

**Module 7:**  
**A Coordinated Multi-System Approach to  
Better Serve Children & Families Affected  
by Substance Use & Co-Occurring Disorders**

***Child Welfare Training Toolkit***



National Center on  
Substance Abuse  
and Child Welfare

# Acknowledgement

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National Center on  
Substance Abuse  
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# Learning Objectives

After completing this training,  
child welfare workers will:

- Identify characteristics and elements of effective systems- and practice-level collaboration
- Explain how differences in values, beliefs, and perceptions affect cross-system partnerships and coordinated service delivery
- Understand the scope of confidentiality regulations, including HIPAA, 42 CFR Part 2, and limits to cross-system information sharing
- Acquire systems-level efforts and practice-level strategies to promote effective communication and coordination within cross-system partnerships

# Why Systems Need to Do Better for Families

## ADULTS



**51.3M**

In Need of Substance  
Use Disorder Treatment

**11.6M**

Received  
Substance Use Disorder Treatment



## CHILDREN



**21M**

Affected by Parental  
Substance Use

**236,143K**

Parental Substance Use  
Associated with Their Removal



# A Coordinated Multi-System Approach Requires a Paradigm Shift

*A permanent shift in doing business that relies on relationships across systems and within the community to secure needed resources to achieve better results and outcomes for all children, parents, and families.*

