

Department of Opportunities and Social Development

Child and Family Wellbeing

Practice Framework

January 2025 (Updated for final language)

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Acknowledgement

The Department of Opportunities and Social Development acknowledges that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

This territory is covered by the “Treaties of Peace and Friendship” which Mi'kmaq Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet), and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1726.

The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources, but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

Additionally, we would like to acknowledge that within Nova Scotia, people of African ancestry settled and contributed to the building of many formative developments, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries.

This includes the Black Loyalists who fought on the side of Britain during the American War of Independence, the Maroons, who fought and never surrendered to the Spanish and British in Jamaica, and Southern American Black Refugees, who fought on the side of the British during the War of 1812.

The Practice Framework was developed with an understanding of the harms caused by colonized child welfare practices. The policies and practices that have historically been in place have marginalized many children, youth, and families. These have had significant and disproportionately negative impacts on the children, youth, and families of Indigenous people, children, youth, and families who are African Nova Scotian, Black, or of African descent, other ethnic populations, and persons who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Moving forward we must acknowledge our history, learn from it, build and enhance relationships, and work together as partners with children, youth, families, and communities to support their safety and wellbeing needs.

Background / Introduction

The Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development (the Department) provides a range of services to children, youth, and families. While child welfare services started through charitable or religious organizations to help abandoned, orphaned, and neglected children, over time the services became directed and governed by governments and professionals.

The Department is taking steps to redesign and transform the services provided to children, youth, and families. The success of children, youth, and families is best supported by early, restorative, and preventative responses, early intervention services, family preservation, and trusted, healthy family and community relationships. The Department recognizes that children and youth require a community of healthy people that provide a circle of support and services to meet their unique needs. As the needs of children, youth, and families change, the supports and services available must adjust.

The Department believes that prevention, early intervention, and family preservation efforts that are rooted in community are foundational to building success for children, youth, and families.

In an effort to shift our practice, the Department’s focus is shifting away from “Child Welfare” to “Child and Family Wellbeing”. Child and Family Wellbeing promotes a holistic perspective that extends beyond physical wellbeing to consider the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and cognitive wellbeing of the child, youth, and family.

The Practice Framework defines the vision, values, guiding principles, and standards for practice required to achieve the best outcomes for children, youth, and families. The Practice Framework describes and defines how those who are delivering supports or services as part of the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum in Nova Scotia, should plan and respond to the needs of children, youth, and families, while being reflective of what ongoing changes should be made to practice.

The Practice Framework acknowledges that the experiences of children, youth, families, and communities vary depending on an individual’s or group’s connection to other overlapping social identities, such as race, gender identity and expression, (dis)ability, age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, immigration status, income, etc., and how these other social identities interact to increase or decrease barriers, opportunities, and privilege. Thus, the Practice Framework promotes pro-equity, anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles in our practice and engagement with children, youth, families, and communities.

While relevant to all Nova Scotians, the Practice Framework is intended to guide the work of Child and Family Wellbeing staff, partners, and community service providers. It focuses on prevention, support, and family preservation and describes the following elements through a child, youth, and family-centered lens:

Vision	This is the outcome we want to achieve. It provides the aspirational statement for Child and Family Wellbeing in Nova Scotia.
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Child and Family Wellbeing Practice Framework

Values	This is why we are doing the work. The values provide purpose and guidance. They describe what those who practice in the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum stand for.
Guiding Principles	This is what we are doing in our work. The Guiding Principles encompass the overarching philosophy of Child and Family Wellbeing in Nova Scotia. They establish a framework for decision making.
Practice Standards	This is how we do our work. Practice Standards outline how Child and Family Wellbeing practices and programs are developed and delivered. They also include guidance, reflective questions, and indicators.

The Practice Framework will enhance access to high quality, culturally safe, and inclusive support to help Nova Scotia’s children, youth, and families thrive.

What is a Practice Framework?

A practice framework:

- Captures the existing strengths and good practices underway, while recognizing the need to reflect and be inclusive of the diverse perspectives, cultures, and needs of children, youth, and families.
- Provides a set of common principles, and supports consistent approaches to practice, from prevention and early intervention through child protection and children in care supports.
- Guides and supports staff, partners, and community service providers who help maintain the safety and wellbeing of children, youth, and families.

The development of the Practice Framework is a continuation of the efforts to move from reacting to crisis, to focusing on prevention, early intervention, family preservation, healthy family and community relationships, and improvement of the overall experience of children, youth, families, and communities.

Child and Family Wellbeing Practice Framework

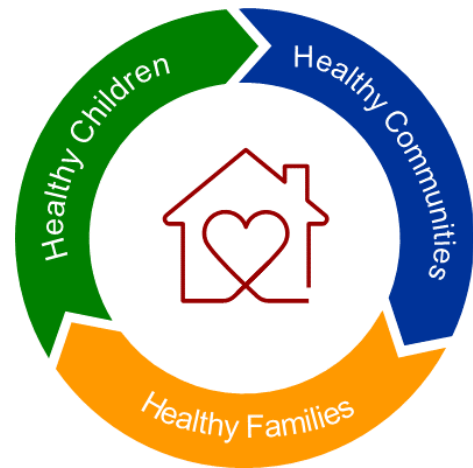
Nova Scotia's Practice Framework

The Practice Framework recognizes that healthy children, healthy families, and healthy communities are interconnected and that there is an interdependence between all three in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of a child.

