A Framework for Practice: The Best Interests Case Practice Model Summary Guide

Department of Human Services

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Program Outline

• Overview of Best Interests Case Practice Model (BICPM)
• The BICPM Summary Guide
• Train the Trainer: Strategies, activities, troubleshooting.

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Introductory Activity

1. What have you had to leave behind to come to this training?
2. Why did you nominate for this role?
3. What questions do you have about the Best Interests Case Practice Model and training it to your staff?
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Considerations in preparing to train

- Room layout
- Getting to know you
- Participant demographics – importance of local knowledge.
- Engaging participants
- Clarifying learning goals and outcomes
- Learning Contract
- “Start as you intend to go on”
- Issues Register

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Considerations in preparing to train

- Multi-media and changing the dynamic of the room keep interest up
- Minimise power point – show slide then hide
- Move from didactic to group discussion to small-group activity
- Reduce whole group feedback from small groups

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What has already been done?

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005:
  "The inherent goal of the CYFA is that the service system engages with the child and family in culturally respectful and helpful ways, which lead to the child experiencing a safe and nurturing sense of belonging and having the opportunity to develop in a positive way"

Best Interests Principles: A Conceptual Overview March 2007
The "old" model...

Learning and Development Strategy

Phase 1 – Preparing for Enactment
Phase 2 – Embedding Reforms
Phase 3 – Ensuring Lasting Cultural Change

Workforce Learning and Development – Phase 1

October/November 2006
- Leadership: Leading the Reforms
November 2006 – August 2007
- Best Interests
- Earlier Intervention and Intake
- Court Orders
- Strengthening Responses for Aboriginal Children and Families
The objective of this strategy

To embed the BICPM in practice, with regional "champions" playing a key role in developing and leading local, ongoing strategies to ensure the BICPM is understood and integrated into all aspects of service delivery across the child and family service system.

Why this training???

- "I hated every minute of training, but I said, "Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion"" - Muhammad Ali

Champions!
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Best Interests - A framework for planning...

- Best Interests Plans
- Best Interests Case Practice Model
- Child & Family Action Plans
- Therapeutic Treatment Orders
- Cultural Support Plans
- Access Planning
- Best Interests Planning - non-statutory
- Family Decision-Making
- Best Interests Planning – post statutory
- High Risk Adolescent Risk Reduction Plans
- Stability Plans
- Permanency Plans
- Reunification Plans
- Leaving Care Plans
- LAC – Essential Information Records
- Care and Placement Plans
- Individual Education Plans
- LAC – Assessment & Action Records

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Best Interests - A model for practice

- A good practice guide
- Incorporating VRF, enhancing existing practice wisdom and knowledge
- A shared framework and a common platform
- A shared language across services
- Purposeful partnership with child, family and community
- Good outcomes for children
- Based on research evidence and on what is in child's best interests
- A culture of learning and reflective practice
- Culturally competent
  - Developmentally, Trauma and Attachment informed

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What we do and How we do it
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Key Message

We can only do the “What” we do effectively if we attend to “How” we do it

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Relationship based practice

- demands emotional intelligence
- an awareness of ‘self’
- vicarious trauma - impact of this work on ourselves both professionally and personally
- supervision and ongoing professional development is essential

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Key Message

The Best Interests Case Practice Model is a process and a way of thinking.
It is not an event.
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**What is it not?**

- A checklist
- A tool to be "done"
- A prescriptive document
- A manualised treatment model
- An additional "task" to be added to people's workload
- All "new" concepts

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**Rights based**

- Child as a holder of rights, entitled to develop safely, enjoy wellbeing and to have a voice
- Development, safety and wellbeing to be viewed cumulatively, over time
- Culture to be protected
- Family entitled to widest possible assistance
- Community has right to a view

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**Trauma and Development**

- Trauma theory is a key consideration in our assessment, planning and intervention
- Practitioners must be developmentally-informed, as well as having a good working knowledge of trauma, attachment and their impact on the child’s development.
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We have key resources available to support us in our understanding of trauma:

