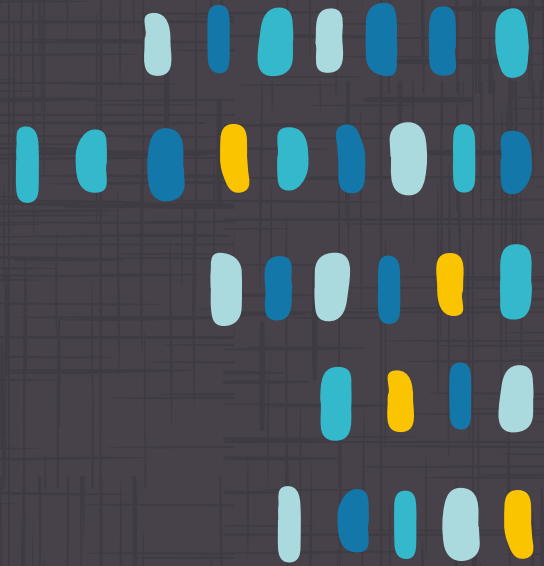




Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities



Intensive Family Support Approach

Prioritising families most vulnerable to
their children entering out-of-home care,
for intensive service provision

2017



Acknowledgement of Country and Peoples

The Department of Communities acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as traditional custodians of this land. It pays respect to their Elders past, present, and future.

It recognises the long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and acknowledges that the past is not just the past. The past, the present and the future are, as they always are, part of each other – bound together.

The term Aboriginal is used throughout the document and is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





Background

The preferred way to safeguard and promote a child's wellbeing, as outlined in the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (the Act), is to support parents and families to care safely for their child. Family support aims to improve family functioning and can form part of the action taken to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect where families are experiencing problems.

In the Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy¹ (EIFS Strategy), the Department of Communities (the Department) recognises that earlier and more intensive engagement and intervention provides the best opportunity to effectively support and benefit children and families. This type of intervention will also help to reduce the likelihood of children entering out-of-home care.

The issues that lead to children needing out-of-home care are multi-faceted and inter-related. A multi-agency response requires a range of universal, secondary and tertiary human services programs and strong partnerships with the community services sector. The importance of these partnerships and community participation to facilitate long term and sustainable improvements to the wellbeing of children and families cannot be underestimated. This provides the foundation for the Intensive Family Support Approach (IFS Approach).

To create good outcomes for vulnerable families and children, the Department applies Western Australia's Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework (Signs of Safety). The work carried out by practice staff is underpinned by the principles and disciplines of Signs of Safety as they affect assessment and planning, safety planning specifically, and working with children. Furthermore, the commitment and way forward for all of the Department's work in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, is embedded in the Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework 2016-2018 (ASPF). The ASPF aligns with the priorities of the EIFS Strategy and the Department's IFS Approach.

The IFS Approach explains how, through the establishment of Intensive Family Support teams (IFS teams) in the districts, the Department will prioritise those families most vulnerable to their children entering out-of-home care, and provide intensive service provision to avoid this action being taken where safe to do so.

The IFS Approach has been informed by a number of reviews² and consultations, including the District Structural Review project (DSR Project), which realigned how the district teams are structured, and how services are delivered, with a key focus on intensive support for families with complex and multiple needs.

¹ <http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Building%20Safe%20and%20Strong%20Families%20%20Earlier%20Intervention%20and%20Family%20Support%20Strategy.pdf>

² Reviews include the District Structural Review, Berry Childhood Institute Review of the Best Beginnings Program



The IFS Approach captures the work previously delivered under the former Family Support (Responsible Parenting) Framework and broader work of the district Child Centred Family Support teams. The changes are underpinned by the key priorities of developing better services for Aboriginal families and children, and developing a suite of options that can better meet the needs of earlier intervention services to families and to prevent children from entering out-of-home care.

At A Glance	
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and Community Services Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2015• District Structural Review begins with an audit of operating models across all districts
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amendments came into effect from 1 January 2016, including those that enter responsible parenting agreements into a new part of the Children and Community Services Act 2004.• Berry Street Review• District Structures and Service Delivery Realignment project• Launch of the Aboriginal Services Practice Framework• Launch of the Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy and cessation of Best Beginnings service and Responsible Parenting Services.



