# When We Hold Different Pieces of the Same Map:

*Navigating Separate Paths Toward a Shared Destination*

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One map,
different responsibilities.

# THE CENTRAL PROBLEM

We are not trying to eliminate disagreement. We are trying to change what disagreement costs the children and families we serve.

## Juvenile court holds adversarial roles... but it does not have to reward adversarial culture.

### Adversarial Roles:

Serves to protect rights, test evidence, identify risk, tell your client's story, settle differences, and preserve judicial neutrality.

### Adversarial Culture:

The culture of our work becomes toxic when surprise, role confusion, and win-loss thinking become the default. Personalizing the case is the catalyst to feeding this culture.

### Collaborative Culture:

Allows rigorous advocacy while building predictable processes that keep the child's life in view.

It holds transparency, communication and intentionality in our work.

This work is what we do, it's not who we are.

Go back to the basics and ask:
Why are we here? Who are we here for?

# THE PREMISE

Culture change must happen at three levels simultaneously:

1

### Whole System

What the court culture rewards, expects, interrupts, and measures.

2

### Agencies & Roles

What each professional group commits to do more clearly and predictably.

3

### Individual Practitioners

How each person carries disagreement, uncertainty, and repair.

*If any level changes alone, the old culture pulls it back into the old map and we lose our way.*

# THE TOXIC CULTURE LOOP

These patterns become self-reinforcing unless the system intentionally interrupts them.

## What the system begins to reward when we are in this toxic loop:

- Surprise positions (and adversarial framing)
- Information used as leverage
- Assumed bad motives
- Escalation before clarification
- Personalized disagreement

**THIS ULTIMATELY HARMS THE FAMILY**

## What the Family Experiences as a Result:

- Conflicting messages
- Reduced faith in the system and those involved
- Delayed services
- Procedural anxiety
- Escalated loyalty conflicts
- Collateral harm long after the hearing, and even after case closure
- Viewing the world in a binary (win v. lose)

# THE GOAL: TO BUILD A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

More disciplined. More accountable. More child-centered.

| FROM | TO |
| --- | --- |
| Reactive | Rhythmic/Intentional |
| Positional | Principled |
| Personalized | Depersonalized |
| Vague concerns | Specific risks and tasks |
| Court as first intervention | Court as focused decision point |

*The goal is not less advocacy.*
*The goal is better architecture for productive and effective advocacy.*

# Whole-System Blueprint

The court culture functionally changes when norms, rhythm, escalation, and feedback all point in the same direction.

1

## Norms

What behavior should every role be able to reasonably expect?

2

## Rhythm

Where does collaboration occur before crisis? Where should it?

3

## Escalation

How do disagreements move toward resolution? How can we do that better?

4

## Feedback

How do we know whether the culture is changing? What needs to happen next?

**System implementation question:**

WHAT ARE WE SAYING NEEDS TO CHANGE AND
HOW ARE WE REINFORCING AND REWARDING THE EXACT ISSUE REQUIRING CHANGE?

# System Tool 1: Shared Culture Standards

A short set of standards becomes the system's map legend.

## No-surprise practice

- Major shifts are disclosed early enough for meaningful response.
- Are the parties conferring before motions? Before mediation? Can we have more frequent staffings to ensure conferral?

## Role clarity

- Each person can state what they can decide, recommend, request, and implement.
- Does each party know for whom they are advocating and why another party might take a different position?

## Issue narrowing

Before court, the system identifies what is agreed upon, and what is still disputed.

## Dignified disagreement

- People can be challenged without being demeaned.
- Collaboration does not mean capitulation.
- Advocacy can be heated but does NOT need to become personal.

## Maintaining a Child-impact Lens

Every process question must return to how the child and family experience it.

# System Tool 2: Predictable Case Rhythm

Collaboration cannot depend on crisis. It needs scheduled places to occur.

## The first meaningful conversation should not happen at a contested hearing.




### Early

Safety • services • kin • tribe • barriers

### Monthly

Progress • barriers • child impact • conflicts

### Before filing a motion

Confer • identify relief • authority

### Before mediation

Separate negotiables from non-negotiables

### Before hearing

Narrow facts • evidence • and stipulated facts

# System Tool 3: Conflict Escalation Pathway

Resolve conflict at the lowest appropriate level while preserving the right to litigate real disputes.

