

HELPING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLIENTS WITH PARENTING & CHILD CUSTODY ISSUES

SECTION TWO

SMALL GROUP PRACTICE FOR FIVE GROUPS USING SCENARIOS #1 - #5

THIS IS SECTION #2 OF THE
GUIDEBOOK AND TRAINING MATERIALS FOR HALF-DAY TRAINING FOR
CASE MANAGERS AND OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS

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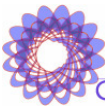
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A Project of the UPENN Collaborative on Community Integration of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities



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SECTION TWO: SMALL GROUP PRACTICE

- Small Group Practice Sheets for Groups 1 – 5, using Scenarios #1 - #5
- Addressing the Key Issues in the Scenarios

IMPORTANT – Give these out AFTER the Small Group Practice is completed!

SECTION THREE – Part 1: HANDOUTS for PARTICIPANTS

- Training Description, Learning Objectives and Curriculum Overview (see above)
- Printed copy of PowerPoint slides (included, 2 to a page)

SECTION THREE – Part 2: HANDOUTS for PARTICIPANTS - These must be downloaded individually from the links below.

- “Custody Assessment Worksheet” www.upennrrtc.org/resources/view.php?tool_id=38
- “Child Welfare & Custody Issues” www.upennrrtc.org/resources/view.php?tool_id=36
- “Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect in Pennsylvania: *A General Guide...*”
www.upennrrtc.org/resources/view.php?tool_id=118
- “Positive Parenting and Child Resilience” www.upennrrtc.org/resources/view.php?tool_id=37
- “Parenting Resources Worksheet” www.upennrrtc.org/resources/view.php?tool_id=178
Use this worksheet to create a list of local resources for parents with psychiatric disabilities, including legal, housing, emergency respite childcare. This can also be used separately as a resource/handout to give clients.



SMALL GROUP PRACTICE FOR FIVE GROUPS USING SCENARIOS #1 - #5

The following scenarios offer us a practical reminder on just how challenging these issues can be:

Scenario #1

A case manager is getting to know an attractive, 25-year old client and learns that she hangs out at a corner bar when she feels lonely on weekends. She claims she mainly goes to find a boyfriend, not to drink, and admits she has had unprotected sex with men she's met. She also admits that she's not sure if she really wants to use birth control because she'd love to have another little girl like her Tonya. After a long battle with child protective services in her county, she lost parental rights and does not know where Tonya is because it was a closed adoption. She feels her heart broke over losing her and she can't get over it.

Scenario #2

A case manager is trying to help a client who is struggling to parent her sons, ages 5 and 3. She tells the case manager that her kids sometimes seem "possessed" because they throw themselves on the floor and use curse words. When visiting her apartment, the apartment seems dirty and disorganized, and the mother admits she has not cleaned it for the last few months because she is too "stressed out" from watching her "bad kids" all the time. The children seem to be of average weight for their ages and do not appear to have any signs of physical abuse, although their hygiene seems poor. They get their mom's attention when they yell, throw things or bother each other. She claims she's never had any involvement or services from the child protective service system, and angrily tells the case manager, "I don't want nothing to do with them!"

Scenario #3

A case manager gets an emergency phone call from a client, saying an investigator from Child Protective Services is at her house because someone reported her for child abuse of her 4-year old daughter. She's enraged that they already questioned her daughter at her daycare without telling her, and now they won't tell her who reported her. She wants to know what she should do or say so they don't take her daughter.

Scenario #4

A case manager has a client who is furious that his 9-year old son was just placed in foster care because he slapped him hard to show him he needs to change his bad attitude. He suspects someone at his son's school called Child Protective Services on him. He almost starts to cry as he pleads with the case manager to help him get his son back as quickly as possible because he grew up in foster care and claims he had foster families who were cruel to him.

Scenario #5

A case manager attends a family court hearing of a 23-year old client, and the judge makes the decision to terminate parental rights due to her failure to meet her goals over the last 15 months. She is hysterical and tells the case manager that the only way she'll be able to cope is to go back to using. She adds that the judge won't be able to stop her from having another baby.



**Small Group Practice
Group 2 - Scenario #2**

1. Choose a recorder/spokesperson for your group
2. Make a list of what the case manager in the scenario below can do to help this client with her parenting issues, including ideas and information provided in this training.

