

What is the PURPOSE of an Active Community Team?

The Active Community Team (ACT) **brings community partners together¹ to improve equitable access** to comprehensive prevention, early intervention, and therapeutic services and supports for families with very young children. This work can be thought of as building a strong **early childhood system** that aims to reach all children and families with needed services and supports.



An **early childhood system** brings together health (holistically defined and for all members of the family), child welfare including the dependency court, early care and education, other human services, and family support program partners - as well as community leaders, families, and other partners - to achieve agreed-upon goals for thriving children and families.

What DOES IT LOOK LIKE when an ACT is implemented successfully?

- All ACT participants feel a sense of **collective leadership and inclusion**.
- All participants feel a climate of **trust, compassion, and transparency** necessary for collaborative solution-finding and alignment of shared resources.
- Shared early childhood systems-building **priorities are identified, monitored, and achieved**.
- Policies, funding, and other infrastructure **changes are made to support Safe Babies approach practices**.
- Strategies to **counteract or change disparities, racist policies, and discriminatory practices** are implemented.

Who PARTICIPATES in ACT?

- Participants represent the broad and diverse sectors serving families with very young children who are involved in the child welfare system or are at risk of child welfare involvement. **The exact makeup of the group will depend on the unique community** and its priorities. The partners involved in the ACT may evolve over time as priorities shift. However, it is critical to include:
 - Families with lived experience in the child welfare system
 - Resource families (foster parents, foster-to-adopt families, and kinship caregivers); foster care organizations
 - Direct service providers
 - Professionals with decision-making authority to implement change in their respective organizations
- The team is **collaboratively led** by the Judge, Child Welfare Leadership, and Community Coordinator.

¹In communities where an existing early childhood coalition is engaged in similar efforts, it may be preferable to integrate the work of an ACT into the already active coalition; the intention is to align early childhood system-building efforts in the community and reduce duplication and overlap.

Essential Functions and Activities

The list of essential functions and activities below describes the key functions and specific activities that fall under the purview of the ACT. These functions incorporate key strategies from the field of collective impact, with a central focus on health equity for infants, toddlers, and their families.

Essential Functions	Activities
Fostering a supportive environment for the Safe Babies approach and related programs, practices, and policies	Meeting regularly and frequently to build expansive community support and champions for the Safe Babies approach and broader prevention efforts
	Creating space for cross-system networking that increases communication and reduces silos
	Promoting new policies and procedures that support, sustain, and spread Safe Babies approach practice changes addressing the need of infants, toddlers, and their families
	Advocating for, facilitating access to, and participating in cross-system trainings and technical assistance to increase workforce skills and competencies in core areas related to the Safe Babies approach, such as applying the science of early childhood development
	Exploring/identifying funding opportunities to sustain the Safe Babies approach and expand reach to more children/families, including funding Community Coordinator positions
	Exploring/identifying in-kind opportunities to support children and families such as providing space for family time and concrete resources for families (e.g., diapers, cribs, self-care products for new mothers, etc.)
	Exploring/identifying funding opportunities to build/expand programs and supports for infants, toddlers, and their families such as parent partner programs, evidence-based interventions that strengthen the parent-child relationship, and effective services to address perinatal substance dependence
Reflection and solution finding	Sharing timely information about available community services, resources, and supports for very young children and their families in the child welfare system or at increased risk of child welfare involvement
	Identifying temporary solutions to address barriers and gaps for children and families supported by the Safe Babies approach while simultaneously working to build long-term systems change/improvements

Functions	Activities
<p>Advancing equity across the early childhood system</p>	Actively engaging and supporting parents/individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system in decision-making and leadership roles
	Serving as a platform for open conversations about personal biases, community discrimination, and institutional barriers
	Advancing a common vision for a more equitable early childhood systems for families with very young children in the community
	Using data separated out by race and ethnicity to recognize barriers to equity, such as discriminatory practices and policies
	Developing, implementing, and monitoring the effectiveness of strategies to counteract or change the disparities, racist policies, and discriminatory practices impacting infants, toddlers, and their families
<p>Promoting continuous quality improvement across the early childhood system</p>	Sharing data trends from Safe Babies sites and community sectors to examine availability, accessibility, and alignment of comprehensive services and supports
	Engaging in the development of a shared set of priorities , measurement, and outcomes among the ACT's community partners
	Creating a plan to address shared priorities , monitor effectiveness of the plan, and adjust as needed



What is the PURPOSE of Family Team Meetings?