Spectrum and integration of Family Support

Families dealing with multiple challenges such as family and domestic violence, homelessness, parental mental health issues and substance misuse require support to overcome issues and live safe and productive lives. The issues are complex and often intergenerational and may lead to poor life outcomes including involvement with the statutory justice or child protection system, and children entering out-of-home care.

For these families, State government departments and community service organisations provide a range of social and family support to the community across a spectrum of primary, secondary and tertiary services in health, early childhood and education. Current work toward the development of a shared outcomes framework will maximise and support the impact of these programs and partnerships.

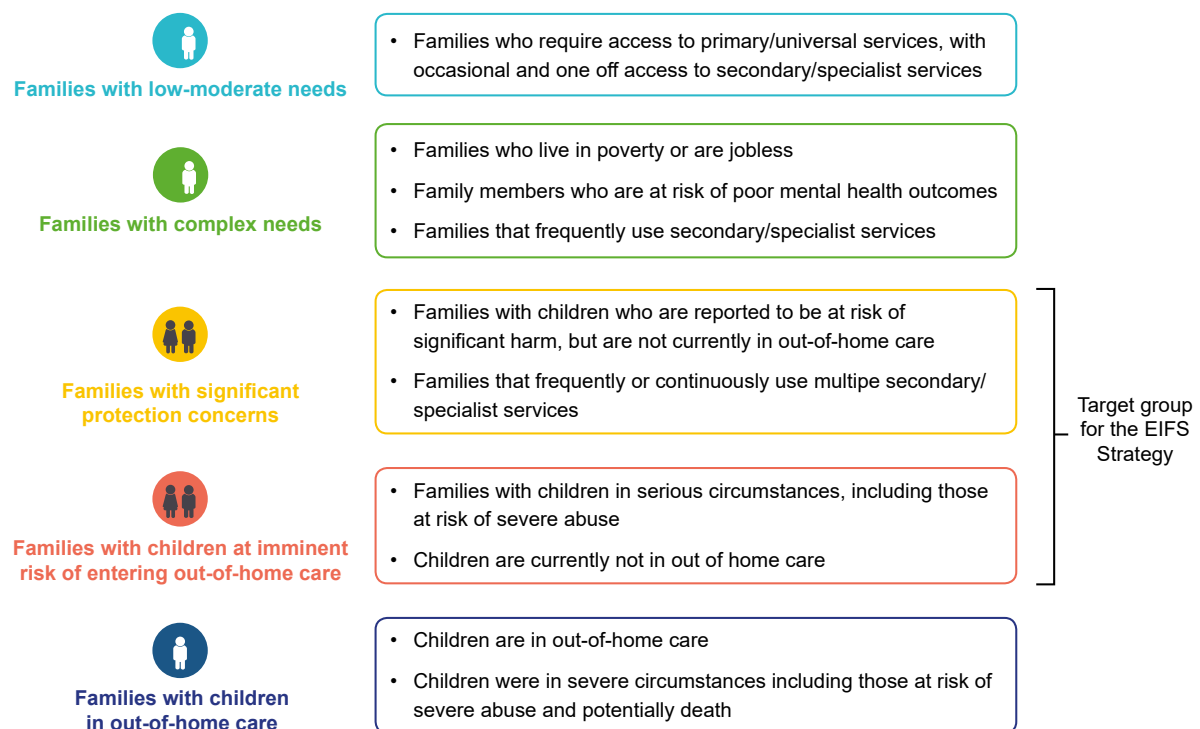


Figure 1 – Spectrum of earlier intervention and family support

The Department delivers and funds a broad range of intensive services which assist families with child protection concerns to build and strengthen their capacity to meet the needs of their children. Figure 1 above highlights the focus area of family support provided and the focus areas for the Department in the delivery of services to the community.

Under the EIFS Strategy the Department is focussed on building on the good practice and strengths of existing service delivery to provide more targeted intensive family support to 'hard to reach' families and children dealing with more extreme issues, through both Department delivered and contracted services.



A priority action of the EIFS Strategy was the establishment of IFS teams in districts to focus on preventing the need for children to be removed from their families.

For an impact to be made on the life trajectories of children and families, service provision needs to be of sufficient duration and intensity to build a family's capacity to address and function with the complex and multi-faceted issues contributing to the dysfunction or disadvantage.

