



Working with Children and their Caregivers: Common Challenges and Their Solutions
WEBINAR SUMMARY
2 Dec 2016

I. Expert:

Denitza Bantchevska is a licensed marriage and family therapist working in the United States extensively with homeless, substance-abusing and runaway children and their families.

II. Content:

Mrs. Bantchevska started explaining that it is important to include in the solution-finding process caregivers, people in the lives of the child, including, when possible, the parents. This approach is beneficial for everyone working with children and involved in the social care system. It is particularly in the interest of the child for this to happen.

She continued by emphasizing that she considers the child's symptoms as belonging to the system, not the child, therefore also involving the primary caregivers. If there is no correspondence between the work and the house situation, the work will be partial or irrelevant to the improvement of the needs and therefore the entire system needs to be addressed.

When the caregivers are not involved or interested, she advised finding out who is involved in the child's life, be it grandparents, aunts and uncles and facilitate engagement and interactions, because it is important not to get just one side of the story, that of the child.

It is important to model healthy behavior around the family and to offer the support that they need, emotionally or otherwise. Often, the stress from financial or health issues prevent the caregivers from focusing on the child, but, when helped, they can provide more support.

Even when seemingly neglecting their children, most of parents and caregivers care. Mrs. Bantchevska exemplified this, by sharing the story of a mother, whose personal history of childhood abuse and trauma, had a crucial influence on how she was treating her own children.

The expert emphasized that it is important to determine the caregivers to accept that their child has problems, as sometimes they might think that their child is only misunderstood. After that acceptance, the guilt of having done something wrong, shame of being a bad parents and the fear of lacking control over what will happen settle in. They might feel helpless and hopeless, while other problems, including mental health ones might be affecting them. The social workers must help them work through these issues, by explaining that parenting is difficult for everyone, as it does not come with a manual and a one-fits-all method of raising the children.

Mrs. Bantchevska proceeded by explaining how to talk to parents:

1. ask about their experience and problems (what they have tried already with the child, what has worked, what has not);
2. listen to them in order to help them realize the problem or perceive it better;
3. be sensitive: there are always two sides to the story;
4. tell them that the goal is to help the family, which is something that they don't always understand;



5. always show understanding and acknowledge their problems;
6. explain clearly what you are seeing, as they sometimes do not understand the seriousness of the situation;
7. Be patient and calm and give hope.

In terms of behavior to avoid, she emphasized:

- a. don't assume, as some caregivers are going or have gone through heartbreaking situations and often don't neglect the children, because they are bad parents, but because they have suffered abuse themselves;
- b. don't judge and blame
- c. don't use sarcasm
- d. never badmouth the children in front of the parents and vice versa.

She finished her presentation with helpful techniques to engage the caregivers:

1. Listen: reflect their words, open up and talk about what they want;
2. Visit the home if possible: taking the child out of their environment is not conducive; in order to be productive, it is better to adjust to their environment.
3. Use therapeutic interaction: games (life stories); sandbox (image of the family); group projects: visual arts, choosing pebbles (ask them to choose people in their family and ask them why).