has experienced one or more traumatic events, has reactions to such events, has specific mental or behavioral health needs, and/or needs a referral for a comprehensive trauma-informed mental health assessment. Screening is a 'wide-net' process."
- "Trauma-Informed Mental Health Assessment refers to a process that includes a clinical interview, standardized measures, and/or behavioral observations designed to gather an in-depth understanding of the nature, timing, and severity of the traumatic events, the effects of those events, current trauma-related symptoms, and functional impairment. ...to inform case conceptualization and drive treatment planning; and to monitor progress over time."

Definitions from *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network*  
<https://www.nctsn.org/>

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Child Development Chart – First Five Years  
Harold Ineson, Ph. D.

	SOCIAL	SELF-HELP	GROSS MOTOR	FINE MOTOR	LANGUAGE
<b>Birth to 6 Months</b>	Distinguishes mother from others. Social smile.	Comforts self with thumb or pacifier. Reacts to sigh of bottle or breast.	Turns around when lying on stomach. Lifts head and chest when lying on stomach.	Picks up toy with one hand. Looks and reaches for faces and toys.	Vocalizes spontaneously, social. Reacts to voices.
<b>6 Months to 9 Months</b>	Pushes things away he/she does not want. Reaches for familiar persons.	Feeds cracker to self.	Sits alone – steady, without support. Rolls over from back to stomach.	Picks up objects with thumb and finger grasp. Transfers toy from one hand to other.	Vocalizes, coos, chuckles. Wide range of vocalizations (vowel, consonant-vowel sound combinations).
<b>9 Months to 12 Months</b>	Plays pat-a-cake. Plays social games: peek-a-boo, bye-bye.	Picks up spoon by handle.	Walks around furniture or crib while holding on. Crawls around on hands and knees.	Picks up small object – precise thumb and finger grasp.	Responds to name – turns and looks. Understands words like "No," "Stop," or "All gone." Word sounds: says "Ma-ma" or "Da-da."
<b>12 Months to 18 Months</b>	Griebs people with "Hi" or similar. Gives hugs or kisses. Wants stuffed animal, doll or blanket in bed.	Insists on doing things by self such as feeding. Feeds self with spoon.	Runs. Walks without help. Stand without support.	Scribbles with crayon. Picks up two small toys in one hand. Stacks two or more blocks.	Asks for food or drink with words. Talks in single words. Follows simple instructions.
<b>18 Months to 2 Years</b>	Usually responds to correction-stops. Shows sympathy to other children, tries to comfort them. Sometimes says "No" when interfered with.	Takes off open coat or shirt without help. Eats with spoon, spilling little. Eats with fork.	Walks up and down stairs alone. Runs well, seldom falls. Kicks a ball forward.	Turns pages of picture books, one at a time. Builds tower of four or more blocks.	Follows two-part instructions. Uses at least ten words. Follows simple instructions.
<b>2 Years to 3 Years</b>	Plays a role in "pretend" games. Plays with other children – cars, dolls, building. "Helps" with simple household tasks.	Dresses self with help. Washes and dries hands. Opens door by turning knob.	Walks up and down stairs – one foot per step. Stands on one foot without support. Climbs on play equipment-ladders, slides.	Cuts with small scissors. Draws or copies vertical lines. Scribbles with circular motion.	Understands four prepositions – in, on, under, beside. Talks clearly – is understandable most of the time. Talks in two three word phrases or sentences.
<b>3 Years to 4 Years</b>	Protective towards younger children. Plays cooperatively, with minimum conflict and supervision. Gives direction to other children.	Dresses and undresses without help, except for tying shoelaces. Washes face without help. Toilet trained.	Hops on one foot, without support. Rides around on a tricycle, using pedals. Hops around on one foot without support.	Cuts across paper with small scissors. Draws or copies a complete circle.	Understands concepts – size, number, shape. Counts five or more objects when asked "how many?" Identifies four colors correctly. Combines sentences with the words "and," "for," or "but."
<b>4 Years to 5 Years</b>	Shows leadership among children. Follows simple game rules in board games or card games.	Goes to the toilet without help. Usually looks both ways before crossing street. Buttons one or more buttons.	Swings on swing, pumping by self. Skips or makes running "broad jumps." Hops around on one foot without support.	Prints first name. Draws a person that has at least three parts: head, eyes, nose, mouth, etc. Draws recognizable pictures.	Tells meaning of familiar words. Reads a few letters (five +) Follows a series of three simple instructions.

