

# Promoting High-Quality Legal Advocacy through Interdisciplinary Team Representation



## WHAT is Interdisciplinary Representation?

An interdisciplinary team model pairs an **attorney** with a **social worker** or a **parent advocate** who has lived experience. Drawing on the unique strengths of each member, they work as a cohesive team of parent defenders to support families involved in dependency and neglect cases and protect the fundamental right to parent. The team may also seek support from experts and investigators.

**1 in 4 cases** currently use an interdisciplinary team model to meet complex case needs.



## How Do Interdisciplinary Teams Invest Their Time?

- 32%** Building a client-centered team
- 23%** Supporting the client in addressing their needs.
- 29%** Advocating for the client in and out of court.

## WHY an Interdisciplinary Team Model?

Parent representation models are a best practice for driving positive outcomes in reunification, out-of-home placement, child safety, and parental well-being. An interdisciplinary team model can promote these outcomes for families with complex case needs.

Ensuring attorneys have access to social workers and parent advocates whenever it meets parent needs is critical to equitably achieving positive outcomes across the state. Additional investment in this model is needed to grow its use and maximize the value of the team approach.



## HOW Do Teams Promote Positive Outcomes for Children and Families?

**Client-centered representation** is best achieved when parents' unique needs are understood, treatment plans are tailored, and families are connected to vital supports like housing.

**49%** of **parent advocate** time is typically invested in building a relationship with the client and establishing rapport.

“A lot of the time, clients have mental health challenges or they don't have their basic needs met. Things like that are barriers to completing their treatment plan.”

– **SOCIAL WORKER**

“Each case is unique and calls for different things. I work with social workers or parent advocates to meet those individual case needs. I know that I'm a better lawyer because of the team.”

– **ATTORNEY**

Social workers and parent advocates provide vital support to attorneys as they uphold **procedural fairness**, providing “boots on the ground” insights and supporting clients in daily needs.

**38%** of **attorney** time is typically invested in advocating for the client through in-court processes.

Team members promote **inclusive and respectful advocacy** by ensuring client needs are central, advocated for, and strategically promoted, with a focus on accessible and timely resources, placement options, and treatment referrals.

**28%** of **social worker** time is typically invested in promoting a meaningful treatment plan.

“I find myself fighting that [visitation] fight a lot for the client to make sure they are actively involved with their children during this separated time and that they're getting the time necessary to keep that bond or rebuild that bond.”

– **SOCIAL WORKER**