The Practice Framework affirms that children, youth, and families have the inherent strengths to thrive, particularly when they are supported by healthy community relationships. It highlights the safety and wellbeing of a child, youth, family, and community as a shared responsibility and not owned by government or service providers.

The Practice Framework identifies the importance of trusted relationships and collaborative partnerships with and within the child, youth, or family's community which includes Elders and knowledge keepers, spiritual and community leaders, friends, neighbours, schools, health care providers, community partners, and staff.

The Practice Framework acknowledges that staff, partners, and community service providers require personal and professional wellbeing. Reflective practice is critical to their resilience and is included in the Practice Framework as an essential component.



Building the Practice Framework

The Practice Framework was designed using multiple internal and external sources of information and inspiration. Building from the foundation provided by the *Children and Family Services Act*, the Practice Framework intends to address learnings and approaches from Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Restorative Inquiry, the Department's Anti-Black Racism Policies / Principles, and the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, Métis children, youth and families*.

Building on the progress and experiences of the past, information was gathered from recent learnings / reviews, legislation, policy, practice, and feedback gathered from engagement with staff, partners, and community service providers.

For a more detailed list of sources see Appendix 2.

How to Use the Practice Framework

In the spirit of "**All My Relations**" and interconnected relationships, the Practice Framework is one of the many interconnected improvements being implemented to support the safety and wellbeing of Nova Scotia's children, youth, families, and communities.

The Practice Framework is meant to guide and support the practice of those who have accountability for the safety and wellbeing of children under the *Children and Family Services Act*, and *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families*.

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The Practice Framework is also intended to provide consistent direction and support flexibility, autonomy, and accountability.

It is a tool to assist in reflecting on biases, inequities, discrimination, and racism when thinking about and working with children, youth, families, and communities. It is not meant to be prescriptive and acknowledges that **there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach**. Each child, youth, family, and community require a response that meets their specific and unique needs.

The Practice Framework is intended for:

- **Those who will use the Practice Framework to guide their work.** This includes:
 - Department of Opportunities and Social Development and Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services staff who are working across the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum, including those in supportive roles and leadership roles such as supervisors, management, and senior leadership.
 - Community service providers who work in partnership with the Department and Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services to provide supports and services to families.
- **Those who are receiving supports and services to better understand what they should expect to experience.** This includes:
 - Children, youth, families, and communities who interact with the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum at any stage, from prevention and early intervention through to permanency.
- **Those who work collaboratively with the Department to support children, youth, and families.** This includes:
 - Communities including communities of interest: those with a common understanding and interest in empowering children, youth, and families; and communities of geography: those that are close to where children, youth, and families reside.
 - Related government programs, departments, and partners.

Additional individuals and organizations, such as other community-based organizations and the community at large, may use the Practice Framework to better understand how Child and Family Wellbeing supports children, youth, families, and communities.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used in this report:

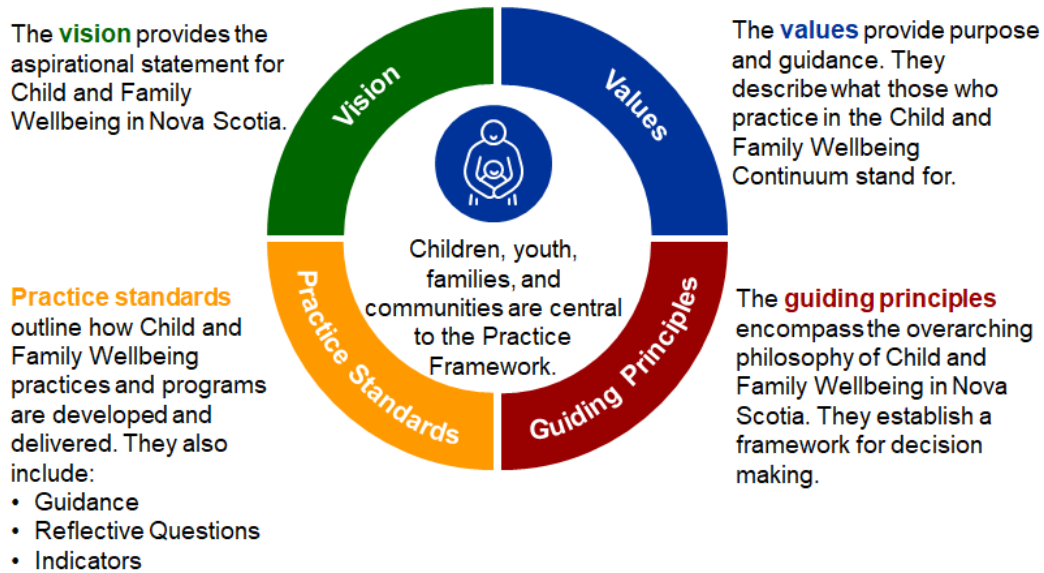
Term	Definition
Africentric Framework	Uses African philosophies, history, and culture to interpret and create relevant approaches to personal, family and community healing, and societal change. This is captured by placing children, youth, families, and community at the centre of the Framework.
An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, Métis children, youth and families	This legislation recognizes the inherent rights of Indigenous people in supporting the safety and wellbeing of their children, youth, families, and communities, and specifically recognizes the rights of Mi'kmaw people and their traditional territory upon which we practice.
Community	<p>Community can be defined differently for each person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cultural communities</i>: those with learned and shared experiences resulting from their nationality, ethnicity, or religion. • <i>Communities of interest</i>: common understanding and interest in empowering children, youth, and families. Child and Family Wellbeing staff, partners, and community service providers are considered as members of a child, youth, and family's healthy community who share responsibility with others to support a child, youth, or family's safety and wellbeing needs. • <i>Community of geography</i>: those that are close to where children, youth, and families reside.
Child Welfare / Child and Family Wellbeing	<p>Child Welfare / Child and Family Wellbeing describes the government and community-based services that are designed to protect children from abuse and neglect and encourage family stability. This may include the protection of children in and out of the home.</p> <p>Throughout this document, Child Welfare is used to reflect historic approaches and practices, while Child and Family Wellbeing is used to reflect a transition towards prevention, early intervention, and family preservation focused supports and services for children, youth, and families.</p>
Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum	All Child and Family Wellbeing supports, services and programs. This includes prevention and early intervention programs and services, child protection (intake and long-term protective services, alternative family care, and youth services), and children in care services (foster care, child and youth caring programs, and adoptions).
Diversity	Is the representation and inclusion of a range of social and ethnic backgrounds, gender expression, sexuality, religion, language, and (dis)ability, among other elements that make each individual unique.

