

Standards, Knowledge & Insight Leading to Success (SKILS)

Training Annotated Agenda

SKILS 162

SKILS 162 is the second two weeks of core training that front line workers receive within their first year of hire with the Office of Children's Services (OCS). Workers who have attended SKILS 161 training, Intersession A learning modules on the BLC are invited to participate in SKILS 162. Their time in the field is an important foundation that SKILS 162 builds upon with specialized topics such as Substance Use, Mental Health, and Domestic Violence.

SKILS 162 is split into two full weeks of training. Both weeks cover child welfare topics pertinent to Initial Assessment Specialists, Family Services Specialists, and Generalists.

WEEK 1

Day 1

Trauma Informed Care

Concepts associated with Trauma-informed Care are introduced. Trainees 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 trainees will 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, trainees learn how to be trauma informed while working with children and families. Ms. Cain explains how trauma informed providers changed her life. Trainees reflect on how they may explore the impact of trauma on a caregiver in a training case.

Brokering Services and Teaming

Trainees discuss concepts related to making referrals for services, following up, and brokering connection between families and service providers. Collaborating with families and service providers to build teams is emphasized. Trainees practice brokering services and building teams using a real case example.

Family Contact

Trainees explore and discuss the importance of family contact for both children and parents. The levels of supervision, determining levels of supervision, and resources for supervision guides are introduced and discussed. An activity is completed to assist learners in transferring the concepts in the guides to practical applications. Trainees learn the elements of a family contact plan and practice developing a new a plan. Trainees are instructed on the policy regarding family contact for incarcerated parents. Trainees have the opportunity to discuss and problem-solve common behaviors that arise for many families related to family contact. Discussion of family contact situations explore individual reactions, values and beliefs that affect the way workers may perceive and respond to difficult situations during family contact.

Day 2

Family Violence

This day begins looking at 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, with an emphasis on correct identification of safety threats that can be tied to appropriate interventions. Using resources available through the Capacity Building Center for States and elsewhere, 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. In table groups, the practice model from present danger to case plan evaluation is reviewed and workers are asked to assess, manage and respond to safety threats in a family violence case at each stage. The day is rounded out with a discussion of resources available to assist them in their work at the national, state and community level.

Day 3

Substance Use Disorders

This day is dedicated to helping workers understand the multiple and complex needs of families involved in the child welfare system who experience substance use disorders, which includes the majority of the cases on worker’s caseloads. Topics include: commonly abused drugs, how addictions affect the brain, screening for substance use, substance abuse treatment, progress and relapse and culturally relevant services. The class explores bias and stigma of parents who suffer from substance abuse and we examine the impact of substance use on children. Using a case example, the workers put information from this day into practice by creating appropriate goals, objectives, and activities for a family facing substance abuse including assessing each parent’s Protective Factors. Time is spent on working with the substance abuse agencies and how to build and maintain professional relationships to benefit shared clients. The class discusses effective treatment and what that looks like for different people and the different services available in different communities.

Day 4

Substance Use Disorders (Cont.)

Substance use is continued from the previous day as it’s such a prevalent issue in child welfare. A guest speaker from the law enforcement field presents about the types of drugs, including signs and symptoms that workers are likely to see in the field.

Active Shooter

The Active Shooter video is shown to the class and data is reviewed. The class discusses potential safety in their offices and how to respond.

Worker Safety

Trainees learn strategies to de-escalate people who are in a crisis. Verbal intervention strategies are emphasized but physical non-violent crisis intervention strategies are also learned and practiced. Trainees become certified in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®, a proven strategy for safely defusing anxious, hostile, or violent behavior at the earliest possible stage.

Day 5

ICWA

This day covers why the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed as federal legislation, how OCS workers can implement this policy into their everyday practice and how to build effective partnerships with tribes. Learners will 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 help trainees develop relationships strategies to improve partnerships between Tribes and the State, which involves engagement in courageous conversations. When available, tribal partners will participate in a panel discussion and provide insight to OCS workers about their roles and how they can work with OCS to improve family outcomes. The success of Tribal compacting and effective Tribal/State partnerships will be emphasized.

