Decolonizing First Nations Child Welfare

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For Colonialism to Succeed

- Take territory – land
- Take natural resources – energy/food
- Take sovereignty – disrupt leadership and governance
- Take away the legitimacy of thought – worldview, language, spirituality, healing
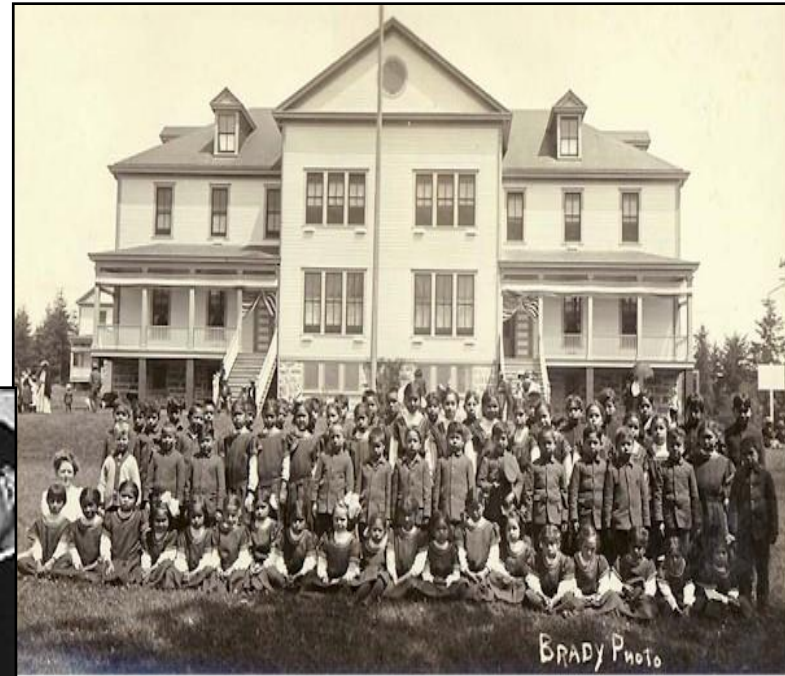- Take the children

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Residential Schools

Church and Government

Symptoms of Post-Colonialism

- Intergenerational trauma
- Lateral oppression and violence
- Internalized racism—self-blame
- Identity politics
- Dismembered social norms
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Blaming the victim

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Decolonization

"Colonization dismembered our culture, our people, and our families. Our job is Re-membering."

Theda Newbreast
Blackfeet

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Post-Colonial Reality

- Disparities – racial inequity in economic security, health, education, social conditions
- Disproportionate representation in systems (over and under)
- Poor outcomes for AI/AN children in state/federal services
- Barriers to self-determination – funding

What culture mean to me

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Over Representation in Child Welfare

Overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care is related to **poverty**, poor housing, poor education, untreated mental health issues, and caregiver substance misuse.