The intensity of intervention should apply to both frequency and duration of contact, and the variety of services provided to the family. This should be balanced with an understanding of the extended and stable contact required with the Department, to allow the family to build relationships and trust with Department staff to work together to identify the family's needs.





Engaging with Aboriginal children and families

Given the Department's focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families in the child protection system³ and the structural inequality⁴ Aboriginal people experience more broadly, a safe and effective service system must be culturally responsive and competent.

- To work effectively with Aboriginal children and families it is important to acknowledge past trauma, history and experience which impacts on children and families and their willingness and ability to engage. Aboriginal families engaged with the Department's intensive family support response (as per the spectrum) are often experiencing complex and multi-faceted issues; often have a history of dealing with several government departments; and often on an involuntary basis.
- Changes in family functioning for Aboriginal families are rarely linear. A period of improvement may not indicate that issues have been resolved; with periods of in/stability likely to occur due to a range of external and complex factors. Persistence and patience may often be required to establish initial engagement with Aboriginal families. Building mutual trust and ongoing support of the relationship facilitates better outcomes for the families.
- The ASPF refers to the Department's commitment to work to improve outcomes by partnering with Aboriginal children, families and communities in ways that are informed by Aboriginal culture; that are supported and led by Aboriginal communities; and recognise the legacy of past policies and practices.
- The creation of the Senior Child Protection Worker/Senior Field Officer – Aboriginal Intensive Family Support role across all districts affirms the Department's commitment to maximising resources to better engage and support Aboriginal families most vulnerable to their children entering out of home care.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle recognises the importance of connection to family, culture and country. Family engagement, participation, and culture is integral to safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children, needs to be embedded in practice⁵.

³ Department for Child Protection and Family Support 2015-16 Annual Report – Significant Issues impacting the Agency

⁴ Structural inequality is defined as a condition where one category of people are attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities.

⁵ SNAICC – Best Practice for implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle February 2017.



Intensive Family Support Teams

The establishment of IFS teams was a recommendation of the DSR project – in the development of consistent district processes across all regions to align practice and service delivery functions with the Department's strategic priorities and areas of focus.

Strategic Plan 2016-19

Outcomes

- Families and individuals are assisted to overcome their risks and crises, are kept safe and are diverted from the child protection system (Intensive Family Support Teams)
- Children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm. (Child Safety Teams)
- Children and young people in the CEO's care receive a high quality of care and have much improved life outcomes. (Care Teams)

Underpinned by the principles and disciplines of Signs of Safety, the IFS team provides a flexible approach, tailored to the needs of parents and caregivers with high levels of complex and multifaceted issues that are impacting on the safety and wellbeing of their children.

The IFS team centres on a Child Protection Worker⁶ working with the family to build safety, through the engagement of specialist roles, services and tools (including statutory tools) from across the team, tailored to their cultural background, the age and developmental needs of the individual children, and family as a whole.

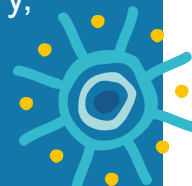
The team works alongside families using their strengths to develop strategies, skills and plans to keep their children safe. IFS teams work with parents to help them keep their children safely in their home, in their community and to prevent them from entering out of home care.

⁶ 'Child Protection Worker' will be used throughout the document to refer to child protection staff responsible for case management. It encompasses the various roles that may be an in an IFS team, specifically Child Protection Workers, Senior Child Protection Workers and the newly created Senior Child Protection Worker/Senior Field Officer – Aboriginal Intensive Family Support.



There needs to be consideration to barriers impacting on engagement with all families we work with – including families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

It is important that efforts are made to increase knowledge on the family and community connections. Where necessary, workers should seek advice from internal or external advisors who may have knowledge of the family and community connections and may assist with engagement.



The IFS Approach focuses efforts on services that complement child protection work to ultimately prevent further statutory involvement if possible.

