



# Best Practices in Serving Families

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Supportive Housing (SH) is an innovative and proven solution to some of communities' toughest problems, successfully helping homeless single adults and families achieve housing stability. When planning and operating supportive housing for families, the mix and intensity of services must be tailored to the unique needs of each member of the family unit and address the trauma that many of these families have experienced.

In designing and delivering services to families in supportive housing, observe the following principles to ensure you meet the needs of this group:

## *Develop Services Plan with Specific Activities for Children*

A broad array of services must be available to help families attain stable housing and work toward recovery and economic self-sufficiency, including: income support, education, job training, employment assistance, child care, case management, linkage to mental health and/or substance abuse treatment, health care for all members of the family, and housing/systems advocacy. This should also include age-appropriate services for children across stages of development, from infants and toddlers to pre-school and school-aged children, preadolescents and teens. Children often constitute the majority of tenants in family supportive housing projects and need developmentally appropriate activities and services available for both genders, which are distinct from their parents' services. Services specifically needed by children and youth may include academic support, after-school enrichment, recreation, youth development and counseling.

Best practices when designing services for children include: developing services that counter the unpredictability and trauma of homelessness through consistent and predictable routines engaging children and parents concurrently, connecting children and youth to activities and services in the broader community, and involving youth in making decisions about the services that are offered. Services must be comprehensive, coordinated, readily accessible, and family-centered. It's important to have someone on the staff that is specific to the children, allowing children to have their own case manager, when needed, separate from the parents.

## *Understand the Impact of Trauma and Violence*

When not addressed effectively, trauma symptoms arising from past violence, and the absence of a safe environment, create obstacles to services, treatment and recovery for survivors. Given the high rates of trauma likely experienced among tenant families, supportive housing projects should take a "trauma-informed" approach and treat all tenants as if they might be trauma survivors. Trauma-informed services do not directly address or treat the effects of trauma; rather, trauma-informed services provide an environment for service delivery that is sensitive to the special needs of people who have experienced trauma. Staff who are knowledgeable about the effects of trauma on survivors deliver these services.

## *Form Positive Relationships with the Child Welfare System*

In order to effectively serve families that are both in supportive housing and involved with or at risk of becoming involved with child welfare, housing providers and service providers must form positive relationships and alliances with their local child welfare system in order to understand how it works and what being involved in the child welfare system means for families. At the same time, supportive housing providers will want to educate child welfare staff about the effectiveness





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of the supportive housing model, the benefits of forming partnerships, and what housing resources exist in their community.

The [Project Profiles](#) section of CSH's Quality Supportive Housing Toolkit includes existing supportive housing projects that are serving families and have designed their services with the needs of that population in mind.