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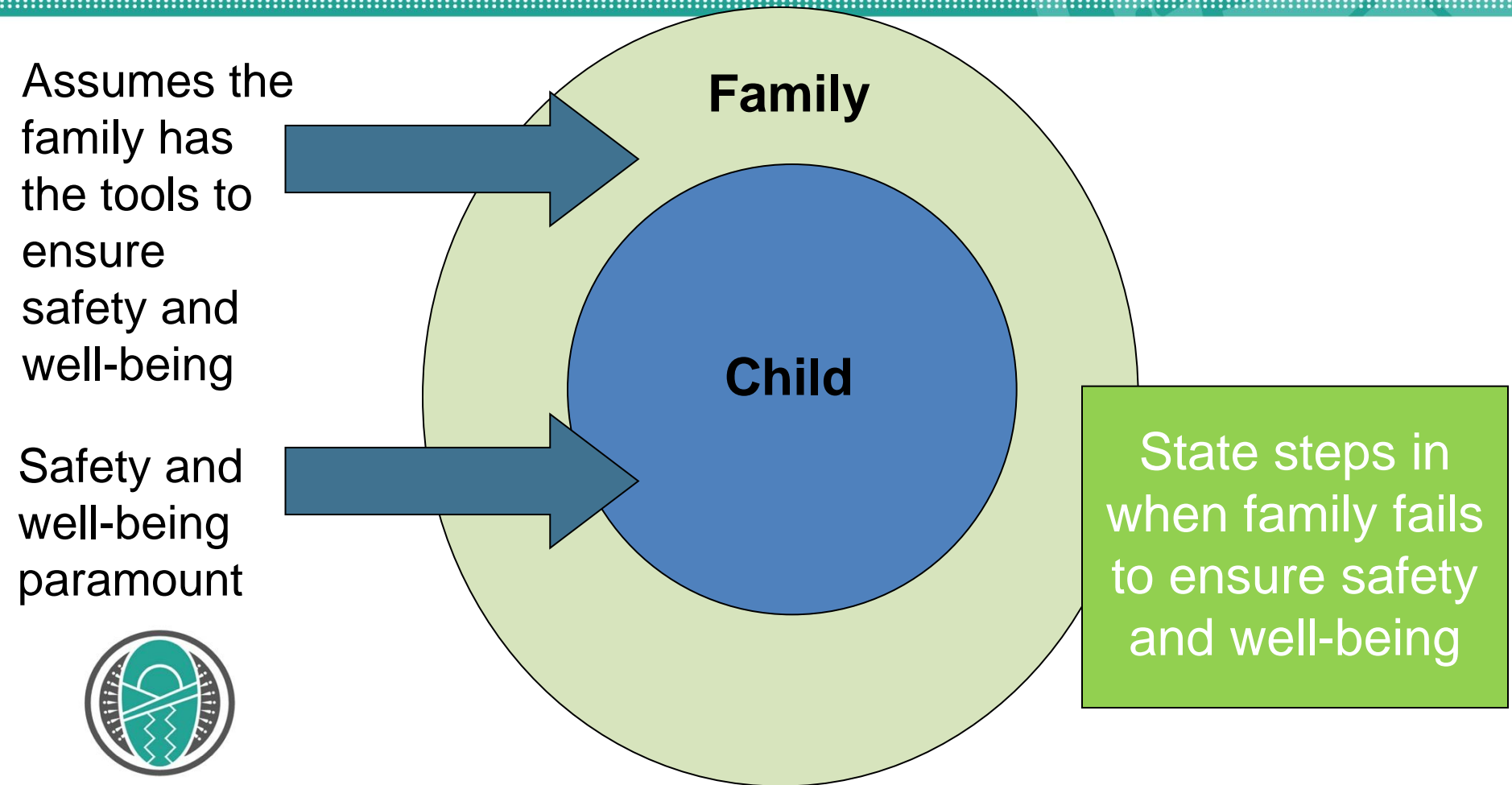
Set Up for Failure?

Are these problems that families can solve by themselves?

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Basic