

Introduction to the FASP Reference Guide

The Role of the FASP in Supporting Child Welfare Outcomes

The mission of the New York State (NYS) Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is to promote and sustain the safety, permanency, and well-being of New York's most vulnerable children and families.

As service providers within the NYS child welfare system, caseworkers are focused on achieving the following child welfare outcomes:

- Children are safe
- Families are preserved
- Children are adopted when their birth family cannot be preserved
- Children and youth develop normally
- Children leaving care at the age of majority have skills for self-sufficiency and are connected to a supportive adult resource

Caseworkers are guided by their supervisor and are the primary agents of change within the child welfare system to achieve these child welfare outcomes. To support effective assessment, decision making, and intervention, caseworkers are required to develop written case plans with families that support achievement of these outcomes.

CONNECTIONS, New York's statewide automated child welfare information system, is the primary platform used throughout NYS to guide, document, and manage efforts to achieve these child welfare outcomes. The Family Assessment and Service Plan (FASP) is a primary tool within CONNECTIONS designed to assist child welfare providers in developing case plans that effectively support achievement of these outcomes.

Purpose of the FASP Reference Guide

The *FASP Reference Guide* is designed to assist those who are responsible for completing, contributing to, and/or approving FASPs to do so in an effective and efficient manner. Use of this guide will help support case assessment, planning, decision making, legal actions, supervision, and documentation that are consistent with applicable casework standards. This guide is intended to make case plans more thorough, focused, consistent, and targeted to address the most significant needs of families and children that impact safety, permanency, and child well-being.

The *FASP Reference Guide* is primarily intended to provide clarity and focus on the content of the responses within the FASP; it is not intended as a guide for navigation within the FASP. For assistance in navigating within the FASP, please refer to the online HELP embedded within the FASP.

This guide can be useful, following appropriate training, as a job aid for completing FASPs once you are familiar with the underlying principles, protocols, and regulations that guide child welfare practice. However, this guide is not intended as a substitute for hands-on training on how to write FASPs. Nor is

this guide meant to substitute for ongoing supervision, which provides caseworkers with guidance and feedback in making thorough, balanced assessments and sound decisions, and in implementing effective case-specific plans.

Who Should Use This Guide

The *FASP Reference Guide* may be helpful to any child welfare provider who has a role in completing, contributing to, reviewing, and/or approving FASPs. Regardless of one's assigned CONNECTIONS role in a given case, (e.g., Case Manager, Case Planner, Case Worker), this guide may be useful in:

- Understanding one's role/responsibilities in the FASP
- Determining which sections of the FASP are required for a given case and why
- Understanding the purpose and intent of specific questions within the FASP
- Knowing what information is expected in response to specific questions
- Understanding how certain questions or sections of the FASP relate to other questions/sections
- Recognizing what information you may have to contribute to the overall assessment and plan based upon the worker's functional role in a given case
- Understanding how specific questions relate to or support the worker's role in achieving the child welfare outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being

This guide will assist FASP reviewers/approvers in determining whether specific questions have been answered accurately, thoroughly, and in a manner consistent with casework standards. When necessary, it can provide caseworkers with specific guidance for requesting additional information/clarification on a case or for providing feedback to the FASP author regarding the need to reframe or rewrite specific responses. This guide may also help supervisors provide constructive developmental feedback to workers about the focus, intensity, and direction of their casework activities, and the clarity and/or thoroughness of their documentation.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized into a series of modules that mirror the sections of the FASP tree. Each module begins with a brief introduction to the module, and rationale for that section of the FASP. FASP screen shots are paired with Quick Tips for completing each window, followed by more detailed information about what should be addressed within each window. Where applicable, this includes background information for understanding the questions, critical reminders about casework principles, child welfare regulations applicable to the specific window, helpful reminders, frequently asked questions (FAQs), redundancy prevention tips, consistency tips, and navigation pointers. It is advised that you read the entire module before completing a section of the FASP for the first time. You may then use the Quick Tips as a guide for completing future FASPs once you are comfortable with the intent and requirements of each section.

It is recommended that caseworkers complete the sections of the FASP in the order in which this guide is designed. The modules are arranged to better assist caseworkers with the critical thinking skills involved in developing a complete and effective FASP.

General Tips for Managing Case Documentation

Seize Control: The caseworker should use the information to serve him/her. For example, how does each question/task help the caseworker do their job better, make better assessments and plans, and support/defend decisions?

Provide Quality Assurance to the Case: The writing process will help the caseworker better understand the case and what to do next. This guide can be used to self-check case documentation and casework.

Engage the Client/Family in Self-Assessment and Decision Making: Family members know their own strengths, needs, and issues; ask them for their input, self-assessment, ideas, and solutions. Family members are often the caseworker's best source of information. Not only is engaging the client/family respectful and honors self-determination, but it is a critical part of the assessment, giving the client an opportunity for self-reflection. It also gives the worker an opportunity to understand the family's view of the situation. Some caseworkers are surprised by the honest appraisals and good ideas the family has.

Make it a Group Effort: Involve the family and other team members. Key decisions are often made at team meetings or family conferences. Utilize relevant sections of the FASP to frame the discussions and decisions at these meetings. Make sure all involved parties leave the meetings with a clear understanding of what decisions were made and where they should be reflected in the family's FASP.

Embrace Your Abilities: Document clearly and write nonjudgmentally and in terms that anyone can understand. This is a key casework skill.