



## Elements of a Learning Culture in Child Welfare

Elements	Definitions	Applicability to Child Welfare
<p><b>1. Personal mastery</b></p>	<p>The work environment encourages the development of personal and organizational goals; methods for achieving those goals include working in partnership with others.</p>	<p>Gaining competence through partnership with others is a primary goal for families involved in the Child Welfare system. As a parallel, a Child Welfare workforce goal is for staff to gain and maintain competence in order to help families achieve their goals. The casework-family relationship is viewed as a critical medium for families to achieve competence; likewise the supervisory and unit relationships are vehicles for staff to achieve and maintain competence.</p>
<p><b>2. Mental Models</b></p>	<p>Mental models are the cognitive frameworks we have about how the real world works. They are small scale models of our perceptions of reality and we form them over time based on our experiences. People need to be aware of their mental models in order to be part of a learning culture.</p>	<p>Meta-cognition, meaning thinking about thinking, or self reflecting on what you know and believe, is a fundamental and highly valued process in human service work. Understanding one’s own mental models and exploring how they affect behavior and beliefs is the basis of self-awareness in working with families.</p>
<p><b>3. Shared Vision</b></p>	<p>When employees share a vision for the future and for how they want their organization to function, they build an ongoing sense of group commitment that can sustain them through difficult times.</p>	<p>Child welfare is a mission-driven field and the importance of all staff sharing visions for child safety, permanency and well being is central to our work.</p>
<p><b>4. Team Learning</b></p>	<p>Learning and contributing together can transform conversational and collective thinking skills, and this in turn can lead to more productive understanding and solutions: the whole can be greater than</p>	<p>In Child Welfare the idea of team learning extends to the clients as well as staff; the empowerment and participation of families is crucial to successful outcomes.</p>



	the sum of its individual member's talents.	
<b>5. System Thinking</b>	Developing the ability to see the 'big picture' and how changes in one area affect the whole system is critical. Remember the value of being able to "go to the balcony" that we've discussed in previous modules.	Our use of family and system ecomaps and genograms reflects our belief in the importance of viewing solutions systemically, in the context of communities and relationships, rather than only as the responsibility of individuals.