Principles of State/Provincial Child Protection

Assumes the family has the tools to ensure safety and well-being
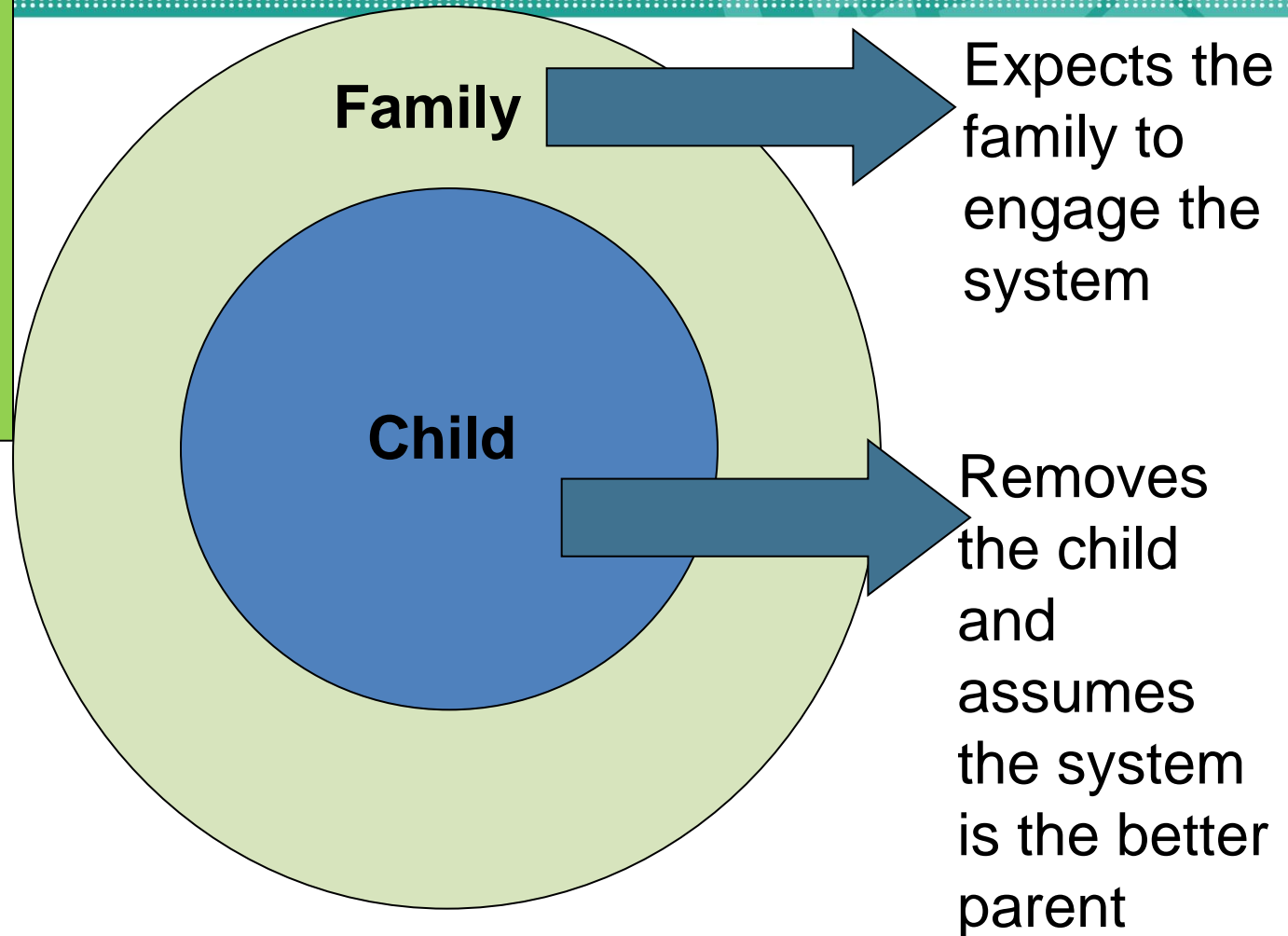
Safety and well-being paramount