Term	Definition
Family	Family is inclusive of anyone identified by the child, youth, and family. This could include mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, Elders, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, relatives, by birth, marriage, common law, adoption, or close association.
Guiding Principles	This is what we are doing in our work. The Guiding Principles encompass the overarching philosophy of Child and Family Wellbeing in Nova Scotia. They establish a framework for decision making.
Policy	Formalized requirements that apply to a specific area or task, a set of guidelines or rules that determine a course of action.
Practice Framework	<p>A value-based practical guidance that provides values, a vision, support for decision-making, increased clarity on joint responsibilities, and an approach to culturally attentive, safe, and inclusive practices. The Practice Framework includes the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome we want to achieve (Vision) • Why we are doing the work (Values) • What we are doing in our work (Guiding Principles) • How we do our work (Practice Standards).
Practice Standards	This is how we do our work. Practice Standards outline how Child and Family Wellbeing practices and programs are developed and delivered. They also include guidance, reflective questions, and indicators.
Procedures	Describe how policy will be implemented and met through a set of approved and recommended steps.
Safety	Means that children, youth, and families are free from harm.
Values	This is why we are doing the work. The values provide purpose and guidance. They describe what those who practice in the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum stand for.
Vision	This is the outcome we want to achieve. It provides the aspirational statement for Child and Family Wellbeing in Nova Scotia.
We	Intended to reflect all those involved in a child, youth and family’s life and community.
Wellbeing	Children, youth, and families are supported to achieve positive mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, environmental, and social experiences.

Practice Framework

The elements of the Practice Framework build upon one another, meaning that the concepts and ideas of one layer inform and apply to the next layer of the framework.

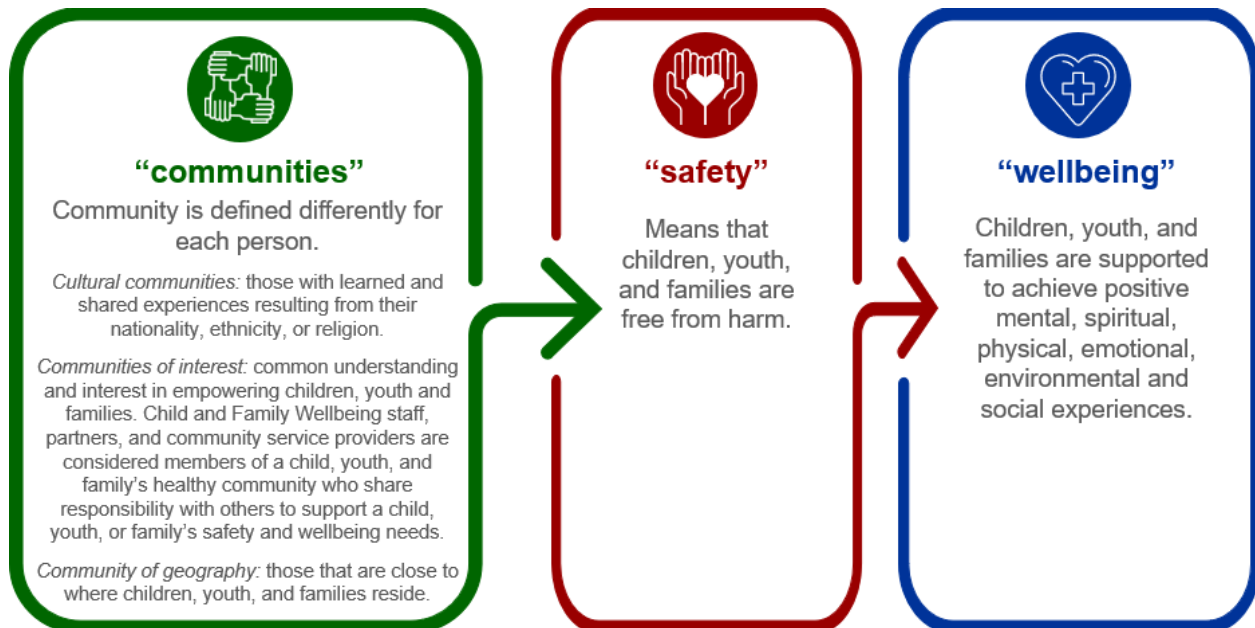
Figure 1: Practice Framework Overview



Vision

Communities support the **safety** and **wellbeing** of children, youth, and families.