Remember that children develop at different rates and this is only a general guide. If you have concerns about your child's development contact a professional.

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## Infants

- Since we cannot interview an infant, observation of the child in their environment is helpful.
- Observe the child with their parents and if they are placed out of the home with their caretakers.
- Assess the child's developmental progress or lack of.
- Interview all the collaterals who know the infant.



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**Pre-schooler 2 to 5**

- Wants to please adults so avoid suggestions.
- Should be able to discuss who, what and where.
- Talk about colors and animals.
- They may like to show off ABCs and numbers.

**Elementary 5 to 10**

- Want to please, but can manipulate, can withhold or add information to achieve an outcome.
- Can tell who, what, where and also discuss multiple incidents.
- Talk about pets, school, and friends.

**Pre-teen 10 to 13**

- Testing the system. Even better about withholding or adding information.
- Let them lead the conversation, very focused on themselves and like to lead.

**Teen 13 to 18**

- Attempting to be independent.
- Want to be treated as adults and will be more open if treated maturely.
- Discuss their interests.
- May say something to startle and test your reaction.

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**2 to 5 Years Old**

- Use short simple sentences and questions. Avoid questions of time.
- Use the child's terms. If you are not aware of the terms, ask the child "What do you call\_?" or "Tell me about\_?".
- Use names not pronouns. For example, Uncle Bruce, or "Shorty" rather than "he".
- Rephrase a question a child does not understand rather than repeating it. This will help the child not become anxious or irritated.
- Children who do not want to be interviewed often do better with games such as: 3 wishes, magic wand, or telephone.

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## 6 to 9 Years Old



- Some of the previous techniques work well with this age group too.
- Do not ask "Do you understand?". Have the child repeat what you have said.
- Try not to follow every question with another question. Children do better when it is more of a conversation.
- More aware of protecting themselves and family so may be resistant to questioning.
- Games are also effective.

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## Younger Children



- Play with toys and tell stories (helps lower anxiety, focus off them)
- What are their characters doing and how do they behave within story?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What makes you upset?
- Draw me a picture of people in your life, who's in the picture, who isn't?
- Do you have rules/chores, what are rules/chores, what happens if you/character break a rule/don't do chores?
- Do parent/child acknowledge each other, are they able to play, do they express and show appropriate emotions?

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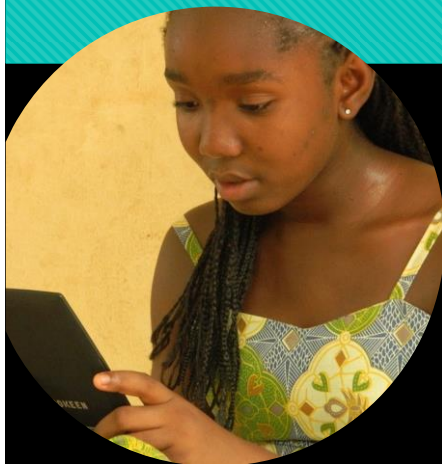
## Older Children

- Tell me what you understand.
- This is what I hear.
- This is what I'm thinking about and concerns I can see.
- This is what I think other people will see/say.
- Help me to understand what will help you.
- Your life is important, your views/opinions are essential.
- Encourage youth to attend hearings and model for them self advocacy.



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## Teens



- Can be angry, hostile, defensive, aloof.
- Will have a better understanding about what's happening and why GAL involved.
- Will have more questions and concerns about best interest representation and this should be explained multiple times.
- Even with young adults, use simple, one-topic questions.
- Assess their understanding, what's their plan if in charge. This is especially important with emancipating youth.
- Distinguish between normal adolescent behavior and something more.

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## 18 to 21

Youth in this range may or may not have developed adult narrative skills. They are still adolescents despite being a legal adult.