# What Is Collaboration?



Understanding differences

Shared decision-making

Mutual outcomes

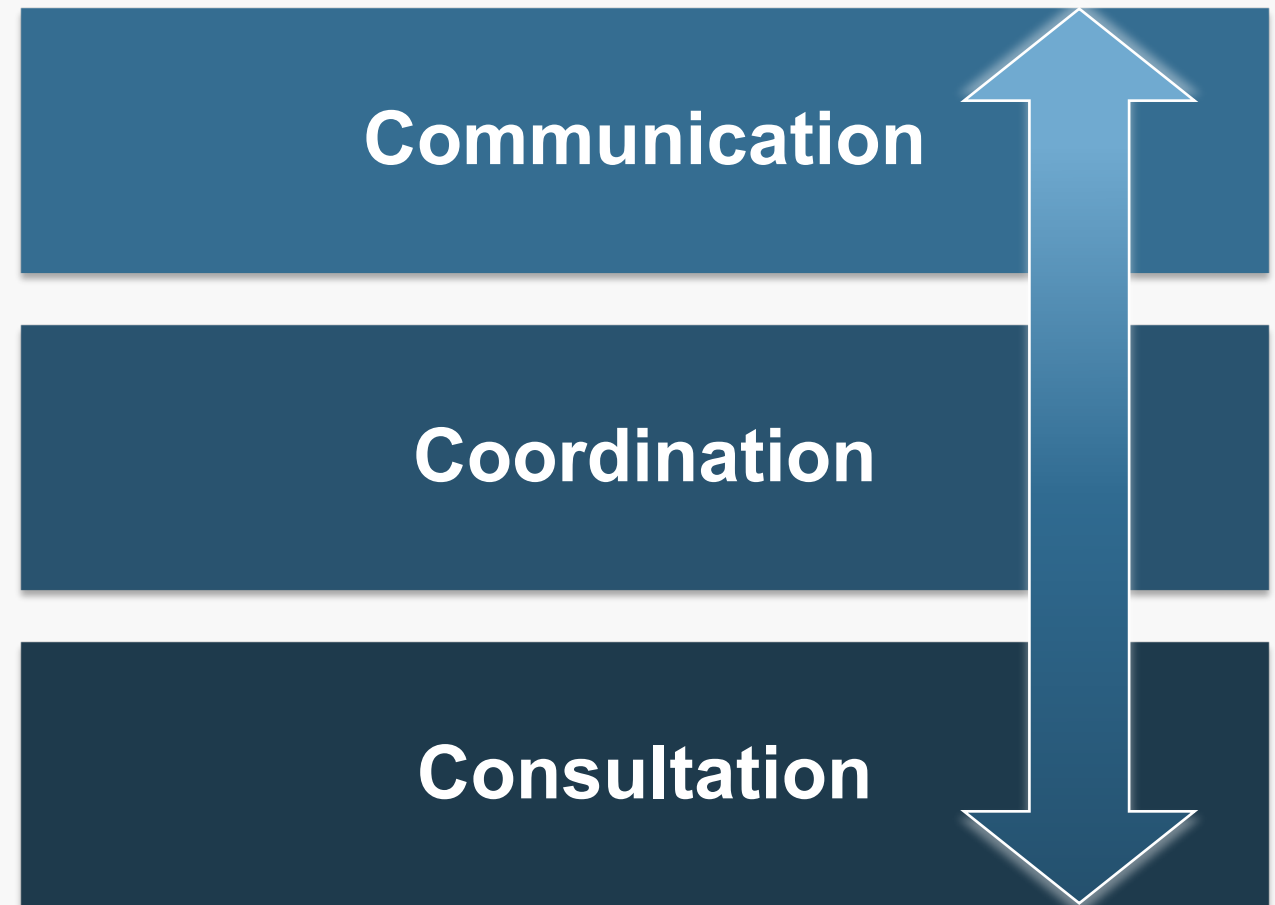
Joint accountability

Prioritizing needs of families





## Elements of Effective Collaboration



# Levels of Collaboration

## Systems-Level

Collaboration between agencies to exchange information, access resources, and develop joint policies and outcomes.



Collaboration between providers to coordinate parent and family treatment and case planning.

## Practice-Level



# What Makes or Breaks Collaborative Partnerships?

Pair and Share Discussion

- **What are some characteristics of successful collaborative partnerships (system-level and/or practice-level)?**
- **What are some common reasons why collaborative partnerships fail (systems-level and/or practice-level)?**

Pair and Share Discussion Questions



# Common Barriers to Collaborative Partnerships

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Misalignment of Mission & Values



# Communication & Data Sharing

## Confidentiality Regulations

**HIPAA**

**42 CFR Part 2**

## Systems-Level Mistrust

A close-up photograph of a person's face, which is completely obscured by their hands. The person's fingers are spread across their forehead and eyes, suggesting a desire to hide or a feeling of shame. The image has a blue tint. A dark blue rectangular box is positioned at the bottom of the frame, containing white text.

