

California CASA Association

What About TBS?

What CASAs should know about Therapeutic Behavioral Health Services

By Phil Ladew

DECEMBER 2010

Often CASA volunteers are searching high and low for services and interventions that might help our youth. There is one often underutilized service that might make the difference for your child. I am referring to TBS Services – or in long form Therapeutic Behavioral Services.

These services were so underutilized that a class action lawsuit named *Emily Q* called for counties in California to improve the provision of timely and consistent access to TBS Services. As a CASA, you can ensure that your CASA child has access to these specialty mental health services that can make the difference and possibly *save a good placement*.

What are TBS Services?

Simply put, TBS services are supplemental specialty mental health services. This means that TBS Services are not the main mental health treatment, but rather are something that can be added to help a child through a rough patch.

TBS services are intended to provide a short-term, intensive, one-on-one behavioral health intervention. The TBS “coach/worker” meets the child on their turf – at home and/or in the community to help the youth identify and target specific problem behaviors. This service is tailored to the needs of the child and the family and can include interventions in behaviors like oppositional attitudes, fighting, self destructive behavior (like cutting), behavior that leads to extreme isolation, etc.

Depending on the issues, the TBS coach/worker will work with the youth for a month or two (though there is no prescribed time limit¹) and attempt to help the youth correct some of the destructive behaviors.

As a CASA, if you have a youth that is receiving mental health treatment, but is still risking their placement by their behavior, risking their schooling, or doing unsafe things, consider asking for this intervention.

Which Children Qualify for TBS services?

In order to qualify for TBS services, children need to meet certain criteria. Generally, a child is eligible if he or she is:

Under 21 years old, and is eligible for full-scope Medi-Cal, **and**

- is at risk of being placed into level 12 (or higher) group home, **or**
- is at risk of being placed into a psychiatric hospital, **or**
- has a history of psychiatric hospitalization within the past 24 months, **or**
- is currently in a level 12 (or higher) group home and needs TBS to prevent placement failure.

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¹ See page 6 of California Department of Mental Health, TBS Coordination of Care Manual, October 2010, Version 2 Available as of 12/1/2010 at http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Services_and_Programs/Children_and_Youth/docs/TBS_Coordination_of_Care_Manual_OCT2010_FINAL.pdf.

It doesn't matter if there is actually a higher level of placement available, only that they are at risk of needing that higher level of placement (i.e. level 12 or higher group home or psychiatric hospitalization); the youth is still eligible for TBS Services.

Also, remember that the Court can make "any and all reasonable orders" to care for the child.² Therefore, even if the child is not strictly eligible for TBS services (e.g. they do not have full-scope Medi-Cal) the CASA should still report to the court the facts and identify any service that could benefit the child.

For example, assume that you have a child who has Kaiser Health Care, and is not eligible for TBS Services. The child has begun to act out aggressively and is starting fights. Instead of blindly asking the court to order "TBS Services," inform the court of the child's behaviors and needs, and ask that the court order that "the Agency provide the child with services to develop anger management techniques." It is up to the court to decide whether to order the service or not. Do not limit your advocacy because of what you think the child is or isn't eligible for services.

CASA Practice

What it looks like

TBS services can be put into place to help the child cope with a particularly stressful time, or develop tools to modify their behavior. This is especially useful if you are trying to save the child placement.

For example, think of a 10 year old child who is placed with their maternal aunt. Life was going smoothly, but recently the child's mother has been visiting and the child has acted out with severe behaviors. The child is starting fights and has begun to ditch school. The aunt is saying that she cannot control him, and the normal mental health services (therapy, some meds, and school discipline) are not working. The aunt feels it is best to consider alternatives to him living with her. The social worker has identified that the next placement for him would be a level 12 group home 40 miles away.

TBS services are perfectly appropriate here. A TBS coach can come in, work with the child at home and at school as needed to reduce the fighting and help ensure attendance in school and at therapy. Three months later, the interventions work, and the child stabilizes. Crisis averted! The child does not have to leave his aunt's home, he stays in the same school, and now he has tools to help him cope.

Barriers to access

The only real barrier to access is ensuring that the application and provision of the TBS coach/worker is made in a timely and appropriate way. Of course, social workers are happy to refer children to any service that can help.

The history of TBS in California, however, is that some counties have had a more difficult time ensuring timely delivery of services. Issues with capacity, a complicated approval process, and mixed messages made accessing TBS services more difficult. However, since the settlement of the *Emily Q* class action lawsuit, the multidisciplinary team has worked to reduce barriers to these services.

So now, it is up to every one of us – each CASA included – to ensure that when a child needs the service, that service is delivered such that it can help.

² Cal Welf. & Inst. Code 362(a).

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Application Process

Parents, caregivers, foster parents, CASAs, social workers, probation officers, and mental health providers can ask for TBS services. However, one ongoing issue is that each county implements a separate application/referral process for TBS Services.

For CASA volunteers, it is best to coordinate with the child's social worker and ask that they do the referral. If any resistance is met, then discuss the matter with your case supervisor and perhaps take the matter to the judge.

The California CASA Association was fortunate to make a small contribution to the development and drafting of a comprehensive *TBS Coordination of Care Best Practices Manual*. You can refer to this manual for more information. It can be found at:

http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Services_and_Programs/Children_and_Youth/docs/TBS_Coordination_of_Care_Manual_OCT2010_FINAL.pdf .

Thank you for your service!

For more information:

Statewide Roster of TBS Professionals:

http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Services_and_Programs/Medi_Cal/docs/Contacts/1-StatewideTBSProviderRoster.pdf

TBS Coordination of Care Best Practices Manual Oct 2010:

A great global resource about TBS services and eligibility in California.

http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Services_and_Programs/Children_and_Youth/docs/TBS_Coordination_of_Care_Manual_OCT2010_FINAL.pdf

More information can be found on the TBS section of the California Department of Mental Health website:

http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Services_and_Programs/Children_and_Youth/EPSTDT.asp