Family

Child

State steps in when family fails to ensure safety and well-being

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Linear Protection/Rescue Model

System steps in when family fails to ensure safety and well-being

Family

Child

Expects the family to engage the system

Removes the child and assumes the system is the better parent

Blackstock & Trocme, 2004

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Touchstones (RWV) Model

Family

Child

System engages the family

Tribe steps in when family fails to ensure safety and well-being
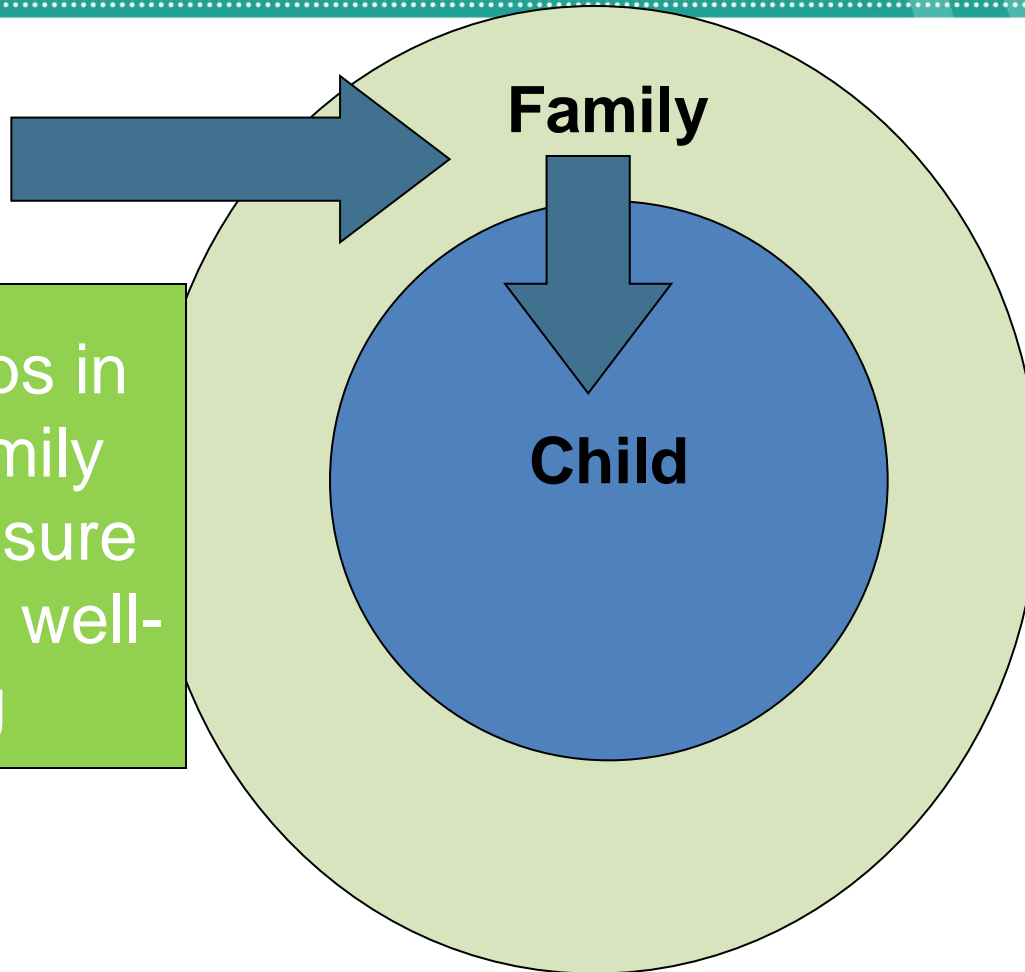
Assumes the family (with support) is the better parent

