

# Providing Active Advocacy: Nuts and Bolts

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# ADVOCATE PERSPECTIVE

Advocates gain their knowledge of children and families and understanding of issues that affect those families through understanding the lived experience of the people affected. Advocates define the problems and solutions through the voices and experiences of those affected.

Policies, programs and interventions are created and adapted to respond to those lived experiences.

List of tasks?

Advocate tasks are determined by the family sitting in front of them, not by predetermined services

It's not what you do but why and how you do it

# Role of Advocates in a MDT/CAC

Consistently bring forth the voice of children and families to ensure that the most effective interventions, support and system decisions can be made

Advocates need to be afforded the time and flexibility to connect long term with families and all advocacy support needs to be voluntary

# Role of advocate with the family

Provide a liberating space to help the family access their voice and identify and prioritize their needs

Build connection among family members/ challenge the effects of the abuse

Be a long term support to create greater resiliency within the family through connecting, understanding the family's unique needs and circumstances, assessing and strategizing with the family, provide key information at key times, and normalizing and validating

Walk with the family through the process

# What advocates do in their role

- Understand the family's perspective/provide non-judgmental support (acceptance is not the same as agreement)
- Respond to self identified and prioritized needs of family
- Provide support throughout all of the systems that families interact with in response to the report of abuse or that assist in creating greater resiliency with the family
- Fill in the gaps of the systems, when it is no one else's job

## What advocates do in their role

- Look at the big picture – connect the dots between systems and look for long term impacts on families
- Use their credibility and connections in the system to bring forth the family's perspective
- Learn about the impact of system decisions on family through working with the families
- Work to change systems when they don't serve kids/families well

## What advocates don't do

- Participate in investigative portions of the process - such as observing interviews or collecting evidence
- Ensure compliance of families to system needs – such as checking up on families use of mental health or other referrals for the purpose of reporting to the team
- Assess mental health concerns/trauma

## What advocates don't do

- Assist the team with their tasks – such as relaying important information in the absence of the team
- Administrative functions for the CAC that serve to disrupt connection and trust between the family and the advocate or are not necessary to the work of advocacy

## Putting it in to practice – Day of Interview

- Be with the family – create connection
- Provide information that is useful at the time
- Look for safety or other worries or concerns by the family
- Explain your role and the process (clearly articulating where and when the family will have a voice)
- Make a plan for follow up

## Putting it in to practice – After the interview

What does follow - up look like? How effective is it? Are people calling you back and utilizing you?

# Boundaries – a couple thoughts

## Ethical Questions to Ask Yourself

- Who is benefitting from my actions? How are they benefitting?
- Are there any harmful affects of my actions?
- Am I overwhelmed? Risking burn-out?
- Is this a short term or long term problem?
- Are there other resources that can help?

# Helpful Hints to Creating Boundaries

- Create a common understanding of the role of advocacy within your organization
- Have other advocates to talk to when ethical/boundary situations arise
- Create (or lobby for) flexible policies that allow room for responding according to family need and situations
- Be honest about mistakes

# Preparing Families for Meetings, Court and Interactions with the Different Systems

- Explain as much about the purpose of the meeting and the system as you know, the key people they will be meeting with
- Find out from the family what they hope to get from the meeting. Learn about their concerns, fears, needs and questions
- They can always have an advocate present – how an advocate can be helpful
- Explain their rights (what rights do they already have and what can potentially be taken away)

# Preparing Families for Meetings, Court and Interactions with the Different Systems

- Talk about where they will get choices and where and how they have a voice (many processes including court continue without participation of the family)
- Make a plan of action with talking points, strategize around predicted issues or problems
- Let them know to ask questions first before sharing– this is a great way to find out what people already know or think
- Safety plan if there is potential contact with the abuser

# Preparing Families for Meetings, Court and Interactions with the Different Systems

- Have a plan to meet early or stay after
- Make sure they have childcare, transportation, a meal or anything else that may be a barrier
- Make sure they know about location, parking and what to expect upon arriving (go together)

# During and After Meetings, Court and Interactions with the Different Systems

- Be there (if you can't be there have another support person ready to accompany)
- Ask questions and clarify statements as appropriate for the setting
- Make sure family gets their questions asked and answered
- Ask for breaks as needed
- Sit between the offender and the family, identify safe places for the family to be
- Address all safety concerns moving forward – Perpetrator access to information of children, insurance billing, address and phone number confidentiality



# During and After Meetings, Court and Interactions with the Different Systems

- Have a plan at the end of the meeting (summarize meetings – next steps and who is going to do them, time frames)
- Put things in writing, ask for things in writing
- Ask the family about their experience
- Keep up on dates and times
- Pro-actively ask to meet attorneys or others present at court

# Strategies for Active Advocacy

- Don't front load potential services they don't need more to do, families need help doing what they are already required to do, get to know the things they will have to do BUT frontload contact and support
- Be the common connector between people – minimize miscommunication and gaps
- Ask for meetings in person or on the phone
- Keep and organize with the family all paperwork they receive

# Strategies for Active Advocacy

- Have parents ask for your accompaniment if you are being left out of certain environments
- Offer ways you can help to systems professionals
- Assert yourself as the equal of the systems professionals and lend your credibility to the family
- Get to know MDT members
- Get to know the other systems rules, role and purpose
- Do not explain decisions made by system professionals, have them explain it – Do not make excuses for system gaps or issues

# Tips for Advocates

- Check court calendars and jail rosters regularly
- Check in with systems professionals as well as families. If you haven't had contact with a family this can be a good lead in to a conversation
- Keep a list of contact numbers for professionals working with a family
- Develop an easy process for releases of information when providing intensive advocacy
- If it is around a meal time - eat something or bring a snack

# Tips for Advocates

- Advise families to:
  - Not sign anything before reviewing it with another person
  - Not agree to anything on the spot without a chance to think through the impact or understand what is happening
  - Ask lots of questions, clarify and ask for breaks or more time to think about something
  - Ask for all of what they need and want
  - Speak to the impact decisions have on their child and family

# Tips for Advocates

- Work with families in groups (identify common issues among families, build support and connection between families and efficiently provide analysis and strategy for families)
- Identify informal supports and help teach those support people how to advocate, identify formal supports and build a web of support around the family
- Always have pad of paper and pens handy
- Get familiar with judges clerks, bailiffs, clerks for the court and attorneys including defense attorney's
- Know statutes

# What impact can advocates have when they are able to fulfill their role on the MDT/CAC

- Greater support for children and families
- Greater stability, resiliency and participation in the process
- Better communication and connection among systems – professionals can better do their jobs
- Better outcomes in investigation and prosecution as well as healing and treatment
- Better skills for families to advocate for themselves and children – long term
- Changes to systems that aren't working so that they can work for families in the future

# First Witness Advocacy Training Dates Duluth, MN

- 3 Days of core advocacy training for advocates working in CAC's or with CAC's. Meets 8 of 9 advocacy training requirements for NCA accreditation
  - May 2-4, 2018
  - October 3-5, 2018
- 2 days of training on the Co-Occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse. for advocates of all backgrounds
  - October 25 and 26, 2018