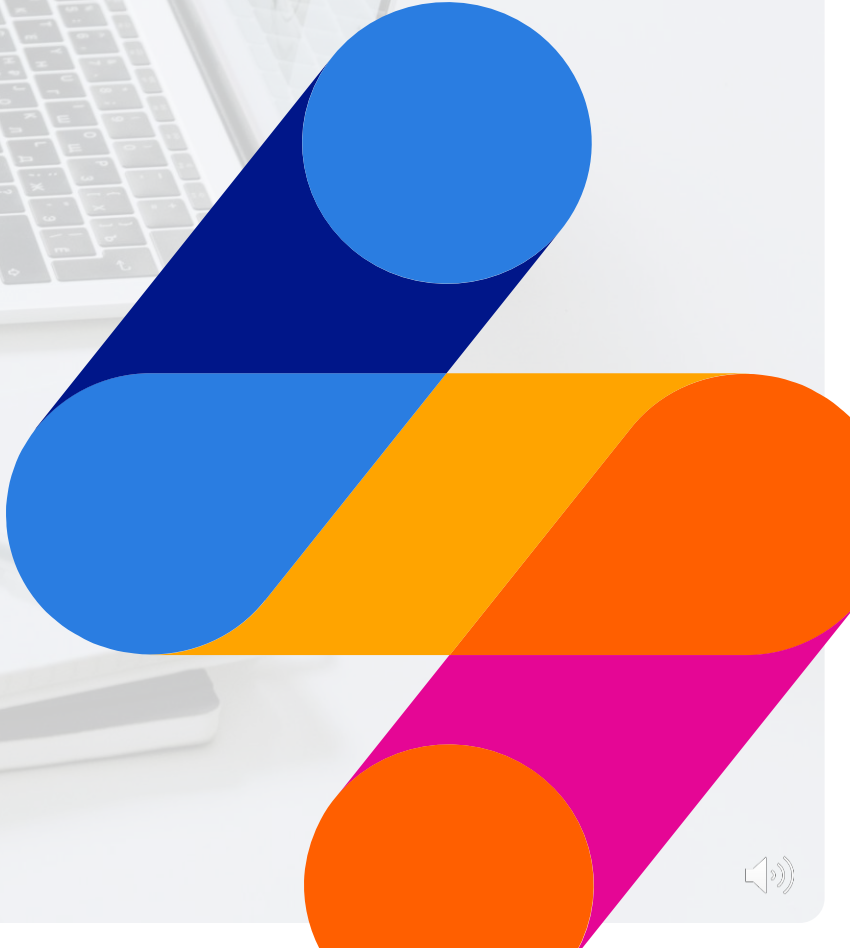


switchboard

Creating High-Quality Case Management Documentation

May 27, 2026





Today's Speaker



**Maya Wahrman, LSW,
MSW**
Training Officer, Switchboard



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to...

Explain

the importance of documentation within the case management cycle

01

Describe

different elements of a case file—including case notes, service plans, and critical incident reports—that adhere to most program guidelines

02

Apply

new tools and techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of case management documentation