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Touchstones of Hope

- Self-determination
- Culture and language
- Holistic approach
- Structural interventions
- Non-discrimination

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Self-Determination

- Development of community visions of child safety
- Embracing what hurts – taking ownership
- Linking economic development/lands to child safety
- Reconciliation in child welfare program for leaders

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Culture and Language

- Clarity of what community child-caring knowledge is
- Acknowledging mainstream child welfare is culturally loaded
- Caution around adapting mainstream programs—center community knowledge and values

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Holistic Approach

- Do community planning with child well-being playing a central role
- Engage children/youth in community visioning exercises
- Be cautious about the risk of doing community development based on what government will fund versus on community need
- Engage the non profit sector

Structural Interventions

- Ensuring Indigenous children have equal access to resources
- Child welfare addressing poverty, substance abuse, mental health, and housing

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Non-discrimination

- Ensuring Indigenous children have equal access to resources
- Ensuring Indigenous knowledge is on equal footing with non-Aboriginal knowledge in child welfare
- Promoting respectful relationship building across cultures

Village of Kwigillingok, Alaska

"Is Everyone All Right?"

Andrew Beaver, Eder and Child Protection Team Leader

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Example: The WPIC Project

- 16 Alaska Native tribal partners
- Developed in response to the disproportionate rate of out-of-home placement of Alaska Native children in Alaska
- Increase tribal capacity in several areas
- Approaching systems change in tribal-state relationships through knowledge and education of historical trauma

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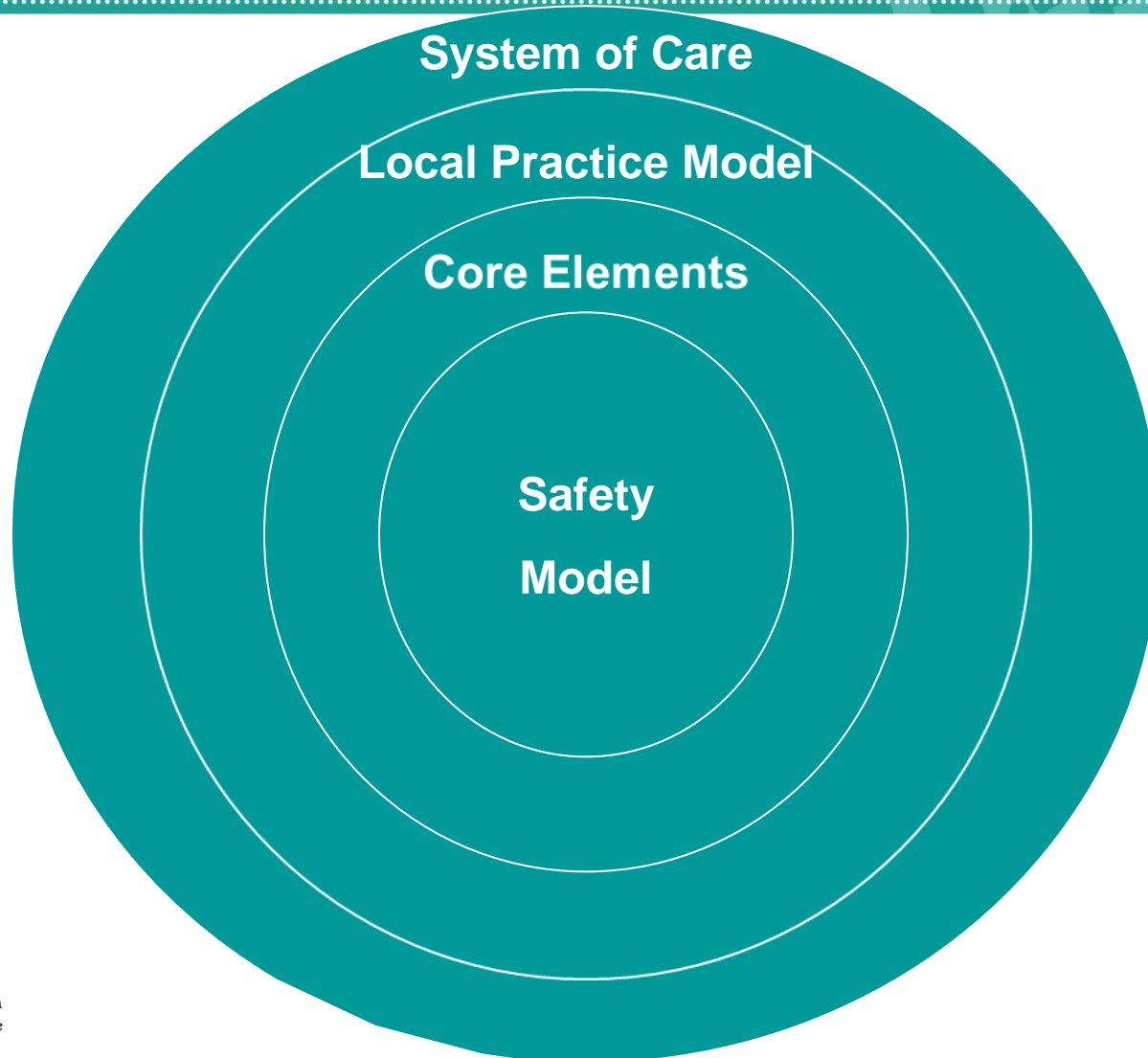# Setting Tribal Service Standards

