Welcome to this online, self-guided powerpoint training. Please read these supplemental notes for each slide. After you have completed the training, download the knowledge check from BlackBoard, complete it, and email or fax it to your district office’s CPE educational liaison. Thanks, and enjoy the training!
Complexity of Cases: While the number of children involved with child welfare has gone down in the last decade, research indicates that the complexity of each case has increased. Another potential indicator of such complexity may be the rising number of fatalities related to child abuse and neglect. Due this complexity, children and families within the child welfare system may benefit from more coordinated care.

Causing Additional Harm: Disconnections between agencies working with families and children in child welfare may cause duplicated investigative and treatment efforts. These repetitions and duplicities may cause inaccuracies in investigation and may further traumatize the children involved.

Reduced Funding for Child Welfare: Changes in state budgets can impact the funding available for child welfare agencies, including the staffing of positions for connections specialists, nurses, adolescent specialists, substance abuse assistance, and domestic violence services. Partnerships with specializing agencies outside the child welfare agency can support services for families when funding for the child welfare agency is reduced.

Questions to Consider: What other reasons might be defined for your agency? What challenges do workers and supervisors identify when considering entering a partnership with another agency?

At this point, complete the Ecomap Activity, if desired.
Bronstein (2003) offers a five part model for social workers to facilitate collaborative efforts. As noted in the slide, these parts include interdependence, collective ownership of goals, flexibility, newly created professional activities, and reflection on the process.

Supervisors of child welfare workers can identify topics for supervision that can facilitate improved worker relationships with collaborating agencies. Additionally, these supervisors may identify managerial opportunities within each area to promote improved relationships agency-wide.
Interdependence is the “occurrence of and reliance on interactions among professionals whereby each is dependent on the other to accomplish his or her goals and tasks” (Bronstein, 2003, 299).

**Relevance:** For interdisciplinary partnerships to be effective, members must value each other and the need for each others’ work in the success of a case. The perception of the collaborative effort as a worthwhile use of an employee’s time impacts the overall success of the work. Further, when child welfare workers perceive a work environment to be constructive and collaborative, they are more likely to remain in that agency long-term. These seasoned workers expand possibilities for the children, families, and communities they serve.
Successful partnerships are rooted in communication practices that enhance a sense of interdependence.

**Developing Communication Protocol:** Regularly scheduled meetings, the development of personal contacts, and the practice of reporting results to applicable partners is an important way to improve service delivery and breakdown negative stereotypes between agencies that may hinder collaborative efforts.

**Awareness of Communication Needs:** More informal communication protocol might include awareness around confusing terms or acronyms, so that clarity between partners is easily discerned. If partners do not do this, the communication confusion may create barriers and an informal hierarchy between partners who understand and people who don’t.

**Initiating Communication with Partners:** The initiation of communication by a child welfare worker with a potential partner can facilitate the initial stages of the partnership. For example, a child welfare worker could initiate contact with a teacher as the child begins the school year with the teacher, sharing acceptable information about the child’s foster care status and offering assistance to the teacher. This trusting step may create a more successful collaboration for the worker and the teacher; it may also improve the outcomes for the child.

**Implications for Supervision:** In a very basic sense, supervisors can model effective communication practices with their employees, including establishing meeting protocols, using appropriate language, modeling reflective listening skills, and punctually sharing appropriate information with supervisees. Supervisors can encourage supervisees to initiate appropriate contacts with potential partners in order to establish a trusting, positive relationship. On a larger scale, supervisors may identify ways that the agency, as a whole, may improve communication practices. For example, in order to clarify roles and establish more positive communication practices with various partners, the supervisor may initiate the development of guidelines and protocols that are shared with new partners regarding the sharing or withholding of confidential information in a shared case.

**Questions to Consider:** In what ways has communication helped or hindered previous partnerships in your agency or in your individual work with clients? How have advancements in technology helped or hurt these communication efforts?
Roles and relationships between partners can create challenges for child welfare workers.

**Power and Hierarchy:** It is important to note the perceptions of hierarchy and power that are often present when working with other disciplines. Interdisciplinary efforts can be undermined by unequal status and power relationships between partners, with those regarded as more powerful gaining an unequal voice in the decision-making process. It is important to note that these differences in power may be legitimate or simply perceived.