They can become confused with linguistic ambiguity like metaphors, sarcasm, or jokes.

They will still lose track with long, complex questions.

They are very **reluctant to ask for clarification or acknowledge they do not understand something**. Pay attention to body language.

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## Part III: How



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## Who am I (today)?

- What triggers/biases am I bringing?
- Is there trauma in my past/present?
- Am I going to over-share? overcompensate?
- Am I here to save?
- *Awareness and preparation mitigate your own triggers/biases.*
- Small as taking a breath before walking into a room or house.



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## And ...

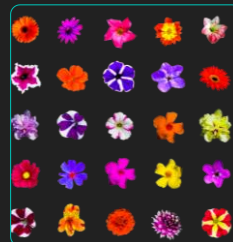
- Am I asking for me or for the best of the client?
- No promises!!
- It's not about us.
- Stay in your lane with compassion.
- Band-aids vs. affecting system/behavior

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## Who am I meeting (today)?

Individual every time, even if met before, part of a large family, or caseload.

- Trust! You're on the clock and behind the ball.
  - I get it, I'm a stranger right now
  - Acknowledge there may be times you won't agree (preparation for a disagreement vs. sudden assertion of your power)
  - If you forget something, say or do something wrong, don't know something- acknowledge it and explain steps to address it (I'm human, I'm not here to surprise, I will be here, I will come back and follow through)
  - Start broad (open ended) and narrow questions, if need be, at later dates, avoid "Why?"
  - Most people don't appreciate intrusive questions, and someone with trauma will use whichever defenses that work for them
  - Explain why you may have to ask more detailed questions later
- Don't lead yourself counselor
  - No person is fully on paper. Reports are snapshots, possibly flawed.
  - Spend one on one time to get fullest picture (Case Consultant's toolbox!)



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## 1<sup>st</sup> Impressions

- Not absolutely carved in stone - but prep and act like it is
- Make it clear they're a unique individual
- Plant a seed: This isn't a bad ending to an initial meeting



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## Part II: Building Rapport & Communication with Child/Youth

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### Building Rapport with Youth

- The dictionary defines rapport as "a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well."
- **Rapport is based on respect and acceptance.**
- Engaging the child and bringing the child to trust and believe that you are there to listen and help.
- Listen actively and let the child know you are interested in the information being provided.
- Every detail is important.
- Children have a lot to say!



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## Communication

- How is it going to work? What works best for them?
- Follow their lead (there are power dynamics—but create a partnership).
  - Older clients: involve in planning, give sense of control
  - Younger clients: it's your demeanor more than words
- Demonstrate how you're different. Actions louder than words.
- Calm, clear, communication, planned/discussed actions, ongoing involvement and review
- You'll be closely evaluated and doubted for a while, if not forever



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## Says who?



- Children are the experts about their family and their life.
- Remember important people, places or things that the child has discussed. What is important to the GAL may not be important to the child.
- The GAL/CC doesn't tell the child what is important. Rather, the child tells the GAL/CC what is most important.
- Even parents who have made mistakes know their child, and the information they can provide should be honored and respected.

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## Red Flags



- No eye contact, a reluctance to have you leave
- "Checking" with caregiver (doesn't have to be there, looking towards room)
- Flinching, too much/too little physical contact
- Dirty clothes, condition of house
- Regression, loss of skills
- Who cooks, what are chores
- Issues with eating and sleeping
- Nightmares/flashbacks, aches and pains
- Problems at school, problems with attention
- Clothes, tech, etc. that are unexplained
- Drugs and alcohol and adrenaline

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## Review Your Role, Role of CC



**NOT DHS!!**



**Talk with me about  
CCs**



**Talk with peers  
about how they  
use CCs**



**We may have  
difficult/frustrating/  
painful conversations  
(no surprises)**

- Don't need every painful detail but may need to get an understanding to better help you.
- If stories change, I won't be mad. It's understandable and hopefully you'll see I'm trying to work for your best. The clearer the understanding I have the better I can try to help you. I'm not here to judge you. You haven't done anything wrong. (More complicated with Delinquency).
- Demonstrating empathy, not a threat or punishment. I'm here now, will be later, and my job is to work with you.

