



Enhancing Child Support Services Through Procedural Justice



- Discover how the principles of procedural justice – fairness, voice, transparency, and impartiality – can revolutionize your daily work in child support.
- This interactive session will move beyond legal definitions to explore practical applications in customer service and policy development.
- Gain valuable insights from the Minnesota Self-Help Center and learn concrete strategies for improving customer engagement and navigating challenging interactions.
- You will also learn how procedural justice applies in policy development, using examples from a driver's license suspension workgroup. Minnesota will also share how these principles are embedded in delivering child support services safely, using examples from Minnesota's SAVES grant.
- Join us to learn how you can apply these strategies to improve customer satisfaction and build trust in child support services.





Speakers:

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What is Procedural Justice?

Government has a fundamental responsibility to provide due process and procedural fairness to litigants, particularly, unrepresented litigants.

- Vicki Turetsky





What is Procedural Justice



- Sometimes call procedural fairness.
- The idea that people's perception of fairness is an outcome of their experience in the process, and not just the end result.
- Research has been done in the areas of policing, courts, prisons, educational settings, child support, and supervisor-employee relations within organizations.



Benefits of Procedural Justice

Builds trust in the justice and confidence in the system.

Increases legitimacy of public servants and agencies.

Studies show that people are more likely to cooperate and follow the law when they have been treated fairly and with respect.



The Five Elements

Voice. You participated and were heard, you told your story, showed your papers, and you influenced the outcome.

Respect. You were treated with dignity and your story mattered.

Neutrality. You were treated fairly and without bias- regardless of your race, gender, economic status, or role.

Understanding. Your circumstances were understood. They took the time to learn what you're dealing with, and they realize you're trying.

Helpfulness. People cared and they wanted to help.





Procedural Justice During Difficult Customer Interactions



Illustration by E.H. Shepard

“Pooh, what’s the bravest thing you’ve ever said?” asked piglet.

“Help” said Pooh.

-Winnie-the Pooh by A.A. Milne

But first, a little about me and my work:

- Morgan Spah, Supervising Attorney
- **Self-Represented Litigant Program, MN Judicial Branch**
 - Statewide Self-Help Center (Virtual)
 - 10 Judicial Districts; 87 Counties
 - 2 Walk-in Self-Help Centers (In-person)
 - Hennepin County, MN
- One of the largest SRL/Self-Help Programs in the country
 - Team of about 35 people
 - Attorneys and paralegals
 - Some bilingual staff
 - 80,000-90,000 customer interactions per year



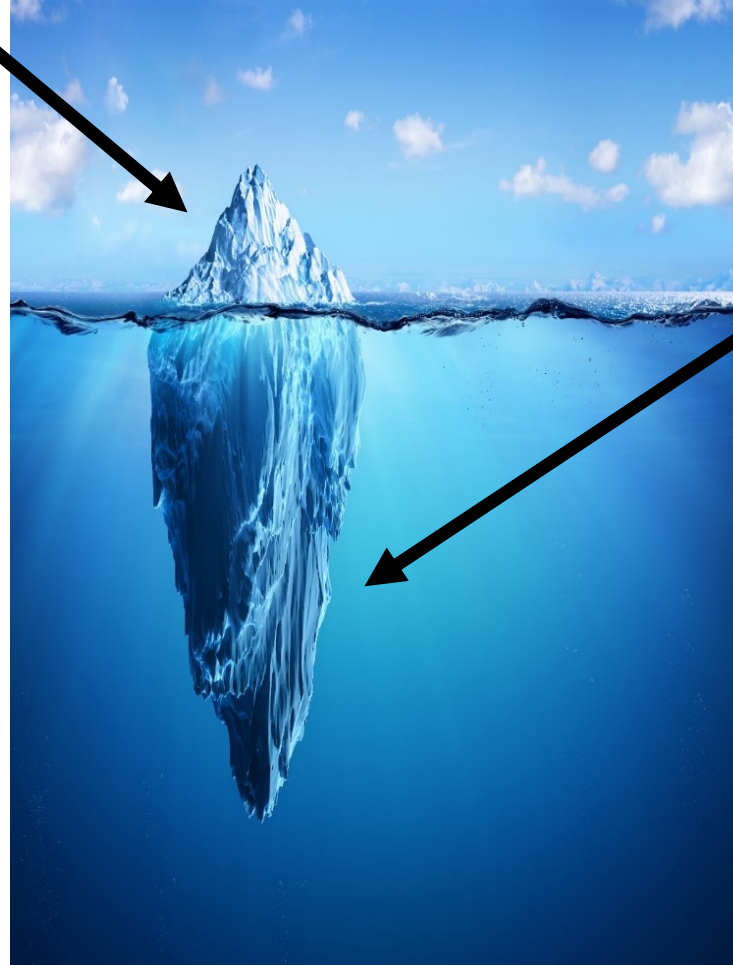
Procedural Justice During Difficult Customer Interactions

