What about Service Referrals?
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Systems Expertise
- Service delivery systems
- Community resources
- Screening & assessment

Working with Others
- Building & maintaining relationships
- Empathy & compassion

Communicating
- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing

As a home visitor, developing relationships with families and spending time in their homes, there will be times when you observe or discuss a child/family need that goes beyond your scope of work as a home visitor. Sometimes the lines of responsibility are not clear-cut and you may need to bring the issue up in a reflective consultation session with your supervisor to gain clarity. However, when a family is in need of a service that you cannot provide, there may be an opportunity to make a referral to a service provider that specializes in the kind of help that the family needs. In the CYFD Home Visiting database system, this is referred to as a “service referral”.

There are many aspects to making a service referral. To begin with, a home visitor should consider what is the reason a referral is needed? What need was observed or determined through discussion with the family? The next step will be to get as much information as possible from the family in order to decide if this is something you can help with directly or else find another source of help for the family. After this discussion you may need to explain to the family why this is something you cannot directly help them with and that there are other people in the community who can.

Be aware that if this is a concern you have identified and brought to the family for the first time, that discussing your concerns should be done in a sensitive way. For instance, you might suspect that a child has a developmental delay after observing the child and completing an ASQ with the family. Staying within your role, it will be important not to make a diagnosis, but instead share the ASQ results and your concerns with the family. From there you may suggest the possibility of getting a
developmental evaluation from the local early intervention provider. It is important to be sensitive to the possibility that hearing your concerns may bring up a range of feelings for the parent.

It will be helpful for the home visitor to be well informed about the agency or services they are referring the family to. Parents may have many questions, such as: Will there be a charge for these services? What can these people do for me? Do you know the name of the person I should contact at the agency? Can we still be involved in the home visiting program if we start these new services? The more information you can provide, the greater the chances of the family following through with the service referral. Having a brochure to give to the family that has information about the service referral agency can also be very helpful as well as directions to their website on the internet.

But the service referral process does not end there. Some questions to consider are: Should the need that has led to the referral be incorporated into a family goal? Is it already part of an existing goal? As a home visitor, how will you check-in with the family about the service referral? It will be important to find out if the family made the connection with the service provider and if they indeed are being helped by them. Depending on the need and the service, it might be appropriate to communicate directly with the service provider (with parent permission). We should not think of a service referral as a hand-off to someone else which we no longer need to think about. We should periodically touch-base with the family regarding the service (and the need that led to the service referral) to be sure it is being addressed, or to determine if the issue has been resolved.

So what do we do if the family chooses not to follow through with a service referral? If this is the case, then we might think about using inquiry as intervention. Have a conversation with the family about why they did not follow-through with the referral. Through the use questions, you might help them uncover underlying reasons or feelings behind their decision. But most importantly, honor their right to make what they feel is the best decision for themselves and their family. That does not mean we have to forget about the need that lead to the referral. On the contrary, you will probably be given the opportunity to raise the subject again during the course of your home visits and explore how the family is doing with the issue. Perhaps at a later date they may be ready to explore contacting the referral source or explore other solutions based on family strengths and resources.

All along the way, it will be important to document the service referral process in the CYFD Home Visiting data base. Be sure to input all service referrals made in the data base. In the DAP notes you can add information about the family’s receptivity to the service referral. Or you may add a goal that addresses the need for the service referral. But just as importantly, remember to update the status of the service referral in the data base so that someone looking at that information will know the result. This is where “closing a referral” comes into play by documenting the disposition of the referral in the data base. Did you inquire about the referral after it was made? Did the family say they were not interested or did they begin services? Entering this in the data base allows us
to know how the story ended rather than leaving us scratching our heads about the outcome of the service referral.

Talking points for supervisors

- As a supervisor you may want to make a record in your reflective supervision notes of any service referrals made by a home visitor that are mentioned during a reflective supervision session. This would work as a reminder to you to follow-up about the disposition of the service referral with the home visitor.
- Know your service partners: You might ask a representative from each of your service delivery partners to come and give a brief presentation at a staff meeting to better inform your staff about their services as well as to connect a name to a face from that agency.
- When reviewing case files, be sure to check if any service referrals found in the database are lacking follow-up data regarding their disposition.