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## Part IV: Effectively Interviewing the Child



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## Setting



- Quiet
- Private as possible
- Minimal distractions
- Children will watch the cues from siblings and adults. Be mindful of non-verbal cues.
- Interview each child alone. They each have their own story to tell.
- Not to say you shouldn't observe siblings together, may let guard down more, dynamics can be interesting.

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- Children are often scared and confused about why you want to speak to them.
- Ask the child why they think you want to speak to them.
- Allow the child to explain and asks questions for as long as the child needs.
- The interview time is driven by the child not the GAL.



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## Style



- Schedule on non court days to dress more casually.
- Sit on the floor or eye level with the child.
- Calm tone and general opener.
  - Examples: "Tell me something you like to do for fun?"
  - "I wonder if it is hard to talk to someone you just met?"
  - "I am here to talk to you and listen to what you want? You are like my boss."
  - Do you want to show me your room?
- Use comforting touch only when appropriate.

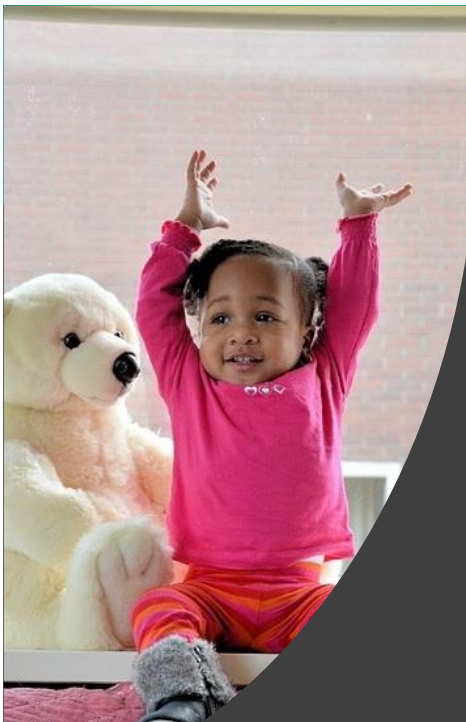
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## Beginning the Interview

- Home visits are often the best and most appropriate place to interview a child.
- Explain your role.
- Explain the limitations of confidentiality. Use age and developmentally appropriate language.
- Describe best interest representation.
- And soon... direct representation.



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## Language

- Verbal and Non-verbal Language
- Developmental age vs. Chronological age.
- Keep your messages simple, concise and to the point.
- One topic or one aspect at a time.
- **NO** legalese. With parents/caregivers too.

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# Non-Verbal Language



- Relax yourself first.
- Adjust your body language and approach so that you are non-threatening supportive adult.
- Non-verbal behaviors of the child may also give insight into how the child is feeling.
- Give the child time to become familiar with you and the environment.
- Be comfortable with silence, stay present and be able to wait.
- Be careful to not react in a negative way to what the child is saying even if surprising or hard to hear.

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## More Tips



- Pay attention and avoid distractions.
- If a child is withdrawing or having a negative response end that line of questioning or even end the interview.
- With practice learning line of too much and when to push.
- Err on the side of patience.
- A child may need to be interviewed multiple times for short periods of time to become comfortable and able to talk about their abuse.
- Anything you want me to tell the judge?
- **Never make promises!**

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## Comprehension

- Children can usually understand more than adults give them credit for.
- Even very young children can provide helpful information and understand more than is obvious.
- Children with developmental delays and communication deficits can understand and participate in their case.



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## Communication Challenges



- Child refuses to speak.
- Developmentally delayed child.
- Child is so unfocused they cannot be interviewed.
- Child is angry and violent.
- Child is over medicated.
- A child is distraught.
- Do not misinterpret their play or take their words at face value.
- Do not reach a conclusion based on one piece of information.
- Involve a CC early for social science knowledge and engagement skills.

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## Do not...