- **What** behaviors can make an interaction difficult?
- **Why** is a customer behaving the way they are?
- **How** do we offer procedural justice during difficult interactions?



What is the behavior?

- Emotional
- “So and so said...”
- Bully/disrespectful
- Give me an answer
- Repetitive
- Know it all already
- Impatient
- Indecisive
- Not solution focused
- Confused
- Disorganized
- Disruptive
- And more...



Why the behavior?

- Trauma
- Physical illness
- Disability
- Financial instability
- Cultural diversity
- Language barriers
- “isms”
- Mental illness
- And more...



The How:

Techniques for Navigating Difficult Interactions

- ☐ Validate/Acknowledge
- ☐ Assurances of effort
- ☐ Explain reasoning
- ☐ Provide choices
- ☐ Refocus
- ☐ Reframe
- ☐ Set Limits
- ☐ Arrange follow up
- ☐ Offer Resources
- ☐ Disengage
- ☐ Level up





Validate (acknowledge needs):

You do not need to validate their belief system. Also do not challenge it. Instead, focus on paraphrasing goals/procedural elements of the interaction.

- “I understand your goal is to...”
- “What I’m hearing you say is....”
- “That sounds like a frustrating situation...”

Assurances of Effort:

Be careful not to give assurance of result or success. You may not be able to deliver the outcome they are seeking.

- “Let me look into that for you...”
- “I talked to a couple of people on my team and...”
- “I spent some time looking at your case...”





Explain Reasoning:

Keep the explanation short. Be careful not to argue or be defensive of the court if they challenge the reasoning. Calmly provide the reasoning and move on to the next point.

- “That that step is important because...”
- “The purpose for that form is...”

Provide Choices:

Remember doing nothing is a choice and so is doing something that probably wont work.

- “You could _____ or you could _____”.
- “To research this more, you can go/use/look up...”



Refocus:

Find balance between letting an individual tell the long version of a story (you might stumble across details that could be helpful) with keeping the interaction focused.

- “Thank you for sharing that information with me, let me ask you a few questions.”
- “Let’s look at what steps you could take to reach your goal.”

Reframe:

Find a way from “can’t” to “can”. If you can’t answer the specific question the way they ask it, reframe the question into one you can answer.

- “I can’t tell you what you should do but I can talk to you about what options you may have.”



Set Limits:

- “My role is to _____. That means I can _____.”
(You can add a reframe too: “I can’t _____ but I can _____.”)
- “I would like to help you but if you _____ I will have to end our conversation.”

Arrange Follow Up:

Use caution in committing yourself to another interaction if it won’t be productive.

- “Let me look into that more for you and [who] will get back to you [how] by [time/date].”

Offer Resources:

- Legal advice resources
- Court or agency website
- Self-Help Center





Disengage:

- “When _____ come back/call back, and we can talk about the next steps.”
- “I’m sorry I can’t help you further with this issue and will not be responding again to this question.”
- “Feel free to contact us again if/when _____”

Level Up:

- “I’m going to bring in (supervisor/manager/leadership etc.) to see if they can help you/us.”
- Inform supervisor/manager/leadership
- Security report?