Family Team Meetings (FTMs) **engage families in collaborative proactive planning** that puts young children's developmental needs for safe, stable, and nurturing early caregiving relationships, as well as the individualized needs of each family member, at the center of decision-making.



What DOES IT LOOK LIKE when FTMs are implemented successfully?

- The participants in FTMs **work together in partnership** as a 'family team' in all planning and decision-making
- Discussions center on the **specific developmental needs** of the infant/toddler.
- **Parents are part of the family team, with professionals actively supporting** the parent's confidence, motivation, and capacity for self-advocacy in a shared planning process.
- **Professionals use respectful and non-stigmatizing language** in developing a climate of compassion and dignity for the family.
- The Family Team works together in a collaborative, solution-finding spirit, built on mutual respect and transparency (no surprises, no "hiding the ball") that develops **trusting working relationships**.
- Planning, including concurrent planning and planning for transitions, uses a **developmental, multigenerational, family-centered lens**.
- There is explicit **attention to the social and environmental conditions** that affect health and well-being in identifying child and family needs, including such concrete needs as housing, food, transportation, and social supports.
- **Meetings occur regularly** and frequently across the life of the case to ensure that needs are identified and met in as responsive and timely a manner as possible.
- **Meaningful information and individualized recommendations** for the child and family are agreed upon for presentation at the next hearing.

Who PARTICIPATES in FTMs?

Exactly who participates will depend on the family and community, but **FTMs must include parents and their self-identified supports** along with the **child welfare caseworker, Guardian ad Litem (attorney/Court Appointed Special Advocate), parent attorney(s), child welfare agency attorney, and providers** supporting the child and family in the child welfare case process. When resource/kinship caregivers participate, it can build and strengthen shared parenting; however, the decision to involve resource/kinship caregivers in FTMs should be made with the parent(s) and on an individualized basis. It is important to note that in the Safe Babies approach, **the judge/judicial officer does not participate in FTMs.**¹

Examples of Family Team Meeting Participants	
Community Coordinator	Child welfare supervisor
Facilitator	Prosecuting attorney or child welfare agency attorney
Parent(s)	Child welfare family support services provider
Parents' self-identified supports	Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health therapist or consultant/expert
Peer mentor/parent partner	Home visiting program provider
Resource/kinship caregivers	Adult mental health provider or consultant/expert
Child welfare caseworker	Adult substance use disorder treatment provider or consultant/expert
Child's guardian ad litem (attorney/CASA)	Domestic violence treatment provider or consultant/expert
Parent attorney(s)	Translator (as needed)

¹Although judges/judicial officers do not participate in FTMs, they are actively involved in the Site Implementation Team and Active Community Team to identify areas for improvement to support all families participating in the Safe Babies approach.



Essential Functions and Practices

The list of essential functions and practices below is provided for the FTM members as a detailed guide to the specific professional practices that fall under the purview of an FTM.

The essential functions for FTMs align with best-practice recommendations for engaging families, promoting protective factors, trauma-responsive care, and multidisciplinary practice as an attribute of high-quality legal representation. With these best practices as the foundation, the Safe Babies approach identifies FTM practices specific to the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families.

Essential Functions	Practices
<p>Engaging families in an inclusive, trauma-responsive, and strengths-based participatory planning and decision-making process</p>	<p>Elevating the parent’s voice by shifting power and supporting the parent in prioritizing topics for discussion in case planning and problem solving</p>
	<p>Demonstrating kindness, compassion, and openness in all interactions</p>
	<p>Treating parents with respect and dignity, using non-stigmatizing terms and language (e.g., “positive screening” or “individual who is in recovery”)</p>
	<p>Celebrating the family’s successes and accomplishments with genuinely supportive statements and encouragement, looking for opportunities to call out strengths and successes</p>
	<p>Eliciting the diverse perspectives, knowledge, and resources of all caregivers and reflecting the cultural context of the child and family</p>
	<p>Prior to the meeting, asking the parent(s) what they would like to discuss during the meeting and how to best share that information, as well as informing them about what else will be brought up and why it is important/relevant to discuss</p>
	<p>Using plain and simple language, terms, and acronyms; avoiding professional jargon (e.g., adjudication, stipulation, concurrent planning); explaining clearly and using repetition to help parents understand what is being said and what is being asked of them to do; and routinely checking for understanding</p>
	<p>Responding to parents with empathy about factors that may be affecting their thinking and behavior, including trauma</p>
	<p>Providing families with information that includes relevant languages and cultural contexts</p>
<p>Creating SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) goals, including those in the child welfare treatment plan, that are individualized and achievable with the appropriate support and scaffolding</p>	

