

# Fact Sheet #2-Why, oh, why?

## CANVaS 2.0

As we are implementing an updated version of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment, it seems like a good opportunity to reflect upon *why* we have a standard CSA assessment and *why* the CANS was selected.

First, why do we do assessments? The initial step in intervening with a child and family, whether it's through social services or court services or behavioral health, is to gather the relevant and critical information necessary to tell the family's story. As you learn about the child and family, you can begin to work with them on identifying what they need and what supports or strengths they already have. The foundation of a useful service plan is a comprehensive assessment.

Secondly, why does the Code of Virginia require a standard assessment for CSA? Why would legislators enact a law about assessments? There was recognition of the need for an accurate assessment before putting resources and services in place and ongoing evaluation of their efficacy. A standard assessment allows for resources to be utilized in a targeted directed manner, where funding is spent effectively. How do you know if all the time and effort you're spending with that family is making them function more successfully? How do you know what an appropriate placement is for a child? What services or supports are working? Which ones aren't working? The CANS will help you answer these questions.

Third, why do we have the CANS instrument specifically? The CANS, developed by John S. Lyons, Ph.D. is an internationally recognized functional assessment and widely used for evaluating children, youth and caregivers across disciplines. A guidance letter to State Welfare Directors from three federal agencies\*, "...encourage(d) the integrated use of trauma-focused screening, functional assessments and evidence-based practices (EBPs) in child-serving settings for the purpose of improving child well-being." The CANS is one of the recommended functional assessments which meet these criteria.

It's important for the CANS you administer to be reliable as it creates the framework of your intervention with the family. In order to accurately rate the CANS, you must set aside and devote time (recommended four hours) to reading and learning about it on the CANS training website. You have to understand the Six Key Principles in rating items, and you have to learn what each item and its anchor definitions mean. For example, did you know that the need to take action on an item trumps the 30-day time frame on many items? The CANS will only be as reliable an instrument as you make it.

Lastly, CANS is not an add-on to your work and it's not "paperwork." It is your work, so you want to do it well. If you develop an appropriate assessment it will help you and the family focus on what is needed to accomplish their goals and success is much more likely!

You have a powerful tool to use in accomplishing your work; take it seriously and use it effectively.

*\*Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) –letter dated July 11, 2013*