

PACT Behavioral Research Project



Elevate Healing.
Build Relationships.

Early Insights from a Pilot Survey

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For two years, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) has been working with families, caseworkers and leaders to co-design the Practice in Action Together (PACT) model. PACT asserts that specific behaviors that are grounded in values will promote healing and relationship building that can be observed in outcomes for both families and workers. In 2023, PCSAO partnered with Kaye Implementation & Evaluation and 37 Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) across the state to conduct the Behavioral Research Project and gain actionable insights to inform model refinement and implementation planning throughout Ohio.

The purposes of the Behavioral Research Project were to (1) co-define the model's outcomes with caseworkers and family members, and (2) test the relationship between the PACT behaviors and co-defined outcomes. The findings of this study support the validation of the PACT model framework and serve as a starting point for behavioral change and relational outcome measurement.

37 PCSAs from across the state participated in the PACT Design Team, focus groups, or survey



Key Findings

Based on focus groups with 12 caseworkers and 8 family members reflecting on successful worker/family relationships...

- Workers and families value similar things in their work with one another, including: honesty, collaboration, hope, confidence, and dignity.

Based on a survey of 162 caseworkers and 85 family members reflecting on the best worker/family relationship they have had...

- It is possible for workers and family members to achieve positive working relationships in public child welfare.
- PACT behaviors and outcomes are significantly associated with one another, which provides initial data to support the PACT model.
- PACT behaviors are more strongly correlated with PACT outcomes among families than among caseworkers.
- Over 80% of family members and workers believe that respecting, listening, and being vulnerable are some of the most important worker behaviors needed to achieve relational outcomes.

Focus Groups

CO-DEFINING AND OPERATIONALIZING PACT OUTCOMES

As part of PACT's ongoing commitment to equity and active collaboration of individuals with lived expertise, the Research Team hosted focus groups with family members to co-define and operationalize the PACT model's outcomes. During the focus groups, the Research Team shared the outcome constructs that had been outlined by the PACT Design Team so far (see Worker Outcomes and Family Outcomes, below) and then asked families and caseworkers to use their own words to define what the outcomes meant to them.

SAMPLE

Focus group participants (eight family members and 12 caseworkers) represented:

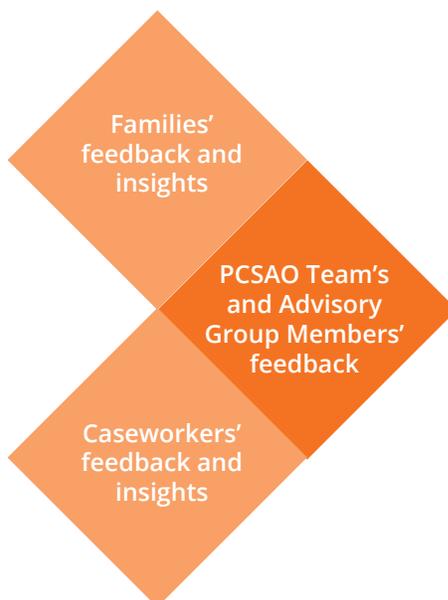
- Different geographic areas of the state
- Small, mid-sized, and large counties
- Experience with different parts of the child welfare system (e.g., investigation, in-home, foster care, kinship care, adoption)
- Diverse racial and ethnic groups

FAMILY OUTCOMES

1. Increased trust with worker & agency
2. Improved motivation for change
3. Increased sense of power and control in decision making
4. Reduced fear and resistance
5. Increased transparency about needs, strengths, and challenges

WORKER OUTCOMES

1. Increased confidence in having the skills to do the work
2. Increased intention to remain in job
3. Reduced impact of job-related stress/trauma
4. Increased pride and job satisfaction
5. Increased trust in families



SHARED RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

1. Mutual honesty
2. Collaborative decision making
3. Shared hope for success
4. Collective confidence
5. Shared dignity

SHARED RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

After analyzing the feedback from the focus groups, the research team identified themes based on the feedback and insights that families and caseworkers shared. For example, families expressed that in their relationship with their caseworker, they want partnership and shared decision-making. Caseworkers shared that in their working relationship with the family, they also want partnership and to make decisions alongside the family.¹

Drawing from the themes identified, the Research Team collaborated with PCSAO to draft shared relational outcomes. The PACT Design Team reviewed and provided substantive feedback to further refine and define the shared relational outcomes (see above).