03



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The Case Management Cycle

Recognizing the Importance of Documentation

01

02

03



The Case Management Cycle

Recognizing the Importance of Documentation

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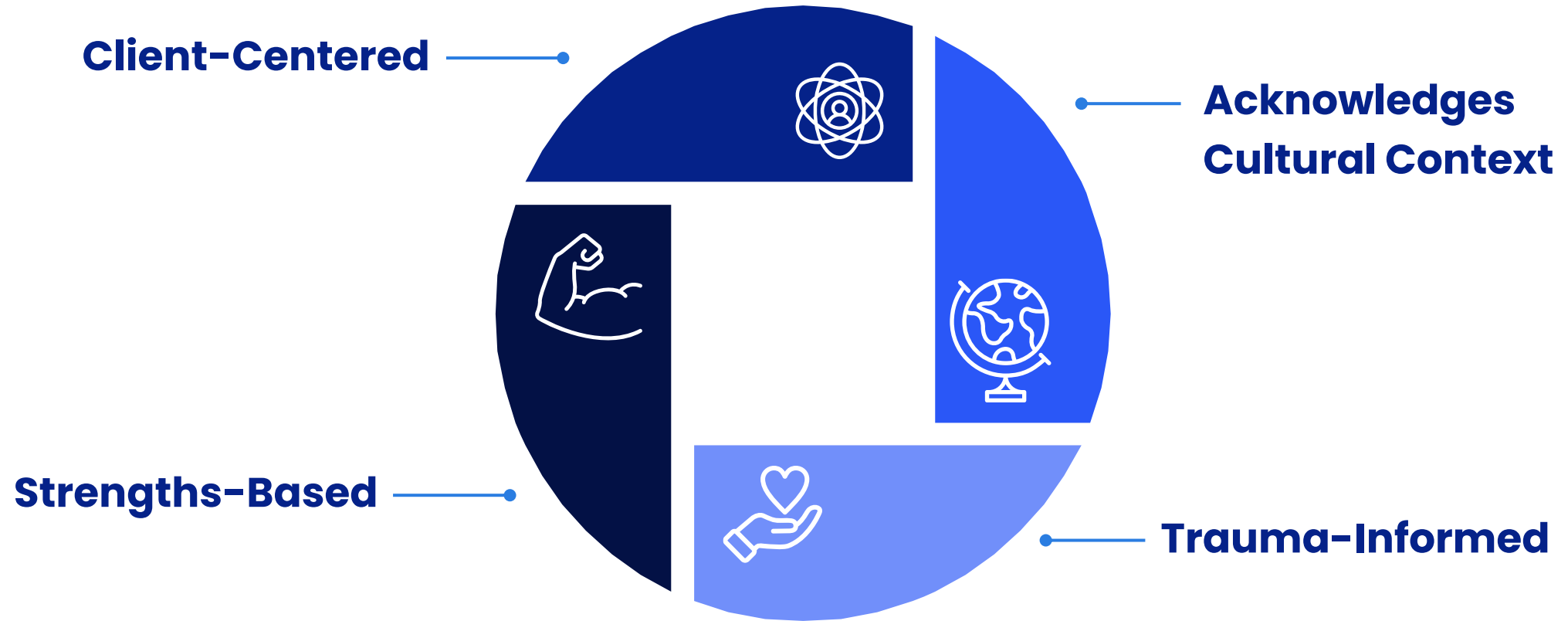
Case Management

Facilitates client wellness and autonomy through...

- Advocacy
- Assessment
- Planning
- Communication
- Coordination
- Monitoring
- Service facilitation



Case Management Approach





Phases of Case Management





Phases of Case Management



Initial Engagement

Intake documentation
Case notes
Screening

Service Provision

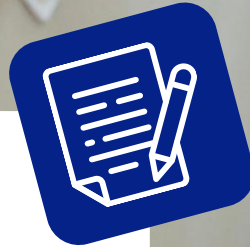
Case notes
Assessment
Goal setting
Service plan
Periodic updates

Termination/ Discharge

Case notes
Service plan (review)
Termination summary



Why Document?



- Accountability and protection
- Tracking of client progress
- Contractual requirement
- Ethical/professional responsibility
- Communication and collaboration



Case Study: Blessing





The Case File

01

02

03



The Case File

01

02

03



Sample Case File Organization

Intake

Intake Documents

- Client Rights and Responsibilities
- Confidentiality
- Other client signatures

Identification

Income Verification

Case Notes

Case Notes

Stored in chronological order

Service Documents

Assessments

Service Plans

Periodic Updates

Termination Paperwork

Case Management

Referrals

Applications

Additional Information

Releases of Information



Case Notes

Case notes are a record of the interactions between client and case manager





What to Include in Case Notes

Remember the 6 W's





Case Note Example

“Client and CM discussed client’s difficulty paying her rent this month. CM will look into rental assistance options for this month. Client thanked case manager.”

How might you make this a more effective case note?

Service Plans

- Reason for service
- Client strengths and supports
- Goal
- Objective
- Target end date
- Any program-specific modifications

Service Plan

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Client Name and ID#: | |
| Type of Plan: | <input type="checkbox"/> Initial <input type="checkbox"/> Update <input type="checkbox"/> Extension of Services |
| Date of Service Plan: | |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Area of Need: | Strengths and Supports: |
| | |
| Goal: | |
| | |
| Objective(s): | |
| | |
| Target End Date: | |

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Area of Need: | Strengths and Supports: |
| | |





Set “SMART” Goals

S Specific

M Measurable

A Achievable

R Relevant

T Time-bound



Short-Term SMART Goals

- Keep short-term goals **realistic**
- Balance **program requirements** with the **client's priorities**
- **Review goals** throughout the service period
- **Update goals** as needed



Long-Term SMART Goals

- Guide clients to **visualize** their ideal future
- Break **long-term goals into achievable and incremental goals** that align with those aspirations
- Help clients **prioritize immediate tasks** and objectives with their future in mind



Periodic Updates

- Check on client progress toward service plans or goals
 - Client-specific (e.g., special/vulnerable clients)
 - Program or agency requirement (e.g., court mandate)
 - Funding requirement
- Routine, required, or best practice