**Perceptions of Social Workers:** Within partnerships, social workers are frequently perceived as more emotional and less professional than some other professions, such as doctors or lawyers. These perceptions are, in part, related to the values society places on professions; they are also linked to socialized behavior and norms for professions, including language, dress, and relationships with authority figures.

**Implications for Supervision:** Supervision can create an opportunity for workers to discuss the value of involving different professionals and different sets of knowledge. Supervision can also be used to identify hierarchies present in collaborative relationships, analyze these hierarchies, and develop new insights into their role in the overall effort. The highlighting the value of using multiple perspectives in interdisciplinary work can be a vital part of a supervisee’s development as a collaborator, offering deeper insight into one’s own perception of social problems and their potential solutions. These discussions can also help supervisees to appreciate their role and the origins of this power structure. When a supervisee “becomes cognizant of the issues he/she will be better able to respond in the manner most beneficial for the client and the treatment team” (Harper-Jacques & Limacher, 2009, 55). This recognition may also include identifying differences in professional culture, and this awareness may improve overall team collaboration.

**Photos:** Consider how these photos (a doctor, social workers, and a lawyer) speak to the ideas presented about power and hierarchy.

**Questions to Consider:** Have you experienced problems with hierarchy and power in your agency when working with external partners? How are these differences usually addressed?
Collective Ownership of Goals

- Relevance
- Case Ownership
- Implications for Supervision

Collaborative efforts are best served when all parties involved develop the goals for the collaborative effort, creating a sense of shared responsibility for the outcomes of the work.

**Relevance:** While each member of the partnership must identify his or her role and set of responsibilities within the scope of the work, creating shared goals for the team is essential to successful partnerships. Additionally, groups should consider how values and ethical principles are honored as the plan for work is designed. Community level collectives should emphasize larger, community level goals as opposed to single agency mission statements when implementing collaborative work.

**Case Ownership:** It is important that partners working on a case together establish a strong understanding of case ownership and case leadership. It is very easy for the sense of responsibility for the case to be “diffused” among all of the partners involved. Interdisciplinary efforts that carefully define roles and responsibilities for each member tend to successfully navigate these issues. These successful partnerships also tend to create action plans for the group, enumerating responsible parties when doing so.

**Implications for Supervision:** When supervising workers on interdisciplinary partnerships, supervisors can encourage critical thinking about the vision, mission, and goals of the group, and the relationships between these elements and those of the agency. Supervisees should be able to clearly define their roles and responsibilities within the group and outline action steps for which they are responsible. Supervisors can also use collaborative efforts to share the vision and mission of the agency to the community. Supervisees can, for example, identify strengths-based approaches and goals when planning as a group, and supervisors can continually model and share the vision, mission, and values of the agency when communicating with the community. Giving community members insight into the work of child protection can create more transparency and better overall community support for the agency.

**Questions to Consider:** How should the partnered agencies communicate their roles to the children and families involved in the cases? Why is defining these roles externally so important?
Members of a successful interdisciplinary partnership tend to be willing to compromise (and even blur) their traditional role in order to creatively solve a problem.

**Cross-Training:** In the arena of child welfare, one area of flexibility available is in facilitating opportunities for the cross-training of interdisciplinary partners in different agencies and professions. Cross-training offers agencies a low-cost alternative for staying current with community resources and needs, and it creates a stronger, more positive collaborative relationship between sharing partners. For example, child welfare workers can offer teachers insights into the needs of students in foster care, while educators can outline support systems in the school and highlight educational activities that would support learning. Both groups could collaborate to help foster parents understand the content of both sets of training. While cross-training is not a common part of the child welfare worker’s role, this example demonstrates the potentially positive relationship that could emerge from shared expertise.

**Ethical Implications:** Particularly for those trained in social work and committed to uphold the National Association of Social Worker’s Code of Ethics, collaborative work with other professions may challenge the commitment to these principles. Child protection workers involved in interdisciplinary efforts should be clear about their role within the context of this code of ethics, as not every partner will adhere to the same document. There are differences between the ethical obligations of doctors, lawyers and social workers.

