

ACT Core Competencies

The Alternatives to Coercive Techniques (ACT) Core Competencies document serves as a reference tool outlining fundamental levels of awareness, information and knowledge needed by all staff employed in programs that care for kids. These Core Competencies serve as the foundation for decisions and practices carried out in working with children and youth in all settings. The framing of each core area suggests that successful ownership of a change in culture within a facility requires commitment by all employees to develop a professional and practical level of awareness and understanding. The ACT Core Competencies address integration of values, philosophies and technologies.

Building upon the January 30, 2006 Department of Public Welfare Special Transmittal (Strategies and Practices to Eliminate Unnecessary Use of Restraint) and draft Bulletins addressing Strategies and Practices to Eliminate the Use of Unnecessary Restraints and Prohibition of the Use of Prone Restraint in Residential Children's Facilities, the attached document provides a roadmap for practice to support movement toward the goal of restraint elimination in residential settings. The ACT Core Competencies provide viable alternatives and support elimination of the need to rely on restrictive, aversive and coercive methods.

This document is not intended to replace, modify or supersede any governing regulations or applicable statutes but rather is presented as a guide to enhance practice. The ACT Core Competencies define what we need to do to be able to provide quality services. By highlighting specific priority areas which support culture change within a program, this guide serves to encourage direct line staff and supervisors in creating and sustaining a restraint free environment.

Throughout the document, terminology is used to refer to most appropriate practices as being family directed and youth focused. Appreciation and recognition of the variations that exist in placement settings as well as in the defined family unit for any child/youth served have been noted. However, the need for determined efforts of all program staff to engage and involve adults identified as part of the support network for a child/youth remains constant.

The value of these relationships, both formal and informal, must be recognized as a critical component of achieving permanency and long-term stability for each child/youth extending well beyond discharge from the facility. These core competencies as presented offer guidance and reinforcement in a strengths based format as a concrete tool for sustained programmatic cultural change.

This document was developed with input from a diverse working group with support from the Department of Public Welfare Offices of Policy, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) and Developmental Programs (ODP). A listing of workgroup participants and contact information is attached to this document.

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Safety and Security

- You understand what constitutes a safe community/site/location/activity and feel safe to ensure that it is maintained
- You understand that the child/youth always have (their) good reasons for what they are doing
- You recognize that the child/youth is doing the best he/she can at that moment
- You understand and demonstrate the ability to objectively describe what you observe.
- You see the child/youth first as a human being and recognize their abilities
- You understand how to and effectively create and sustain an empathetic/supportive connection/relationship with the child/youth
- You understand and demonstrate the ability to establish and nurture a partnership moving from “power over” to “power with” to “power within”
- You understand that both the parents and child/youth must be offered reassurances, first and foremost, that [feel] that their child/youth is “safe”.
- You understand the value of assessing safety at each encounter with the child/youth
- You are aware of the impact of trauma as a potential aspect in supporting the child/youth to feel safe
- You support a youth guided approach to planning and interventions as long as risk to child/youth is kept to a minimum

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Environment

- You will work to create a climate and tone that supports open communication, models respect and expression of feelings, celebrates success and reaffirms effort
- You understand how the environment can affect the child/youth
- You understand how to support the child/youth by developing accommodations (individualized responses and supports) within the environment
- You understand that each child/youth has his/her unique personal perspective and view point based upon their experiences and how this impacts on the child/youth and their responses in their environment
- You understand that child/youth learn and develop through their experiences
- You develop skills to survey the environment and address potential safety/risk factors before they impede child/youth's progress.
- You understand the need to safe alternative outlets for a child/youth to regain their composure and self-control