Figure 2: Definition of Key Words in Vision Statement



Child and Family Wellbeing Practice Framework

Children, youth, and families inherently have strengths. The communities supporting children, youth, and families have a shared responsibility to help recognize and enhance these strengths to preserve the family.

The vision highlights the strength and resiliency of children, youth, families, and communities and their natural capacity to thrive, achieve, and excel when they are connected to supportive, shared healthy relationships. It is informed by the past and focused on the future, reinforcing that children, youth, and families are the fundamental keepers of their own safety and wellbeing.

This vision establishes staff, partners, and community service providers as members of a child, youth, and family's healthy community who share responsibility with others to support a child, youth, or family's safety and wellbeing needs.

Values

Values provide purpose and guidance. The Department has an established set of values, as defined below:

Respect	<p>We accept and value the diverse ideas, skills, and abilities of others.</p> <p>We treat all people in a courteous and caring manner.</p>
Equity	<p>We treat people fairly.</p> <p>We apply policies and procedures consistently.</p>
Integrity	<p>We are open, honest, and strive to be fair in our dealings with others.</p> <p>We adhere to facts and evidence and are consistent in making decisions.</p> <p>We honour our commitments and place the common good ahead of personal interest.</p>
Quality Client Service	<p>We promote timeliness, responsiveness, reliability, and accessibility in delivering services to our clients.</p> <p>We listen to clients and encourage and use continuous feedback.</p> <p>We embrace and support measurement as key to improving service quality.</p>
Creativity	<p>We foster creativity, innovation, continuous learning, and improvement.</p> <p>We value initiative and support appropriate risk-taking.</p>
Team Work	<p>We share a sense of common purpose and goals.</p>

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	<p>We foster active participation, open communication, and the growth of knowledge.</p> <p>We believe in collaboration, cooperative effort, mutual assistance, and shared leadership.</p>
Excellence	<p>We strive for excellence in all that we do.</p> <p>We evaluate ourselves to ensure our work reflects this high standard.</p> <p>We seek continuous improvement and expect from our staff a dedication and commitment to the pursuit of excellence.</p>
Accountability	<p>We act and report on defined expectations.</p> <p>We take responsibility for our performance and encourage others to take responsibility for theirs.</p> <p>We promote a full accounting of the use of public funds and the results obtained.</p>

While the Practice Framework values (as listed below) are specific to Child and Family Wellbeing, they are related to, build upon, and enhance the values of the Department. They describe what those who practice in the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum stand for.

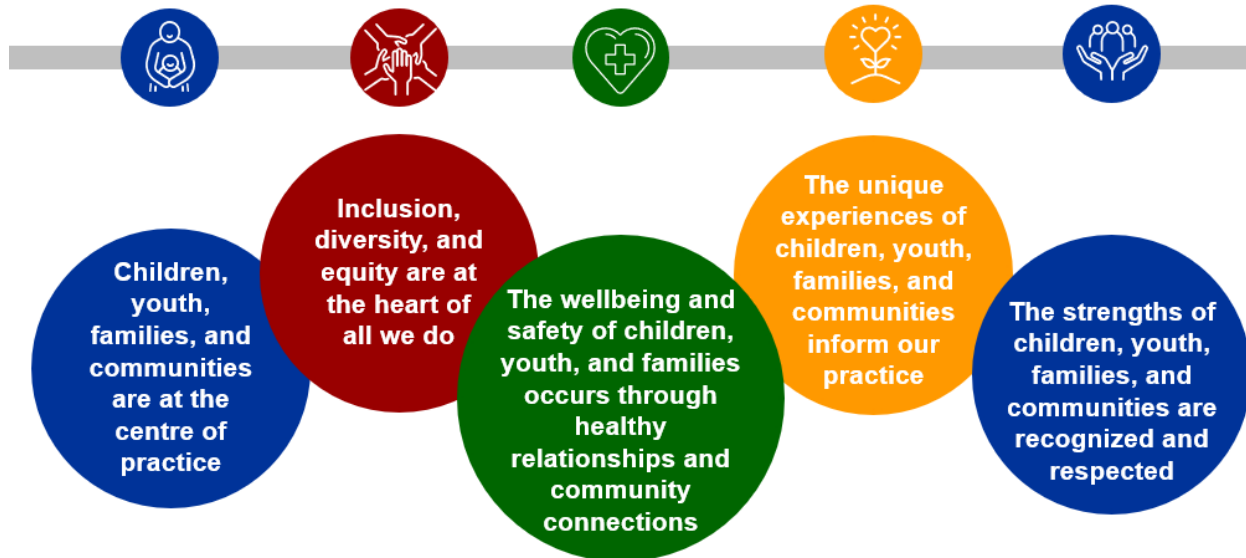
Figure 3: Value Statements



Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles encompass the overarching philosophy of Child and Family Wellbeing and establish a framework for decision-making.

Figure 4: Guiding Principle Statements



Practice Standards

The important role of staff, partners, and community service providers often includes working with the most vulnerable members of society. Children, youth, and families of Indigenous people, children, youth, and families who are African Nova Scotian, Black, or of African descent, Acadian, other ethnic populations, as well as 2SLGBTQIA+ communities have been disproportionately negatively impacted by Child Welfare services.

