

CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED: ACTION SHEET

Your role

As a professional working with families, your role is not just to provide referrals to needed services, but to identify any barriers the families may have in accessing those services. Helping families overcome those barriers is crucial to ensuring that their concrete needs are met. Such help may entail:

- Encouraging help seeking behavior
- Working with the family to understand their past experience with service systems and any stigma they attach to certain services
- Helping the family to navigate complex systems by explaining eligibility requirements, filling out forms or making a warm handoff to an individual who can help them negotiate getting access to the services they need
- Helping the parent understand their role as an advocate for themselves and their child
- Giving parents opportunities to help meet concrete needs of other families in the program or the community, to encourage reciprocity

Questions to ask when a family is in need

- What do you need to _____ (stay in your house, keep your job, pay your heating bill etc.)?
- What have you done to handle the problem? Has this worked?
- Are there community groups or local services that you have worked with in the past? What has been your experience accessing their services?
- Are there specific barriers that have made it difficult for you to access services in the past?
- How does dealing with these issues impact the way you parent?

What to look for

- Is the parent open to accessing and utilizing services?
- Has the parent had positive experiences with services in the past?
- Does the parent have specific barriers (literacy, lack of transportation, etc.) that will make it difficult to access services?
- Are there personal behavioral traits (e.g., punctuality, willingness to share personal information, etc.) that the parent could address to more effectively utilize services?
- Does the parent try to buffer the child from the stress caused by the family's concrete needs?

Activities to do with parents

- Ask the parent to identify one concrete need that, if met, would lighten his or her burden. Come up with a list of at least three possible avenues to get that need met (e.g., agencies to approach, people to ask for help, cutting back on other expenses).
- Talk to the parent about what their family's socioeconomic status was in their childhood and what effect that had on them. Discuss things their parents did or did not do to buffer them from the stress of poverty, to teach them the value of money or to make sure their needs were met.