

From COOKIE CUTTER to CUTTING EDGE: Personalizing the Improvement Period

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PROBLEMS WITH THE COOKIE CUTTER APPROACH

Which services do you “always” seem to see offered in nearly every improvement period?

- Psychological evaluation
- Parental Fitness evaluation
- Drug testing
- Supervised visitation
- Individual counseling
- Life Skills
- Parenting
- RDVIC (Batterer and Victim)
- AA / NA Meetings

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PROBLEMS WITH THE COOKIE CUTTER APPROACH

What problems do you see with using the same basic services for every family?

(Text your answer to:

XXX-XXX-XXXX)

(Live Results)

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PROBLEMS WITH THE COOKIE CUTTER APPROACH

- Respondents / children do not receive targeted services that they need
- Respondents receive services that they do not need, do not have the capability to utilize, or may not be ready for
 - Places unrealistic expectations / burdens on Respondents
 - Sets Respondents up to fail when they cannot keep up with excess services
 - Unnecessary services interfere with Respondents' ability to find / maintain employment, housing, and education
- There is a delay in needed services while the family waits on unnecessary assessments
- Waste of judicial, governmental, and community resources
- Discourages Respondent participation in services and MDTs

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PERSONALIZING THE IMPROVEMENT PERIOD

What are some **BARRIERS** to personalizing Improvement Periods?

- Ineffective MDT / No MDT
 - Lack of Respondent participation (Transportation, work/school schedule, visitation schedule, interference with other services or obligations)
 - Lack of Attorney participation
 - Lack of Service Provider participation
 - Hostility between parties
 - Frequency of MDT/Recognition of the need to call more frequent MDTs
- Lack of access to records relating to the family
- Lack of current information about the family
- Lack of communication from the family about its needs
- Scarcity of resources
- Lack of reasonable timeline for implementation of services / unreasonable expectations (it's a long road to recovery)

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PERSONALIZING THE IMPROVEMENT PERIOD

- What are some **WAYS** to personalize Improvement Periods?
 - **Know the family** – as individuals. Know their history, their strengths, their needs, their goals, their limitations, their resources.
 - Accurately assess the **family's readiness** and **ability to change**, and be realistic about which parts of the family's life are unlikely to change
 - **Overcome BARRIERS** to creation AND implementation of an effective improvement period
 - **Increase communication** between all members of the MDT
 - Ensure that **Respondents actively participate in determining which services are needed**. Ensure that they fully understand what they will need to do to "fully participate" in each service and to ensure the safety of the children.
 - **ONLY implement services that are necessary** – no more "cookie cutter" cases
 - **Know the available resources**

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PERSONALIZING THE IMPROVEMENT PERIOD

- What are some **WAYS** to personalize Improvement Periods?
 - Establish a **reasonable timeline** for initiation and completion of EACH service
 - All services don't need to be initiated during the first week of the improvement period.
 - Start with reasonably achievable goals that are each a step toward completion. Goals can be added and plans modified based upon the progress made. New services can be added when each family member is ready to fully utilize each new service.
 - **Plan for setbacks!** There will be relapses. This is expected, and strategies to effectively deal with relapse need to be negotiated, planned, and built into the improvement period process, rather than simply reacting (or overreacting) to relapses or setbacks.
 - Maintain **realistic expectations** about participation in services

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The Doe Family: One Size Doesn't Fit All

FAMILY and COURT INVOLVEMENT

- **John** (age 36) and **Jane** (age 34) are married and have two children:
 - **Jemma** (age 6)
 - **Josh** (age 20 months).
- Jane has two other children from a prior relationship with **Olaf** (age 35):
 - **Jack** (age 16)
 - **Jill** (age 12).
- Jack and Jill live with Jane and John, and visit their father one weekend per month. There is no Order regarding custody or visitation for Jack and Jill, although Olaf is supposed to pay child support, which he does sporadically.
- All of the children appear to be well nourished, reasonably clean, and healthy. However, Jemma has recently been acting out in school and at home, and has been sent home multiple times for hitting classmates and refusing to follow instructions by her teachers and school staff.
- John and Jane stipulated at Adjudication to the following:
 - Educational Neglect (John and Jane)
 - Drug Use Interfering With Their Ability to Parent (John)

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The Doe Family: One Size Doesn't Fit All (cont.)