Their unique stories require our attention, acknowledgement, and support as we continually learn from them and adapt our practice to meet their needs. How we view, think about, relate to, include, and behave towards these children, their families, and their communities contributes to their success or failure.

That is why having a set of standards that are aligned with our professional designations, leading practice, our service to the public, and our commitment to children, youth, families, and community, is ethically important and makes the expectations clear and transparent for all.

Figure 5: Practice Standard Statements



The practice standards describe how the vision, values, principles, and commitments are demonstrated in our work with children, youth, families, and communities. They outline the baseline expectation for how staff, partners, and community service providers approach their work with children, youth, families, and communities. They inform **how** we practice. The policy manual will define **what** we do.

The following elements are also provided to support achievement of the standards:

- **Guidance statements** are examples of activities that support the achievement of the practice standard.
- **Reflective questions** are questions that staff, partners, and community service providers can ask themselves, can be used in communities of practice, peer support and reviews, case reviews, and during supervision to stimulate self-awareness, critical thinking, and achievement of the practice standards.
- **Indicators** help understand the level of achievement towards a standard. They assist in understanding whether efforts on behalf of children, youth, and families are aligned with the vision, values, principles, standards, commitments, and expectations of an enhanced person-centered practice.

As with all practice within the Child and Family Wellbeing Continuum, no one person, document, framework, or standard is unrelated to others. The standards are not mutually exclusive and as such, to provide high quality, responsive support to children, youth, families, and communities, we strive to meet or exceed achievement of all the practice standards.

Detailed Practice Standards

Standard 1: Engaging children, youth, and families as experts in their own lives

Recognizing that those who know best for a child, youth, or family is themselves, the intention of this practice standard is to enable, support, and empower children, youth, and families to meet their needs by identifying what they feel would be most beneficial to them. The role of the community is to provide the necessary support and resources as identified by the child, youth, or family to explore their own strengths and barriers in order to succeed.

Every child, youth, and family have unique past and current realities that must be understood, acknowledged, and honoured. Children, youth, and families who experience challenges, such as poverty, family violence, mental illness, substance abuse, social isolation, inadequate housing or homelessness, and generational trauma, are less likely to have their critical needs met. Unmet needs can escalate to more serious issues if not supported early on, therefore, it is important to work with children, youth, and families and provide guidance on how best to move forward in their lives.

Standard 1: Engaging children, youth, and families as experts in their own lives		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Seeking input from children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore, seek to understand, and respond to each child, youth, and family's unique identity, diversity, desires, and needs. • Consistently seek the child, youth, and family's views about their life, goals, experiences, past and present realities, culture, and how you partner together. • Centre the child, youth, and family's voice in your work and involve them in all decisions. • Identify, support, and enhance existing strengths in the child, youth, and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my assumptions and biases about the child, youth, family, or community? • How does the child, youth, and family identify their race, culture, religion, gender expression, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, among other diversity elements? • How does the child, youth, and family engage with their race and / or culture? • How is the child, youth, family's voice included in the case plan? • How have I included the child, youth, family, and community in the decision-making process and validated the decision(s) with them? • What information have I gathered as important to the child, youth, and family? • What supports have the child, youth, or family said worked for them in the past?

Standard 1: Engaging children, youth, and families as experts in their own lives		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
Adapting practice to put the child, youth, and family at the centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe space for children, youth, and families to ask questions and provide feedback about their experience and adjust practice in response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I know that I have created a safe space for children, youth, and families to express their opinion without judgment? • How have I adapted my practice to best suit the needs of the child, youth, and family?
Communication practices with children, youth, and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that children, youth, and families have different communication styles and preferences. • Provide clear, timely, open, and relevant information to children, youth, families, and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has my practice been adapted to fit the learning and understanding needs of the child, youth, and family? • How do I know that the child, youth, and family understand the process?

Indicators of achievement for this practice standard include:

- Practice demonstrates that the child was at the centre of discussions and that the family led the planning and decision-making.
- Practice demonstrates changes and shifts based on early and ongoing input from the child, youth, and / or family.
- There is a demonstration that there is a shared understanding of the reason for involvement and the situation between staff and the child, youth, and family.

Standard 2: Keeping families together within their community

This practice standard affirms that a family is the foundational relationship for children and youth, and when supported by healthy community relationships, it can help to achieve and enhance their safety and wellbeing. A child / youth who stays together with those they identify as their family (mother, father, sisters, brothers, Elders, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, relatives), by birth, marriage, common law, adoption, or close association, in a supportive community achieves better overall outcomes than those who are separated from these natural supports.

Every effort should be made to be supportive community members and keep families safely together prior to separating a child / youth from their family and natural supports. In situations where this cannot be done safely, every effort should be made to maintain as many of the child / youth’s natural connections as possible within their identified community.

