



# ND Child Welfare Supervision

## HOW SUPPORTING TRANSFER OF LEARNING CAN INCREASE RETENTION OF WORKERS

When it comes to personnel, supervisors in child welfare are looking for something similar during each interview: someone that can do the job. Once hired, we seek to enhance their knowledge or for them to learn new information that can effectively be transferred into practice in the work setting, by sending them to training. But, no matter how talented or engaging the trainers, if the employee isn't prepared for the training, or does not apply what they learn when they return to the agency, then the agency has effectively lost most of the benefit they hope to gain from the training itself. In fact, according to the Center for Leadership Studies, within the first hour of post training, learners forget about 50% of the content. One month later, content retention could be as low as 10%. This is typical of workers that aren't prepared for training, don't come to training with the intent to learn or don't apply what they learn once they return to the office, leaving workers unprepared and lacking the skills necessary to do the work. Couple that with the impact of the "Great Resignation," where millions of workers across all walks of life have left their jobs in 2021, retaining workers, workers that are confident and competent is more critical than ever in child welfare. This is where transfer of learning becomes imperative.

While COVID has clearly made an impact on why workers are leaving their jobs, we also know why some stay in their jobs. Workers that feel supported by the leaders within the agency and that are confident within the work that they do, tend to stay with their employers. When we can engage our workers by showing them that we want them to succeed, that we want them to be confident and competent in the work that they do with families, and that we also have a stake in the game, we retain workers that can do the job.

# WHAT IS TRANSFER OF LEARNING?

Now that I may have your attention, what is transfer of learning? According to one definition provided by Wikipedia: *"Transfer of learning occurs when people apply information, strategies, and skills they have learned to a new situation or context. Transfer is not a discrete activity, but is rather an integral part of the learning process."* Positive transfer implies that learning in the training setting resulted in a better performance on the job.

There are many theories about transfer of learning but there are some pretty consistent thoughts in the child welfare field about what positively supports the transfer of learning from knowledge to skill and what tends to prevent that from taking place. First and foremost, we all play an important part in how successful that worker is in transforming what they learned into practice. At the UND Children and Family Services Training Center we are working on new ways not only to enhance this through communications with those that attend training and their supervisors, but also in how we increase the participation during the training itself. We know that those that attend training are more likely to retain information if they are actively talking about it and actively incorporating it into their work.



## THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER OF LEARNING

Transfer of knowledge does not automatically equal skill. This transformation from knowledge to skill takes practice, and lots of it. Below are ways that you can positively reinforce knowledge into skill.

1. Encourage continual learning within professional development by helping staff access training that meets their needs. Talk with workers and observe workers in action, where are their strengths, where do they need more support or additional training?
2. Arranging for coverage of their caseloads while they are in training. Missing training due to phone calls, providing transportation, and crisis interventions take workers away from the training that they may be required to attend. Avoid calling, emailing, or texting the worker while they are in training. The most important piece is to convey to the worker that training is a priority. Their ability to focus on training and to be a part of all of it from start to finish without interruptions can speak volumes by you communicating to them that training is important and an important piece of their work and that it is protected time.
3. Help workers identify cases and situations relevant to an upcoming training. Then create a plan for how the knowledge and skills that they will gain in training will be transferred to their daily work with that particular family.
4. After training, there are critical steps to take in order to support the transfer of training. Meeting with the worker within a week of the training to review key points in the training and the action plan is critical.  
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## February 2022 Key to Successful Transfer of Learning cont.

Some questions to consider when meeting with the worker:

- What were the three most important learning points? What is something that you could implement today, next week?
- How is this learning similar to what you already know? How is it different?
- What cases and situations does it apply to? Why?
- What ideas do you have for application? Where do you think we should start?