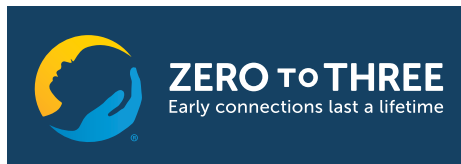
Essential Functions	Practices
<p>Collaborating to plan and find solutions in a proactive way</p>	<p>Creating a space where parents receive compassion, with all relevant information shared openly to promote trust, clear communication, and the opportunity for everyone to be heard</p>
	<p>Engaging families with a strengths-based approach to accomplishing change together, ensuring that parents are prepared in advance of meetings and hearings and that there are no surprises</p>
	<p>Coming prepared with key information about case progress and any barriers impacting progress</p>
	<p>Engaging collaboratively in difficult conversations to address the safety and well-being of the child and family</p>
	<p>Seeking creative solutions that address barriers families face in accessing services and supports</p>
	<p>Building the family's ability to seek help, including how to navigate community resources, such as connecting the family to a peer mentor/parent partner</p>
<p>Promoting shared accountability by identifying and assigning tasks to members of the Family Team in preparation for the next meeting or hearing</p>	



Essential Functions	Practices
<p>Putting the very young child's health and developmental need for safe, stable, and nurturing caregiving at the center of planning and decision-making</p>	<p>Prioritizing infant and toddler health and developmental needs in all discussions and planning</p>
	<p>Partnering with the family to develop thoughtful individualized "parallel planning" (concurrent planning) and transition planning that protect the very young child's developmental need for safe, stable, and nurturing early caregiver relationships</p>
	<p>Partnering with the family to develop thoughtful, individualized post-permanency planning that helps to maintain family resilience and strengths and to protect the very young child's developmental need for safe, stable, and nurturing early caregiver relationships</p>
	<p>Identifying strategies that support frequent family contact (ideally taking place daily or several times per week, when appropriate and safe) to protect and strengthen the very young child's relationship with his or her parent</p>
	<p>Identifying strategies that support quality family contact, including settings and supportive mentoring/modeling opportunities that promote nurturing, protective caregiving and strengthen the relationship between the very young child and his or her parent</p>
<p>Identifying and addressing the comprehensive and holistic needs of the family</p>	<p>Examining how social and environmental conditions are impacting the family's circumstances (e.g., safe and stable housing)</p>
	<p>Referring the child and family for screening and assessment, including for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life stressors and emotional distress, including that related to intimate partner violence, experienced by the parent • Child emotional/behavioral dysregulation • Developmental screening • Strengths and challenges in the child-parent relationship • Parental depression • Substance use disorders • Child and parent physical health • Needs related to protective factors • Needs related to the social determinants of health, including social supports
	<p>Ensuring that referrals are individualized to address the specific needs identified through screening and assessment</p>
	<p>Monitoring case data to ensure that children and their families are receiving all necessary supports and services and that the case is progressing</p>

Essential Functions	Practices
<p>Ensuring timely, effective, individualized wrap-around services and supports</p>	<p>Meeting regularly and frequently throughout the life of the case</p>
	<p>Utilizing a continuum of services for infants and toddlers in case planning, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular well-child visits where children receive age-appropriate developmental screenings and immunizations • Part C early intervention services and other developmental supports • Psychoeducational parenting intervention • Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health services, such as Child-Parent Psychotherapy • Home visiting programs for parents and caregivers of young children, such as SafeCare, Healthy Families America, and other models
	<p>Utilizing a continuum of services and supports for parents in case planning, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete supports and resources to meet the family’s needs • Peer mentor/parent partner support • Shared parenting/building relationships between parents and resource families • Infant and early childhood mental health services • Early education and care • Adult mental health services, including medication management (e.g., for substance use disorders) • Domestic violence services • Primary and other health care services, including postpartum care • Home visiting programs • Supports and services in the community that are culturally relevant • Civil legal services to address issues such as housing, domestic violence, paternity, and immigration
	<p>Prioritizing age-appropriate, evidence-based practices in referral-making, including those with promising research evidence</p>
	<p>Referring families to culturally relevant services, including services in their primary language and using interpretation services as needed</p>
	<p>Expediting service referrals, appropriately building upon, or scaffolding, other services so that they are manageable</p>
<p>Helping parents understand the purpose and short- and long-term benefits of each service to which they are referred</p>	