# Effects of Public & Structural Stigma





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# Practice-Level Tips & Strategies for Building Collaborative Partnerships

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# Benefits to Building Trust Between Systems

Greater commitment or buy-in

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Increased productivity and cohesion

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Improved quality of services

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Enhanced engagement and service retention

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# Strategies to Support Cohesion

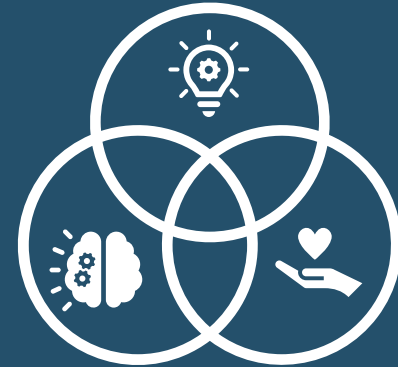
Ask questions and  
remain teachable



Engage in open and  
honest discussions

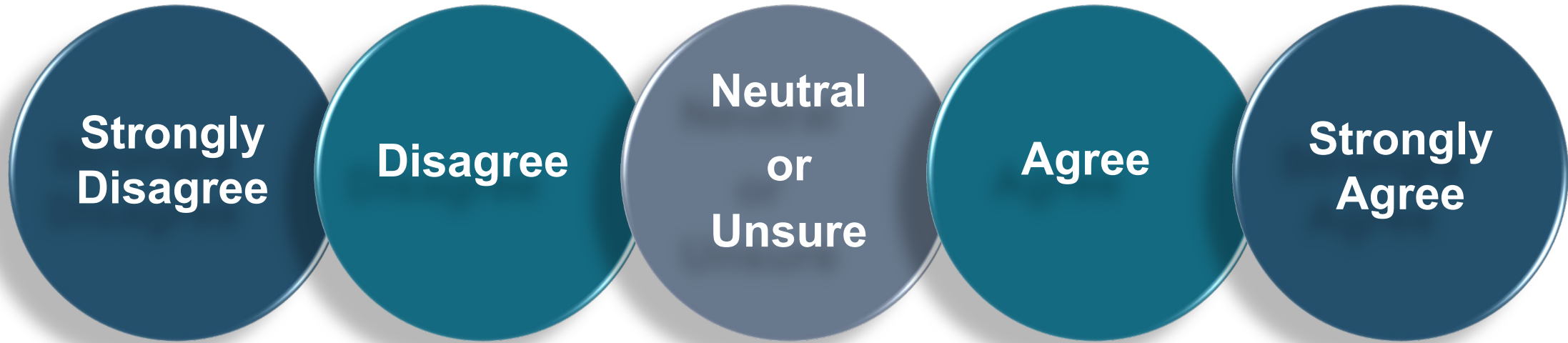


Identify differences in  
values and beliefs



Staying Open-Minded

# Large Group Values Discussion



- A parent's return to use should result in a child's removal or a change in the case plan goal if reunification efforts are in place.
- A parent with a co-occurring mental disorder must first receive mental health treatment before substance use disorder treatment can work.
- Negative drug tests are the best indicator of a parent's progress in recovery from a substance use disorder.





