

Identifying Needs

1. The transition from the goal statements to generating needs is fairly natural. You can start by simply asking folks to rank the domains. “Where do you think we are closest to our goals and where do you think we have the most work to do? Which ones should we start with?” A need is simply the difference between the description of “doing all right” and the child and family’s actual situation.
2. It is always difficult to help team members separate needs from services. Often, however, a follow up question when someone suggests a specific strategy at this stage is to ask why it is being proposed. “What will having a foster home provide Bob? What’s missing now that he needs?” This can be done without criticizing the person who makes the suggestion. “Foster care might be an option here. But before we tie ourselves down to that, lets see what we’re trying to accomplish. This is a pretty complex situation, we don’t want to miss anything.”
3. People will also raise valid fears and objections that will need to be dealt with. “I can understand why you are worried about being alone with Bob. That last argument would have upset anyone. And Bob has threatened you. It sounds like one of the needs you’d like us to put up here is the need to feel safe when you are with Bob.”
4. Some team members will offer the diagnostic labels of the parent or child as needs. Some diagnoses link more directly to needs than others. For example: “Yes, you’re right. A key need that fits in both the medical and the safety domain is finding a way to help Bob deal with his diabetes more consistently.” On the other hand some are more removed from statements of need: “Yes, Bob has been described as having a conduct disorder. Now, what does that tell us about the sort of needs Bob or the people taking care of Bob have here in the Educational domain?”
5. Don’t worry too much about listing oddly phrased or minor needs during this brain storming phase. During the next step, when the team moves to prioritize the needs in each domain, things usually sort themselves out. It is important, however, that the child and family have been able to clearly state what they think their needs are.
6. The outcome for this step will be a cluster of various sorts of needs associated with each of the domains in the child and family’s life.