¹Data Source: PACT Behavioral Research Project themes from focus groups with workers and families

Worker and Family Surveys

COLLABORATIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The next phase of the Behavioral Research Project was designed to gather input from a larger group of families and workers using a survey. To develop the survey, the Research Team reviewed 16 existing measures and identified or developed survey items that aligned with the outcomes co-defined by families, workers, and the PACT Design Team.

CREE REVIEW OF EXISTING MEASURES

Specially trained researchers conducted a **CREE (Culturally Responsive Equitable Evaluation)** review of existing measures to ensure that survey items highlighted the unique needs and cultural context of families and caseworkers by considering three criteria:

- **Worldview** - explicit and implicit values embedded in survey items,
- **Multicultural validity** - whether items hold true across cultural contexts,
- **Social justice** - acknowledgement of power and privilege.

PHRASES FROM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Using the families' and caseworkers' words and concepts, researchers adapted existing family and worker items or drafted new items to compile the PACT survey.

DRAFT ITEMS FOR REVIEW BY PCSAO, WORKERS, PARENTS

FINAL SURVEYS

The initial draft of the survey items was reviewed by PCSAO and piloted by a small group of caseworkers and families. Together, the Research Team and pilot reviewers finalized two parallel versions of the surveys, one designed for caseworkers and one for family members.

DATA COLLECTION

PCSAO recruited 32 diverse PCSAs to participate in the survey. Workers in participating PCSAs were asked to complete a survey, and to invite families on their caseload. Survey respondents were asked to answer questions based on the individual with whom they had the best working relationship. If the family gave permission, the Research Team invited caseworkers that families identified in their family survey to take a caseworker version of the survey. To maintain families' and caseworkers' privacy, strong confidentiality protections were in place throughout the recruitment phase.

SAMPLE

247 survey respondents, including 162 workers and 85 family members, represented: 32 PCSAs in different geographic areas of the state

- Small, mid-sized, and large counties
- Experience with different parts of the child welfare system (e.g., investigation, in-home, foster care, kinship care, adoption)
- Broad age ranges of workers (21-63) and family members (18-63)
- Predominantly white racial group
- Families and workers of color and youth are underrepresented in this sample