CHANGE

Moving the Needle from  
Stigma Toward Responsive Care

# When Substance Use Disorders Are Treated as a Disease...



Parents are placed into SUD treatment only after receiving a clinical diagnosis and appropriate level-of-care recommendation

Only qualified SUD professionals make treatment recommendations and judges, caseworkers, and attorneys support the clinical treatment recommendation

Only qualified health professionals help parents make decisions about medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)

MOUD is allowed and supported throughout the case, and not considered a deterrent for case closure

Parents are referred to quality treatment provider agencies that use evidence-based interventions and practices to support long-term recovery



# Additional Benefits of This Change



## Professionals understand:

- The components of quality SUD/mental health treatment
- The importance of early identification and timely access
- Their role in supporting, engaging, and retaining parents in treatment and services

## Professionals value:

- Engagement of parents and families as active partners in their treatment and service planning
- Use of person-first, non-stigmatizing language
- Use of peer support models and services
- That treatment works and recovery is possible



# Why the Language We Use Matters

**Instead of...**

**Try...**

**Addict/Drug Abuser**

Person/Parent with a substance use disorder



**Clean/Dirty Drug Screen**

Screen tested negative or positive for substances



**Former Addict**

Person in recovery



**Drug Addicted Baby**

Infant with prenatal substance exposure



**Hard-to-Place Kids**

Children affected by trauma



**Foster Child**

Child in-care or out-of-home placement



# Stigma Reduction: Moving Toward Responsive Care

Pair and Share Discussion

- **Discuss ways in which stigma and bias can affect critical decision-making in child welfare, treatment, and the courts.**
- **What steps could you or your agency take to help mitigate stigma and bias?**

Pair and Share Discussion Questions

# Importance of Cross-Training

Develops a mutual understanding of systems-level structure and processes

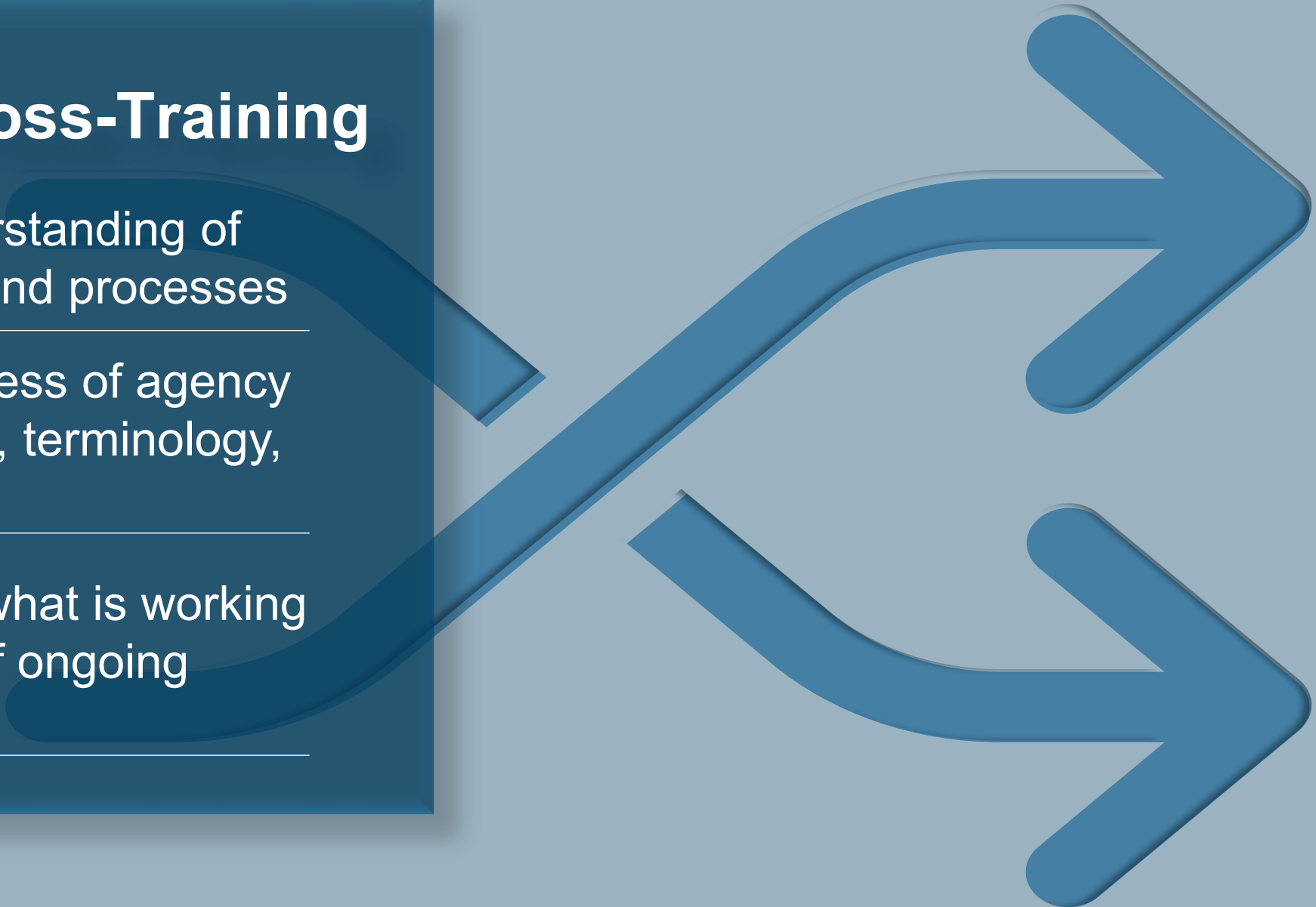
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Provides greater awareness of agency roles and responsibilities, terminology, and practices

