

What is Evidence-informed Practice?

Evidence-informed practice (EIP) involves using various types of research when making decisions about policy and practice. EIP considers:

- The best available research evidence
- Client preferences and values
- The clinical state and circumstances
- Practitioner knowledge and experience (Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011; Practice and Research Together (PART) website, www.partcanada.org).

Multidimensional Evidence-informed Practice

Multidimensional evidence-informed practice includes knowledge from research and from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups, such as clients and professionals. PART has embraced the notion of multidimensional evidence-informed practice by promoting the belief that different “ways of knowing” contribute to alternative sources of valuable information for improving practice (PART website).

Why EIP?

- EIP has potential to create change in organizations and systems, and has been proposed as a method of supporting critical thinking and practice in child welfare that is based on sound evidence (Trocmé, Belanger, & Roy, 2008).
- It is argued that existing knowledge is underused by child welfare practitioners and that in order to move forward as a profession we must move toward an approach that utilizes evidence in practice (Gambrill 1999; 2001).
- The use of research to inform practice can increase accountability and transparency in decision-making, better determine whether interventions will likely have the desired outcome, and ensure that practitioner decisions to intervene are informed by the best available knowledge (Epstein, 2009).
- EIP practice and policy at the macro level offers the field great potential for honouring ethical guidelines to integrate practice and research, to respond ethically to problems of scarce resources, to involve clients as informed participants, to enhance social and economic justice, and to empower clients (Gambrill, 2008).
- Extant literature illustrates that evidence-informed practice in child welfare organizations is associated with organizational cultures of learning (Collins-Camargo & Royse, 2010), which are important for practitioner retention, well-being, and child and family outcomes.

EIP: An Emerging Concept

EIP is new in the field of child welfare and there may be some uncertainty around its application. Appreciating the role of EIP is an ongoing process and is directly related to being a lifelong learner. Using EIP is like taking all of the research about a certain topic that you've learned and putting it in your bag wherever you go. When you encounter a practice or policy situation based on this same topic you will consult your bag of information. What does the evidence say? What are the different research methodologies? How does this apply to my situation? What do stakeholders say about the evidence? What do service users say about the evidence? Is there new evidence on this issue? All of these questions will guide you in your use of the information that you've collected in your bag.

EIP & Training

| Evidence-informed Practice | Training |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Involves questioning and assessing the way that child welfare is currently done, and seeking additional research, information, resources, and interventions to guide practice that is ethically appropriate.▪ Is made up of the day-to-day activities that practitioners employ to make the best decisions for children and families.▪ Can include referring families to programs with proven track records and a self reflective practice model that involves questioning what you do and how you do it (California Social Work Education Center, 2010). | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Seeks to teach people a specific set of skills or behaviours.▪ Training may be related to specific interventions (e.g. Family Finding), specific tools (e.g. Risk Assessment), or specific methods of practice (e.g. Motivational Interviewing, assessing attachment) |

Critical Thinking & EIP

Critical thinking describes the process that we use to make decisions about important events and issues in our daily work and personal lives (PART, 2012). When reviewing research evidence, contextual factors, client preferences, and incorporating practitioner wisdom, it is vital to use a critical thinking lens, questioning and continually reflecting on the decisions and judgements that we make.

Critical thinking is:

- The art of analyzing and evaluating our thinking with a view to developing a deliberate process
- Guided by careful examination of beliefs and perspectives
- Self-directed, self-disciplines, self-monitored, and self-corrective
- A journey which will be experienced differently by everyone (PART, 2012; Paul & Elder, 2006).

Critical thinkers are:



(PART, 2012)

Sample critical thinking questions:

- What precise question or problem am I trying to answer?
- From what point of view or perspective am I thinking?
- What information am I using to base my decision upon?
- Have I sought information from multiple sources or points of view?
- Am I consistent in interpreting the information and alternative points of view?
- How am I interpreting this information?
- Am I drawing inferences that are logical and follow from the evidence?

For more information on critical thinking in child welfare and how it can benefit the children and families you work with, please see our critical thinking guidebook: *Taking the Path Less Travelled: Critical Thinking for Child Welfare Practitioners*.

What does Evidence-informed Practice look like?

Examples include:

- Using evidence to inform practice and policy within an organization
- Including stakeholder perspectives in decision-making
- Understanding what works for your service users e.g. evaluating your services
- Utilizing research evidence related to similar service users
- Examining and utilizing broad research evidence as part of decision-making processes.

1. *EIP at the Organizational Level:*

- At Staff/Department Meetings: Invite staff to discuss research related to a specific issue (e.g., working with high conflict families) that practitioners are facing
- At Case Conferences: Discuss research in case conferences and decision-making
- At Team Meetings: Support teams to develop their own strategies for utilizing evidence.

2. *EIP at the Individual Level:*

- Supervision: Devote time during supervision to discussing the evidence as it pertains to a certain topic or pending case decision (e.g., what are some evidence-based interventions for caregivers with substance misuse issues and what community organizations offer this intervention)
- Professional Development: Individuals identify their own EIP learning needs (e.g., goal to become knowledgeable about strategies to engage families who have worked with child welfare over multiple generations)
- Reminders: Individual practitioners should develop and set their own reminders to explore the evidence (e.g., every Friday afternoon for half an hour explore the research on a question or issue that you faced during the week).

What should I consider when interpreting research evidence?

- What methodology was used in this study?
 - What are the limitations and strengths of this type of methodology?
- What are the key characteristics of the population involved in the study?
 - Are there similarities and/or differences between this population and the children and families I am working with?
 - How might this impact the relevance and applicability of this research to my practice?
- Where was this research carried out? E.g. in a rural/urban setting? In Canada, Europe, Australia?
- Are issues of culture and ethnicity considered in this research?
- What do the results indicate?
 - What do these statistics really mean?
 - Can I apply these findings to my practice? What do I need to consider before doing so?
 - What do these results mean to me and my work with children and families?
- Are these results generalizable?
 - If not, how might they inform my practice?
- What does previous literature say about this issue?

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