Education, Housing and Employment:

- John dropped out of high school in 11th grade. He was fired last month from his construction job when he was arrested for possession of marijuana (<15 grams). He has trouble keeping a job more than a few months, but is currently working as a seasonal employee for a landscaping business.
- Jane has a high school diploma and works at WalMart, where she has been a cashier for the past 4 months, after being fired from Teletech for absenteeism when she could not find rides to work or childcare. She is currently on probation at WalMart for absenteeism, and has been told that she cannot call off work again or she will be fired. She has no known history of drug use.
- John and Jane consistently have trouble paying their bills, and are not good at managing money. They have received an eviction notice and must be out of their apartment within 30 days. They have also received a shut-off notice for their electric. They have not applied for HUD.

Mental Health:

- Jane has a history of mild to moderate depression, which is inconsistently treated.
- Olaf has a history of bipolar disorder. He is sporadically compliant with treatment.

The Doe Family: One Size Doesn't Fit All (cont.)

Truancy:

- **Jemma (6)** was absent from school 19 days last year (with 11 of those days unexcused).
- **Jill (12)** was absent from school 23 days last year (with 13 of those days unexcused).
- **Jack (16)** was absent from school 47 days last year (with 39 of those days unexcused).
- Jane says that sometimes Jack refuses to go to school, but her explanation for excessive absences for Jemma and Jill is that they "are sick a lot". The school indicates that Jane and John do not reliably respond to attempts to work with the family regarding truancy.

Drug Use:

- John was arrested last month for possession of marijuana (<15 grams).
- John has a history of abusing pain pills (starting after he hurt his back at work about 5 years ago), but his last two drug tests have come back negative for everything except marijuana.
- A recent referral alleged that he "gets high when the kids are home", that "they let the kids run wild until all hours of the night", and that "they have trouble controlling Jemma".
- Jack and Jill both report having seen John use marijuana "a few months ago" but are vague as to how long ago and how often he uses marijuana. Jill reported seeing John crush pills "sometime in the winter" then "acting kinda weird". The children do not recall ever seeing Jane use any drugs "other than medicine when she gets sick".
- There are no referrals alleging that Jane or Olaf use illegal drugs, although Olaf admits to use of marijuana "occasionally" "when the kids are not around" and Jane admitted to "trying marijuana a few times when I was younger, but I didn't like the way it made me feel."

The Doe Family: One Size Doesn't Fit All (cont.)

Domestic Violence:

- Jane and Olaf have a domestic violence history (including multiple protective orders, all of which were dropped by Jane), but Olaf has only one conviction for domestic violence which was from 9 years ago. There have been no reported domestic violence incidents between Jane and Olaf since they split up.
- There are no allegations that any of the adults have physically abused the children.
- Jack and Jill both report that Olaf “yells at us a lot” and that they don't want to visit with him when he's “in one of his moods”.
- John and Jane deny any domestic violence, although both Jack and Jill report that John and Jane “argue a lot”. Law enforcement has been called to their home twice in the past year for verbal altercations, with no arrest made and no protective order requested.

Supervision:

- A recent referral alleged that “they let the kids run wild until all hours of the night”, and that “they have trouble controlling Jemma”.
- Jack and Jill often have to babysit Jemma and Josh for several hours at a time when John and Jane are not at home, and occasionally overnight.

The Doe Family Improvement Period

- Which issues **MUST** to be addressed in this Improvement Period? (Live Results)
- Which issues **SHOULD** be addressed in this Improvement Period? (Live Results)
- Which issues are the highest priority? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **John** (Dad/Step-Dad)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Jane** (Mom)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Olaf** (Jack & Jill's Dad)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Jack** (16)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Jill** (12)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Jemma** (6)? (Live Results)
- Which services do you recommend for **Josh** (20 months)? (Live Results)
- How should the timeline of services be structured? (Verbal results)

(TEXT YOUR ANSWERS TO: XXX-XXX-XXXX)

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QUESTIONS?
INSIGHTS?
SUGGESTIONS?

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THANK YOU
FOR ALL THAT YOU DO!

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