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Initiates discussions on what is working well and areas in need of ongoing improvement

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# Cross-Training Priorities & Needs

Small Group Discussion



- **What are common misunderstandings or misperceptions about child welfare policies and practices?**
- **What are common misunderstandings or misperceptions about SUD treatment policies and practices?**
- **Has your onboarding/ongoing workforce training included opportunities for cross-system training?**
  - **For those who answered yes, please share details about these cross-system learning opportunities including any key lessons or takeaways.**
  - **For those who answered no, what are some cross-system topic areas that would support a greater understanding for improved collaborative capacity?**

**Small Group Discussion Questions**

# Information Needed From Child Welfare



Reason for referral  
and current drug and  
alcohol concerns



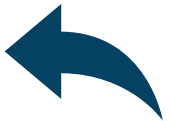
Screening and  
assessment results  
and case plan



Household composition  
and any children  
previously removed



Status of children and  
visitation plan  
(including any changes  
in placement or  
visitation and  
permanency goal)



History of child  
welfare involvement



Family strengths/  
protective factors



Confirmation of  
release of  
information signed



Drug and alcohol  
history, if known



Name and contact  
information of the  
child welfare worker

# Information Needed From Treatment Providers



Quality of engagement  
and progress in treatment



Level of participation



Appointment attendance



Treatment  
recommendations



Return to use episodes  
or treatment withdraw



Drug testing results



Discharge plan and  
aftercare  
recommendations



Timeframe for completion  
of treatment

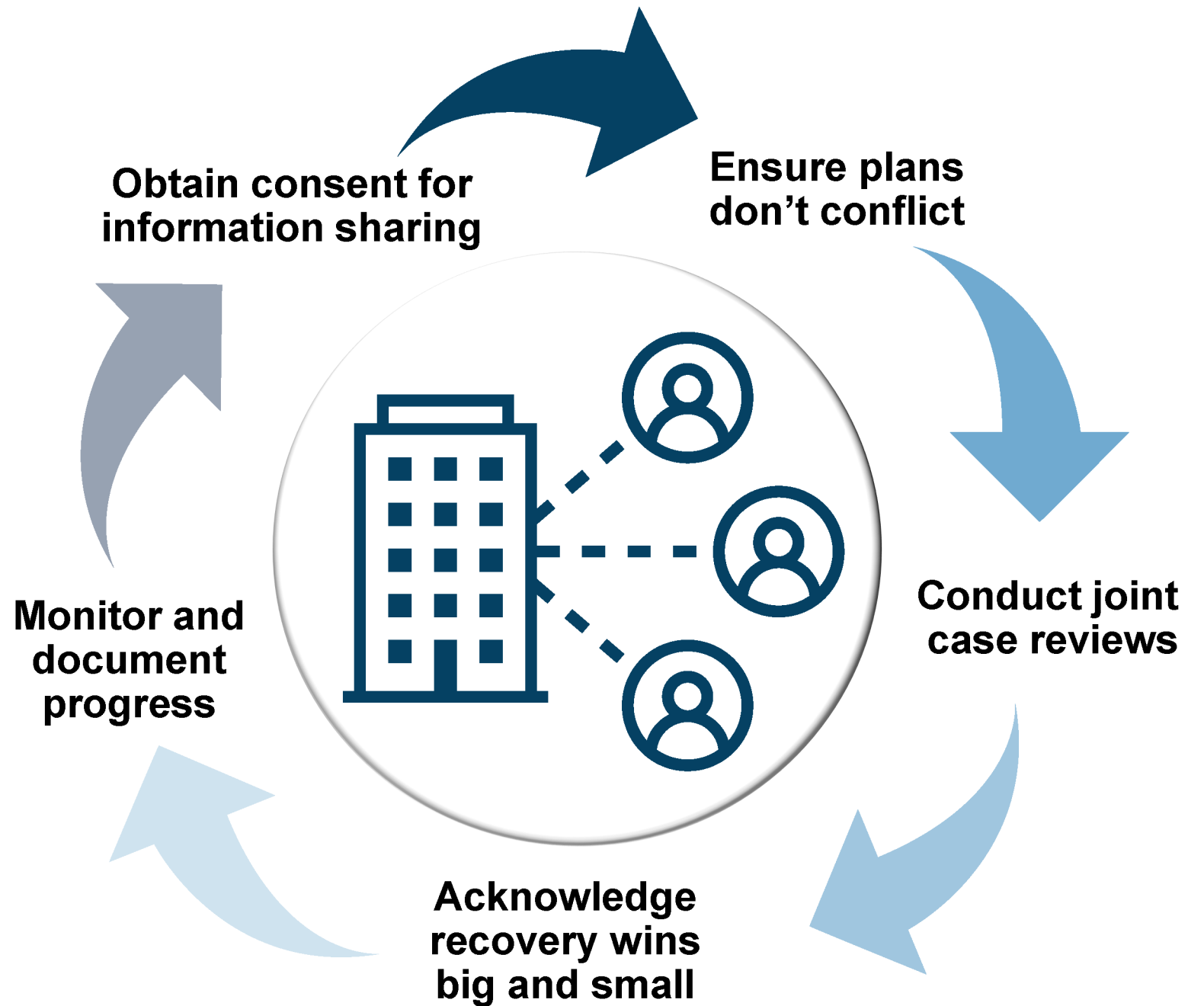
# Efficient Cross-System Communication

Small Group Discussion

- **In your experience, what have been the most common barriers to efficient cross-system communication?**
- **Do your multi-system collaborative partnerships have clear administrative policies and protocols for the proper exchange of confidential information? If yes, what do these policies and protocols entail?**
  - **What type of information is included on your agency's release of information (ROI) forms?**
  - **Are ROI forms 42 CFR Part 2 compliant? If not, how has this affected the exchange of information with SUD treatment providers?**

## **Small Group Discussion Questions**

# Strategies for Collaborative Case Planning





# Tips for Effective Joint Case Reviews



Start the review by discussing what is happening with the children



Working your way to what is happening with the parents and larger family unit

Focus discussions on desired behavioral change



Monitor progress with attention to both what has been working well and areas of needed improvement



Use a court report or review template that incorporates child and parent information



Come prepared and plan to use time efficiently

The image shows four young plants, likely bean seedlings, growing from a dark, textured soil surface. The plants are arranged in a row from left to right, with heights decreasing progressively. The tallest plant on the left has three leaves, while the shortest on the right has just two. The background is a dramatic sky with soft, wispy clouds in shades of blue, orange, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A semi-transparent dark blue rectangular box is positioned at the bottom of the image, containing the text "A Reminder About Measuring Progress" in white, sans-serif font.

A Reminder About Measuring Progress

# Additional Tips for Measuring Progress

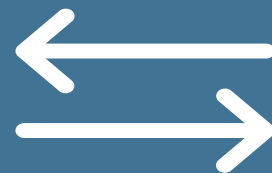
Progress or lack of progress—  
regardless,  
**document it**



Lack of progress is usually an  
indicator that something is not  
working—**explore it**



When something is not working,  
**change it**







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# Systems-Level Strategies for Building Collaborative Partnerships

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# Additional Tools for Implementing Collaborative Practice



Data Inventory

Drop-Off  
Analysis

System  
Walk-Through

Communication  
Protocols

Collaborative  
Capacity  
Instrument

# Examples of Data Inventory Questions



What data do partners currently collect?



Where is the data stored?



Who can access the data?