**Clarification** — Is the problem fact, role, authority, communication, or risk?

**Staffings** — Can the team solve it with information, services, or safeguards?

**Conferral** — Can counsel narrow the requested relief and disputed issues?

**Mediation** — Can a neutral help resolve or partially resolve the conflict?

**Litigation** — What precise question requires judicial decision?

*Escalation is not failure. Unnecessary escalation is a culture problem.*

# System Tool 4: Culture dashboard

Measure the culture you want. A system changes faster when it can see whether daily habits are improving.

## Position transparency

Increase % of major positions disclosed before the hearing through frequent staffings and conferral

## Issue narrowing

Increase % of hearings with clearly stated disputed questions and stipulated facts

## Service access

Time from order/referral to service start and implementation

## Family clarity

Whether families can explain expectations and next steps. Check for understanding and provide clarification

## Repair rate

Whether ruptures are addressed before the next proceeding and how to do so appropriately and effectively

## Continuity

Whether plans survive staff or provider transitions and eliminating barriers wherever possible

*Do not measure collaboration by whether people disagree. Measure whether disagreement becomes clearer, earlier, and less harmful.*

# Agency and Role Blueprint

Collaboration becomes observable when every role owns its piece of the map.

1

## Role compact

What do we contribute, need, and commit to provide?

2

## Shared language

How do we translate role-specific frameworks into questions others can answer?

3

## No-surprise practice

How do we disclose changes early enough for meaningful response? How do we support transparency on all ends?

4

## Bridge use

Who is best positioned to reach the person or system currently stuck?

**Agency implementation question:**
What is our role willing to make predictable for everyone else?

# Agency Tool 1: Role Compact

A role compact turns “collaboration” from an aspiration into a visible practice commitment.

### How do we contribute:

What does this role uniquely see, protect, or bring to the analysis?

### We do we need?

What information, process, or response improves our ability to do our role well?

### Our Commitment:

What we will provide consistently so others can work with us more effectively and in reliance on our service provision.

***Use this by role group structure:***

*Division, GALs, defense counsel, court, service providers, parent advocates, tribes, schools, placements, etc.*

# Agency Tool 2: Translate Role-language Into Shared Language

Role-specific frameworks can be preserved while becoming easier for others to understand and respond to.

| Role | Role-language | Shared-language question |
|---|---|---|
| **Division** | Safety + services | What risk remains, and what supports will reduce it? |
| **GAL** | Child impact | What is this child experiencing currently and what could the child experience longitudinally? |
| **Defense** | Rights + due process | What process, proof, and opportunity are necessary? |
| **Providers** | Functioning + change | What observable/measurable behavior indicates progress or concern? How do we move forward? |
| **Court** | Authority + remedy | What is the order sought, and what finding supports it? |

## Shared role-based goal:

How do we support this family so that we can leave them in a better place than how they were when they came into our care.

# Agency Tool 3: The No-Surprise Protocol

A culture changes when major shifts are disclosed early enough for others to respond meaningfully.

## Use the S – S – S – C – P framework:




### Signal

A position may change or a new concern has emerged. **Identify** what the new position or change is.

### Specify

Name the fact, risk, order, or evidence driving the shift. Be **specific** and intentional about identifying the information.

### Share

**Provide** information early enough for review. Transparency, clarity, and communication will drive collaborative outcomes.

### Confer

**Ask** what could resolve, narrow, or clarify the dispute. Consider alternative positions, solutions, and processes.

### Preserve

If litigation remains necessary, preserve the issue cleanly.

*No-surprise practice does **not** require agreement.*

*It requires enough collaborative notice for meaningful response and possible resolution.*

# Agency Tool 4: Using the Systemic Bridge

"Hard-to-reach" does not mean unreachable. It often means the puzzle piece isn't fitting and we need to find the right one, or a different one.




Who is the trusted source to bridge the divide? Counsel, therapist, social worker, kinship, other community supports?

**Bridge-building does not weaken accountability or aim to polarize positions.**

**It makes accountability more reachable and allows for positions to align.**

# Individual Practitioner Blueprint

Culture is reproduced one interaction at a time.

1

## Pause

What am I reacting to? Why?

2

## Perspective

What might this other role see that I cannot?

Why might they take the position that they are taking?

3

## Purpose

What does the child/family need from this interaction?

What potential harm might be caused by my response?

How can I be sure not to cause further harm through my own engagement?

4

## Proceed

What is the next professional action?

What can be done to cause the least harm while maintaining my role and respecting the roles of others?

**Practitioner implementation question:**

How do I stay principled without becoming fused to my position?

# Practitioner Tool 1: Depersonalize the Disagreement

The work is what we do. It is not who we are.