Standard 2: Keeping families together within their community		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
Preserving the family unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the child / youth within their family and community, based on the definition of family and community for that child / youth’s circumstances. Make decisions that are aligned with what would happen within the context of a “family”. Focus on preserving, reuniting, and supporting families to be strong and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who has the child / youth identified as the safe people in their life? Who have the caregivers identified as people they trust with their child / youth? Recognizing that the definition of family differs for everyone, how have I explored with the family all their possible connections and supports? How have my own assumptions or biases about family influenced planning and decisions for the child, youth, and family? How were family relationships considered or explored before other options? How will I involve the child / youth's family if they are unable to provide care?
Creating connection to community supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and consider how the child / youth's community and culture can provide support to the child / youth and the family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What existing community or online support and resources are available to support the child, youth, family? What barriers might the child, youth, or family be experiencing

Standard 2: Keeping families together within their community		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek opportunities to safely maintain connection for children, youth, families, and community 	<p>that could impact their ability to access support (i.e. language, race, culture, (dis)ability)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will I meaningfully engage the family and community supporting the child / youth? What do I know / need to learn about the community to support connections for children, youth, and families?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Reduced number of open child safety and family preservation files.
- Reduced number of children in care.
- Increased number of supports offered by community members to support families.
- Practice demonstrates families being supported to access and use culturally attentive and responsive community resources.
- Practice demonstrates collaboration between community service providers and the Department.
- Practice reflects that the child, youth, family believes that they've explored and considered how their extended family and community connections can support them.

Standard 3: Engaging in reflective practice

This practice standard asks us to be present, curious, attentive, and open when we are working with children, youth, and families in need. It asks us to reflect on what we know, and what we think we know and to validate this regularly by asking and checking. This requires humility, honesty with oneself, and a commitment to understanding and doing better. It also requires us to use the best available data and information to keep us informed and up to date.

Staff, partners, and community service providers working with children, youth, and families have an opportunity to be a part of a supportive professional community committed to the health, safety and wellbeing needs of children, youth, and families. It is critical that we approach this with awareness, insight and knowledge of ourselves, our behavior, and the environmental context that can lead to increased challenges. The children, youth, families, and communities deserve nothing less.

Standard 3: Engaging in reflective practice		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
Approach to reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead, model, promote and make time to participate in reflective practice. • Acknowledge and recognize the effects of historical and intergenerational trauma, experiences of racism, inequality, and cultural experiences. • Consistently review and reflect on rationale for direction and decision-making, including what went well, where improvements could be made and what was learned. • Embrace a culture of openness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has racial identity, gender expression, sexuality, culture, religion, language, and (dis)ability, among others diversity elements impacted the past and current realities of children, youth, families, and communities? • What are all the possible options and approaches that I have considered before making a decision? • How have I interacted with others in a respectful and professional manner? • How have I encouraged and supported, and sought support from, my colleagues?
Exploration of what has happened and different perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be genuine and thorough in exploring what is happening for the child, youth, and family. • Seek out support, advice, consultation, guidance and feedback from the child, family, community, knowledge holders and colleagues to adapt practice as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the child, youth, and family best process information and have I tailored my communication to this style? • How have I demonstrated that I have treated others how I would want to be treated? • How can I promote anti-oppressive, anti-racist practices at an institutional / systems level?

Standard 3: Engaging in reflective practice		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Reflection on what can be done differently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on and address how your own beliefs, experiences, biases, and opinions influence how you interact with others. • Be present and reflect on how your presence and actions contribute to a response from others. • Reflect on and intentionally respond to feedback and mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How am I engaging in self-reflection on a regular basis? • What are my biases and how have they influenced my decisions? • How have I thought about the power imbalance that may have influenced this interaction? • How have I addressed any occurrences of harmful practices I noticed? • What are the gaps in my own knowledge and how have I sought support to address this?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Practice demonstrates fluid and adaptive changes in planning based on reflection of information.
- Practice demonstrates intentional activities that mitigate the bias or power imbalance that may exist, for example, sharing of personal experiences and normalizing the experiences of children, youth, and families.
- Practice demonstrates a willingness to admit mistakes and errors, and a commitment to building further understanding through checks / re-checks.
- Practice demonstrates participation in learning circles, communities of practice, or opportunities to engage with and seek input on personal practices from children, youth, and families.

Standard 4: Building and maintaining relationships

Children, youth, and families need connections to individuals who are meaningful to them within their identified communities and can provide nurturing support and a sense of connection. This practice standard acknowledges people as social beings and reinforces relationships, and particularly healthy relationships in the context of community, as the key to successful achievement of outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities.

It asks us to identify, build, support and maintain the relationships both between the child, youth, family, and their community and with the child, youth, family, and their community.

Standard 4: Building and maintaining relationships		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Offering support as a partner to children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the child, youth, family, and their community to understand and create goals that meet their unique needs. • Partner with the family to create a positive and natural experience of being together. • Prioritize establishing, nurturing, and maintaining relationships that encourage wellbeing for the child, youth, and family. • Facilitate opportunities for connection within the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the child, youth, and family’s definition of “family” and “community”? • How has racial identity, gender expression, sexuality, culture, religion, language, and (dis)ability, among others diversity elements impacted the child, youth, or family’s relationships? • How and with whom does the child, youth, and family want to remain connected to, and be connected with? • Who does the child / youth say they love and loves them? • How have I considered the unique racial, cultural, gender, and social norms or diverse identities of the child, youth, and family and how have I been careful not to make assumptions about their needs? • How have I identified and addressed any assumptions I hold about family members and their commitment to the wellbeing of the child / youth?
<p>Creating an environment for relationship building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach practice through partnership, compassion, and flexibility. • Consistently check in on progress and adapt supports and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do I know about the child, youth, and family to provide planning and support? • How have I created an environment where the child,

