



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES

**Virginia Department of Social Services  
Practice Model**

*The Virginia Department of Social Services Practice Model sets forth our standards of professional practice and serves as a values framework that defines relationships, guides thinking and decision-making, and structures our beliefs about individuals, families, and communities. We approach our work every day based on various personal and professional experiences. While our experiences impact the choices we make, our Practice Model suggests a desired approach to working with others and provides a clear model of practice, inclusive of all agency programs and services, that outlines how our system successfully practices. Central to our practice is the family. Guided by this model, we strive to continuously improve the ways in which we deliver programs and services to Virginia's citizens.*

**1. All children, adults and communities deserve to be safe and stable.**

- Every child has the right to live in a safe home, attend a safe school and live in a safe community. Ensuring safety requires a collaborative effort among family, agency staff, and community partners and across all programs and services.
- Every adult has the right to live and work in a safe environment. We value all programs that address domestic and family violence and the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older or incapacitated adults.
- We value individual and family strengths, perspectives, goals, and plans as central to creating and maintaining a safe environment. The meaningful engagement and participation of children, adults, extended family, and community stakeholders is a necessary component of assuring safety.
- When legal action is necessary to ensure the safety of a child and/or an adult, we use our authority with respect and sensitivity.
- Individuals are best served when services are client-centered, family-focused and community-based and aim to preserve the family unit and prevent family disruption.

**2. *All individuals deserve a safe, stable and healthy family that supports them through their lifespan.***

- We believe mothers, fathers, and children thrive in safe, stable, healthy families. We value family structures that support the best interests of children; however, we believe that children do best when raised in intact, two-parent families.
- Both parents should be actively involved in the lives of their children, even if they are not the primary caregiver.
- Healthy, lifelong family connections are crucial to the development of children, the stability of the family and the support of infirm, dependent or aging adults. Through the services we provide, we seek out, promote, and preserve these healthy ties to family members and to others in the community to whom the family is connected or who may provide support.

**3. *Self-sufficiency and personal accountability are essential for individual and family well-being.***

- Family members support each other in ways the social services system cannot. We value the intra-family resources and supports that are available within the context of any family as a pathway to self-sufficiency and personal accountability.
- We believe employment, training, and education are keys to self-sufficiency. We believe in employment and training programs that remove barriers and create opportunities for individuals and families.
- Individuals and families face unique challenges that impact their ability to maintain self-sufficiency. We value all programs and services that assist individuals and families to regain and maintain self-sufficiency and achieve personal accountability.
- Both custodial and noncustodial parents should provide necessary financial resources to support their children.
- We believe that parents and caregivers serve as role models in teaching the importance of self-sufficiency and personal accountability.
- We support asset development strategies to help individuals and families weather short-term emergencies and improve long-term stability.

**4. *All individuals know themselves best and should be treated with dignity and respect.***

- All programs and services should be culturally and linguistically sensitive to all individuals.

- Individuals and families are empowered when they have access to information and resources.
- We support programs for vulnerable populations including children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.
- The measure of success differs with every individual. We strive to understand children, adults, and families within the context of their own values, traditions, history, and culture.
- The voices of children, individuals, and families are heard, valued, and included in decision-making processes related to programs and services.

**5. *When partnering with others to support individual and family success, we use an integrated service approach.***

- Cooperation, coordination and collaboration within and outside of the social services system are essential to providing the most comprehensive services to families. We are committed to working across programs, divisions, agencies, stakeholder groups, and communities to improve outcomes for the children, individuals, families, and communities we serve.
- Through the development of policies, procedures, standards, and agreements across systems, we will share information, solve problems, and overcome barriers.
- We value prevention networks that link effective public and private programs and community-based organizations that identify individuals and families before they need services.
- We believe in partnering across programs and systems in order provide a full array of services along the continuum of care. We are committed to working within and outside of the social services system to identify and address service gaps.

**6. *How we do our work has a direct impact on the well-being of the individuals, families, and communities we serve.***

- Children, individuals and families deserve trained, skillful professionals to engage and assist them. We hire, develop and maintain a workforce that aligns with our practice model.
- Clear expectations, effective supervision, leadership and proper resource supports are critical for the workforce to do their job effectively.
- We believe in creating and maintaining a supportive working and learning environment with accountability at all levels.

- We value the provision of high-quality, timely, efficient, and effective services. We believe relationships and communication should be conducted with honesty, transparency, integrity, empathy, and respect within and outside of our social services system.
- The collection and sharing of accurate, outcome-driven data and evidence-based information is a critical part of how we continually learn and improve. We use data to inform, manage, improve practice, measure effectiveness and guide decisions.
- Continuous quality improvement is fundamental to our work.