

Child Advocacy Network Recommended Best Practices for Court Ordered Parenting Classes

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The Child Advocacy Network (CAN) has been meeting since September 2006 to formulate best practices for court approved parenting classes in Kern County. The California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16507.7 mandates that all parenting classes that are court ordered for the parents of children who are dependents of the Juvenile Court or that are recommended for parents in a voluntary family maintenance program meet certain specific requirements. These are as follows:

- a. Each parenting course shall be no more than six months in duration, and shall meet for a specified number of hours determined by each program as sufficient for the program to meet all of the requirements listed in subdivision b.
- b. The curriculum shall include all of the following components:
 1. Building self-esteem, including, but not limited to, parents' building a positive parental identity and building the self-esteem of their children.
 2. Handling stress and anger.
 3. The growth and development of children, including, but not limited to, safety, nutrition, and health.
 4. Developing and increasing communication skills in order that a parent may learn to listen to and speak with his or her child or children.
 5. Learning to use positive disciplinary mechanisms as alternatives to the physical punishment or a child, including, but not limited, to, learning what constitutes abuse and neglect.
 6. Learning the boundaries of permissible sexual conduct by adults with regard to children.
 7. Respect for, and sensitivity to, cultural differences in child rearing practices in addressing all of the topics listed above.
- c. Each parenting course is encouraged to have a maximum parent to teacher ratio of 15 parents for each teacher.
- d. Each parenting course is encouraged to conduct an initial assessment and interview of each parent enrolled in the course.
- e. Each parenting course shall give a preliminary examination prior to the start of the parenting course and an exit examination at the conclusion of the parenting course to measure changes in parental attitudes.
- f. Each parenting course shall require parents to enter into a written agreement detailing the expectations a parent must meet in order to pass the course.
- g. Parenting course staff shall have training in the following areas:
 1. The prevention of child abuse and neglect
 2. Parenting techniques
- h. Each parenting course shall provide all of the following information to the county welfare department of the county in which the course is taught, for clients referred through child welfare services programs (generally in certificate form):
 1. Level of participation
 2. Number of course hours completed

3. Topics covered during attendance in class by each parent and topics covered during same parent's absence from class
4. Assessment of a parent's gain in his or her knowledge about parenting as demonstrated by tests prior to and after the parenting course.

Background

The Kern Child Abuse Prevention Network has been operational since 1979. It was incorporated as a private non-profit corporation in 1981. In 1987, it was designated as the official Child Abuse Prevention Agency for Kern County by the Board of Supervisors and has served in this capacity ever since. At about the same time the "CAN" or Child Advocacy Network was developed to serve in a community based way under the policy-making umbrella of KCAPC.

CAN serves the community in several capacities:

- Participation on the Kern County Child Death Review Team which is a multi-disciplinary body is made up of representatives from Law Enforcement, Coroner's and District Attorney's offices, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Probation, Public Health and Mental Health Departments, Pediatricians, Child Protective Services and KCAPC.
- Provision of community education through coordination of community conferences and participation in numerous community awareness functions, including Child Abuse Prevention Month.
- Coordination of the Case Review Team
- Participation on the Kern County Network for Children as a Founding Governing Board member.

In 2006, CAN accepted the role of coordinating efforts to determine best practices for Court approved parenting classes. A subcommittee was formed of representatives from several agencies. They have worked together extensively to ensure standards for all programs that serve parents as part of the Child Protective/Court Ordered system.

Definitions

Parent training is defined here as parent education taught in a class setting whereas parent counseling is family, group, or individual therapy focusing on parenting issues. All court ordered parenting classes are required to have a segment on the subject of neglect, but a court order for neglect training requires completion of a specific neglect class. A court order to complete neglect counseling requires a separate six month obligation including therapy. The recommendations contained in this document are concerned solely with parent training.

Recommendations

Although CAN has found a number of research based curricula that address many of these requirements, the committee has been unable to find a curriculum that is specifically geared to parents who have come to the attention of CPS due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment AND who currently do not have their children in their custody. However, the Committee did find that research shows that the most effective parenting curricula use parenting classes as one component of an overall treatment program that also includes case management and home visitation.

With this in mind, CAN is making the following recommendations to use as a guideline for developing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to providing mandatory parenting classes:

1. All clients who are referred by the court for parenting classes should have a comprehensive assessment to determine their variety of needs and strengths. This assessment should not be a simple mechanistic checklist but rather should involve engagement of the client in services. Ideally the client's social worker, probation officer, or case manager should provide this

assessment, but if that is not possible, the client should be referred in a timely manner to an agency with that capability.

2. After the completion of an assessment, clients should be given a copy of the resource directory and together with the social worker, probation officer, or case manager should decide which parenting classes would be most likely to meet their needs.
3. There must be a consent for sharing information between the referring agency and service provider.
4. There should be a mandatory meeting at least quarterly for all persons providing parenting classes to share information and ideas and to discuss clients whose needs are difficult to meet.
5. The curricula used by providers should not be simply theoretical. There should be an opportunity for discussion, class interaction, homework, practical application, and practice.
6. It is assumed that the majority of clients taking court ordered parenting classes will not be living with their children. None-the-less, it is very important that they have an opportunity to put into practice the new knowledge and skills they will be acquiring in their parenting classes. Two suggestions for addressing this issue are:
 - Training social workers, services aides, and other DHS designees about the content of the parenting classes and how to assist and encourage parents in utilizing those new skills
 - Requiring that all parenting curricula include an opportunity to discuss how new information was put into practice by clients during their visits with their children.
7. The pre-service training (PRIDE) now being used by the Department of Human Services to train prospective foster parents and other resource families emphasizes contact between the foster and birth parents. Resource families are being encouraged to act as mentors and to work as team members with the social worker, birth parent, and any other professionals who may be involved in the child's life. Resource families should also be given information about the content of the parenting classes so that they can encourage and assist the birth parent.
8. The Department of Human Services should continue to determine which agencies will be service providers, but a more comprehensive application process for agencies that provide parenting classes should be developed. Providers should be required to spell out how they plan to deal with issues such as tardiness, absenteeism, level of participation, and teacher/parent ratio. As part of the selection process, it will be important to ensure as much as possible that services are not duplicated and that a balance of classes are available to meet a variety of client needs throughout the county.
9. A method of monitoring providers of parenting classes to ensure that each curriculum contains the required elements and is being taught in an effective manner should be developed. Monitoring should at least include regular (perhaps quarterly) receipt of the results of the providers' pre- and posttests, their graduation rate, and the results of a routinely administered client satisfaction survey. Because of the need for interagency collaboration to ensure the success of these classes, an interagency committee could be appointed to assist DHS in the monitoring process.
10. Current parenting curricula should be examined to determine whether or not they are in line with the current Welfare and Institutions Code, cover all the required topics, and address other issues discussed in these recommendations. After this initial examination, providers should

annually reexamine their curricula to ensure they are effective and in compliance with the current requirements.

11. Ongoing training should be provided to all prospective providers and referring agencies on the content and other requirements for providing mandated parenting classes.
12. All providers must either have the ability to provide case management services or have a mechanism for partnering with another agency that has that ability.
13. In line with social work values and ethics, all contact with clients should be strength-based and engaging.

CAN will work with all referring and service providing agencies to develop a plan for implementing these recommendations.

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