Week 2

Day 1

Safety Planning, Individualized Case Planning and Evaluation

Case planning is an integral part of helping a parent to achieve lasting behavior change. The day begins by reviewing foundational building blocks to the OCS practice model. An in-depth review is completed of the safety threats and how the 5 protective factors impact the safety threats. We examine and practice developing effective case plans with individualized goals and activities for families. A discussion is facilitated around effective family engagement where workers are encouraged to take a family-centered and strength-based approach in working with parents. The importance of culture when case planning and engaging with families is reviewed. A review of the process of case plan evaluation when a parent has successfully demonstrated behavior change as a tool to move towards a trail home visit and reunification. Finally, we wrap up by discussing the case closure process.

Day 2

Mental Health

The day begins with discussion of the prevalence of mental health treatment needs in Alaska. There is particular attention paid to 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 explored, including psychological evaluations, neuropsychological assessments and biopsychosocials – with a focus on the purpose and practical applications of each in both assessment and case planning.

Workers 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 covered briefly, as well as 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. The day's 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). The day is concluded with a discussion of how this assessment is the foundation of an effective case plan, and they consider possible goals and services that might be developed in partnership with the family from the case study example.

Day 3

Permanency II

The class starts by looking at different 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. The morning is rounded out with an interactive review of permanency goals and concepts.

Youth Panel

Trainees listen as current and former foster youth share in a panel format about their experience in the child welfare system. Trainees have an opportunity to ask questions to connect to concepts relevant to independent living, transition planning, youth engagement, and other topics from a youth's perspective.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions:

Initial Assessment

During the interactive IA workshop, workers have an opportunity to practice advanced adult interviewing skills. This starts by reviewing the information collection standards and an identification of where workers are getting stuck. Workers then conduct a self-assessment of their own casework and identify areas of improvement and practice new skills to overcome barriers.

Family Services

With the FS group, a deeper look at pertinent permanency topics are discussed. This includes 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.

Day 4

Assessing the Alternate Caregivers, Emergency Licensing, and Foster Care Placement

Trainees review best practices for assessing the alternate caregiver in an out of home placement. Both relatives and family foster home placements are discussed. Trainees use information from CPS and criminal background checks to assist them in assessing emergency placements. Trainees connect considerations in emergency placement to questions about concurrent planning.

Separation, Grief, and Loss

Trainees discuss strategies for helping families cope with issues related to placement, separation, and loss. Small group exercises help trainees understand how families and children feel when placements are made. Activities help trainees reflect on how to serve families with compassion and understanding when children and parents struggle. Workers use real case examples to consider strategies for different types of permanent plans.

A panel discussion with resource parents is provided to the class to hear from those who care for children in OCS custody. A discussion about what the needs of resource parents are and how new workers can learn to meet the needs of the children on their case load.

Day 5

Resilience II

The final day together is spent focusing on an important topic- worker resilience. Strategies to understand and recognize compassion fatigue, burn out, and secondary trauma are discussed and practiced. Trainees examine their own vulnerabilities in the context of secondary trauma, vulnerabilities in others, and then

develop strategies for self-care and for participating in a healthy work environment. The book “Trauma Stewardship” by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky is given to each worker to use as a reference when they get back to their offices as well as a journal.

Then we focus on the OCS vision, mission, values, and guiding principles of OCS. Workers spend time identifying their individual values and how these may conflict with the organization’s values. Workers are invited to share tips and pointers about staying organized in daily case work activities to learn from each other. Discussion about the differences between supervision and coaching is facilitated followed by workers role playing scenarios with a supervisor to practice asking for what they need. A seasoned worker will present their OCS “journey” and talk about what helped them stay energized while working for OCS. Finally, workers write a plan to develop and maintain their own worker resilience and are encouraged to implement the plan when they return to their field offices.