- False Reassurance: "Everything will be fine."
- Passive or aggressive responses: Passive responses avoid an issue that should be discussed. Aggressive responses can provoke a confrontation.
- Do not argue with a client. Pointing out why you disagree is good modeling and informs that client of how you see things differently.

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## Start Here: Striving for Cultural Competence

- The word **culture** is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.
- The word **competence** is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively.

*Cross et al. (1989)*

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## Cultural Considerations

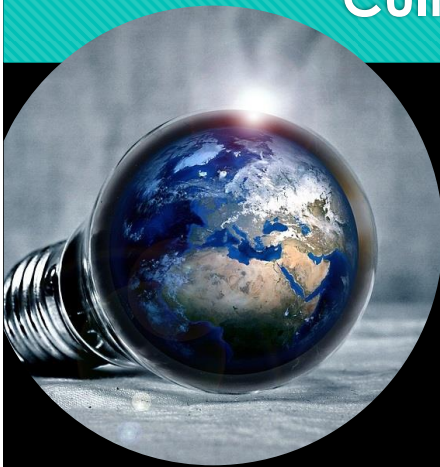
"At the individual level, this means an examination of one's own attitude and values, and the acquisition of the values, knowledge, skills and attributes that will allow an individual to work appropriately in cross cultural situations."

*Denboba, MCHB, 1993*



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## Cultural Considerations



Cultural competence mandates that organizations, programs and individuals must have the ability to:

- value diversity and similarities among all peoples;
- understand and effectively respond to cultural differences;
- engage in cultural self-assessment at the individual and organizational levels;
- make adaptations to the delivery of services and enabling supports.

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## Cultural Considerations

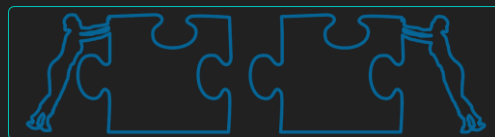
- The same person can belong to several different cultures depending on his or her birthplace; nationality; ethnicity; family status, gender; age; language; education; physical condition; sexual orientation; religion; profession; etc.
- Culture is the lens in which someone views the world.



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## Cultural Considerations

- Becoming more aware of cultural differences as well similarities, can help a GAL communicate with others more effectively.
- **Do not be afraid to acknowledge a lack of understanding and have the child or family explain their culture.**
- However, being from a different culture does not justify abusive behavior!



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## Part V: Communication with Parents & Professionals

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## Building Rapport with Parents

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## In Their Shoes

- Respect the parents even though they may have made mistakes.
- Parents may be defensive, scared, suspicious, guilty, shameful or angry.
- The court process can be long and confusing. For parents waiting to find out what will happen with their children is very stressful. A GAL can help alleviate this by providing updates and letting a parent know your concerns and positions on an ongoing basis.



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## Rapport-Building with Parents



In the beginning of the case the GAL needs to explain their role and how that differs from the caseworker, respondent parent counsel or any other party.



Take away the "unknowns" so that honest communication can occur.



Set the GAL's expectations in the beginning of the case.



Explain the duty of an independent investigation.

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## Tips



- Acknowledge parents at court, meetings, home visits, etc.
- Learn their names and find out how they would like to be addressed.
- Communicate often in various forms.
- Invite them to share any concerns or issues.
- Let them know what is expected and how they can help.
- Allow parents to be involved in some decisions when appropriate.
- Share every success and attempt to remain solution focused.

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## Communication Strategies with Parents & Professionals

- Be respectful. Everyone has a job and role to do.
- Be open to other's positions and listen to their points of view.
- Even when you do not agree state your position using not only the facts but the LAW.



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## Out-of-Court Meetings

- Treatment Provider Staffings
- Team Decision Making (TDM)/VOICES
- Education Meetings
- Mediations
- Parent and Child Interaction



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## Tone and Appearances

- During out-of-court meetings, it is important to stay professional and unbiased.
- Families often categorize every professional together as the "system."
- Avoid the appearance of being in the department's "pocket." Acting too friendly with the respondent parent counsel or caseworker can lead to a parent feeling distrustful and will not allow for open communication.



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## GAL needs to be prepared & informed to discuss:



Purpose/Situation that triggered the meeting.