- Child Development and Trauma Guide
- Best Interests Principles: Conceptual Overview
- Cumulative Harm: Conceptual Overview
- Stability Guidance paper


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The every child every chance "Child Development and Trauma Guide" has practical and applicable tips and strategies in each section:

"Parent/Carer support following trauma"

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"Trauma and Recovery" (Herman 1992)

1. Establishing safety
2. Reconstructing the Trauma story
3. Restoring the connection between survivors and their community

Like the BICPM, these phases are not linear, they are interdependent and interconnecting.
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**Optimism about Trauma**

As practitioners we must maintain optimism for the child and family.

"It is important to understand that the brain altered in destructive ways by trauma and neglect can also be altered in reparative, healing ways. Exposing the child, over and over again, to developmentally appropriate experiences is the key. With adequate repetition, this therapeutic healing process will influence those parts of the brain altered by developmental trauma"

(Perry, 2005)

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**Trauma and Development**

- The parents of the children we work with are often impacted by trauma themselves.
- What we may label as "difficult", "resistant", "not listening", "inconsistent" may indeed be behavioural indicators of a trauma history.

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**Trauma and Development**

"Remain compassionate to the distress that children and families experience and mindful that anger and resistance usually reflect the hurt and overwhelm that lies beneath"

(Summary Guide p.15)
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**Information-Gathering**

"Any risk or safety assessment or future casework is only as good as the quality of information on which it is based"

BICPM Summary Guide p.17

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**What we do and How we do it**

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Activity: Information Gathering

- What information do we want?
- Why do we want information?
- Who do we have access to, to gain this information?
- How do we gather this information?
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**Information – Gathering: How we do it**

- Information-gathering involves "deep listening" to the family history and needs.
- Information should assist us to not only assess risk and needs, but to paint a picture of the child and family's "lived experience".
- The BICPM asks us to seek information from a systemic, ecological perspective.

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**Tools for Information-Gathering: How we do it**

- Genograms
- Eco-maps
- Timelines

Assist in drawing out the family's story
Assist practitioners to think and act systemically

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**Information-Gathering**

- The Summary Guide provides prompts which help us to clarify what we know, and also what we need to know.
- Information-gathering occurs throughout the life of your intervention, which must be reviewed in the light of new information as it arises.
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Information-Gathering: How we do it

• The how when information-gathering is as important as getting the task done.
• We will have a better chance of true engagement with the family if we attend to the dynamics of our interactions with them.
• Engagement requires understanding of trauma impacts on the child and family.

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What we do and How we do it

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Analysis and Planning
• The BICPM is based on a *professional judgement* model – analysis supports workers to make considered judgements and to be able to clearly articulate the rationale behind these judgements.

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"It is important that practitioners are aware of the problems associated with professional judgement. These problems include a lack of recognition of known risk factors, the predominance of verbal evidence over written, a focus on the immediate present or latest episode rather than considering significant historical information, and a failure to revise initial assessments in the light of new information".

(Munro 1999)

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• Key reference:
  "Effective Child Protection Practice" (Eileen Munro, 2002)

- relevant to all who work with vulnerable children and families, not just Child Protection practitioners.
"Research and experience has shown that there is usually lots of information available about the child and family, however reviews of practice often find that there was insufficient shared analysis to form a good plan”

Summary Guide p. 9

Analysis – Risk Assessment

- The BICPM should not be viewed by practitioners only as a risk assessment tool – it is a framework for practice.
- The BICPM asks us to carefully analyse the information we have, taking into consideration historical, systemic and ecological factors, to inform our risk and needs assessment, as well as our planning, actions and review.

Key message: The BICPM does not become redundant once you have done your risk assessment.

Definitions

- Harm
- Impact
- Vulnerability
- Sustainability
- Culture

Activity: define these terms
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**Harm - Considerations**

What has happened or is likely to happen to the child?