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Communication

- You understand how each child/youth expressively communicates both verbally and non-verbally
- You understand how each child/youth receptively interprets both verbal and non-verbal communication
- You understand that communication methods must be individualized for each child/youth.
- You understand how you communicate with the child/youth
- You understand and demonstrate appropriate communication models
- You understand that a demonstration of “challenging behaviors” may be the expression of many factors such as unmet needs /wants /fears/ communication barriers/illness
- You understand what the action/behavior is communicating (what is the likely function of the behavior)
- You understand and demonstrate the use of alternative outlets – play therapy, drama, sports, dance, etc – to support a child/youth in communicating/expressing feelings/concerns/experiences
- You understand the value of not only listening but also truly hearing what a child/youth is expressing
- You respect the confidentiality of a child/youth’s disclosures/sharing of personal information as appropriate. You then demonstrate awareness of the need to document and report information specific to abuse/neglect and value in advising child/youth of these parameters
- You demonstrate awareness of the need of privacy when the child/youth is sharing personal information
- You use language and behavior which consistently respects the dignity of the child/youth
- You support the child/youth to exercise to their fullest ability to follow the established due process/grievance procedures related to the child rights
- You support the debriefing process by serving as a role model with open, honest, critical self-assessment and feedback
- You understand when to seek additional support from supervisors/clinical support team/teachers/family
- You know yourself and understand what you bring to the work environment in the form of your own strengths, weaknesses, personal values, influence, etc
- You understand and model personal and professional accountability

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Cultural and Unique Personal Identification Awareness

- You understand that each child/youth has his/her cultural heritage
- You understand how the child/youth's family dynamics are unique and influenced by their culture and family's personal experiences
- You understand racial uniqueness and identities
- You demonstrate cultural sensitivity and competence
- You recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies, and practices characteristic of the child/youth and family ethnic background
- You understand and support opportunities for the child/youth to learn and participate in age-, culturally- and developmentally-appropriate practical life experiences that are transferable to home and community (i.e. 'life skills'), and are not in conflict with the culture, norms, and mores of the home
- You recognize and respect the religious orientation of the child/youth and support opportunities for them to practice their beliefs
- You recognize and respect each child/youth's sexual orientation and gender identification

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Individualized Planning

- You understand that the focus is on valuing and building on the multiple strengths, resiliency, coping abilities, inherent worth, and capabilities and potential of the child/youth
- You understand and support the child/youth's social, physical, emotional and educational well being
- You focus on the child/youth's feelings, what the child/youth is experiencing and what the child/youth wants rather than on diagnosis, label and history about the child/youth's life
- You understand and demonstrate knowledge about various physical and mental health disorders and their impact on the child/youth, their family and community
- You understand the various aspects of basic human development including physical, cognitive, social and emotional stages
- You understand that all child/youth have the potential to be resilient, including those with serious challenges
- You understand your role in supporting the child/youth to transition to their family, community or other permanency goal as identified
- You understand and are able to recognize the "voluntary vs. involuntary" components of the child/youth's actions
- You understand the active role you play in the individualized planning process of the child/youth
- You understand and demonstrate principles Trauma-Informed Care
- You understand and demonstrate the need to actively and meaningfully involved the child/youth in everyday decision-making about the program and their care, and have multiple opportunities on a daily basis to exercise choice in all aspects of their care
- You incorporate consideration of the child/youth's history of trauma and their individualized responses to that trauma into all interactions with them
- You understand and demonstrate the use of gender responsive approaches

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Youth Involvement

- You understand how the child/youth's family dynamics are unique to each culture and influenced by their culture and family's personal experiences
- You understand that getting to know the child/youth is a critical component of achieving success and desired outcomes
- You treat the child/youth as a person with the capacity to learn, change and make decisions about their life
- You recognize and support the child/youth's needs, choices, desires, hopes, dreams, family, friends, relationships, fun, involvement, integration, inclusion, valued role, empowerment; etc
- You support the child/youth's independence by supporting the child/youth to make his/her own choices; his/her own mistakes –Understanding that choice-making and risk-taking lead to child/youths growth
- You support the child/youth to lead, control, exercise choice over, and determine their own path of recovery/rehabilitation by maximizing autonomy and independence
- You understand the invaluable role of mutual peer support wherein child/youth encourage other child/youth in recovery while providing a sense of belongingness, supportive relationships, valued roles and community is recognized and promoted
- You understand that inclusion/involvement of the family is a valid component of long term stability for the child/youth post-discharge

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Family Involvement

- You understand that the term family must be a reflection of the child's life experience and is the child's natural and extended system of support and nurturing
- You understand how the child's family dynamics are unique to each culture
- You recognize that the family is most familiar with the child/youth and is a resource for information, resources and support
- You recognize that the parents of child/youth should be able to celebrate with their child/youth on his or her accomplishments while in treatment/care
- You recognize and understand the best ways to engage the family in the process to assure that changes are both realistic in the context of the family, and that the family has the skills, support, and expertise to help sustain the changes

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