Referrals to the IFS teams are therefore targeted and may include:

- Families where safety and wellbeing assessments (SWAs) have been substantiated for significant harm or likelihood of significant harm, but intervention action is not recommended. Intensive work with the family is required to increase the family's capacity to manage a safety plan and to reduce risk.
- Families with multiple contacts with the Department or have been identified as "at risk" as an outcome of multi-agency collaborative meetings for example through District Leadership Groups (Regional Human Services Manager Forums), Children at Risk Meetings, Youth At Risk Meetings, Prolific Priority Offender Management Meetings.

These families often present across several agencies for a range of issues. There may have been several periods of contact with the Department and SWA's which have been unsubstantiated. Changing the way we respond to their often episodic and crisis contacts should reduce demand long term and more importantly improve the safety, wellbeing and outcomes for the families.

If the case is referred to the IFS team following an initial inquiry but prior to a SWA being undertaken, a draft danger statement/s and safety goal/s must be completed at a minimum.

Under the new structures, the IFS teams also include the delivery of the Best Beginnings Plus (BB Plus) and Parent Support services. BB Plus Workers will deliver BB Plus⁷ where babies /infants are at risk of entering care; with Child Protection Workers to deliver Parent Support services in a whole of family way.

⁷ BB Plus has been revised in line with the EIFS Strategy and the Department's commitment to service the most vulnerable children and families, to better work with Aboriginal children and to prevent children from entering out-of-home care. BB Plus is now solely delivered by the Department.



Key elements of the IFS teams include:

- Stronger focus on working with Aboriginal families, earlier and in a culturally responsive way, to divert children from entering out-of-home care. Strategies to facilitate family participation in all child protection decisions affecting them are integral to working with Aboriginal families in the IFS teams.
- Integration of tools from the Family Finding model⁸, to help staff develop strategies to locate and engage family members, and develop natural support networks. With a particular focus on Aboriginal children, the implementation of this model recognises the right of the child to be brought up within their own family and community if possible. Where a child cannot be brought up by their own family and community they have a right to know them and maintain meaningful connections.
- Time limited support for 6 - 12 months depending on the needs of the child(ren).
- Monthly review meetings of all IFS cases through Multidisciplinary Case Consultations (MCCs).⁹

Key functions of the IFS team

The IFS team comprises of Child Protection Workers (including the newly created Senior Child Protection Workers/Senior Field Officer – Aboriginal Intensive Family Support), BB Plus Workers, Parent Visitors and Youth and Family Support Workers.

A collaborative team approach is required to work with families towards sustained change. However, overall case management responsibility in the IFS teams is held with the Child Protection Worker

⁸ <http://www.familyfinding.org/>

⁹ MCCs are targeted consultations attended by relevant professionals (Department staff and sometimes external if required) to determine the best differentiated response for a family that presents with multiple concerns to the Department based on danger statements and safety goals. The initial MCC is held within the the first 30 days of a family's involvement with the IFS team to determine direction of a case. Following this, MCCs will provide a mechanism for reviewing cases on a monthly basis, to avoid case drift, and/or to inform decision making at 'critical' points in the life of a case. It is an important element of this formalised review process that professional perspectives, rationales and decisions are clearly documented in the MCC template.



Child Protection Focus

Child Protection Workers are responsible for:

- Increasing child safety through intensive in-home support services and case management.
- Strengthening families capacity to provide safe care for their children in ways that are:
 - practical and flexible;
 - in alignment with the Department's case plan for the family, and;
 - responsive to the family's cultural needs.
- Monitoring and co-ordinating (as required) relevant services and community resources, in accordance with the case plan.

Senior Aboriginal Child Protection/Field Officer positions will undertake case management and work in partnership with identified at risk families. They may also assist other workers in the IFS team to improve service responses for Aboriginal children and families.

Workers support families to create a safety plan that will help make sure the children stay safe. This includes working with the families to recognise and build on what they do well, and support parents in getting the help they may need to address issues such as family and domestic violence, drug or alcohol misuse, or mental health issues.

IFS service delivery integrates the Family Finding model, which comprises of strategies, principles and skills that aim to safeguard children and young people's safety and wellbeing through strengthening family connections and support networks. The more a family is able to build support and resilience within their own network, with support from the Department, the greater the likelihood that child protection involvement will be reduced.

- Quality family decision making processes will produce plans that are owned and supported by family and community.
- Family based solutions to child protection issues reduce further child protection intervention.

