

Some Questions and Answers about the Family Development Credential Program (FDC™)

What is the FDC?

An interagency strengths-based training and credentialing program for frontline family workers.

The Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (FDC) is a major National initiative that provides frontline workers with the skills and competencies they need to empower families to attain a healthy self-reliance and interdependence with their communities.

This interagency training and credentialing program is available in communities across the state and country to frontline workers from all public, private and non-profit service systems (e.g. home visitors, case managers, family resource center workers, community health workers, and teacher aides).

The FDC was developed under a partnership between the New York State Dept. of State, Division of Community Services and Cornell University's College of Human Ecology, where the curriculum was developed. National FDC trains official FDC instructors and the University of Connecticut issues the credential.

Fifteen state agencies working as the Interagency Work Group on Family Support and Empowerment under the leadership of the NYS Council on Children and Families, have advised the FDC. There are now more than 5,000 frontline workers who have earned the Family Development Credential.

Many services and interventions, being fragmented, problem-specific, and crisis driven, are not as effective as they could be at helping families achieve long lasting changes in their lives.

Why is the FDC necessary?

For too long, services have been available only when a family is in crisis or about to disintegrate. Public interventions have focused on "rescuing and fixing" families rather than helping families develop their capacity to solve problems and achieve long-lasting self-reliance.

Now on both state and national levels, families, service providers and policy makers, are joining together to reorient the way services are delivered toward a more family-focused and strengths-based approach.

The FDC is critical to achieving this goal, because it can ensure that frontline workers across all systems are using the same highly effective approach to helping families. The FDC will provide all state and local agencies with accessible, high quality training resources.

What is the FDC achieving?

For families - Services are more focused on helping families use their strengths and set and reach their own goals.

For frontline workers - The FDC offers quality, sequential training enabling workers to develop skills and competencies needed to work effectively with families. The FDC also provides a career pathway or avenue into college for workers with little or no formal training or higher education.

For States - With its interagency nature, the FDC is transforming the way agencies work with families - fostering collaboration, reducing duplication, and providing a way to streamline training for frontline workers. The FDC credential is recognized by all major family-serving agencies.

What is the family development process?

1. The family develops a partnership with a family

development worker.

2. A family development worker helps the family assess its needs and strengths; this is an ongoing process.
3. The family sets its own major goal (such as getting off welfare, or providing healthy care of a disabled family member) and smaller goals working toward the major goal, and identifies ideas for reaching them.
4. The family development worker helps the family make a written plan for pursuing goals with some tasks being the responsibility of the family members and some the worker's. Accomplishments are celebrated, and the plan is continually updated.
5. The family learns and practices skills needed to become self-reliant.
6. The family uses services as stepping-stones to reach their goals.
7. The family's sense of responsible self-control is restored. The family (and each individual within the family) is strengthened by the family development process so they are better able to handle future challenges.

What is the FDC curriculum?

The comprehensive curriculum of the FDC course is *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers*, developed by Cornell University with input from families, frontline workers, program supervisors, and policy makers who attended focus groups, reviewed drafts and participated in pilot tests. See pages 4-5 for competencies taught by this curriculum.

There are three documents:

Worker Handbook- the core of the curriculum, highly readable.

Instructor's Manual - easy-to-use guide to over 90 hours of interactive course sessions.

Portfolio Advisor's Manual - for FDC portfolio advisors to assist workers in doing skills practices and preparing for the FDC credential.

Who can purchase and use this curriculum?

FDC instructors, portfolio advisors and workers who are part of the official FDC credentialing program; including agencies and coalitions, community colleges and four-year colleges. (To prepare workers to earn the FDC credential a training program must have at least one instructor who has attended an FDC Instructor's and Portfolio Advisors Institute).

- Individuals who wish to do self-study
- Agencies or coalitions who wish to offer informal workshops in their communities
- Agencies who want to incorporate it into their own ongoing training. Inquire about receiving permission to adapt the materials.

How can a worker get this training and earn the FDC credential?

Comprehensive FDC training and portfolio advisement is available through official programs in local communities across the state.

The first FDC credentials were issued by Cornell's School of Continuing Education in Dec. 1997. To this time, nineteen states have adapted or replicated the FDC and have established training and credentialing systems.

What does a worker need to do to receive the FDC credential?

FDC Course - Participate in approximately 90 hour course over several months, led by an official FDC instructor.

Portfolio Advisement - Students work with a trained portfolio advisor associated with the course, who provides guidance to complete required portfolio work.

Portfolio Development - Prepare a portfolio that contains, for each of ten chapters:

- Responses to at least three “Activities to Extend Your Learning” from the Worker Handbook.
- Plan and carry out at least one skills practice for each chapter;
- Share this with your portfolio advisor and document it in the portfolio.

The last section of the portfolio contains three Family Development Plans that the worker creates with one family, to demonstrate an ability to work with family member(s) as they choose a goal and begin to take steps toward that goal.

Examination - Successfully complete an examination based on the Worker’s Handbook.

Costs include a fee charged by the local FDC program (fees vary, averaging around \$850), the 2015 Worker Handbook (\$45) a \$300 credentialing fee.

What if we just want to attend the course and not earn the credential?

Your agency can purchase the curriculum and offer informal training for your own and other community agencies’ workers. To offer the course leading to the credential, someone would need to become part of the official FDC Instructors’ network.

Workers can also buy the Worker’s Handbook and do self-study on their own or with co-workers.

