

# Starting Services Quickly Increases Community Safety and Improves Outcomes



Both **Functional Family Therapy** and **Multisystemic Therapy** emphasize the importance of starting services quickly. Prompt service initiation requires a collaborative approach; providers, county leaders, and BH-MCOs must come together and develop a protocol that supports immediate access to services. Why is it crucial to invest this time and energy? A few reasons are listed below.

<b>Services Start Quickly</b> (within 7 days of referral)	<b>Services Are Delayed</b> (more than 1 week from referral to first session)
<b>Increased Chance for Success:</b> During this “crisis of opportunity,” immediately after an interaction with court, probation, or child protective services, the family is highly motivated to begin working on the problems.	<b>Family is Less Motivated:</b> Risk level for youth has not changed, or may have actually increased, but the urgency of the problem has diminished. Family members become distracted by daily routines, and the memory of the crisis fades.
<b>Preserves School Engagement:</b> When services begin immediately clinicians can engage school stakeholders to avoid suspensions, expulsions, or drop out.	<b>Increased Risk of School Failure:</b> When behaviors go unaddressed suspension or expulsion may be the school’s only option.
<b>Improved Community &amp; Youth Safety:</b> Detailed safety plans can be developed involving the important systems and individuals in the youth’s life.	<b>Increased Risk of Delinquency &amp; Placement :</b> While behaviors and underlying causes go unaddressed youth can be at risk for escalation of behaviors, which may result in out-of-home placement.

## What is the main reason that services are delayed?

When referral and funding mechanisms in a county require that a youth have a psychological or psychiatric evaluation and be authorized by Medical Assistance (M.A.) *before* starting services, the process can take several weeks. Fortunately, in many communities county stakeholders, providers, and BH-MCOs have worked collaboratively to ensure services can begin immediately. The most common plans:

- The BH-MCO authorizes 30 days of service using an “initial assessment” and then extends the authorization once the full M.A. packet containing an evaluation and ISPT form has been submitted.
- County funding is readily accessible and pays for services until M.A. authorization is in place.

## How can we reduce the amount of time that the county needs to fund the service?

The following approaches can be used in tandem.

- Engage the County Assistance Office to develop a plan for ensuring that M.A. applications for youth referred to FFT and MST are expedited.
- Establish a process for "retro-eligibility" which allows the provider to bill services back to the date the M.A. application was submitted to the County Assistance Office.

## Do services start quickly in your community?

EPiSCenter staff are available to answer questions about facilitating the quick start of services and/or to work with county stakeholders and provider(s) to develop a plan. Contact Dr. Liz Campbell, Interventions Program Coordinator, at [ecampbell@episcenter.org](mailto:ecampbell@episcenter.org) or (717) 233-1350.