

# Family First Prevention Services Act Message Box

**Philosophy and values are the foundation for the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) that support our agency transformation.**

**WE CAN ALL AGREE:** Kids involved with our agency should grow up in safe, stable and secure families who support their long-term well-being. Research makes clear — growing up in a family is essential for all kids, especially those who have experienced abuse or neglect. *And, the public and voters support these values and philosophy.*

**Quality prevention services and strong federal, state and community collaborations are the foundation for Family First policies.**

The law demands quality prevention services with a proven track record based on data, facts and evidence. It includes:

- Developing and providing prevention services including in-home, skill-based parent training, mental health care such as family therapy and substance abuse and treatment programs.
- Providing treatment programs that are short-term, customized therapeutic support while kids are living in families — with birth parents, relatives, close friends or foster caregivers.
- Recognizing group residential treatment can be life-saving and may be needed for short-term stabilization, usually less than 90 days.

Implementation of the law means:

- fairness for all families,
- top-quality social work practices and
- flexibility to be innovative and responsive to opportunities, especially during challenging times such as today's opioid epidemic

Passage of Family First is an opportunity moment that offers exciting possibilities for us to be responsive to the specific needs of children, teens and families.

The law's name reflects its most critical components: A *family first* for children and teens with *prevention services* to keep kids safe and growing up in their families.

**Family First follows a long tradition of legislation designed to ensure that children and teens grow up in family settings. But true transformation of child welfare systems will take time.**

Family First is the first major modernization and overhaul of the system in three decades. It will take time to implement all of the elements properly. Beyond Family First implementation, policy updates and modernization will always be needed based on lessons learned and evolving evidence on what works best for children, teens and families.

This new law supports our ongoing reform effort and gives us additional resources to promote innovations and flexibility thanks to the federal dollars that can be used for prevention services. Children and teens touched by our system need to have the right options, at the right time, with the right services for themselves and their families — this takes time and resources.

**We need your help. No agency can do it alone.**

There is a continuing need for partnerships with our families and communities, local organizations, private providers, the legal community and other stakeholders. We know kids do best in strong families — and families do best in supportive communities. We need your support and help.

# Using a Message Box

One of the best tools to help develop and stay “on message” is to use a chart called a message box. You don’t need to use all of the message points or use them in any particular order. Instead, pick and choose according to your audience and the venue. This one-page box is usually easier to use than multipage, single-spaced message memos, especially for media interviews and remarks before smaller groups.

- At the center of the box are the basic or core messages — these are one-liners stating **the overall takeaways** on the Family First Prevention Services Act.
- The top message (at 12:00 on a clock) is about the **shared values** that Family First embodies.
- The right side message (at 3 o’clock) puts Family First in context and emphasizes that it **is part of your ongoing transformation efforts**.
- The bottom message (at 6 o’clock) acknowledges that **community engagements** are key for the success of Family First implementation and should include an appropriate action step for your audience — even if you just ask them to go to your website for more information.
- The left side message (at 9 o’clock) provides the **outline of Family First and why it is important**.