What essential data are missing or difficult to access?

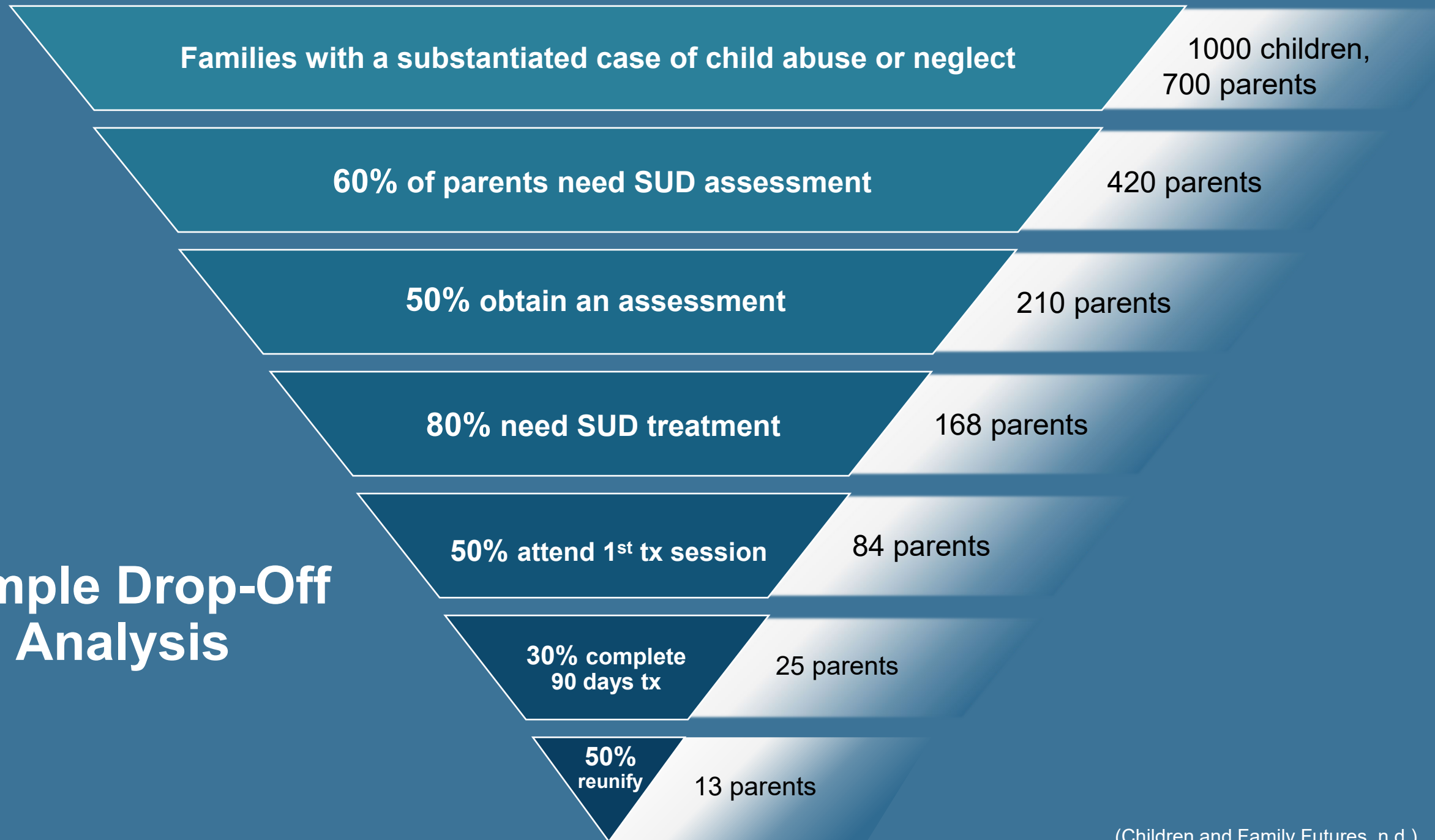


How is data shared between agencies?



What data is not shared between agencies?

## Sample Drop-Off Analysis



# Early Identification & Timely Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services

Small Group Discussion & Action Planning



**Substance use and its effects on child and family safety is not always evident from the initial CA/N report.**

- What array of tools does your agency use to support early identification of parental substance use and co-occurring disorders?
- Has your agency implemented universal screening using a validated tool?

**Does your agency have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with local treatment providers to guarantee priority access to substance use/co-occurring assessment and treatment services?**

- For those who answered yes, how does this work and have you observed any improvements with early identification and timely access?
- For those who answered no, what is your current referral practice and on average how long are parents waiting from date of referral to intake for assessment and treatment services?