What competencies does Empowerment Skills for Family Workers teach?

The ten chapters of the Worker’s Handbook, and ten corresponding modules of the Instructor’s Manual address the following FDC skills and competencies:

Chapter 1: Family Development: A Sustainable Route To Healthy Self- Reliance

A bone-deep longing for Freedom and self-respect

Beyond “Providing Services
Does case management empower families?
Core principles of family development
Power and family development
The family development plan
Your mind and your brain
The importance of family context
Putting it all together as a family development worker

Chapter 2: Communicating with Skill and Heart

Communicating with skill and heart
Empathy: putting yourself in their shoes
Understanding nonverbal communications
Finding a good balance between listening and expressing yourself
Listening well
Saying what you mean clearly and respectfully
Promoting cooperative solutions to conflicts
Handling blame and criticism constructively
Confronting people constructively when necessary
Communicating about “hot topics”
Working with families with language barriers and low levels of literacy
Communicating using technology

Chapter 3: Presence and Mindfulness: Cornerstone of Healthy Relationships

Presence
Shifting your focus from “doing” to “being”
Mindfulness-based stress reduction
Mindfulness practice exercises
Practical strategies for mindful family development work

Chapter 4: Taking Good Care of Yourself

Clarifying a personal vision for your work
Creating a support system at work
Creating a support system for yourself
Creating your own stress-reduction and wellness program
Balancing work and family life
Family Financial Literacy

Chapter 5: Our Diverse World

Living in this diverse world

What is culture?

Why is an understanding of diversity and oppression important to family development?

Why is cultural competence important for family development workers?

Language and cross-cultural communication

Language and family dynamics

Displacement and immigration

Barriers to a culturally competent society

Discussing diversity

Exploring your own culture

Expanding your ability to work respectfully with other cultures

Helping your agency to develop cultural competence

Chapter 6: Strength-Based Assessment

What is assessment?

Basic principles of strength-based assessment

Confidentiality

The family circles assessment

Helping your agency choose strength-based assessment tools

Chapter 7: Helping Families Set and Reach Their Own Goals

Establishing mutually respectful, trusting relationships with families

Helping families build on their own strengths

How to avoid families becoming dependent on you

When and how to end the relationship

Chapter 8: Helping Families Access Specialized Services

Helping families use specialized services to become self-reliant

Identifying specialized services and helping families gain access to them

Recognizing the need for specialized services

Making and following through on referrals

Supporting family members in specialized programs
Recognizing, referring, and supporting families needing specialized services

Supporting military families and veterans

Other specialized services commonly needed by families your agency works with

Families with many complex problems

Chapter 9: Home Visiting

Home visiting: A unique relationship

A family development approach to home visiting

How to enter a family's home respectfully the first time and on future visits

How to establish the purpose of the home visit

Safety issues

TV, dogs, another cup of coffee: Handling the practical matters of home visiting

Home visits in child protection or other domestic violence situations

Ongoing visits

Chapter 10: Collaboration and Community Support

The importance of Community

Helping families identify and strengthen their informal helping networks

Support and advocacy groups

Family conferences

Teaching leadership skills to family members

Collaboration

Building respectful relationships with community service partners

Coordination and cooperation: The first steps toward collaboration

Different levels of collaboration: Individuals, front-line workers, and systems

Keys to successful collaboration

Practical pitfalls of collaboration-and how to turn them into advantages

The bigger picture: How agency, state, and national policies affect your work

Interagency training: A key to interagency collaboration

Core principles underlying the empowerment and family support approach to family development

1. All people, and all families, have strengths.
2. All families need and deserve support. The type and degree of support each family needs varies throughout the life span.
3. Most families are not dependent on long-term public support. Neither are they isolated. They maintain a healthy interdependence with extended family, friends, other people, religious organizations, community groups, schools and agencies, and the natural environment.
4. Diversity (race, ethnicity, gender, class, family form, religion, physical and mental ability, age, sexual orientation) is an important reality in our society, and is valuable. Family workers need to develop competence in working effectively with people who may be different from them or come from groups that are often not respected in our society.
5. The deficit model of family assistance, in which families must show inadequacy in order to receive services (and professionals decide what is best for families), is counter-productive to helping families move toward healthy self-reliance.
6. Changing from the deficit model to the family development approach requires a whole new way of thinking about social services, not simply more new programs. Individual workers cannot make this shift without corresponding policy changes at agency, state, and federal levels.
7. Families need coordinated services in which all the agencies they work with use a similar approach. Collaboration at the local, state, and federal levels is crucial to effective family development.
8. Families and family development workers are equally important partners in the empowerment process, with each contributing important knowledge. Workers learn as much as the families from the process.
9. Families must choose their own goals and methods of achieving them. Family development workers' roles include assisting families in setting reachable goals for their own self-reliance, providing access to services needed to reach these goals, and encouragement.
10. Services are provided in order for families to reach their goals, and are not themselves a measure of success. New methods of evaluating agency effectiveness are needed that measure family and community outcomes, not just the number of services provided.
11. In order for families to move out of dependency, helping systems must shift from a "power over" to a "power with" paradigm. Human service workers have power (which they may not recognize), because they participate in the distribution of valued resources. Workers can use that power to work with families rather than use power over them.

For more information about the FDC, including information about where FDC training programs are being offered, contact Terry Bearden, ACAA Programs and Development Director, at (501) 372-0807 or by email at tbearden@acaaa.org.