- Standards based on a safety model
- Development and implementation of 8 core elements
- System of Care model
- Cross-system collaboration

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Tribal In-Home Services

System of Care
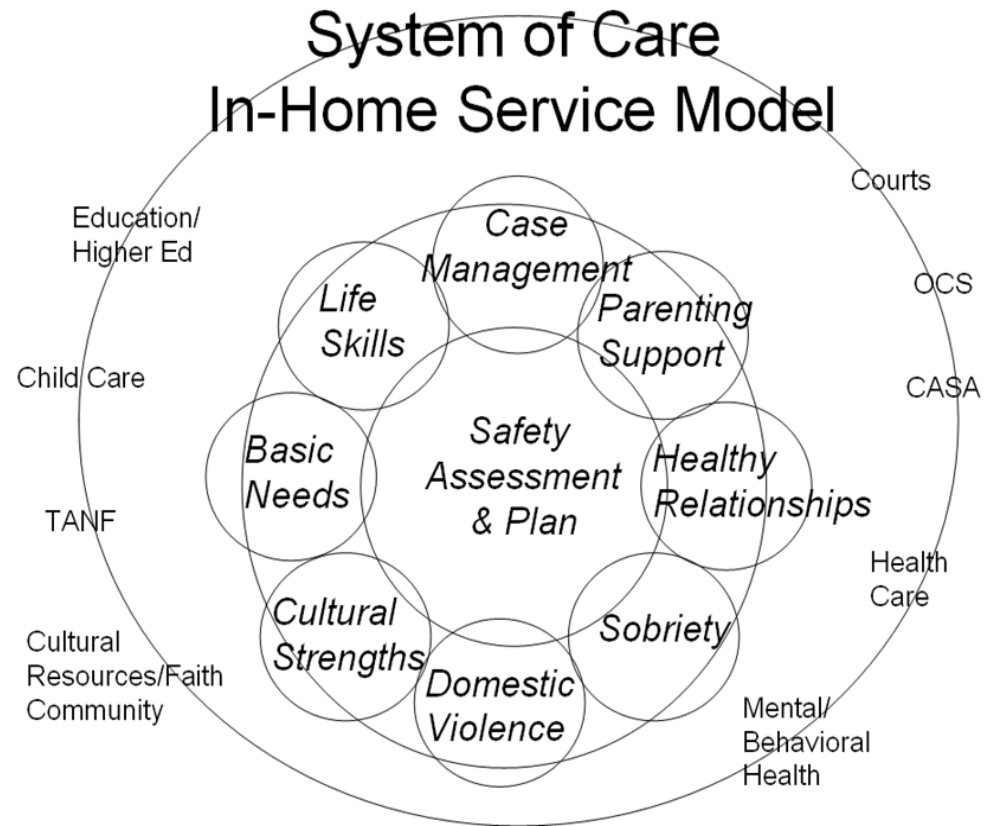
Local Practice Model

Core Elements

Safety

Model

Tribally Determined Services

- Standards based on a safety model
- Development and implementation of 8 core elements
- System of Care model
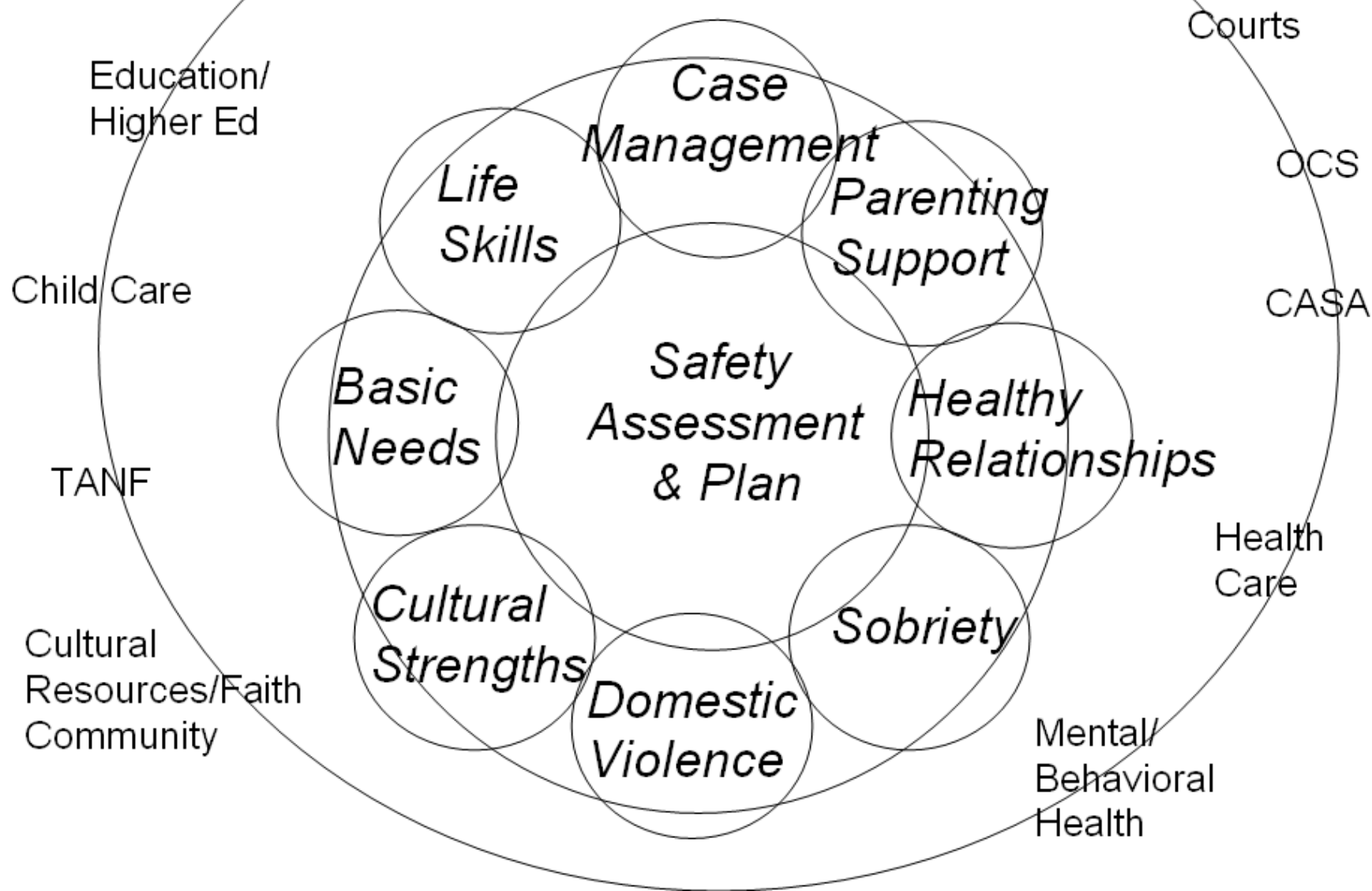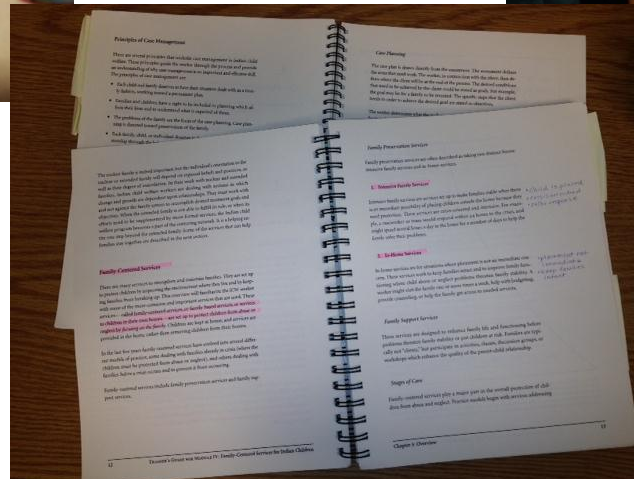- Cross-system collaboration