- Distinguish between harm and harm-causing behaviour
- Describe the evidence of harm i.e., injuries, behaviours which indicate harm, developmental delay that has been assessed by a medical professional as non-organic, high-risk adolescent behaviour etc.
- Harm = acts of omission and commission

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**Impact - Considerations**

- What effect has the harm had on the child’s safety, stability and development?
- How severe do you judge this impact to be?

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**Vulnerability - Considerations**

- Considering the child’s age, stage, culture and gender, how do these factors increase/decrease this particular child’s vulnerability to further harm?
- Does the child’s particular temperament/personality impact on their vulnerability to further harm?
- Does the child have a physical/intellectual disability that adds to their vulnerability to further harm?
- Are there socio-economic factors that make this child more/less vulnerable to further harm?
- Do family patterns indicate increased vulnerability to the child?
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**Sustainability - Considerations**

- Where strengths and/or protections have been identified, how do we assess the likelihood that they can be **sustained over time**?

- **Strengths should not be confused with safety**

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**Culture - Considerations**

- Culture is a broadly-defined concept that encompasses a child’s core identity, the **meaning** of that identity to that child and their family, and the wraparound scaffolding that maintains that cultural identity i.e. family/cultural connectedness (extended family, community), family rituals and customs, stories and music etc.

**Key message:** Culture is not a "Yes/No" question to be ticked off!

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**The 5 C's**

- Competence
- Competency
- Constraints
- Connectedness
- Culture

![Diagram of the 5 C's model]

- Current assessment
  - Next steps plan
Analysis – Assessing needs, risk, harm and strengths

The BCPM requires practitioners to consider:

• pattern and history
• the impact of these on the child’s day to day experience, safety, stability, development and wellbeing
• family strengths and demonstrated safety
• effectiveness of our practice i.e. the outcomes

Articulating Your Analysis

"Practitioners need to be able to present evidence to the Children’s Court that shows the effects of harm, and future risks to children’s safety, stability and development. The Court will also want to know the rationale for professional judgements and decision-making, what assistance has been provided to the family and the outcomes of previous interventions, all supported by evidence."

Summary Guide p.4

Key Message

Any plans and recommendations that we develop must clearly and logically flow from our analysis.
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**Activity: Analysis**

**Case Study**

1) Complete the Best Interests Assessment Summary Tool
2) Complete a Goal Plan
3) Review these documents in light of new information

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**Outline Day 2**

- Review
- Incorporating the Best Interests Case Practice Model into daily practice
- Reflective Practice
- Local Best Interests training strategies – where to from here?
- Review program
- Train the Trainer
- Evaluations

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**Review**

[Diagram of a circle with various icons and arrows indicating different steps in a process]
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Action

• Action is not simply making a recommendation to the Children’s Court, or developing a Best Interests Plan, or holding a case conference.
• Action is each intervention you and other practitioners undertake with a child and family.

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Action

• Engagement of the family in an action plan is fundamental to its success
• True engagement is when the family signs on to a common agenda for change.

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Engagement

Real engagement occurs when the family acknowledges the things that need to change, are actively involved in developing a plan to address those changes, and then actually take the steps agreed upon to make changes.
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**Engagement**

“Possibly the strongest indicator of engagement is when you feel you can talk about change without fear of jeopardising the relationship”

(The Bouverie Centre 2006)

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**Action**

“Any action should be based on sound analysis and be purposeful towards engaging the family members in a change process”

Summary Guide p.38

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**Family Group Conferencing and Aboriginal Family Decision Making**

- AFDM and FGC give a strong message of partnership and empowerment to the family.
- AFDM is culturally appropriate
- AFDM/FGC convenors exist in DHS in each region
- We must give greater consideration to engaging absent fathers and their families
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Actions

- Any actions taken must evolve from an analysis of the available information.
- Actions must where possible be taken in partnership with the family and with a professional network/care team.