A case manager is trying to help a client who is struggling to parent her sons, ages 5 and 3. She tells the case manager that her kids sometimes seem “possessed” because they throw themselves on the floor and use curse words. When visiting her apartment, the apartment seems dirty and disorganized, and the client admits she has not cleaned it for the last few months because she is too “stressed out” from watching her “bad kids” all the time. The children seem to be of average weight for their ages and do not appear to have any signs of physical abuse, although their hygiene seems poor. They get their mom’s attention when they yell, throw things or bother each other. She claims she’s never had any involvement or services from the child protective service system, and angrily tells the case manager, “I don’t want nothing to do with them!”

3. Recorder/spokesperson reports your group’s ideas to the large group.



**Small Group Practice
Group 3 - Scenario #3**

1. Choose a recorder/spokesperson for your group
2. Make a list of what the case manager in the scenario below can do to help this client with her parenting issues, including ideas and information provided in this training.

A case manager gets an emergency phone call from a client, saying an investigator from Child Protective Services is at her house because someone reported her for child abuse of her 4-year old daughter. She's enraged that they already questioned her daughter at her daycare without telling her, and now they won't tell her who reported her. She wants to know what she should do or say so they don't take her daughter.

3. Recorder/spokesperson reports your group's ideas to the large group.



Small Group Practice
Group 4 - Scenario #4

1. Choose a recorder/spokesperson for your group
2. Make a list of what the case manager in the scenario below can do to help this client with his parenting issues, including ideas and information provided in this training.

A case manager has a male client who is furious that his 9-year old son was just placed in foster care because he slapped him hard to show him he needs to change his bad attitude. He suspects someone at his son's school called Child Protective Services on him. He almost starts to cry as he pleads with the case manager to help him get his son back as quickly as possible because he grew up in foster care and claims he had foster families who were cruel to him.

3. Recorder/spokesperson reports your group's ideas to the large group.



Small Group Practice Group 5 - Scenario #5

1. Choose a recorder/spokesperson for your group
2. Make a list of what the case manager in the scenario below can do to help this client with her parenting issues, including ideas and information provided in this training.

A case manager attends a family court hearing of a 23-year old female client, and the judge makes the decision to terminate parental rights due to her failure to meet her goals over the last 15 months. She is hysterical and tells the case manager that the only way she'll be able to cope is to go back to using drugs. She adds that the judge won't be able to stop her from having another baby.

3. Recorder/spokesperson reports your group's ideas to the large group.



Addressing the KEY ISSUES in Scenario 1

What can the case manager in this scenario do to help this client with issues related to parenting or child custody?

*A case manager is getting to know an attractive, 25-year old female client and learns that she hangs out at a corner bar when she feels lonely on weekends. She claims she mainly goes to find a boyfriend, not to drink, and admits she has had **unprotected sex** with men she's met. She also admits that she's **not sure if she really wants to use birth control** because **she'd love to have another little girl like her Tonya**. After a long battle with child protective services in her county, she **lost parental rights** and does not know where Tonya is because it was a closed adoption. She feels her heart broke over losing her and she can't get over it.*

- 1) **Validate the client's grief and trauma** over losing her daughter and **offer resources** to deal with these issues such as grief/trauma counseling and support groups for parents who have lost parental rights, if such groups exist.
- 2) **Work with the client to see if she has insight into why she lost custody and parental rights of her daughter.** Any behaviors she could identify that led to her custody loss could form the basis of a goal plan around recovery, mental health treatment or substance abuse treatment if she ever wanted to have another child and not risk the trauma of losing custody or parental rights. The goal of parenting could help motivate her to work on her wellness and recovery.
- 3) Since this client expressed ambivalence about birth control, ask if she'd like to **discuss the pros and cons of using birth control** at this point in her life.
- 4) If the client still seems ambivalent or wants to explore different birth control methods, you could **help educate her about different forms of birth control OR help her make an appointment with her gynecologist or family planning clinic.**



Addressing the KEY ISSUES in Scenario 2

What can the case manager in this scenario do to help this client with issues related to parenting or child custody?

A case manager is trying to help a client who is struggling to parent her sons, ages five and three. She tells the case manager that her kids sometimes seem “possessed” because they throw themselves on the floor and use curse words. When visiting her apartment, the apartment seems dirty and disorganized, and the client admits she has not cleaned it for the last few months because she is too “stressed out” from watching her “bad kids” all the time. The children seem to be of average weight for their ages and do not appear to have any signs of physical abuse, although their hygiene seems poor. They get their mom’s attention when they yell, throw things or bother each other. She claims she’s never had any involvement or services from the child protective service system, and angrily tells the case manager, “I don’t want nothing to do with them!”