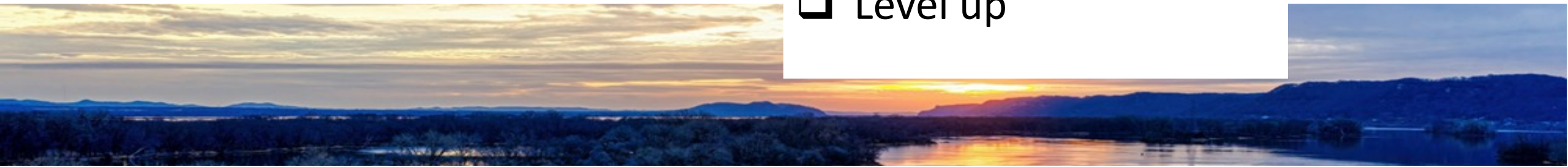


Real Example: What do you do?

An individual says:

“What is wrong with you? Are you too dumb to understand what I’m telling you or is it that you don’t care?”

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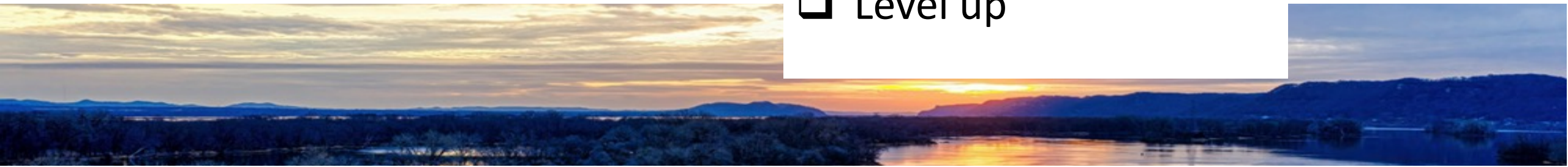


Real Example: What do you do?

An individual says:

“I received paperwork to change child support. My deadline to reply is today. Do I have to reply and if so, what do I say?”

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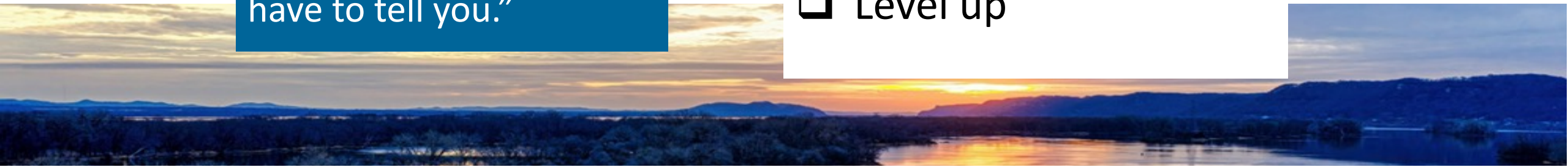


Real Example: What do you do?

An individual says:

“I’ve talked to 5 people, and no one knows what they’re doing. I don’t see the problem. I spoke to someone else here yesterday and they said there wouldn’t be a problem getting this done. Just do it. This better be the last time I have to tell you.”

- ☐ Validate/Acknowledge
- ☐ Assurances of effort
- ☐ Explain reasoning
- ☐ Provide choices
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“So often people with the knowledge get exasperated with those who don’t but your team had a gentleness in how they helped me.”

—Self-Represented Litigant



“I’ve learned that people
will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou
1928 - 2014

 half the sky
movement



Procedural Justice in Action

- Driver's License Suspension (DLS) Pilot and DLS reform
 - Pilot operated in 12 counties, operated October 2021 – June 2022
 - Pilot was one of the Procedural Justice Peer-Learning Sites (OCSE)
 - DLS legislative reform passed in 2023, one part effective July 1, 2023 and one part effective January 1, 2026
- Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES)
 - 5-year federal grant
 - Started September 2022
 - Improve child support response in situations of domestic abuse – help families safely access child support services



DLS pilot – script with NCPs

- ▶ **Voice:** Parents should have a chance to be heard by sharing their side of the story and expressing their concerns.

Questions in DLS Pilot:

- Have you experienced any challenges in obtaining full-time, consistent work? (instead of, why aren't you working?)
- Are there any other circumstances you're experiencing that could be a challenge to employment? These could be items like mental health or chemical health (drug/alcohol) concerns, physical work limitations, criminal history or anything else?
- In your own words, how does having a suspended license, or a soon-to-be suspended license, affect you?

TIP to invite voice: Can you tell me more about that?



DLS Pilot cont.

