SKILS (Standards, Knowledge & Insight Leading to Success) is the mandated core training that all new Protective Services Specialists (PSS) receive upon hire with the Office of Children’s Services (OCS). SKILS 162R is the second session of core training for Protective Service Specialist (PSS) at the Office of Children’s Services (OCS). PSS Staff attend SKILS 162R upon completion of SKILS 161R and Intercession A online learning modules. SKILS 162 builds upon the foundation of field experience and focuses on specialized topics.

SKILS 162R is offered through two full weeks of training via Zoom covering child welfare topics pertinent to Initial Assessment, Family Services, and Generalists PSS staff.

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SKILS 162R Online WEEK 1
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WEEK 1, DAY 1

Practice Model Review
Trainers review the OCS Practice Model as it pertains to Investigation and Assessment (I&A) and Family Services (FS) casework activities. Participants review and practice identifying safety threats and protective factors in I&A and FS. Trainers review the process of goal writing. Participants practice writing goals for case planning. Participants explore factors that impact engagement of caregivers and utilize critical thinking to problem solve and determine solutions to factors experienced in their own work.

Trauma Informed Care
Concepts associated with Trauma-informed Care are introduced. Participants identify different types of trauma and discuss intervention strategies, both for the child and for the parent. The science of the brain is explored regarding how the brain responds to trauma and how this effects the behavior of the children and families’ participants work with. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study is reviewed and the importance of ACES and its impact on families is discussed. These topics lead to the importance of trauma informed care as a way of assessing and intervening. Through a video of a woman (Tonier Cain) who talks about her trauma history, homelessness, drug addiction and losing her children to the system, participants learn how to be trauma informed while working with children and families. Participants reflect on how they may explore the impact of trauma on a caregiver utilizing a mock case.

WEEK 1, DAY 2

Substance Use Disorders
Participants gain an understanding of the multiple and complex needs of families involved in the child welfare system who experience substance use disorders. Topics include commonly abused drugs, how addictions affect the brain, screening for substance use, substance abuse treatment, progress and relapse and culturally relevant services. Participants explore bias and stigma of caregivers who suffer from substance abuse and examine the impact of substance use on children.

Mental Health
Trainers discuss the prevalence of mental health treatment needs in Alaska. Specific areas of focus include bias and stigma, with discussion of how these factors impact casework and serve as barriers to treatment. Different ways of defining and experiencing mental health and wellness are discussed.
including concepts from the Traditional Health and Wellness Guide. A range of assessment tools are introduced, including psychological evaluations, neuropsychological assessments and biopsychosocial assessments – with a focus on the purpose and practical application in assessment and case planning.

Participants consider the experience of a family member engaging in both child welfare and mental health systems and they discuss strategies for collaboration to improve service delivery. The course includes a segment on suicide and prevention, including sensitivity to families and communities who have experienced a loss and culturally appropriate behaviors when engaging with Alaska Native people, for whom suicide is experienced at a disproportionate rate.

Commonly diagnosed mental illnesses are reviewed along with co-occurring disorders, with emphasis on evaluation of functioning and behavior as they relate to safety, strengths and needs. The impact on children and youth whose caregivers experience mental illness is discussed, along with appropriate case plan interventions for children.

WEEK 1, DAY 3

Family Violence in Child Welfare
Trainers discuss the prevalence of domestic violence in the U.S. and Alaska and rates of co-occurrence between family violence and child maltreatment. Learners are introduced to the power and control wheel as an assessment tool, and they practice differentiating between situational violence and violence tied to power and control. Particular attention is paid to analysis of this information using the practice model with application to their own cases with coaching towards assessing deeper dynamics of family violence (i.e. avoiding mischaracterization of family violence as “isolated incidents” or “mutual”).

Best practice for screening, identifying, and responding to domestic violence when working with either a child, victim, or batterer is discussed. Trainers emphasize correct identification of safety threats and ties to appropriate interventions. Participants explore and discuss batterer tactics such as gaslighting and manipulative behavior. Participants receive an introduction to strangulation and lethality. Participants practice appropriate communication techniques when engaging family members who are impacted by violence – including normalizing and empowerment for survivors and accountability for perpetrators. Participants discuss the impact of exposure to violence to children, including ACES, and they discuss appropriate interview and case planning techniques.

Discussion is facilitated around the unique roles and responsibilities of victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecution and how survivors experience different systems

Application for Substance Use Disorders, Mental Health, Family Violence in Child Welfare
Participants break out into groups. Using a case example, participants apply information from Substance Use Disorders, Mental Health, and Family Violence in Child Welfare to practice. I&A Application is focused on safety assessment and safety planning.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions:
Initial Assessment
A case example is utilized to discuss and practice information collection to complete a safety assessment. Participants walk through the process of identifying present danger and impending danger. A safety plan is developed utilizing the information from the case example. Participants discuss next steps in the I&A process.