Continue to talk through the application of these skills during your one on one staff meetings or during team staff meetings. Encourage workers to set goals. When supervisors and workers talk openly about goals, they are more likely to achieve them. This follow through can increase learner retention by almost 65%

Adapted from: North Carolina Division of Social Services (2015) Children's Service Practice Notes, v. 20, n.2 Social Worker Transfer of Learning Tool. Retrieved from: <http://practicenotes.org/v20n2/TOL-tool.pdf>

## How to support Transfer of Learning with the SFPM

We know that the implementation of the Safety Framework Practice Model has forced us to look at our work through a different lens. In doing so, some of us may not feel as confident about our work as we did prior to the implementation. That being said, we are in a perfect position to know how it feels for new workers learning a new framework as they enter the field, unsure and likely not as confident as they would like to be. That being said, additional support may be needed during the time when workers are trying new skills. And we know that you as a supervisor also need that additional support. If you are unsure about how to supervise the Safety Framework, that's okay! You are learning as well.

Below are some suggestions and thoughts to consider as a means to support your workers with the Safety Framework Process.

- Develop an expert understanding of safety intervention. If you can't define present danger, how can you effectively supervise safety intervention? Supervisor Support Sessions and Boosters that will follow specific topics for 2022 are being developed as we speak. Attend these sessions with the intent to learn from each other, to participate fully and to do so without interruptions. Not only will you take more from the training if you actively participate by sharing a case example or by asking a question, you will be modeling to your staff that training is a priority.
- Is there a Supervisor Session or Booster coming up? Talk to your staff about the topic, find out if they are struggling with that particular area and if so, create scenarios or questions that you can pose during training to bring back. If this is an area that they have been creative and have "tricks and tips" to share? Gather them up and share with your colleagues during the session!
- Constantly communicate the Safety Framework throughout all aspects of our work with families. It will define who we serve, when we serve them, and how we serve them.
- Being mindful that you are not conducting safety intervention with families, your workers are. It is your job to facilitate their ability and confidence to provide effective safety intervention through the lifetime of our work with families. Your approach will impact the development of your workers' competence and their ability to effectively implement the safety intervention. Be available to your staff. Hold individual supervision meetings weekly, staff cases as a team during staff meetings. Allow your workers to "hash" out cases with you.
- Keep track of safety issues in cases. Ask your workers to articulate the safety issues and what needs to change. Are you and the worker stuck? Consider involving a FSS or bringing the case to a coaching session or a booster session.
- Assure that your workers are always applying the safety threshold when considering safety intervention and are evaluating family information.

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## February 2022 How to support Transfer of Learning with the SFPM cont.

- Develop your worker's confidence with safety assessment and safety analysis. Workers should understand and be able to explain the criteria required for each document.
- Accompany each of your workers to home a visit to observe their PCFA skills at different intervention stages and provide lots and lots of feedback. Learning PCFA and practicing it will take time. It's likely your workers are nervous about PCFA, so we encourage you to find ways to enhance their PCFA skills. Schedule group supervision where team members role play different intervention stages or practice goal writing in case plans. If this is an area you struggle with, connect with your FSS, or reach out to the Training Center to see how we can help.
- Don't stop learning about the Framework, or supporting your workers in their efforts!

Adapted from: Supervisor Guide Book: A Comprehensive guide to Getting Started as a Supervisor in Child Welfare; Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System-2011

## Upcoming Training Opportunities

### Upcoming Safety Framework Supervisor Support & Booster Sessions:

#### March

Supervisor Session: Thursday, 10th  
Field Booster: Monday, 21st

#### May

Supervisor Session: Thursday, 5th  
Field Booster: Monday, 16th

#### April

Supervisor Session: Thursday, 14th  
Field Booster: Tuesday, 19th

#### June

Supervisor Session: Thursday, 9th  
Field Booster: Thursday, 23rd

\* All Sessions run 10 a.m. - 12 noon Central Time

**Do you have ideas on training that you want for Supervisors or direct line workers? Do you need more Safety Framework hard cards? Contact Rachel by email: [rachel.behm@und.edu](mailto:rachel.behm@und.edu)**

## Additional Resources for Supervisors

Need more ideas on how to support your new worker through Child welfare Certification Training? Take a look at our [Transfer of Learning Tool for Supervisors](#).

Are you new to supervision and are looking for ways to engage your team, obtain new strategies that will enhance the learning and development of workers, as well promote critical thinking as workers address safety, permanency and wellbeing? Click [HERE](#) to find out more about Foundations of Supervision Training being offered in 2022! Dates for training will be announced soon.