- ▶ **Helpfulness:** Parents should feel that the child support agency was helpful and interested in addressing their situations.

Questions in DLS Pilot:

- I want to give you an opportunity to ask me any questions and tell me about any other concerns you face related to child support.
- Are there other areas where I may be able to help connect you with a resource or provide you a referral?
- Do you have any questions for me at this time?
- Do you have any other concerns you want to share with me?



A tale of two letters

PRISM generated notice of intent to suspend license:

Purpose

This notice tells you

- *Your case meets the criteria to suspend your driver's license

- *How you can prevent the suspension

Notice

You are at least three times past due in paying your total court-ordered support or maintenance payments, or both. **You have not complied** with a written payment agreement to pay your monthly support or maintenance payments or both, Under Minnesota Statute, 518A.65, **we will direct the** appropriate authority to suspend your driver's license(s) unless you act to prevent the suspension.



DLS flier for the pilot



**[NAME], we can work with you
on your Child Support payments**

[COUNTY] Child Support is contacting you because we did not receive a child support payment last month.

There is a new program to help parents who are behind on their child support payments. We have new, flexible options to pay past-due child support. In one phone call, we will work together to create a case plan. This plan will address your specific situation and your challenges in making regular child support payments.

We also offer additional services, such as reviewing your case to see if:

- Your child support order should change
- You qualify for forgiveness of state-owed child support debt.



More info on flier

Call us at [PHONE NUMBER] by [DATE]

- Our business hours are [DATE TO DATE, TIME TO TIME]
- If you get voicemail, leave a message with your name, phone number and 10-digit Minnesota child support participant number (also called your MCI number) case number, or social security number (optional)
- You have a voice in your child support case!



If you do nothing

If you do nothing, you may continue to fall behind on your child support payment.

- If you are working, please contact us so we can update your information.
- If you are not working, we may have resources to help you find a job.
- We can help you avoid additional penalties for past-due support.
- The money you pay helps support your child.