Family Services
FS learning is synthesized with a case study activity where participants apply all of the above concepts to correctly identify safety threats, manage safety and identify the family’s protective factors (strengths
and needs). Participants discuss how this assessment is the foundation of an effective case plan and consider possible goals and services to develop in partnership with the family from the case study example.

**WEEK 1, DAY 4**

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Foundations**
Participants reflect on their individual identities, identify blind spots, recognize biases and improve how they interact with colleagues and respond to families. Participants develop a common language as a foundation for engagement. Participants engage in activities to gain an understanding of and how to respond to micro aggressions.

**Resilience**
Participants discuss and practice strategies to understand and recognize compassion fatigue, burn out, and secondary trauma. Participants examine their own vulnerabilities in the context of secondary trauma, vulnerabilities in others, and develop strategies for self-care and for participating in a healthy work environment.

Participants identify their individual values and explore potential conflict with the organization’s values. Participants are invited to share tips and pointers about staying organized in daily case work activities to learn from each other. Trainers discuss the difference between supervision and coaching. Participants engage in a group discussion about how to have a conversation with their supervisor to practice asking for what they need. Participants write a plan to develop and maintain their resilience and are encouraged to implement the plan when they return to their field offices.

**WEEK 1 DAY 5**

**ICWA**
Trainers review passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act, how PSS staff can implement this policy into their everyday practice and how to build effective partnerships with tribes. Learners expand their knowledge about historical trauma and resilience, engage in critical thinking about the role of OCS in strengthening ICWA, apply key ICWA guidelines to direct practice and develop relationship strategies to improve partnerships between Tribes and the State. When available, tribal partners will participate in a panel discussion and provide insight about their roles and how they can work with OCS to improve family outcomes. The success of Tribal compacting and effective Tribal/State partnerships are emphasized.

**WEEK 2, DAY 1**

**Permanency**
Trainers discuss definitions of permanency- including legal, relational, and cultural permanency. Each of the five permanency goals, recognized in Alaska, are reviewed through a small group activity including the federal timelines for reunification, adoption, and guardianship. Best practice tips for facilitating meaningful family contact between children, parents, and extended family are reviewed.

**Afternoon Breakout Sessions:**

*Initial Assessment*
Participants practice advanced adult interviewing skills. Participants review the information collection standards and conduct a self-assessment of their own casework identifying areas needing improvement, and practice new skills to overcome barriers.

**Family Services**
Trainers discuss maintaining connections for children in out-of-home placement, trial home visits, the differences between adoption and guardianship, working with older youth, and alternate planning.

**WEEK 2, DAY 2**

**Parent Engagement Strategies**
Trainers discuss engaging involuntary clients. Participants learn about and discuss the inherent power imbalance with involuntary clients, as well as ways to navigate that with the caregivers. Participants discuss the stages of change and how motivational interviewing helps create the energy to motivate parents towards change.

Participants watch two separate interviews with parents who have successfully navigated their OCS case and achieved reunification. Parents discuss their perspective and experience with OCS and share what was helpful and what could have been improved.

**Youth Panel**
Current and former foster youth share their experience in the child welfare system through the duration of a case. Participants have an opportunity to ask questions to connect to concepts relevant to independent living, transition planning, youth engagement, and other areas specific to a youth’s perspective.

**WEEK 2, DAY 3**

**Identification of Child Abuse**
Dr. Cathy Baldwin-Johnson presents the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. Participants are provided with examples and discuss safety assessment and decisions around neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Dr. Baldwin-Johnson discusses what is normal to see in children as well as, when PSS staff need to seek additional professional assistance.

**Investigating Child Abuse and Neglect**
The Assistant Attorney General’s (AAG) office presents on the types of evidence and how to document evidence. The AAG discusses investigation and information gathering techniques and documentation techniques that meet OCS standards. Participants learn the importance of corroboration and how to document. The AAG discusses how bias can impact decision making around child safety. The training builds on the presentation from the morning and goes into the subsections of the Alaska Statutes surrounding child maltreatment.

**WEEK 2, DAY 4**

**Worker Safety**
Participants learn safety strategies presented by the OCS Safety Officer and Manager. Pre-operational planning as well as de-escalation and violence prevention techniques are presented.
WEEK 2, DAY 5

Worker Safety
The OCS Safety Officer presents strategies to de-escalate individuals in crisis. And how to ensure their own safety in the field.

Asynchronous Work
Trainees are provided time to complete Asynchronous or Intercession work in the afternoon.