System of Care
In-Home Service Model

Education/Higher Ed · Child Care · TANF · Cultural Resources/Faith Community · Courts · OCS · CASA · Health Care · Mental/Behavioral Health

Case Management · Life Skills · Parenting Support · Basic Needs · Safety Assessment & Plan · Healthy Relationships · Cultural Strengths · Domestic Violence · Sobriety

System of Care
In-Home Service Model

Courts

Education/
Higher Ed

OCS

Child Care

CASA

TANF

Health
Care

Cultural
Resources/Faith
Community

Mental/
Behavioral
Health

Case
Management

Life
Skills

Parenting
Support

Basic
Needs

Safety
Assessment
& Plan

Healthy
Relationships

Cultural
Strengths

Sobriety

Domestic
Violence

Development of TIHSM On-Site

Step 1: Providing a foundation, overview, materials to discuss the TIHSM

Development of TIHSM On-Site

Step 2: Discussion, brainstorming, group dialogue

What is a "safe child" in your Community?

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Development of TIHSM On-Site

**Step 3:
Case staffing to
reveal services**

**Step 4:
Incorporation of tribal principles and values on safety**

Kawerak, Inc. Definition of a Safe Child

A safe child is:

- A happy and thriving individual who is valued and protected through traditional knowledge and values;

- Provided a supportive environment through education and advocacy of the community;

- Valued and protected by each community through the building and bonding of trusting relationships.

What is a SAFE CHILD?

ONC	AVCP
Family Support	Child that has been well taken care of at home and in the community
Attending school regularly	Basic Needs are met
Sober parents	Not harmed by substance use
Protected healthy	In the villages there is always a perpetrator
Being nurtured	
Basic needs met (food shelter clothing)	
Being secure	Not playing with sharp objects/harmful foreign objects
Being loved	
Not suffering-	Happy child
Good self esteem	Child looking after siblings
Participates in family activities	Protected (i.e. for school bullies)
Berries, fishing, cultural activities	Well fed and well clothed
Healthy relationships between parents	Child who is bonded to parents (and grandparents)
Elder support/mentors	
Cultural pride and strength	Not harmed by those who are abusing substances
Ability to say no.	
Having trust	

Additional Maniilaq Guiding Principles:

- Responsibility to self and caring for self and own well being. (How are you going to do this for others if you can't do it for yourself.)
- Strengths should always be a basis of our work.
- Utilizing elders to provide cultural supports to strengthen families.
- Helping our families to recognize that change is good.
- Couples and families can be self reliant. We were taught this traditionally through parents, elders, community, teachers, etc.
- Use values to help them become self sufficient, learn family roles.

Safety and Protection of Child through Inupiat Values

1. Love for Children- Our job is to ensure the well being of your family, whether it is yours or not. Help do that by proving ones self worth and family; through this you can identify if the child is ok or not.
2. Responsibility to Tribe- How you should handle those issues within your tribe first ; handle locally, and taking ownership.
3. Cooperation- with family, community, who ever sees the kid and they work together.
4. Respect for others- when you see problems and try to help out.
5. Knowledge of Family Tree
6. Domestic Skills
7. Avoidance of Conflict
8. Family Roles

Other Uses of the TIHSM

- To develop an assessment
- To staff and problem solve
- To document services provided to families and children
- To develop court reports

Institute participants using the WPIC In-Home Services model to develop a case plan and court report during small group session.

**What is
the System of Care
Approach?**

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System of Care Defined

A system of care is not a program — it is a philosophy of how care should be delivered.

- Systems of Care is an approach to services that recognizes the importance of family, school, and community, and seeks to promote the full potential of every child and youth by addressing their physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and social needs.

System of Care Defined

Child Welfare Definition

"A **spectrum** of **effective**, **community-based services and supports** for children and youth with or **at risk** for child maltreatment and their families, that is organized into a **coordinated network**, builds meaningful **partnerships with families and youth**, and addresses their **cultural and linguistic needs**, in order to help them to **function better** at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life."