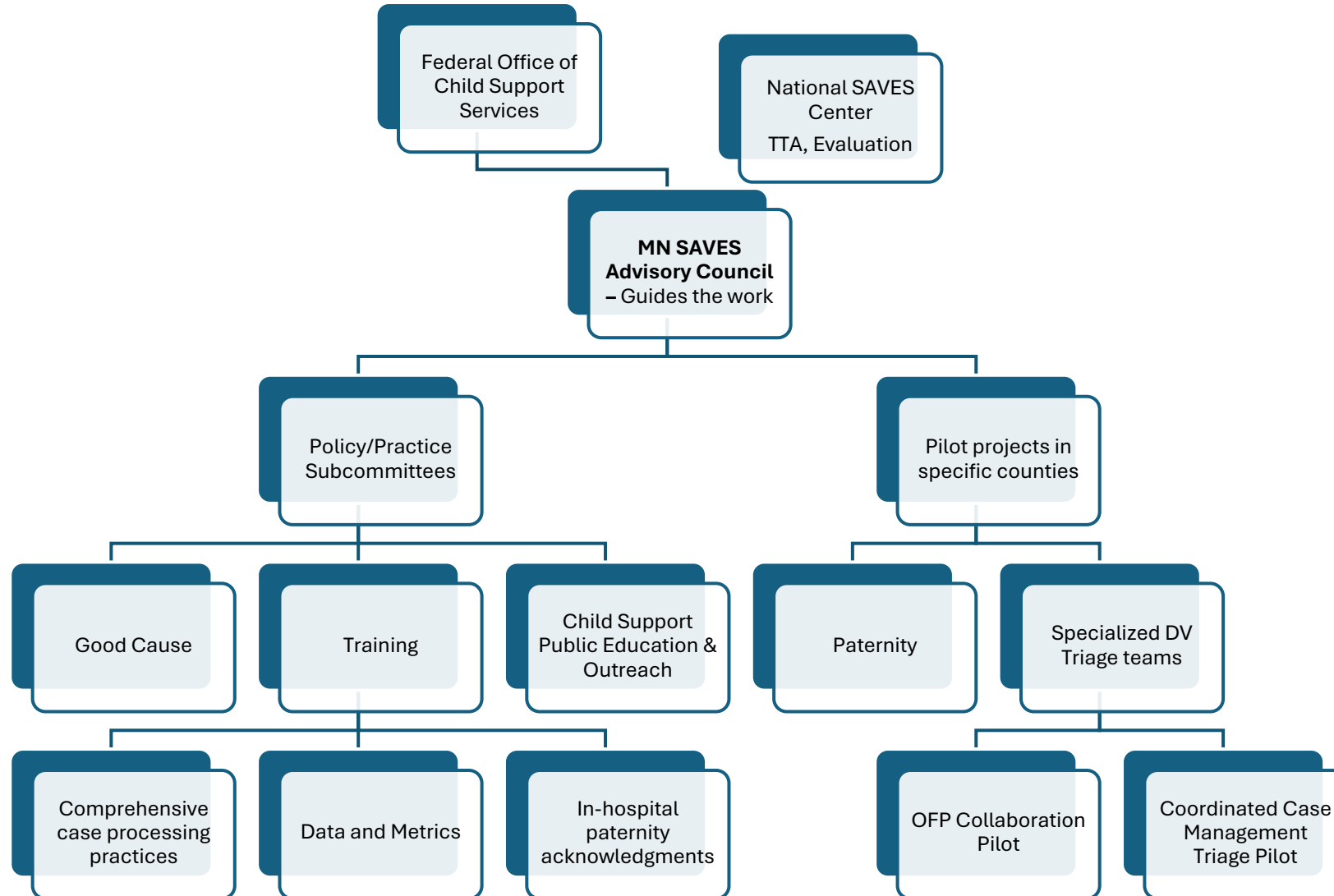
DLS statute reforms – Minnesota

Statute section 518A.65

- Procedural justice elements:
 - Due process! License suspension will not select if no address to notify the NCP
 - Helpfulness and Voice: statute changes allow agency to consider factors going to obligor's ability to pay and stop suspension administratively
- Allows both parties to have a voice in the process
 - Is suspension likely to induce the payment of support?
 - Would it have direct harmful effects on the obligor or joint children that make it an inappropriate remedy?
 - Safety concerns of custodial parent



SAVES grant – Minnesota



SAVES – Safety Assessment

- Safety assessment is being piloted on paternity cases in Ramsey and Hennepin counties
 - Starting with “pilot lite”
 - Soft roll-out in July 2025
 - Series of trainings to prepare
- Survivor-centered and trauma informed
- Survivors and DV agencies have been at the heart of the development of this tool

We are changing our communication:

- how we have conversation with participants
- how we provide education to participants



Assessment uses procedural justice principles

► **Respect:** Parents should believe they were treated with dignity and respect and their concerns were taken seriously.

Assessment starts with:

- I'm calling because we opened a child support case regarding (*children's names*).
- Before we start working on your case, we want to do a case management safety assessment.
- We take the safety of families receiving child support services seriously, and we can provide safety measures to help with safety concerns.
- Having safety concerns in the child support process is common, and we ask everyone these questions. We can provide some information on measures and resources that are available.
- The purpose of the safety assessment is to determine what safety measures may be needed for your family and your child support case.
- Your responses can be changed at any point moving forward or in the future.

Confirm they have time to talk and are in a safe space, if not, make plan to connect in way is time/place that is safe for them



Assessment uses procedural justice principles

- ▶ **Voice:** Parents should have a chance to be heard by sharing their side of the story and expressing their concerns.
- ▶ **Helpfulness:** Parents should feel that the child support agency was helpful and interested in addressing their situations.
- Self-assessment allows parents, in interactive dialogue with the child support worker, to select their safety needs level on a 0 to 3 scale
- Participants can share what they are comfortable with, and express concerns confidentially
- Participants will have access to resources for further assistance on safety



New or updated educational tools

- ▶ **Understanding:** Parents should understand the child support processes and have their questions answered.
- Assessment scripts that include explaining processes
- New webpage on [Safety](#) on DCYF
- Updated information on custody, parenting time and safety as part of the Parenting Decisions Affidavit – example next slide
- New educational documents (paternity info steps educational documents) – example on next slide



Steps in paternity case information document

Your child support case has opened. What's next?

Assess for safety

What we do: We will have a phone conversation with you about concerns you may have when proceeding with child support services. We will also discuss safety measures available during each step in the process.

