

CASSP Principles

(Child and Adolescent Service System Program)

Brief History

A national study in 1982 found that two-thirds of all children with severe emotional disabilities were not receiving appropriate services. These children were “unclaimed” by the public systems responsible to serve them (“Unclaimed Children” by Susan Nitzer) and there was little coordination among the various child-serving systems. To address this need, Congress appropriated funds in 1984 for the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP), envisioned as a comprehensive mental health system designed for children, adolescents and their families.

CASSP Core Principles

CASSP is based on a well-defined set of principles for mental health services for children and adolescents with or at risk of developing severe emotional disorders and their families. These principles are summarized in six core statements.

- Family-Driven: Services recognize that the family is the primary support system for the child and participates as a full partner in all stages of the decision-making and treatment planning process.
- Child/Youth-Focused: Services meet the individual needs of the child, consider the child’s family and community contexts, and are developmentally appropriate, strength-based and child specific.
- Community-based: Whenever possible, services are delivered in the child’s home community, drawing on formal and informal resources to promote the child’s successful participation in the community.
- Multi-system: Services are planned in collaboration with all the child-serving systems involved in the child’s life.
- Culturally competent: Services recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitude, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices characteristic of the family’s ethnic group.
- Least restrictive/least intrusive: Services take place in settings that are the most appropriate and natural for the child and family and are the least restrictive and intrusive available to meet the needs of the child and family.