**Do families affected by substance use or co-occurring disorders receive a more intensive service delivery compared to other child welfare-involved families with no history of substance use or co-occurring disorders (e.g., in-home family preservation vs family reunification services)?**

- Does your agency currently offer evidence-based programs or interventions to meet the specific needs of families affected by substance use or co-occurring disorders?
- If yes, how are families identified and engaged for these evidence-based programs or interventions?
- And what steps does your agency take to ensure access and utilization for all families in need of these treatment services?

## Small Group Discussion Questions

# Establishing Communication Pathways & Information Sharing Protocols

- Client consent form
- System-level data to monitor effectiveness

Access to client level information



Monitor SUD treatment and case plans

Who, what, when

Data sharing agreement



Share with discretion and accordance with established rules

# Key Shared Outcomes for Families

**Recovery**

**Remain at Home**

**Reunification**

**Repeat Maltreatment**

**Re-Entry**



Outcomes in all 5 Rs with key disaggregated data

# An Important Reminder About the 'Why' Behind Our Collaborative Partnerships

Increased engagement and retention of  
parents in service delivery

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Fewer children removed from parental custody

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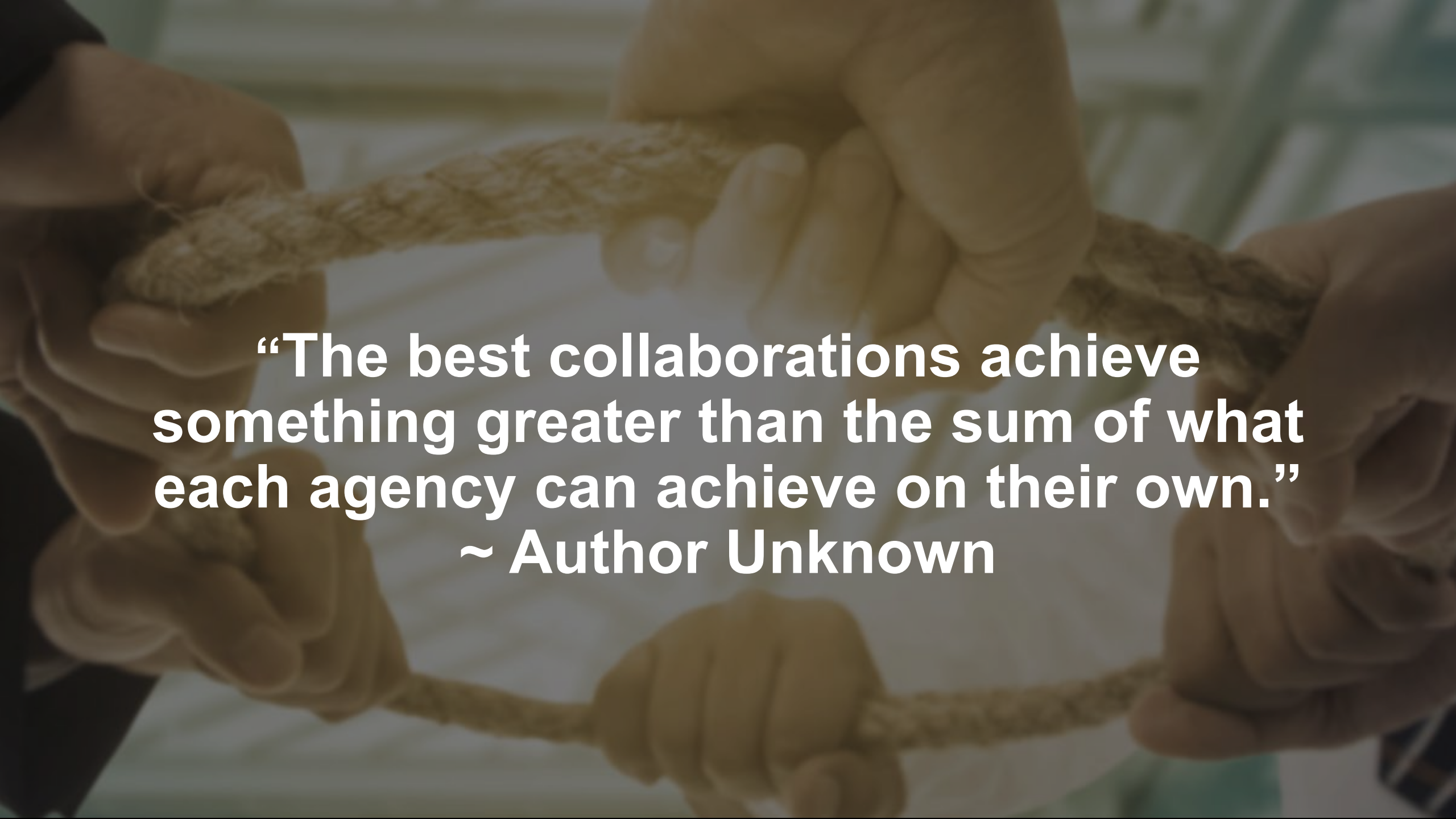
Increased family reunification post-removal

