

# **Supervisory Guide to Critical Thinking**

## **Questions for unit members when discussing cases**

Are you using intuitive “gut” feelings in this case? If so, how is this affecting your decision making?

Is confirmation bias evident in how you and other decision makers are gathering and interpreting evidence in this case? Have you seriously considered alternative explanations for the facts in question?

Do you recognize any common patterns such as approach/avoidance, ambivalence, self-sabotage, enmeshment with parent or child, a power struggle gone wrong, etc. in the way that the parent(s) interacts with his or her child or in your interaction with the parent?

Are you open to new information or a new perspective regarding this case? Are you able to listen to people who disagree with you in a non-defensive way?

Is the physical abuse in this case excessive discipline or something quite different, such as battered child syndrome or torture?

Does this neglect case show signs of chronic neglect or chronic maltreatment (a combination of neglect with physical abuse or sexual abuse)? How do you know? What should be done if the answer is “yes”?

## **Definitions**

### **Heuristic bias**

A mental shortcut that leads to systematic error

### **System 1**

Automatic thinking, associated with intuition, always “on” when we’re awake, connected to emotion, radically insensitive to the quantity and quality of evidence, unlimited stores of energy, poor at statistics.

### **System 2**

Deliberate thinking, able to overrule intuition/System 1 but usually provides rationalizations for System 1 inclinations; has limited energy stores and is therefore lazy; has a sweet tooth.

## **Confirmation bias**

The tendency to search for information that confirms one's views and ignore evidence that disconfirms beliefs; confirmation bias has powerful effects in child welfare, especially after caseworkers and supervisors have stated their views in a public setting.

## **Halo effect**

The tendency to assume that first impressions of other people reflect their character as a whole; if the first impression is positive, then there is a tendency to assume that everything about a relative stranger is positive and vice versa.

## **Recognition primed decision making**

Expertise characterized by quick, often intuitive, recognition of key patterns and their implications for action.

## **Pattern recognition**

The capacity to identify common patterns in a large number of events or a series of events; the type of expertise associated with intuitive expertise.

## **Chronic neglect**

A recurrent and pervasive type of neglect that usually touches all child care domains, e.g., supervision, provision of basic needs, protection from danger, educational neglect, nurturance; has a gradual cumulative effect on children's social and emotional development.

## **Chronic maltreatment**

Chronic neglect combined with physical abuse and/ or sexual abuse; reflects the erosion or collapse of social norms around parenting.

## **Excessive discipline**

A type of physical abuse that, though excessive, has a disciplinary intent; does not involve torture or the severe physical abuse of babies and toddlers