



A system of care is: A spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children and youth with or at risk for mental health or other challenges and their families, that is organized into a coordinated network, builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth, and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs, in order to help them to function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

Systems of care are:

1. Family driven and youth guided, with the strengths and needs of the child and family determining the types and mix of services and supports provided
2. Community based, with the locus of services, as well as system management, resting within a supportive, adaptive infrastructure of structures, processes, and relationships at the community level
3. Culturally and linguistically competent, with agencies, programs, and services that reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences of the populations they serve to facilitate access to and utilization of appropriate services and supports

Systems of care are designed to:

1. Ensure availability of and access to a broad, flexible array of effective, evidence-informed, community-based services and supports for children and their families that addresses their physical, emotional, social, and educational needs, including traditional and nontraditional services as well as informal and natural supports
2. Provide individualized services in accordance with the unique potential and needs of each child and family, guided by a strengths-based, wraparound service planning process and an individualized service plan developed in true partnership with the child and family
3. Deliver services and supports within the least restrictive, most normative environments that are clinically appropriate
4. Ensure that families, other caregivers, and youth are full partners in all aspects of the planning and delivery of their own services and in the policies and procedures that govern care for all children and youth in their communities, states, territories, tribes, and nation
5. Ensure cross-system collaboration, with linkages between child-serving agencies and programs across administrative and funding boundaries and mechanisms for system-level management, coordination, and integrated care management
6. Provide care management or similar mechanisms to ensure that multiple services are delivered in a coordinated and therapeutic manner, and that children and their families can move through the system of services in accordance with their changing needs
7. Provide developmentally appropriate mental health services and supports that promote optimal social and emotional outcomes for young children and their families in their homes and community settings
8. Provide developmentally appropriate services and supports to facilitate the transition of youth to adulthood and to the adult-service system as needed
9. Incorporate or link with mental health promotion, prevention, and early identification and intervention to improve long-term outcomes, including mechanisms to identify problems at an earlier stage and mental health promotion and prevention activities directed at all children and adolescents
10. Incorporate continuous accountability mechanisms to track, monitor, and manage the achievement of system of care goals; fidelity to the system of care philosophy; and quality, effectiveness, and outcomes at the system level, practice level, and child and family level
11. Protect the rights of children, youth, and families and promote effective advocacy efforts
12. Provide services and supports without regard to race, religion, national origin, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical disability, socioeconomic status, geography, language, immigration status, or other characteristics; services should be sensitive and responsive to these differences

Stroul, B., Blau, G., & Friedman, R. (2010). *Updating the system of care concept and philosophy*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health