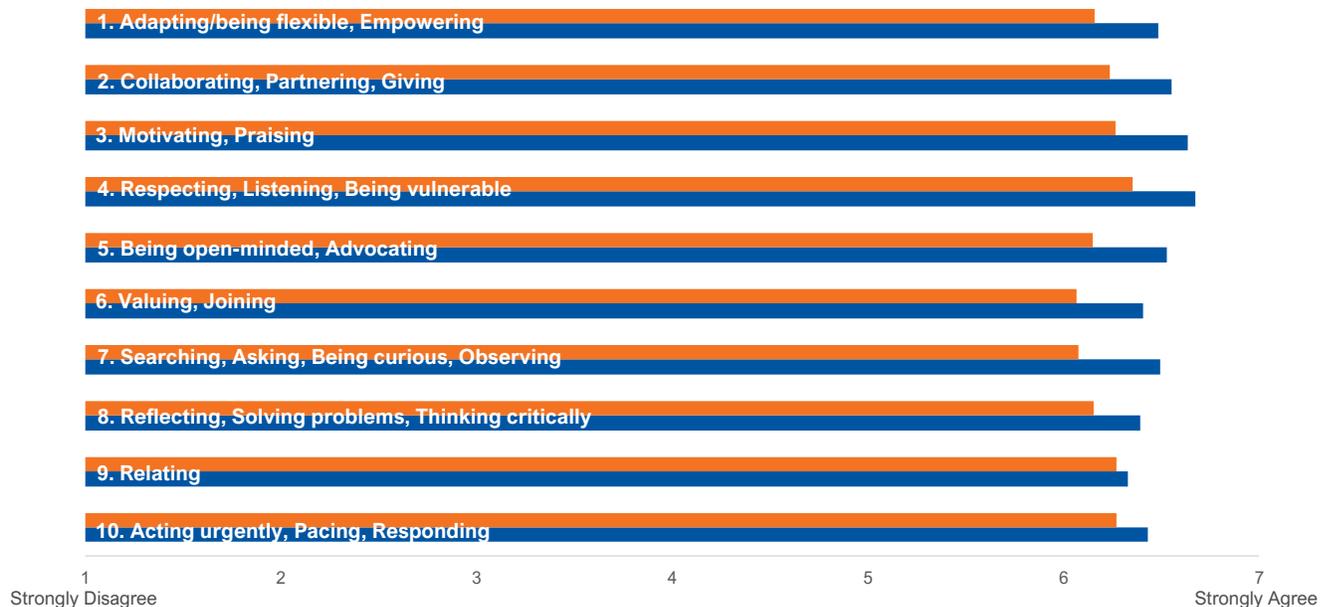
Survey Results

1.

What is the current prevalence of PACT behaviors identified by workers and family members?

Survey respondents were asked to reflect on their time working with the worker or family member with whom they worked best, and rate whether the worker displayed PACT behaviors on a scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

On average, family members and workers reported high levels PACT behaviors. Workers reported slightly higher rates of PACT behaviors compared to family members.



Data Source: PACT Behavioral Research Survey. n=162 worker surveys and n=85 family surveys.

2.

Which PACT behaviors were identified by workers and family members as being the most important for achieving PACT outcomes?

Survey respondents selected up to five PACT behaviors they felt were most important in achieving strong relationships between workers and families.

Most workers and family members identified Respecting, Listening, and Being Vulnerable as the most important worker behaviors for achieving PACT outcomes.

Motivating and Praising were identified as most important by over half of workers, and a third of family members.

Percent of workers and family members who identified each behavior set as one of the most important	% Workers	% Family members
4. Respecting, Listening, Being vulnerable	86%	82%
3. Motivating, Praising	53%	35%
5. Being open-minded, Advocating	45%	54%
2. Collaborating, Partnering, Giving	45%	53%

Data Source: PACT Behavioral Research Survey. n=162 worker surveys and n=85 family surveys.

3.

What is the current prevalence of PACT outcomes identified by workers and family members?

Survey respondents rated their level of agreement with multiple statements designed to assess the PACT relational outcomes on a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

On average, **family members** and **workers** reported high levels of PACT outcomes. **Families** reported significantly higher levels of mutual honesty than **workers**.



Data Source: PACT Behavioral Research Survey. n=162 worker surveys and n=85 family surveys.

4.

Which PACT behaviors were associated with PACT outcomes?

When examining survey respondents' ratings of worker behaviors and relational outcomes together, all of PACT behavior sets were correlated* with each relational outcome among both workers and families. Correlations between PACT behaviors and relational outcomes were **stronger** among families than workers, which suggests that PACT behaviors might be particularly important to families' assessments of worker/family relationships.