Essential Functions	Practices
<p>Ensuring timely, effective, individualized wrap-around services and supports</p>	<p>Putting supports in place while building long-term, community-based solutions for children, parents, and other caregivers (kin, resource) such as short-term housing while working towards long-term housing or substance use disorder treatment that leads to a community supportive of recovery</p>
	<p>Putting post-reunification supports in place including health insurance coverage, strong social supports, affordable child care, and concrete supports to meet the family's ongoing needs</p>



Safe Babies, a program of ZERO TO THREE, meets the needs of babies and toddlers under court jurisdiction by implementing a team-based approach, rooted in the science of early childhood development, to ignite collective action across states and communities.

IMPACT: Safe Babies focuses on the urgent developmental needs of young children during all planning and decision-making to strengthen early relationships with parents and caregivers and to create safe, stable, and nurturing environments for babies and toddlers.

The Safe Babies approach is guided by five areas of focus, with the needs of babies and their parents at the center. The approach works concurrently, at both the **Child and Family Level** and the **State and Site Level**, to ensure healthy childhood development while impacting long-term capacity building.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Driving and sustaining best practices to foster reflection instead of reactivity, allowing the space for families and professionals to grow, adapt, and change based on effective data and evaluation

Interdisciplinary Collaborative and Proactive Teamwork

Ensuring families' individualized needs are addressed by promoting coordination across communities to find creative solutions and remove structural barriers that perpetuate discriminatory processes and inequities



Enhanced Oversight and Collaborative Problem-Solving

Enhancing judicial oversight with more frequent court hearings and engaging families as partners guided by respect, kindness, and compassion

Expedited, Appropriate, and Effective Services

Ensuring services for babies and their families are timely and comprehensive while respecting their lived experiences and the intergenerational effects of social, racial, and health inequities

Trauma-Responsive Support

Responding to trauma with a healing approach while recognizing the resilience of parents and understanding the lifelong, systemic social and health inequities facing some families with young children



Providing babies, toddlers, and their parents or caregivers the safe connections and supports needed to remain safe, stable, and healthy

Safe Babies, a program of ZERO TO THREE, works to keep families together by preventing the need for babies and toddlers to enter out-of-home care, or for further involvement in the child welfare system.

EVERY BABY HAS UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

Positive experiences and emotionally nourishing relationships are critical to the healthy development and lifelong well-being of babies and toddlers. Yet, due to the adverse childhood experiences and systemic social and health inequities faced by some parents, children under the age of 3 enter the child welfare system at a higher rate than any other age group.



WHAT WE DO

Build coordinated and aligned early childhood systems to support a SAFER path for families to flourish and thrive

OUR FOCUS (SAFER)



SERVE

as an entry point for community access to align a continuum of timely and equitable services for all families, regardless of their circumstances



ADVANCE

child and family well-being by providing the resources and supports that babies and toddlers need for a strong start in life



FOCUS

on the babies' developmental need for safe, stable, and nurturing early relationships during all decision-making



EMPOWER

parents to lead with their voices and lived experiences to transform child welfare practice and advocate for fellow parents across the country



REDESIGN




policies and practices to promote racial equity and social justice



IMPACT

Meeting the immediate needs of babies and toddlers through an innovative, team-based approach that strengthens early relationships with parents and caregivers, ensuring healthy development and well-being




FAMILIES REMAIN TOGETHER

-  Keeping babies and toddlers with their families whenever possible
-  Connecting children and their families with timely and equitable services and supports
-  Strengthening families to reduce the likelihood of repeated maltreatment or involvement with Child Protective Services

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT STAYS ON TRACK

-  Promoting timely screening and assessment for developmental needs and services
-  Increasing medical home access for preventative pediatric care
-  Prioritizing family time when children are placed out of home

PARTNERS HAVE A SPACE TO CONVENE

-  Collaborating on a shared mission and vision, with children and families at the center
-  Prioritizing parents' voice and leadership within the team
-  Developing strategies using a continuous quality improvement lens
-  Strengthening communities by building supports and services for families