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Key Message

“Where there is harm, referral to another service will not ensure that the family will engage or that change will occur. There needs to be active casework to ensure that the family engages with the service in a meaningful way.”

(Summary Guide p.29)

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Activity: Action

Participants to reflect on a time when they/their family had to negotiate with a large bureaucracy.
- What made this difficult?
- What helped to make it easier?
- What can you as a professional do to "make it easier" for the families you work with?
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Review

"Review is the continual process of being curious about our effectiveness"

Summary Guide p.45

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Review

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Review

"...We should avoid being carried along by the current flow of how a case is perceived and a case of that type, routinely dealt with. Innovation and change are only possible if we stand back and deliberately use our intelligence and imagination to think of new ways of responding to the family” (Munro 1998)
Review

“Review information frequently. Identify gaps. Be open to changing your initial views rather than interpreting new information in a way that supports a pre-existing opinion of a child or family”

BICPM Summary Guide p.17

Review

“Good practice requires competence and courage about what we do know, but an openness and humility about what we might not know”

Summary Guide

Incorporating the BICPM into our daily practice

• Strength-based
• Outcome-focused
• Engaging of families
• Partnership building
• Empowering
Activity: Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes

- How are you feeling (physically/emotionally)?
- What are you thinking?
- What are you hearing other people saying/what do you believe they are really saying?
- What do you want to say but can’t/won’t?
- What do you think others want you to say?

Reflective Practice

The BICPM requires reflective practice:

“In Victoria there is a strong commitment to strengthening a culture of reflective practice so that the best interests of children are achieved” (p.49)
Reflective Practice

Planning  
Experience  
Reflection  
Observation

Forums for Reflective Practice

• Supervision
• Case conferences
• Peer supervision
• Team meetings
• Individual reflection

Reflective Practice prompts are in the Summary Guide (p.49)
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**Activity: Where to from here?**

What are we doing well?
Where do we need to further develop in terms of Best Interests?
What strategies can I use to promote Best Interests
1) Within my team
2) Within my organisation
3) Across services in my local area
4) Across my region
What networks/resources do I know of that can be a part of this strategy

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**Where to from here?**

Possible obstacles to embedding the Best Interests Case Practice Model?
- Crisis driven; dealing with the urgent, neglecting the important
- We're too busy
- I already act in children's Best Interests, always have.
- Workplace culture
- Hierarchy
- CRIS compatibility
- CSO Registration process
- Resources
- Recruitment and retention

What can we as "champions" do to address these?

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**Obstacles...**
**Program Outline**

- Overview of Best Interests Case Practice Model (BICPM)
- The BICPM Summary Guide
- Train the Trainer: Strategies, activities, troubleshooting.

**Resources**

- every child every chance documents on website:
  - The Best Interests Framework
  - The Best Interests Principles – Conceptual Overview
  - Child Development and Trauma Guide
  - Cumulative harm – Conceptual Overview
  - Stability – Guidance Paper
  - Strategic Framework for Family Services
  - Fact Sheets
- Reference list at back of Summary Guide
- Child Protection Practice Manual

**Resources – Specialist Practice Guides**

**By end 2008**
- Working with vulnerable infants
- Young people 10-14 years with problematic sexualised behaviours
- Children under 10 years with problematic sexualised behaviours
- Engaging parent: assessing and enhancing parenting capability/capacity
- Violence/Abusive people
- Working with families in which someone is abusive

**By end 2009**
- Stability – child and family
- Stability in long term out of home care
- Stability and issues associated with reunification
- Cumulative Harm
Train the Trainer

Troubleshooting:

• Managing the group
• What if you don’t know the answer?
• After-lunch “slump”
• Dominant participants

Train the Trainer

Timing

• Have an agenda including breaks/lunch
• Be clear about times for returning from breaks/lunch
• Don’t wait for latecomers

Train the Trainer

Resources for Trainers:

• DHS Central Office IT Training/Presentation Skills
• CSO participants – can people recommend good local training resources?
Lead the way!!