**Implications for Supervision:** Supervisors working with child protection workers involved in interdisciplinary partnerships can use supervision to create a strong sense of balance between clearly defined roles and a willingness to “blur” roles. This willingness to blur roles can support clients and the partnership, but strong partnerships also have high levels of role clarity. This supervision can highlight the value of flexible responses to problems when balanced with a clear sense of the roles and responsibilities of child welfare workers. These responsibilities include a clear adherence to the ethical obligations of the social work field, identifying the worker’s primary role as a child welfare worker, not a consultant for another agency. Supervision can help workers identify themselves as, in part, community resources to partner agencies without losing sight of the overall expectations of those working in child protection.

**Questions to Consider:** What acceptable activities in your agency “blur” the roles set by the agency? At what point do you identify a behavior or activity to be “too flexible”?
Interdisciplinary groups should consider the creation of acts, programs or structures that facilitate interdisciplinary work, though these activities may not be transferable to work outside the interdisciplinary group. The group’s goals guide the development of these structures and processes, and the achievements will be greater than what individuals in the group could have accomplished separately.

**Unique Activities:** The activities and processes may not be transferable to work outside the group. For example, a collaborative protocol for investigating and interviewing child abuse cases between law enforcement officers and child protection workers may reduce trauma for children and increase law enforcement success rates. That said, these protocols would not be effective if the two professionals were not paired for the investigation.

**Innovation and Time Management:** Interdisciplinary decision-making is more time consuming, especially when new partnerships are developing new collective activities. That said, the success of these efforts may make up for the time lost in the early phase of the work. For example, child welfare workers, foster parents, and teachers can work together to create a formal education plan for students in foster care. These plans could improve teachers’ knowledge of the child and the child welfare system, raise foster parents’ awareness of the school services available to them, and reduce the frustration often experienced between child welfare workers and school districts. Despite the positive attributes of this new activity, it is important to note that this activity will take time on the “front end” of the case, and child welfare workers must consider whether the collaborative activity will be an effective use of this time.

**Implications for Supervision:** Supervisors can assist supervisees as they continually clarify their role as a part of the interdisciplinary process as new professional activities emerge to improve care. Supervisors can use time with supervisees to consider the innovations of the collaborative as they relate to the child welfare agency’s mandate and the collective’s jointly-developed goals. The new activities can be assessed as a part of a strengths-based approach to wraparound case work. Further, collaborative efforts may highlight systemic changes that supervisors can advocate for at the agency or state level.

**Questions for Consideration:** What are the current collaborative activities and protocols for partnerships in your agency? How are these new activities related to collective goal setting, communication, and flexibility within partnerships?
Collaborative efforts are strengthened by continual cycles of feedback and reflection on the group’s work. This pattern of reflection and self-evaluation is directly linked with a collective’s overall ability to communicate efficiently and effectively. Thus, the elements of interdependence are well integrated into the elements of reflection, feedback, and improvement of process.

**Additional Scrutiny:** This feedback will leave the work of all involved in the process open to additional scrutiny by group members, an aspect of interdisciplinary work that is often criticized by child welfare workers. Supervisors of child welfare workers can dialogue about this scrutiny and the role interdisciplinary critiques play in the worker’s overall perception of effectiveness. One way to proceed with this is to encourage interdisciplinary groups to use objective criteria when determining success. This way, workers can regularly self-assess their work within the context of the collaborative effort.

**Formalized Supervision:** Social workers understand the value of regular reflection through their understanding of supervision, and modeling this practice for partners can illuminate its value for other members of partnerships. Giving priority to supervision and reflection by formally scheduling time for it adds legitimacy to the process. Thus, formal supervision about collaborative work enhances the professional-nature of the work.

**Group Supervision and Peer Support:** Supervisors can also marry the spirit of collaboration with the supervision process through the implementation of group supervision. These group sessions not only add to all of the members’ knowledge base about successful collaboration, but also offer live demonstrations of group dynamics, roles, and communication patterns. These group sessions can then offer insights for individual supervision discussions about the parallel processes occurring between this group’s development and the interdisciplinary team’s work. Further, the sense of peer support created during group supervision can reduce the likelihood that a new child welfare worker will leave the agency in the first three years in the field.

**Questions to Consider:** How are “best practices” for partnerships within your agency communicated between workers? What are ways that these can be reflected on and improved?

*At this point, complete the Chart Activity, if desired. Following this, complete the Practical Application and the Knowledge Check.*