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Issue 24-22

Date: 12/26/24

Faith-Based (FB) Reminders

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) have historically played a vital role in meeting the needs of their communities by serving as pillars of trust, providing compassion, supportive services, and critically needed tangible resources. The involvement of faith-based partners can contribute greatly to meeting the needs of children, youth, non-minor dependents (NMDs) and families involved with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

This FYI provides a reminder to social work staff about the importance of preserving a child's culture and religious or faith identity, including:

- Their right to practice their faith and attend religious services and
- The potential involvement of a child and family's faith-based practitioner or community support persons.

This is provided in legislation, DCFS policy, and is supported by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. This FYI also provides information and tips on assessing for and engaging a child and family in accessing faith-based resources.

As a response to the September 25, 2018 Faith-Based Board Motion (Item #22), https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1046174_092518.pdf, DCFS seeks to provide families with supportive services available to them within their chosen Communities of Faith and not impose any faith on any client. Research from pioneering universities have shown a number of positive impacts in acknowledging a client's spirituality, including improving resiliency and building a community. DCFS does not impose any faith on any client, but instead our goal is to broaden supportive services by utilizing more faith-based resources to build on the family strengths and connection to community.

DCFS wants to ensure that the quality of life for all children in out-of-home care is respectful and that all facets of a child's upbringing from the family of origin are considered. This includes the faith based practices of the children, youth and NMDs in foster care. When social workers assess the needs of families and children (CANS – Child/Adolescent Needs and Strengths), it is important to examine the different cultural, relational, and spiritual context and beliefs of each family to understand their unique strengths.

There are currently three policies that reference faith-based engagement:

- 1) [Policy 0100-570.05: Quality of Life in Out of Home Care](#) states the following:
"Children in foster care have a right to religious freedom, including the right to attend religious services and activities or to refrain from the practice of religion altogether. The child's association with their religious group must be maintained, if so desired by the child and their family, while the child is in out-of-home care. A parent or legal guardian has the authority to determine the child's religious preference, until the child is:



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- Old enough to choose a religion for themselves, or
- Parent's rights are terminated (legally freed).

If a parent is unavailable or their whereabouts are currently unknown, and the religious preferences of the parent were not previously shared, the child may voluntarily participate in the religious activities with the out-of-home caregiver, as long as those activities do not endanger the child's health and safety. The child can also decline to participate without providing an explanation."

- 2) [Policy 0100-510.60: Placement Considerations](#) for children instructs the following when **Placing a Sibling Group** under the **ERCP/ER/Case-Carrying CSW Responsibilities** section, which includes Item #1, which states to "ask the parent(s) if they want to involve a faith-based practitioner or other community support person to assist in locating a community-based placement." In addition, Item #9 states to "document all information regarding any efforts to place the child with any identified sibling(s) in the Contact Notebook and the applicable court report, including any input from the family's faith-based practitioner or community support person."
- 3) [Policy 0400-503.10: Contact Requirements and Exceptions](#) state that the purpose of the social worker's **Contact with the Child, in Continuing Services**, is to "assess the safety and well-being of the child and to achieve the following:
 - Assist the child in preserving and maintaining their culture or origin. This includes religious and ethnic identity as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE)."

Assessing for Faith-Based Resources

When CSWs meet with families, it is recommended that they utilize faith-based resources in a professional way and stay cautious about underutilizing or imposing faith-based resources.

Definition of the preferred approach:

- Utilizing faith-based resources as identified by the family

Utilizing family-based faith-based resources:

- Understand the role of culture and spirituality within each unique family
- Be curious about their individual/spiritual stories
- Be curious about positive or negative spiritual/religious experiences
- Refer individuals/families to faith leaders (at the request of the individual/family)
- Find and refer to faith-based resources, if the family is interested.

Definitions of the non-preferred approach:

- Underutilizing faith-based resources
- Imposing faith-based resources



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Underutilizing faith-based resources:

1. Ignoring faith-based resources out of fear of offending a family
2. Not knowing the spiritual/religious background of the family
3. Belief that having “any” faith conversations = Imposing faith
4. Belief that having “any” faith conversations = crossing the line of church and state
5. Assuming negative stereotypes about all “organized religions”

Imposing faith-based resources:

1. Making assumptions about another’s faith/spirituality
2. Looking down on people that have different opinions/beliefs
3. Only referring to faith-based resources
4. Hints of pressure with faith-based resources
5. Giving religious/spiritual resources without knowing any of the context

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Question:** How do I begin to ask families about their faith?

Response: Have you or someone in your immediate family experienced support from a personal faith or spiritual experience?

2. **Question:** What if the child/youth’s faith doesn’t align with the caregiver’s faith?

Response: The CSW can ask the caregiver the following:

- “Can you provide a safe space for different opinions about faith and spirituality?”
- “Do you have a plan for the child(ren) placed with you to practice their faith?”

3. **Question:** How do I encourage a non-religious family to become comfortable with using faith-based resources?

Response: I acknowledge your different perspective. We have faith-based resources available that we believe would meet the needs of your child. Accepting faith-based resources is voluntary and participation is at your discretion. Do you have any objections to receiving this resource?

4. **Question:** What if the social worker is apprehensive about talking about faith/spirituality because of their own personal lack of faith/spirituality in their own personal background?

Response: Statements/questions a social worker can use when talking with clients:

- Are you open to telling me about your own faith background?
- Have you had any positive or negative experiences with faith in the past few years?
- What does faith/spirituality mean to you?

5. **Question:** What if a social worker is concerned that bringing up “faith” is equal to “imposing faith?”



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Response of a supervisor: It is best practice to assess different strengths of individuals and families. Some families believe that their faith/spirituality is a significant aspect of their strength and hope. It is best to show curiosity about faith, just like you would show curiosity about someone's culture/ethnicity. Below are a two simple questions to ask every family. If they answer yes, explore further. If they answer no, do not explore further and move on.

- Does faith play an important role in your life?
- Do you have a faith community that provides support?

To learn more about the benefits of faith-based engagement, see links provided below:

<https://academic.oup.com/book/55201/chapter-abstract/425561610?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

(professors from Harvard and Duke University)

www.lisamillerphd.com (Columbia University)

<https://hollyoxhandler.com/resources/> (Baylor University)

If you have any questions regarding this release, please email your question to:

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