Strength of correlation: Weak * Moderate * Strong *

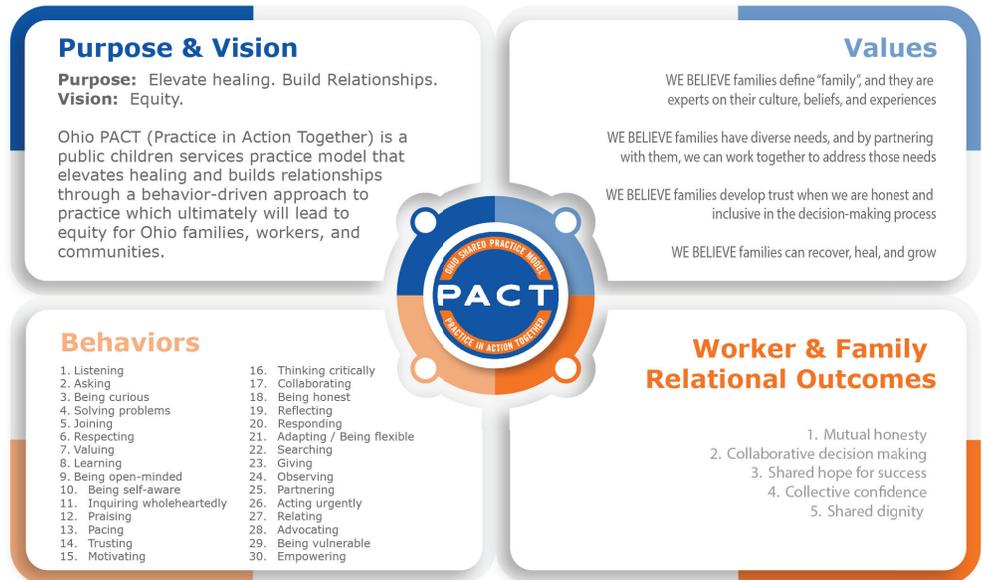
* p < .05

	Correlations Among Workers				Correlations Among Family Members			
	Collaborative decision making	Collective hope and confidence	Mutual honesty	Shared dignity	Collaborative decision making	Collective hope and confidence	Mutual honesty	Shared dignity
1. Adapting/being flexible, Empowering								
2. Collaborating, Partnering, Giving								
3. Motivating, Praising								
4. Respecting, Listening, Being vulnerable								
5. Being open-minded, Advocating								
6. Valuing, Joining								
7. Searching, Asking, Being curious, Observing								
8. Relecting, Solving problems, Thinking critically								
9. Relating								
10. Acting urgently, Pacing, Responding								

Data Source: PACT Behavioral Research Survey. n=162 worker surveys and n=85 family surveys.

CONCLUSIONS

The Behavioral Research Project offers some encouraging initial data to support the underlying PACT program theory, illustrated above. Results indicate high rates of PACT behaviors among the best caseworker/family member relationships, and that caseworkers' use of values-focused behaviors are associated with positive relational outcomes in this sample.



LIMITATIONS

This study intentionally focused on gathering input from the strongest worker/family member relationships to maximize PCSAO's opportunity to learn from successful working relationships. The survey sample was predominantly white and workers and family members of color were underrepresented in this study. It is unclear whether the results observed in this specific sample would generalize to broader and more diverse populations, so continued research is needed.

FUTURE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Specific opportunities to continue learning about PACT behaviors and outcomes as PACT begins installation and initial implementation in 2024 include:

- Increasing the diversity of families and caseworkers who participate in the survey which will support cross-cultural exploration of the PACT model.
- Gathering input from a broader sample of caseworkers and families with different working relationships to understand more nuanced associations between behaviors and shared relational outcomes.
- Analyzing data from matched worker/family member dyads to gain additional insights into which behaviors are more strongly associated with relational outcomes within specific working relationships.
- Conducting ongoing evaluation of the PACT model to continue enhancing the measurement of PACT's outcomes and behaviors.

Additional References

PACT BEHAVIOR DEFINITIONS

PACT behaviors were co-defined with the PACT Design Team based on input from workers and family members.

LISTENING

Taking in information without judgment or prejudice, with a sincere desire to understand the purpose and motivation of the messages being shared.

ASKING

Believing there is always more information you can gather to help better understand the situation and using open-ended questions to clarify and explore.

BEING CURIOUS

Demonstrating an eagerness to understand or learn about the root cause or issue that may be resulting in expressions of negative/confrontational emotions or, in contrast, positive expressions of support and connection.

SOLVING PROBLEMS

Committing to help overcome or eliminate challenges that “get in the way” of achieving the shared goals and approaches.

JOINING

Sitting with someone when they are feeling strong (negative or positive) emotions and finding aspects of their experiences which you can genuinely relate to.

RESPECTING

Recognizing that no matter how complex or difficult a situation may be, the individuals involved deserve to be treated the way you would want to be treated. This includes talking about people as though they were always in the room with us.

VALUING

Believing that the different strengths, perspectives, and experiences that people bring to a situation have worth and can be uniquely harnessed to contribute to a solution.

LEARNING

Approaching each day with the balance of learning to apply your experience and knowledge to date, with the eagerness to gain new skills and understanding in the process.

BEING OPEN-MINDED

Believing that there is more than one way to address a challenge and that providing people an opportunity to contribute may provide a solution that otherwise may not have been available.

