Parent-Child Assistance Program (PCAP)
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Fetal Alcohol & Drug Unit
180 Nickerson Street, #309
Seattle, Washington 98109 (206) 543-7155

Case Notes

The Importance of Documentation

1. Case notes document Time Summary forms and Biannual Assessments. They serve as a narrative version of your activity and your clients' progress.

2. What was tried? Did it work? Write down what did and did not work. Case notes help us understand effective and ineffective strategies.

3. Your files are not strictly for you. If an auditor, other advocate, or supervisor picks up a file, she needs to be able to get a clear picture of who the client is, what has been done, what is working, what areas need attention. Without good, clear case notes, it can be next to impossible for successful client transition should you be absent.

4. Case notes could be important in an investigation. You want an accurate, truthful record of what has happened. You don't want a file that reads as if you did next to nothing with a client or with a service provider. All attempts at contact need to be documented. If a client refuses services, or is a no-show, it needs to be recorded. If a service provider doesn't respond to phone calls or email, or is a no-show for meetings, it needs to be recorded.

5. Advocate case notes help to tell the complete story of the client's experience in PCAP. Work with clients is reflected in: Case notes, Time Summaries, Goals, Biannual Assessments. Information should be consistent across forms.

6. Supervisors are required to review, sign off, and date every client file quarterly (every 3 months).

Format for Writing PCAP Case Notes

Charting good notes requires discipline. Keep case notes up to date. It is critical that you get in the habit of jotting down a few notes after every action or interaction. Then complete case notes by the end of each week.

The "DAP" System

Notes can be brief, but they need to include the following:

DESCRIPTION
ASSESSMENT
PLAN

DESCRIPTION: An objective description of pertinent information

WHEN Note ACTUAL DATE contact happened: month, day, and YEAR, and time of day if it was outside normal work hours.

WHERE Note location where contact occurred. Note the specific address if it's a new location.

WHO Note EVERYONE who was present. If it is a new provider, add to Service Coordination form. It is okay to use names in your case notes, except for other PCAP client names. If referring to a PCAP client, just use her first name.

WHAT What did you and the participant do (client, child's care-giver, service provider)? Note purpose of visit, topics discussed, reactions, and outcome of contact.

ASSESSMENT:

How is client working toward her goals?
How is client presenting? (i.e. what did you see?)

PLAN:

Make a plan for next step; a date for next visit. What needs to be done? When and by whom? Note any upcoming major changes/issues.

<u>Case Notes: Some Do's</u>

- Write case notes neatly, in ink. If you type case notes, they must be kept up to date, printed out weekly, signed, and put in client file. (See Electronic Case Note Security, below.)
- Sign each case note entry with full signature (not just initials), and date (including year), and put in client file.
- Use direct quotes from clients to portray a client's attitude or opinion, and report just the facts.
- Use plain English. Avoid technical terms, jargon (e.g. "slippery"), and acronyms. If you use a new or unusual acronym, define it the first time you use it. (e.g. SO = significant other).
- Keep case notes up to date. Have at least some notes jotted down each day, and complete case notes by the end of the week.
- Write notes that are useful to you.
- If you make a mistake, strike through and write above. No white-out.
- Record volatile situations, but also notify your supervisor (e.g., client reported to CPS, client threat to self or others).

And Don'ts

- Avoid speculation. Do not discuss what you think the client or provider's actions mean. Instead use direct quotes, or describe actual behavior you observed (e.g., "…. as evidenced by….").

- Avoid subjective, judgmental statements.

- Don't get behind on your notes.

Electronic Case Note Security

Advocates may write their case notes on the computer. If they do they should follow these security protocols:

- Client and target child names or other identifiable information are never put into an electronic case note; instead, use the client ID # at the top of the page. Full names of others should not be in the case notes. Use initials or descriptor (e.g., "landlord" or "older sister").

- Case notes must be printed out weekly, signed, and filed in the chart.

- The computer used or the case note file should be password protected, and may temporarily be saved on a thumb drive, and should never be saved to the hard drive.

- Case notes should be deleted from the computer or thumb drive after they are printed out and filed.

- Because deleted files can easily be recovered, it is more secure to delete the text from the file before the final save (i.e., save an empty file). Then delete the file. The data is still on the hard drive but it's harder to recover.

- Thumb drives should ideally have the capacity to be password protected and to have the data encrypted in case the thumb drive is lost. Not all drives can do this ("Cruzer" thumb drives, for example, do come with software that can do this.)