Standard 4: Building and maintaining relationships		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
	<p>interventions in response to changing needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about decision making processes and the role each partner has in this process. 	<p>youth, and family feel safe and comfortable expressing their views?</p>
<p>Building relationships with children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen connections and working relationships, both within and outside of your community. • Strengthen relationships with children, youth, families, and communities. • Explore and understand who the child, youth, and family's supports currently are, could be, or have been in the past. • Maintain meaningful connections to the child, youth, and family's community. • Recognize and respond to individual strengths, diversities, challenges, and readiness when building relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who have I spoken to who are important to the child, youth, and family, as identified by them? • How have I sought information and understanding from, and who have I shared information with as a relevant party? • How have the experiences of the child, youth, and family created barriers or impacted their connections? • What have I done to support a family to repair or reconcile connections?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Practice reflects a collaborative effort with the child, youth, and family in seeking out family, communities, partners, and supports.
- Practice demonstrates genuine engagement where people are valued and there is mutual comfort and trust in seeking input and support.
- Practice demonstrates increased diversity of connections and non-traditional collaboration across, and between Departments and community-based service providers.
- Children, youth, and families experience a meaningful difference in their interactions with and within their communities.

Standard 5: Valuing community as part of a family

A child, youth, or family does not exist outside of a community of interest, a community of geography, or a cultural community. This practice standard recognizes a family’s success is intertwined and interdependent on the support of community, just as a community’s success is intertwined and interdependent on the success of its families.

This practice standard asks us to acknowledge this relationship by valuing community as a part of a family and the success of the family, and tailor practice with this in mind.

Standard 5: Valuing community as part of a family		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Defining a child, youth, and family’s community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore with the child, youth, and family who they consider a part of, or could be part of, their community. • Recognize the role community has in maintaining safety and wellbeing for children, youth, and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the child, youth, and family’s cultural and community connections be a source of support? • How does the child, youth, and family identify their race, culture, religion, gender expression, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, among other diversity elements as part of their family / community? • How have I explored with children, youth, and families their current formal and informal support networks? • How have those in the child, youth, and family’s life impacted their wellbeing?
<p>Leveraging community in supporting children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek community resources that support the unique and diverse identities and past and current realities of children, youth, and families. • Seek opportunities to gather input and support from community, including knowledge keepers, Elders, and community leaders, when completing assessments and case planning. • Strengthen partnerships with community to support children, youth, and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is my awareness of and ability to access the community resources to help support the diverse needs of children, youth, and families? • How have I built positive relationships with community-based organizations and community service providers? • How have I asked for feedback, heard what was said, and adapted my practice as necessary?

Standard 5: Valuing community as part of a family		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Engaging with community in support of children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and demonstrate the importance of community and community-based supports in safety and wellbeing. Share information with community partners. Seek ongoing opportunities to engage and strengthen relationships with the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have I done to engage with and strengthen relationships between children, youth, families, and communities? How did I consult with the child, youth, and family about what and to whom information is shared?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Practice demonstrates that children, youth, and families are not isolated from communities, and regularly participate in community-based activities.
- Practice demonstrates that there are relationships built that leverage community resources and supports as part of case planning, including community participation in family-informed planning and decision-making.
- Practice demonstrates that community approaches the Department in child wellbeing situations and requests supports.
- Practice demonstrates that there is non-intervention focused engagement with community.

Standard 6: Embracing individuality and diversity

While there are many ways in which we are connected as people, we are also all unique individuals with unique and diverse backgrounds and experiences. This practice standard asks us to be conscious of our own unique experiences and embrace the individuality and diversity of the children, youth, and adults that we work with. It also asks us to be open, curious, interested, attentive, and aware of the experiences of others and to work with them with that knowledge in mind.

Standard 6: Embracing individuality and diversity		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Understanding the individual’s multiple, and diverse intersecting factors that impact how they understand, and experience supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the importance of an individual’s physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing and identity. Understand, respect, and honour the child, youth, and family’s beliefs, values, race, gender, identity, history, goals, language, reality, and world view. Explore the context and rely on strengths, connections, successes, and previous experiences when interacting with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is my awareness of how past and current realities and experiences can influence a child, youth, and family’s responses? How does the child, youth, and family identify and engage with their race, culture, religion, gender expression, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, among other diversity elements? How are age and / or developmental levels impacting the experience of the child, youth, and family? How is the child, youth, and family impacted by their physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing?
<p>Supporting the individual based on their needs and identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an environment that considers the supportive factors when working with children, youth, families, and communities. Be flexible and creative in your approach to supporting children, youth, and families. Enhance connections and relationships with culturally attentive and inclusive supports and services. Improve awareness of supports and services available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have the child, youth, and family been actively involved throughout the process? How have those who care about and contribute to the wellbeing of the child, youth, and family been provided with opportunities to participate? How have I checked my assumptions and objectively approached planning and decision making?

Standard 6: Embracing individuality and diversity		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have I helped the child, youth, and family access supports and services? • How have I prepared and gathered information to facilitate connection?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Practice demonstrates an acknowledgement of the impact of the realities and experiences people have had and their unique responses to that experience, including an understanding of the distrust those experiences may have for the child, youth, and family.
- Practice demonstrates an intentional focus on understanding a person’s identity, what is important to them and their individual needs, and the inclusion of specific activities or interventions that reflect their identity as part of the case plan.
- Practice demonstrates that community partners, caregivers, and staff are reflective of the cultural and diverse needs of the child, youth, and family.