What we will ask you to do: Share with us, in confidence, any concerns you might have.

While a case safety assessment is done at the beginning of the process, you can share safety concerns at any point.



Gather information about who is the father

What we do: We will review Minnesota birth records and court data bases to gather information about the legal father and to determine if there is already an order for child support.

What we will ask you to do: The applicant or mother must provide information about who is the father(s). They may be asked for copies of documentation and to fill out a Paternity Information Form or a Paternity Affidavit. The completed form or affidavit will be filed with the court and copies will be provided to the mother and anyone named as a potential father.

What will happen next? After we have information about the father(s), we will schedule appointments genetic testing.

Genetic testing

What we do:

Schedule an appointment for the mom and the child(ren), and a separate appointment for the father to provide a genetic testing (cheek swab) sample.

What happens if someone does not show up for their genetic testing appointment? We will obtain a court order that requires them to provide a genetic testing sample.

What happens if the results come back stating that the man is not the biological father?

We will mail a copy of the results to both the mother and the other person who was tested. We will contact the mother to gather more information about other possible fathers. The mother may need to complete a new





Parenting Decisions Affidavit



Child Support Services

Office of the Ramsey County Attorney

An Elected Office of
RAMSEY COUNTY

Parenting Decisions Affidavit



Why We Are Sending You This Affidavit

Before setting a child support amount, the court may need to decide who the legal father of your child is. We call this process “establishing paternity.” Genetic testing is often part of how the court establishes paternity.

The court also decides on **three other issues** as part of this process of establishing paternity:

- **Parenting time**
- **Custody**
- **The child’s legal name**

The information on this affidavit tells the court how you want it to decide on those three issues.



What We Are Asking You to Do

Please complete and sign the Parenting Decisions Affidavit. Then return it to our office. Be sure to keep a copy for your records.



What to Do If You Do Not Feel Safe During This Process

We take the safety of parents, children, and guardians seriously. We encourage you to ask your child support worker questions about the process and to raise any concerns you have with any part of it.

We can put safety measures in place for your case. You can always update your safety concerns in the future.



What We May Do with the Affidavit

Display

How the Court Decides on Parenting Time

The court normally calculates parenting time by counting the number of overnight stays that a parent has with a child. But the court may also consider other ways that a parent spends long periods of time with the child.



In Person: Downtown: 121 7th Place E, Suite 2500, St. Paul, MN 55101
Maplewood Mall: 3001 White Bear Ave N, Suite 1022A
Maplewood, MN 55109



Mail: 360 Wabasha St N, Suite 300, St. Paul, MN 55102



Phone: 651-266-3344

Fax: 651-266-3300



Email: ChildSupport@RamseyCounty.us

Generally, the court starts from the position that the child should spend a minimum of 25% of the parenting time with each parent. Why? Because the law assumes that this 25% minimum will be in the best interests of many children. The law also lets the court make a different decision about parenting time if it finds that the 25% minimum is not in the best interests of the child.

What Kinds of Parenting Time Decisions the Court Might Make

For safety reasons or for the best interests of the child, the court may add conditions to parenting time, such as:

- Not allowing overnight visits
- Requiring that the visits happen under supervision
- Requiring that a parent be sober for a period of time before, during, or after parenting time
- Limiting electronic communication with the child
- Limiting access to information about a child (such as medical information or schooling)

The court could also order that a parent should not have any parenting time.



Caseworker Desk Reference for DV Survivor Centered Communication

- Coming from the SAVES Center
- Guiding principles and examples
- Responding with empathy and transparency

“You aren’t to blame for what was done to you”

“I can’t be in your shoes, but I’m here to walk beside you through the child support process”

“Is it helpful for me to repeat things as we talk?”

“Here are the next actions that will happen on your case, and who will be taking those actions”



Resources

- [Minnesota's Driver's License Suspension Pilot Descriptive Report \(April 2023\)](#)
- [Minnesota's Driver's License Suspension Pilot Impact Evaluation Report \(July 2024\)](#)
- [Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt \(PJAC\) includes](#)
 - Reports
 - Short videos on incorporating procedural justice in child support
- [savescenter.org](#) (Site temporarily offline – check back!)





Thank you!