◉ Adapted from SAMHSA

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System of Care Principles

- Family driven
- Youth guided
- <u>Culturally competent</u>
- Community based
- Comprehensive
  - Accessible
  - Individualized
  - Coordinated and collaborative

Fit with Indigenous Thought
Relational Worldview

BALANCE

Essential Elements for Systems Change

Documented Needs
Community Readiness
Resources/Strengths
Political will/urgency
External Relationships

Financing
Policy
Standards of Practice
Data
Accountability
Dependability of Institutions
Partnerships
Communication

Environment | Infrastructure

Mission | Resources

Values
Shared Vision
Cultural Integrity
Sovereignty/Governance
Respect for ancestral wisdom
Alignment of principles

Leadership
Family and youth voice
Staffing
Training/TA
Vertical buy-in
Funding

Theory of Change

Key Elements for Implementing Sustainable Systems Change
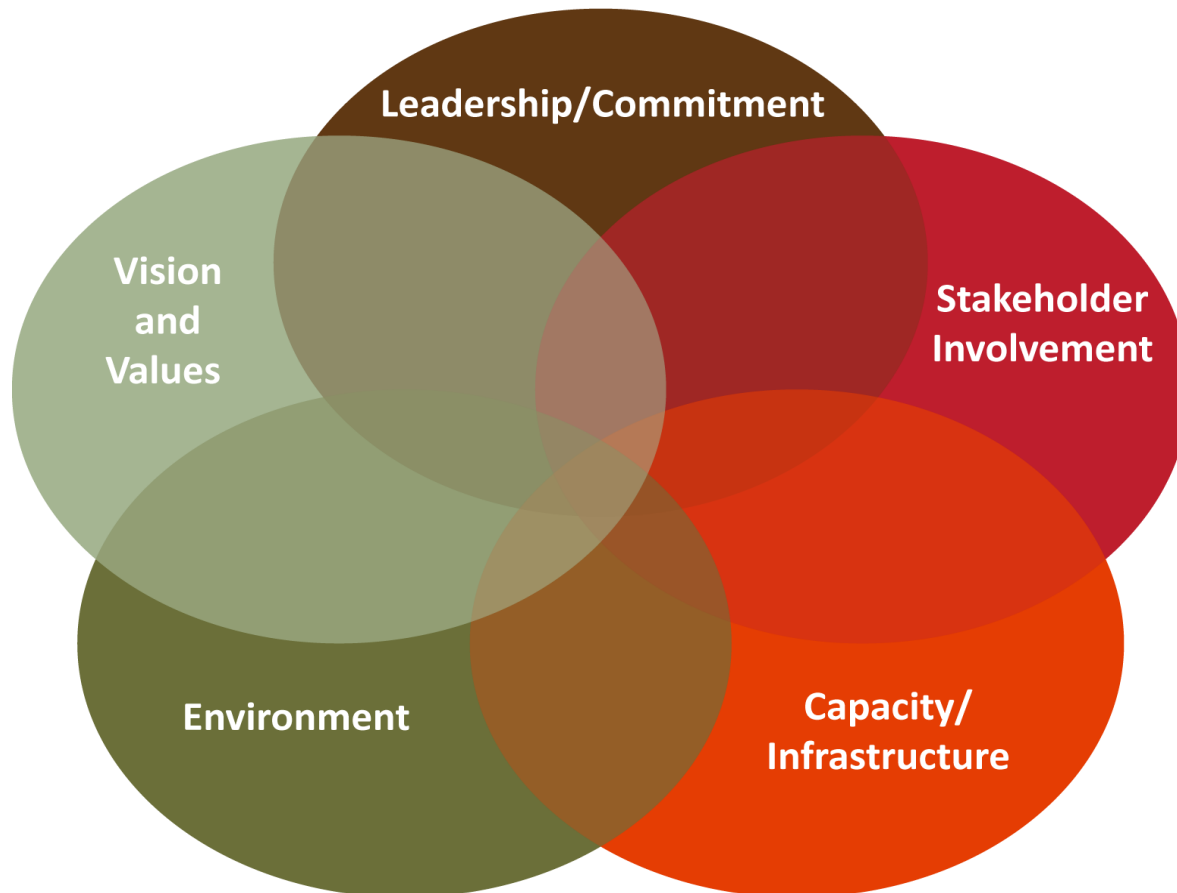
Questions?

Great Grandmas Matter!

My Mom and Grandson

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