- 1) Be familiar with your **state’s laws for reporting child abuse and neglect**. Hopefully the case manager’s conclusions that the children were not being abused or neglected were based on knowledge of the state’s laws for what constitutes child abuse or neglect. If you are not sure of your state’s laws, ask your supervisor for training or information in this area, because in many states, people who come into contact with children as part of their jobs are mandated to report child abuse or neglect, and face penalties if they do not.
- 2) **Empathize** with this client about the stress of parenting two young children and running a household.
- 3) **Express concerns** that she seems overwhelmed and stressed out, and that her way of dealing with the stress is to yell when they act up. You could explain how this parenting style might not be working because children love attention any way they can get it.
- 4) **Offer resources** that could help make parenting less stressful and help her learn some parenting skills. Resources could include daycare programs, respite childcare programs, and parenting classes, especially if there are classes for parents with mental illness. In making referrals to resources, the case manager should stress that they are not part of the child protective service system. Such resources are not likely to be accepted by this mother if they are sub-contractors of the child protective service system because of her statement that she wants nothing to do with them. Also, once a case is opened with the child protective service system, this mother may run a higher risk of losing child custody than if the services are provided through an agency that does not sub-contract with the child protective service system.
- 5) Frame these resources as a way to avoid getting so stressed out that she does something that gets reported to the child protective service system. Clarify that **you are trying to help her avoid this possibility, which she stated she does not want.**
- 6) Consider offering her a **referral to agencies where her children could be evaluated to rule out any developmental or behavioral health issues and get early intervention if necessary.** Again, the case manager should stress that these services are not under the child protective service system.



Addressing the KEY ISSUES in Scenario 3

What can the case manager in this scenario do to help this client with issues related to parenting or child custody?

A case manager gets an emergency phone call from a consumer, saying an investigator from Child Protective Services is at her house because someone reported her for child abuse of her 4-year old daughter. She's enraged that they already questioned her daughter at her daycare without telling her, and now they won't tell her who reported her. She wants to know what she should do or say so they don't take her daughter.

- 1) **Validate and empathize with** the client's understandable feelings of anger and fear.
- 2) **Reassure her** that she does have rights and you are going to tell her some steps to take so things go well, but that she has to try **to calm down so she can listen** to what you have to say:
 - a. Let them in.
 - b. Be respectful and careful about what she says and does, because anything she says or does can be used against her.
 - c. Ask for the names and phone numbers, or cards, of the investigators.
 - d. Don't sign any forms, even if pressured.
- 3) Offer the client **phone numbers of any local legal hotlines** or legal assistance agencies familiar with representing the rights of biological parents and encourage her to call immediately for additional legal advice.
- 4) **Prepare her for what might happen**...that if the investigators decide her daughter has been abused, they may take further action like returning with the police, but reassure her that you will help her take steps to get her daughter back as soon as possible if this happens.
- 5) Ask her to **identify any family members or friends she trusts** to take care of her daughter in case they want to temporarily remove her daughter from her home. Encourage her to give the investigators this information if they want to remove her daughter from her home, even if they do not ask her.
- 6) **Keep empathizing and reassuring her** that you will help her take steps to get her daughter back if she is removed, but that the next step is to try and stay calm and focus on what she needs to do next.

(Review the steps again if necessary.)
- 7) **Encourage her to reassure her daughter** about what is happening so her daughter gets the message that even if they have to be separated, her mom will be talking to her and seeing her while she fixes things so she can come back home.

If she does lose custody of her daughter, see the tips in Case Scenario 4 for helping a parent to regain child custody and parent from a distance once a child is removed from their care.



Addressing the KEY ISSUES in Scenario 4

What can the case manager in this scenario do to help this client with issues related to parenting or child custody?

A case manager has a male client who is furious that his 9-year old son was just placed in foster care because he slapped him hard to show him he needs to change his bad attitude. He suspects someone at his son's school called Child Protective Services on him. He almost starts to cry as he pleads with the case manager to help him get his son back as quickly as possible because he grew up in foster care and claims he had foster families who were cruel to him.