Parent Support Service

Child Protection Workers in the IFS team engage with hard to reach families with school aged children and young people involved in criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and truancy (provided truancy is in combination with criminal and/or anti-social behaviour).

The focus of Parent Support's service is on increasing the capacity and responsibility of parents in relation to their child's behaviour.

The Child Protection Worker Officer provides in-home support to parents, helping



them develop strategies to gain control of the young person's behaviour, and developing Responsible Parenting Agreements (RPAs) to work together to improve the young person's opportunities in life. RPAs are used to help parents identify their children's problem behaviours, establish goals and develop parenting skills to exercise appropriate control over their children.

A RPA is developed or attempted with every family opened to Parent Support and must be informed by the Child Environment Matrix. A Child Behaviour Matrix must also be completed for all Parent Support Cases.



Responding to criminal, anti-social and truancy behaviour requires a multi-agency approach. Strong partnerships are in place between the Department, the Department of Corrective Services, Department of Education and Western Australia Police at senior and service delivery levels.

Best Beginnings Plus

The BB Plus Worker delivers the BB Plus program¹⁰ under the case management of an IFS Child Protection Worker and in accordance with the BB Plus Program Model and Practice Guide.

The service complements statutory child protection work by providing a specialist, parallel program that focuses on the needs of infants through building family's skills in parenting, child development, attachment and family functioning as well as child safety. Caregivers may be experiencing a range of issues including family and domestic violence, mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse.

The BB Plus Worker provides practical support and culturally sensitive information that acknowledges Aboriginal child rearing practices. Workers aim to support families around parenting infants safely and strengthen the bond with their child.

Where appropriate, BB Plus Workers may commence engagement with families through pre-birth planning.

Additional In-Home Support

The Parent Visitor and Youth and Family Support Worker (YFSW) provide additional practical support in the IFS teams.

Through the provision of in-home practical parenting support for families (such as setting up routines and role modelling good ways to spend time with children), and helping families link into pro-social activities, community services and other supports, Parent Visitors work across all services within the IFS team.

¹⁰ Refer to Best Beginnings Plus Program Model and Practice Guide



The YFSW provides culturally appropriate in-home support to Aboriginal families and with a focus on increasing the safety and wellbeing of youth. This work is targeted, innovative and includes partnering with other agencies. YFSWs are located within IFS teams but can also work across the Child Safety and Care teams, through consultative, co-working and mentoring activities.

There are a range of culturally appropriate tools and strategies which can be utilised by staff in the IFS team to create safety and an appropriate care response for children.

This includes Signs of Safety Mapping and Tools, Child Environment Matrix, Child Behaviour Matrix, Responsible Parenting Agreements and the Family and Domestic Violence Assessment Toolkit. Workers may also consider Child Protection Income Management or Liquor Restricted Premises applications.

Given the collaborative team approach, it is important to consider who will administer tools as part of the development of the case plan.





Multidisciplinary Case Consultations

When a case is referred to the IFS team for support, a multidisciplinary case consultation (MCC) will be held within 30 days, to determine the direction of the case.

MCCs are targeted consultations attended by relevant Department staff which may include Team Leaders, Child Protection Workers, Aboriginal Practice Leaders, Psychologists, Senior Practice Development Officers, Family and Domestic Violence Workers, Education Officers, and Legal Support Officers. It may also be appropriate to include professionals from other agencies/services working with the child.

Initially the MCC will be used to determine the best differentiated response for a family that presents with multiple concerns to the Department based on danger statements and safety goals. This is to help identify who on the team is best placed to be involved with the family and assess what kind of case trajectory is needed to create safety for the children. The integration of the formulation exercise from Family Finding provides an informative and comprehensive start to meaningful case consultation and planning.

Following this, MCCs will provide a mechanism for reviewing cases every 30 days, to avoid case drift, and/or to inform decision making at 'critical' points in the life of a case. It is an important element of this formalised review process that professional perspectives, rationales and decisions are clearly documented in the MCC template.

At any point in the life of a case, only relevant staff are required to attend the MCC. As the case progresses and different issues arise, only those pertinent to the current issues and the decision making process moving forward, are required to attend the MCC to document their perspective.

During the monthly review process and at the cessation of the 6 - 12 month IFS service period, a MCC will inform decision making regarding case closure or what further action may need to be taken.



Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community services sector intensive family support provision

The EIFS Strategy aims to align and coordinate government services to have a local and shared role in identifying families who require intensive earlier intervention. Shared responsibility and collaborative effort of government agencies and community sector services, including Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs), needs to be increased to prevent these families requiring intrusive and expensive tertiary intervention.

To address the need to provide culturally responsive services for vulnerable and at risk Aboriginal children and families, a proactive and targeted Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Strategy (ACCO Strategy) has been developed. The implementation of this strategy is central to other key reforms in the Department and will facilitate an increased opportunity for ACCOs to deliver contracted child protection and earlier intervention and family support services to their communities.

Under the EIFS Strategy, new service arrangements to be delivered by ACCOs and the community services sector are expected to commence between January and July 2018 and will include:

- Aboriginal in-home support services;
- expanded and enhanced Family Support Networks in the Perth metropolitan area to provide case management and coordination for families vulnerable to involvement with the child protection system;
- re-aligned funded intensive family support services; and
- re-aligned funded youth services to focus on the families of the most vulnerable to having contact with the Department, having their children enter out-of-home care and/or the youth justice system.

District Leadership Groups (Regional Human Service Managers Forums) will be structured to more formally identify and refer vulnerable families for intervention.



Key Partnerships

In April 2017 the State Government announced Machinery of Government changes in the public sector, aimed at creating collaborative departments focussed on whole of government objectives and delivering services in a more efficient and effective way. The new Department of Community Services will include the Department along with Housing, Disability Services Commission, Department of Aboriginal Affairs Regional Offices, Regional Services Reform Unit, Youth Justice and functions under Communities including youth and multicultural interests, volunteering and seniors.

Currently, the Department partners with key government and community sector agencies to provide family support in response to a number of social issues. This work is operationalised through interagency protocols and contractual arrangements, with some relevant areas outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Family support partnership agencies and sectors

Family issues	Agencies
Alcohol and other drugs	Drug and Alcohol Office and community sector service agencies
Mental health	Mental Health Commission, WA Health and community sector agencies
Juvenile justice and anti-social behaviours	WA Police, Department of Corrective Services and Department of Local Government and Communities
Domestic violence	WA Police and community sector service agencies. The Department also convenes the Family and Domestic Violence Governance Committee and the Family and Domestic Violence Advisory Network that comprises various government and community sector agencies responsible for responding to family and domestic violence.
Education and truancy	Department of Education, independent schools and private schools
Housing and homelessness	Housing Authority and community sector service agencies
Disability	Disability Services Commission, community sector service agencies and Commonwealth agencies



Family issues	Agencies
Health	WA Health and community sector service agencies
Aboriginal community	Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, community sector service agencies and Commonwealth agencies

Learning and Development

Comprehensive learning and development structures are in place to support staff of the Department and funded community sector agencies to respond to the complexity of issues experienced by the families they work with.

The Department's learning and Development Centre has commenced a review of learning pathways. The redevelopment of the Child Protection Learning Pathway will include a new orientation program focussed on intensive family support and specialist programs in Signs of Safety, infant social and emotional wellbeing and family domestic violence.

Related References

- Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework
<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Policies%20and%20Frameworks/SignsOfSafetyFramework2011.pdf>
- People Development Framework
<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Organisation/Documents/People%20Development%20Framework%202015.pdf>
- Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework
<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/ABORIGINAL%20SERVICES%20AND%20PRACTICE%20FRAMEWORK.pdf>
- Family Finding: Why Children Need Families and How to Find Them. Model, tools and resources
<https://cpfs.moodle.com.au/course/view.php?id=881>
- Building Safe and Strong Families - Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy
<http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Building%20Safe%20and%20Strong%20Families%20Earlier%20Intervention%20and%20Family%20Support%20Strategy.pdf>
- Casework Practice Manual Entry 1.2 Signs of Safety – Child Protection Practice Framework
<http://manuals.cpfs.internal/CPM/SitePages/Procedure.aspx?ProcedureId=266>
- Casework Practice Manual Entry 13.3 Parent Support – Referral and Intake
<http://manuals.cpfs.internal/CPM/SitePages/Procedure.aspx?ProcedureId=157>