► Initial meeting after a case is filed is information-gathering for GAL to form his/her theory of the case.



Danger or harm for which the child is **currently** at risk.



Danger or harm for which the child has **historically** been at risk.

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## GAL needs to be prepared & informed to discuss:



Risk factors or complicating factors including past incidents.



What is currently working well?

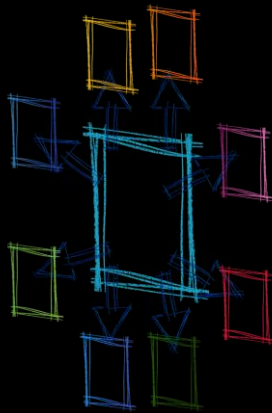


Strengths of the child and family.

► Solution-focused discussions. It is important for the GAL to find strengths in the family and build on those. Every family has something they do well and finding that is crucial.

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## Assessing Services for the Family



- What are the current services?
- Who are the current providers?
- Amount of time the services are offered?
- Analyze each service to determine purpose and effectiveness.
- Are any unnecessary, overloading?

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## Analyzing Each Service For Each Member of the Family



Example: **FATHER**

- Are services appropriate and addressing the issue(s) that brought the case to the court?
- Explain progress or lack of progress?
- Be specific!
- Do not just say that you have concerns. Families deserve for the GAL to be specific.
- Are additional services needed?— and if so, what are they?

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## Other Topics to Discuss



Placement.



Parenting Time.  
(NOT visitation)

Does it need to be  
expanded or  
reduced?



Education.



Medical.



Barriers to return home or remaining home.



Safety Network.



Permanency.

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## Part VI: Now What? How to Determine the Best Interests of the Child



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## Synthesizing the Information

- Putting together all the information you have learned about the child to help form your position and next steps in the case is a painstaking task.
- Every piece of information is important.
- Like putting a puzzle together, the goal now is to make the information clear enough so that you can formulate a best interest recommendation.



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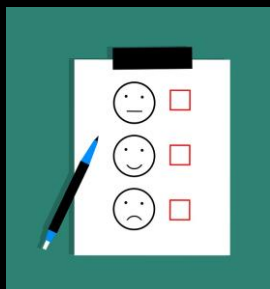
## Best Interest Determination

- The GAL's determination of what is in the child's best interests must include an independent investigation.
- The child must be consulted in an age and developmentally appropriate manner, and the GAL must inform the court of the child's position.
- When appropriate the child should attend court in person.



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## Best Interest Determination



- What happens when the child's position is not aligned with the GAL's position.
- The GAL must still relay what the child wants to the court.
- The GAL can then argue what they feel is in the child's best interest. NEVER surprise the client on the record. The child should be prepared in advance about WHAT the GAL plans to argue and also WHY the GAL is taking a different position.

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## Best Interest Determination



After court the GAL must make time to explain to the child what happened.



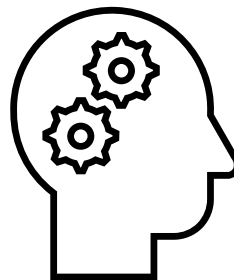
Respecting the child's anger, disappointment, or confusion is essential to maintaining a trusting working relationship.



A GAL may need to do some work in re-building rapport and trust.

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## Part VII: Special Considerations in Delinquency Cases



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## Special considerations for JD youth

- Best Practice: 1 GAL = 1 CHILD. Follow the youth to other jurisdictions
- Detention is not therapeutic and shouldn't be used as a default.
- These are often D&N issues disguised as delinquency.
- What services were in place if at all before the incident?
- If you have history and knowledge of the family, connect with the defense lawyer ASAP.
- If newly assigned, you will be able to get information faster/easier from DHS.
- GAL focus is on child safety vs. DA focus is on community safety. GAL's priority remains the best interest of the youth.
- Engaging parents: more crucial here (parents don't have attorneys like D&N; easy to lost in the system, whereabouts may be unknown).
- Interview: **DON'T** talk about facts of the case! Don't make yourself a witness!
- Keep in mind collateral consequences (e.g., immigration)

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## Feel Free To Consult

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