- 1) **Validate and empathize with** the client's understandable feelings of overwhelming anger at the system and fear for his son. Emphasize that they will help to motivate him to get his son back as quickly as possible.
- 2) **Reassure him** that he does have rights and you can tell him some steps to take to get his son back as quickly as possible.
- 3) Offer him **phone numbers of any local legal hotlines or legal assistance agencies** familiar with representing the rights of biological parents and encourage him to call immediately to see if he can get an attorney to represent him. Otherwise, explain that he will have a court-appointed attorney, and that he should **educate his attorney about his mental illness** (e.g., he is in recovery, managing his symptoms and receiving treatment if that is the case.)
- 4) Set up a meeting or phone conversation as quickly as possible so that you can **go over the guidelines when he is calmer:**
 - a. Ask if he knows the date of the **next meeting with Child Protective Services (CPS)** to discuss his **family service plan goals** and if he wants you to accompany him to this meeting to support him.
 - b. If he has a **family service plan document from CPS**, ask to see it and **make a copy** so you can know what goals he has to meet and the dates of court hearings.
 - c. Emphasize that he needs to **meet his goals as quickly as possible** in order to get his son back and get him back as **soon as possible**. (You may also want to explain that if he does not meet his goals in a year, CPS can begin proceedings to end his parental rights and his son could be adopted, which is why he should try to meet his goals as fast as he can.)
 - d. Ask if he knows the **date of the next family court hearing** and if he wants **you to accompany him to this meeting** to support him.
 - e. Explain that they may ask him to sign **release forms** that allow your agency and other treatment providers to release confidential information about his treatment, and that he should sign those forms, but **ONLY to release his diagnosis, treatment recommendations and compliance with treatment**. Emphasize that if you speak to them your goal will be to **advocate for him**, and that he can help you do that by cooperating with you and others involved in his treatment.



- f. Emphasize that even though he may be angry, **he should establish a good relationship with everyone involved, including the foster parents, because everything he says and does with others involved can and might be held against him in court hearings.**
- g. Encourage him to **maintain as much contact with his son** as possible and **keep up with visits**. When talking to his son, help him understand what happened and that you are getting help so he can come home as soon as possible.
- h. Encourage him to get a notebook and keep **notes of dates and events** related to his case, if he is capable of doing so.
- i. Emphasize that he should **be prepared for all meetings & court hearings** (e.g., dress appropriately, bring his notebook of dates and events, speak respectfully to others.)

If the client is able to read and comprehend printed information adequately, the case manager can share printed information from the Power Point slide and Community Integration Tool fact sheets included in this guidebook, or share this web site's Child Custody Guidebook for Parents In Recovery from Psychiatric Disabilities when it becomes available.

- 5) Talk to your supervisor about **your agency's policies for releasing information to CPS, responding to subpoenas, testifying in court and other legal matters.**
 - a. Remember that case managers are not "expert witnesses" but provide links to "experts" so you may NOT have to testify in court.
 - b. Progress notes can be subpoenaed.
 - c. Asking a client to sign a consent form for CPS to release confidential information to your agency can be helpful in some cases, but in other cases, threaten the client's and case manager's alliance, and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 6) Be prepared for other "**ethical dilemmas**" such as attending a CPS meeting or court hearing and hearing your client provide information you know or strongly suspect is not true. *It is a challenge for case managers to balance their need to form an alliance with their clients and their responsibility to protect children from harm. Sharing the burden about how to handle such ethical dilemmas with a supervisor or trusted colleague can minimize your anxiety or guilt about how you respond.*



Addressing the KEY ISSUES in Scenario 5

What can the case manager in this scenario do to help this client with issues related to parenting or child custody?

A case manager attends a family court hearing of a 23-year old female client, and the judge makes the decision to terminate parental rights due to her failure to meet her goals over the last 15 months. She is hysterical and tells the case manager that the only way she'll be able to cope is to go back to using drugs. She adds that the judge won't be able to stop her from having another baby.

- 1) Validate and empathize with the client's understandable feelings of grief, pain and fear for her child.
- 2) Reassure her that some adoptions are open, and even when they are not, many children seek to find their biological parents once they become adults.
- 3) Offer resources for grief counseling and support groups for parents whose parental rights have been terminated or similar groups if any exist in your community.
- 4) Strongly encourage her to take advantage of these resources because they can help her cope with the pain and also help her avoid reacting to her grief and pain by doing things that she may regret (e.g., going back to drugs, getting pregnant again before she's ready, having a relapse, etc.)
- 5) If she expresses guilt or regret, work with her to see if she has insight into why she lost custody and parental rights of her child. Any behaviors she could identify that led to her custody loss could form the basis of a goal plan around recovery, mental health treatment or substance abuse treatment if she ever wanted to have another child and not risk the trauma of losing custody or parental rights again. The goal of having another baby and keeping this child could help motivate her to work on her wellness and recovery.