BEING SELF-AWARE

Understanding the possible impacts of one's own biases and triggers, as they may impact the ability to remain focused on building relationships and achieving positive outcomes.

INQUIRING WHOLEHEARTEDLY

To believe there are endless reasons why someone may not feel comfortable sharing information and that by asking with complete sincerity and commitment, a safe and trusting environment can be created.

PRAISING

Finding actions or decisions a person has made, which you can genuinely commend and honor.

PACING

Manage the speed [deliberately slow down or speed up] of the interaction and meet one where they are at. In order to reduce anxiety, gather information and develop trust while ensuring information being shared is understood.

TRUSTING

Believing that engagement and mutual understanding will lead to an honest and inclusive relationship between all entities involved.

MOTIVATING

A positive approach to engaging and interacting that focuses on a shared purpose and enhances an individual's own desire to make changes by focusing on their "why."

THINKING CRITICALLY

An unbiased approach to collecting and analyzing information and developing solutions for decision making in consideration of all sides for potential outcomes.

COLLABORATING

Spirit of partnership where all parties involved want to work together and want to learn from one another.

BEING HONEST

Providing others with reliable information that does not mislead or create distrust. Being sincere & truthful about actions, next steps, potential situations, and addressing fears/concerns/issues.

Bravery/courage in how you share information.

REFLECTING

Pausing between stimulus and response to review information & event; consider others, yourself, & actions; affirming strengths.

RESPONDING

Acknowledge information or questions and reply in clear/consistent ways. Not responding is a response.

ADAPTING/BEING FLEXIBLE

To be flexible in our response to the needs and the current situation. Being inclusive of supports in adapting to the current situation to best meet the needs.

SEARCHING

To try and find something by looking and seeking carefully and thoroughly.

GIVING

Providing genuine support & tailoring that support to individual situations.

OBSERVING

Viewing a situation with focus, intention & purpose.

PARTNERING

Leveraging individuals' strengths, experience, and skills in collaboration and having effective communication and mutual respect towards each other when differences arise.

ACTING URGENTLY

Immediately tending to any situation with an empathetic and calm approach to assist and support effectively and positively.

RELATING

To identify with, or have or establish a relationship or connection with another individual, seeing humanity in others and having empathy.

ADVOCATING

To plead on your own or someone else's behalf to ensure one's voice is heard.

BEING VULNERABLE

Creating space that allows for one to feel comfortable in opening up without fear of consequences and judgement.

EMPOWERING

To acknowledge and purposefully set aside any real or perceived power differences so one can be confident in having a voice and authority in their own decision making.

DATA-DRIVEN PACT BEHAVIOR SETS

During the survey co-design process, the Research Team worked with workers, family members, and PCSAO to combine the 30 PACT behaviors into 19 survey items. During data analysis, the research team developed PACT Behavior Sets based on responses from family members and workers. Behavior Sets included one or more behaviors that were highly correlated with one another; meaning workers and families almost always reported these behaviors occurring together.

10 BEHAVIOR SETS	19 SURVEY ITEMS: THE WORKER WAS.... (1=STRONGLY DISAGREE TO 7=STRONGLY AGREE)	30 PACT MODEL BEHAVIORS
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible and adapted if the family member's situation changed. Created space for the family member to share their opinions. 	Adapting/being flexible Empowering
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brought helpful people together to work toward the family member's goals. Provided supports that were a good fit for the family member's situation. 	Collaborating Partnering Giving
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraged family member to take steps toward their goals. Pointed out positive things the family member did. 	Motivating Praising
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treated family member with respect. Listened to the family member. Made the family member feel comfortable to share info about themselves. 	Respecting Listening Being vulnerable
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-minded about solutions. Advocated for what the family member wanted for their family. 	Being open minded Advocating
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valued the family member's contributions to finding solutions for their family. Understood why the family member responded to their situation in the ways they did. 	Valuing Joining
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asked good questions to learn about the family's situation. Was curious and wanted to better understand the family's situation. 	Searching Asking Being curious Observing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thought carefully before jumping to conclusions. 	Reflecting Solving problems Thinking critically
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Related to the family member as a person. 	Relating
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responded to the family member in a timely way 	Acting urgently Pacing Responding

SHARED RELATIONAL OUTCOMES WITH DEFINITIONS

PACT relational outcomes were co-defined based on focus groups with family members and workers, and collaborative interpretation and refinement with the PACT Design Team.