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Fewer children re-entering the child welfare  
system and out-of-home care

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A background image showing several hands of different skin tones holding a thick, light-colored rope in a circular formation, symbolizing teamwork and collaboration. The image is slightly blurred and has a warm, golden-brown tint.

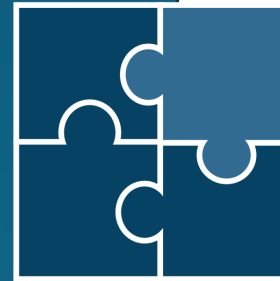
**“The best collaborations achieve something greater than the sum of what each agency can achieve on their own.”**  
**~ Author Unknown**

# Contact

## Contact the NCSACW TTA Program

Connect with programs that are developing tools and implementing practices and protocols to support their collaborative

Training and technical assistance to support collaboration and systems change



## National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare



<https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/>



[ncsacw@cffutures.org](mailto:ncsacw@cffutures.org)



Toll-Free @ 1-866-493-2758

# References

# References, 1 of 2

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# Resources

# Resources, 1 of 3

- Children and Family Futures: [Comprehensive Framework to Improve Outcomes for Families Affected by Substance Use Disorders and Child Welfare Involvement](#) (2021)
- Children and Family Futures: [Drop-off Analysis](#) (n.d.)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 1: Setting the Collaborative Foundation: Developing the Structure of Collaborative Teams to Serve Families Affected by Substance Use Disorders](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 2: Setting the Collaborative Foundation: Addressing Values and Developing Shared Principles and Trust in Collaborative Teams](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 3: Setting the Collaborative Foundation: Establishing Practice-Level Communication Pathways and Information-Sharing Protocols](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 4: Setting the Collaborative Foundation: Establishing Administrative-Level Data Sharing to Monitor and Evaluate Program Success](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 5: Frontline Collaborative Efforts: Developing Screening Protocols to Identify Parental Substance Use Disorders and Related Child and Family Needs](#)* (2022)

# Resources, 2 of 3

- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 6: Frontline Collaborative Efforts: Establishing Comprehensive Assessment Procedures and Promoting Family Engagement into Services](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: *Building Collaborative Capacity Series: How to Develop Cross-Systems Teams and Implement Collaborative Practice—[Module 7: Frontline Collaborative Efforts: Developing and Monitoring Joint Case Plans and Promoting Treatment Retention and Positive Family Outcomes](#)* (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Child Welfare & Planning for Safety: A Collaborative Approach for Families with Parental Substance Use Disorders and Child Welfare Involvement\*](#) (2023)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Child Welfare Timeline for Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Other Partners Technical Assistance Brief\*](#) (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Disrupting Stigma: How Understanding, Empathy, and Connection Can Improve Outcomes for Families Affected by Substance Use and Mental Disorders\*](#) (2021)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Engaging Parents and Youths with Lived Experience: Strengthening Collaborative Policy and Practice Initiatives for Families with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders\*](#) (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Relationships\*](#) (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Resources\*](#) (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [\*Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Results\*](#) (2022)

# Resources, 3 of 3

- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [Successful Collaboration: Top Down or Bottom Up? Both Webinar](#) (2022)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [Sustainability Planning Toolkit - Five Steps to Build a Sustainability Plan for Systems Change](#) (2020)
- National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: [The Use of Peers and Recovery Specialists in Child Welfare Settings](#) (2018)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: [A Collaborative Approach to the Treatment of Pregnant Women with Opioid Use](#) (2016)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: [Facilitating Cross-System Collaboration: A Primer on Child Welfare, Alcohol and Other Drug Services, and Courts](#) (2012)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: [Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) (2024)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: [Disclosure of Substance Use Disorder Patient Records: Does Part 2 Apply to Me?](#) (2018)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: [Disclosure of Substance Use Disorder Patient Records: How Do I Exchange Part 2 Data?](#) (2018)