Standard 7: Advocating for and with children, youth, families, and communities

Working with children, youth, and families who may be marginalized and disadvantaged, means that they may not have the capacity or support to have a voice and/or address their needs on their own.

This practice standard asks us to be a healthy and supportive community member for a child, youth, and family by supporting them to speak for themselves, and when they aren't able, to advocate for them as they request or their needs demand.

Standard 7: Advocating for and with children, youth, families, and communities		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Promoting children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplify the voice of the child, youth, and family by providing space for them to be heard. • Ensure the rights of children, youth, and families are upheld and identify and address situations where this is not happening. • Promote and facilitate culturally attentive and inclusive practices and supports. • Support the child, youth, and family in accessing all resources they need, both within and outside of the Department. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have I brought the focus back to children, youth, and families when necessary? • Have I identified and supported the child, youth, and family to have their diversity needs met (e.g. race, language, (dis)ability, gender expression, sexuality, etc.)? • How have I collaborated and consulted with the child, youth, family, colleagues, community, and others to come up with the best possible solution for the family?
<p>Improving the experience of and for children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how existing policy and procedures, legislation and other resources can be used to support children, youth, and families. • Recognize how social inequality impacts children, youth, and families and work to address and provide practical solutions to lessen these impacts. • Highlight and adopt leading practices and ways of working. • Create new and strengthen existing programming to meet the needs of children, youth, families, and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have I used my role or position to the best of my ability to strengthen support for children, youth, and families? • How has social inequality, systemic racism, my own biases, and culture, etc. impacted the experience of children, youth, and families? • How have I questioned / challenged dominant ways of thinking, focusing on transforming power imbalances to equity? • How did I address any occurrences of harmful practices I noticed?

Standard 7: Advocating for and with children, youth, families, and communities		
Theme	Guidance	Reflective Questions
<p>Working with others in support of children, youth, and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate to strengthen available support and services when gaps are identified. • Share and promote awareness of the needs of children, youth, and families across the continuum. • Examine how the history of Child Welfare impacts relationships and can perpetuate power imbalances and the marginalization of social groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have I identified the needs of children, youth, and families and collaborated with them and other community members to meet those needs? • When a child, youth, and family have needs that require the support of others, how have I shared and promoted those needs with others? • How have I participated with other community members in building a common understanding of the needs of an impacted community of people and advocated for support to meet those needs? • What do I understand about who I represent as a member of Child Welfare to those who have had negative experiences with Child Welfare, and how do I acknowledge and address this?

Indicators of achievement of this practice standard include:

- Practice demonstrates allyship and advocacy alongside children, youth, and families, as well as other community members, to provide services and supports that meet the identified needs of children, youth, and families.
- Practice demonstrates support for access to the right services at the right time.
- Practice demonstrates identification of issues or challenges with legislation, policies, and practices and professionally and respectfully advancing those for discussion and resolution.

Our Commitments

For all who have the privilege of becoming a part of a child and youth's trusted community, regardless of the role that we play, we owe children, youth, and families in Nova Scotia our very best.

- As **leaders and managers**, we commit to organizational standards for ethical practice and professional decision making that best supports those that work face-to-face with children, youth, and families.
- As **supervisors**, we commit to organizational standards for ethical relationship-based practice and professional decision making that we can use in our conversations and relationships to support others to reach their potential in practice.
- As **Child and Family Wellbeing staff**, we commit to organizational standards for ethical relationship-based practice and professional decision making that is child, youth, family, and community focused that we can rely on to understand our relationships and our achievements.
- As **caregivers and community partners**, we commit to standards for ethical relationship-based practice and services and supports that place the child, youth, family, and community first that we can use to understand our relationships and our achievements.

Appendix 1 – Practice Framework on a Page

Vision

Communities support the **safety** and **wellbeing** of children, youth, and families

Values



Guiding Principles



Practice Standards



Appendix 2 – Information and Inspiration Sources

The Practice Framework is a consolidation of the learnings and experiences of the past with a view to a better future. It borrows from a community of thought leaders – Elders, community leaders, practitioners, and academics, who have contributed greatly to building a better future represented in part in the legislation, policy, and practice that guides our work.

- *Policy and legislation:*
 - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,
 - *Children and Family Services Act*, and
 - *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, Métis children, youth and families*.
- *Jurisdictional Scan:* information was gathered from leading practices across the following areas:
 - An Act Representing First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families
 - Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services
 - DCS: Anti-Black Racism Policy
 - Ontario's 'One Vision, One Voice' Framework
 - Africentric Social Work Practice
 - Ontario's Anti-Opressive Framework for Child Welfare
 - Restorative Justice Inquiry
 - New South Wales Practice Framework
 - New Zealand Oranga Tamariki Framework
 - Alberta Child Intervention Practice Framework
- *Current State Summary:* current practices within Child Welfare were reviewed and strengths and opportunities for enhancement were identified.
- *Partner Engagement Sessions:* Approximately 500 attendees participated in 46 engagement sessions held with staff, including focused sessions with Mi'kmaw / Indigenous, and African Nova Scotian / African descent individuals, community-based service providers, and other partners and community organizations.