1. MUTUAL HONESTY

The ability to be open and honest with one another is central to a trust-based working relationship. Mutual honesty will be measured as the worker's comfort having open and transparent conversations with families about their involvement and the steps that will help the family achieve their goals. In turn, mutual honesty will also be measured as the family's comfort with expressing their needs, strengths, and challenges with the worker.

2. COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

When families and workers partner together to make joint decisions, both the family and worker are more likely to take ownership of, and accountability for, those decisions. Involvement with children's services, at any level, can result in decisions about families lives which are driven by mandates, rules, and court processes. Therefore, it is imperative for workers and families to be intentional in making decisions together in an ongoing and collaborative manner. Collaborative decision making will be measured by the family's and worker's perceptions that their voices and perspectives were heard, understood, and included in the decision-making process.

3. SHARED HOPE FOR SUCCESS

Hope is defined as "wanting something to happen" and it is rooted in the belief that people can recover, heal, and grow. As an outcome, hope will be measured as the worker's expectation and desire to achieve the shared goals and objectives established with the family. Hope will also be measured as the family's belief that with the right supports growth toward achieving their goals is possible.

4. COLLECTIVE CONFIDENCE

Confidence is different from hope as it is based upon one's own abilities or qualities. As a relational outcome, confidence is measured as the worker's belief in their ability to help the family achieve the shared goals and objectives, and the family's confidence that the shared goals and objectives will assist with their recovery, growth, and healing process.

5. SHARED DIGNITY

Families want to be seen, heard, respected and understood. Workers want to be recognized, valued, respected, and appreciated for their efforts in helping families. Shared dignity is measured by the worker's and family's sense of value they feel in their roles as a worker and a family member and the added value that they bring to the working relationship

DATA-DRIVEN PACT OUTCOMES

During the survey co-design process, the Research Team worked with family members, workers, and PCSAO to draft several items designed to measure the five relational outcomes. As part of data analysis, the Research Team identified four Data-Driven PACT Outcomes which included one or more survey items that were highly correlated with one another and likely measured the same relational outcome. Families' and workers' responses on items designed to measure the PACT outcomes of Collective Confidence and Shared Hope for Success were so similar that researchers grouped them together in the final analysis.

DATA-DRIVEN PACT OUTCOMES	FAMILY SURVEY ITEMS ¹	WORKER SURVEY ITEMS
Collaborative decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker and I collaborate on setting goals for my case. • Worker and I have established a good understanding of the goals that would be good for me and my family. • I feel like I can tell worker my side of the story and be heard. • Worker and I are focusing on the right next steps for my situation. • Worker and I agree about the things I will need to do in my case to help improve my situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and I collaborate on setting goals for their case. • Family and I have established a good understanding of the kind of goals that would be good for them and their family. • I feel like I can tell family how I see things. • Family and I are focusing on the right next steps for their situation. • Family and I agree about the things they will need to do in their case to help improve their situation.
Collective hope and confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident in worker's ability to support me to achieve the goals I want for my family. • I feel that the things I do for my case will help me to accomplish the changes that I want. • I believe my family will get help we really need from worker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident in family's ability to achieve the goals they want for their family. • I feel that the things I do for their case will help family to accomplish the changes that they want. • I believe family will get help they really need from me.
Mutual honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can rely on worker to share all the information I need to know about my case. • I feel like I can trust worker to be fair and to see my side of things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can rely on family to share all the information I need to know about their case. • I feel like I can trust family to be fair and to see my side of things.
Shared dignity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker and I respect each other. • I play an important role in my family. • My efforts make a positive difference in the outcomes of my case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and I respect each other. • I play an important role in my community through my work with families. • My efforts make a positive difference in the outcomes of family's case.

¹PACT survey items were developed based on adapted items from existing measures (Paap et al, 2002; Yatchmenoff, 2005), and items developed by the PACT Research Team in collaboration with family members and workers.