### What happens when our work becomes our identity and defines who we are and not just what we do?

- Disagreement feels like an attack
- Correction feels like humiliation
- “Winning” becomes self-protection
- Curiosity becomes harder and we foreclose opportunities for repair
- Burnout narrows judgment

**Danny’s Motto:**
Ground yourself. Go outside and touch the grass. Something to recenter yourself. This is your job, and it’s important, but it’s not your identity (and shouldn’t be).

### When our work remains what we DO instead of who we are…

- Disagreement can be useful data for meaningful change and alignment
- Correction can improve practice
- Advocacy can stay principled
- Repair remains possible and more likely
- Judgment stays flexible
- The family stays at the center and their story can be told without professional enmeshment

**Jessica’s Motto:**
No one wins by always wanting to be right.
Be committed to the work, not attached to being right. When we focus on win or lose, the family is who loses.

# Practitioner Tool 2: Ask the Map Question

One question can interrupt certainty without weakening conviction.

## “What can this role see that I cannot?”

### Agency Perspective

Ask:

What barrier or safety concern may I be missing that the agency sees?

### Defense Perspective

Ask:

What barrier, fear, right, or access issue may I be underestimating that counsel is seeing?

### GAL Perspective

Ask:

What child-impact concern may I not be weighing enough that the GAL holds as significant?

### Provider Perspective

Ask:

What functional information may change the analysis? What else do we need to know that we don’t already know?

This question does not require a practitioner to abandon their conclusion.

Instead, it asks whether the conclusion has been tested against the limits of the practitioner’s own vantage point.

# Practitioner Tool 3: Repair Process without Conceding

Repair is not capitulation. Repair protects the conditions needed to keep solving the case.

1

## Name the concern:

"That exchange became less useful to the cause than it needed to be."

2

## Own your behavior:

"I should have been more specific about my concern."

"I could have articulated that differently. What I meant to say was..."

3

## Return to issue at task:

"The issue we still need to solve is..."

"What can we do to work on this together?"

4

## Commit to next steps:

"By Friday, I will send..."

"Next time I will be sure to..."

*A repaired working relationship can remain appropriately **adversarial in role***

*while becoming **collaborative in process.***

# Practitioner Tool 4: Make the next step unmistakable

Culture changes through repeated, observable behavior.

## End hard conversations with four things:

**What**

Identify the specific next action needed

**Who**

Name/Identify the responsible person

**When**

Create a deadline and/or the next check-in

**How**

Accountability check: what is the confirmation method to ensure the deadline is met?

*Ambiguity and stagnation invites re-litigation.*

*Specific next steps create momentum and forward-moving progress.*

# Putting the Pieces of the Map Together

The culture shifts only when all three levels reinforce the same message.

| Level | Ask | Build | Practice Tool Application |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Systemic** | What does our court culture reward either consciously or subconsciously that needs to change? | Shared standards + shared-language + shared goals | Escalation pathway + dashboard |
| **Agency** | What is our role willing to make more predictable or shift to support the change? | Role compact + shared language | No-surprise practice + bridges |
| **Practitioner** | What am I missing from where I stand? What other perspective can I see? | Depersonalization + map question | Repair + unmistakable next step |

*A culture map is useful only if the pieces are designed to fit together.*

*It is up to us as a system, as an agency, and as practitioners to fit the pieces together.*

# The 30-day Culture Challenge

Choose one observable behavior that teaches the system a new way to work.

### System

Add one no-surprise or issue-narrowing expectation to a recurring meeting.

### Agency

Create one role compact:

What we contribute, what we need, what we commit.

### Practitioner

End every hard conversation with what, who, when, and how.

*Culture does not change because everyone simply agrees it should.*

*Culture changes when new behaviors are repeated until they become expected and normed.*

# What changes for families if we use the tools?

System culture is not abstract to the people living inside it.

### When the culture is toxic:

- Parents hear conflicting expectations
- Children wait while adults re-litigate process
- Services stall behind role confusion
- Families experience the system as unpredictable and unreliable
- Every hearing becomes another rupture

### When the culture is collaborative

- Expectations are clear
- Disputes are narrowly framed
- Services are implemented and streamlined
- Court makes decisions on the issues truly needing judicial guidance
- **Families carry less collateral harm**

# Laying Down your Piece of the Map

A closing call to action at every level of the system.

### At the system level:

Change one structure that unnecessarily rewards conflict and breeds the toxic culture.

### At the agency level:

Make one collaboration commitment observable and predictable.

### At the practitioner level:

Ask one question before defending one conclusion:

What am I missing because of where I stand?

## The map becomes more useful when we stop guarding our piece of it.

# THANK YOU!

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