Termination Summaries

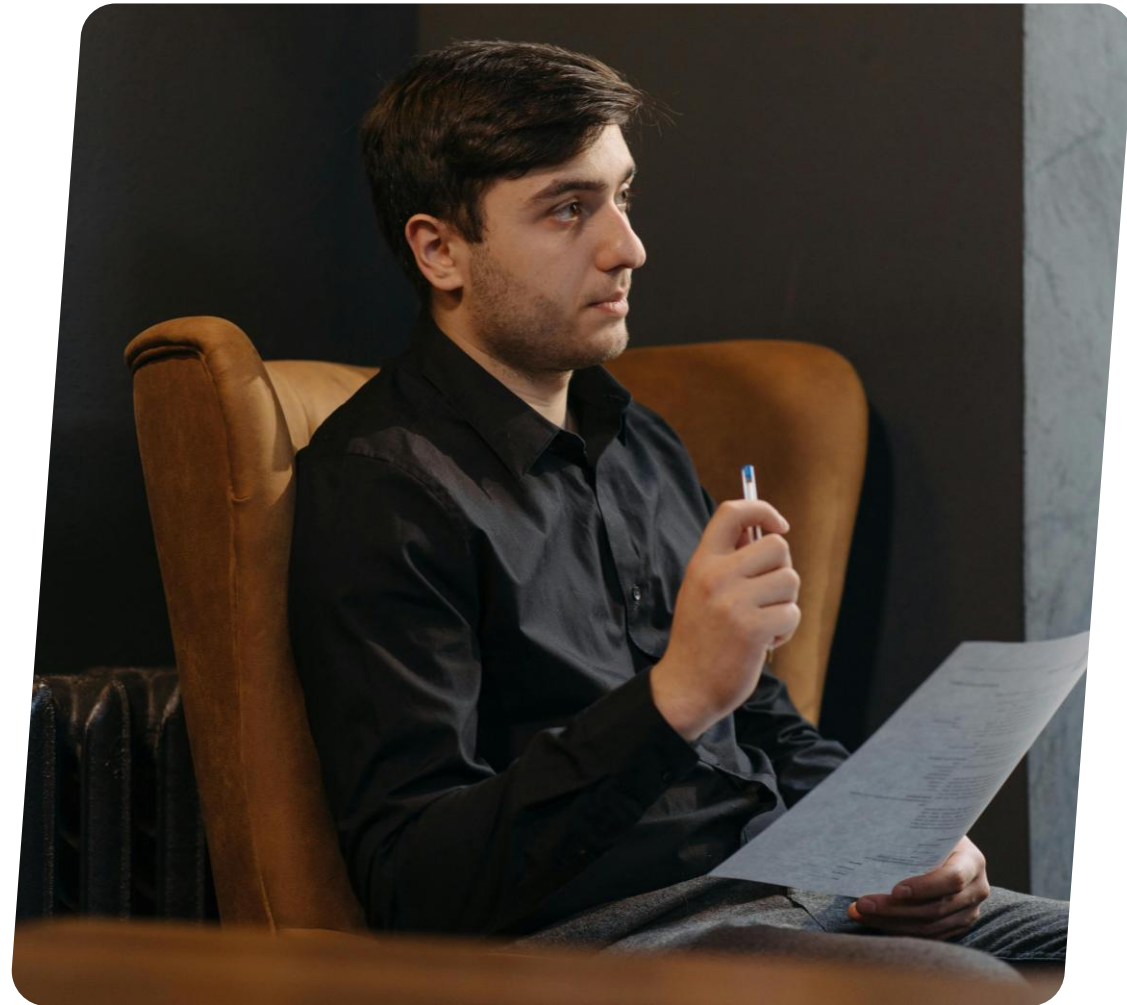
- Termination or closure letter
- Closure checklist
- Summary of services
- Transfer of services





Case Study: Samer

Samer is a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holder from Afghanistan. Although he has been in the United States for some time, you were only recently assigned to be his case manager. After reading his case file, you learn that delays in receiving his Social Security number have impacted his ability to secure employment. In your first intake meeting, Samer tells you he hopes to pursue a college degree but needs to find stable employment to pay for tuition. He is anxious that he has not made much progress toward his goals.





Specialized Documentation



**Mandatory
Reporting**

01

02

03



Specialized Documentation



**Mandatory
Reporting**

01

02

03



Specialized Documentation



Mandatory Reporting

Abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults

01

02

03



Specialized Documentation



Mandatory Reporting

Abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults

01



Critical Incidents

02

03



Specialized Documentation



Mandatory Reporting

Abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults

01



Critical Incidents

- Emergencies where police or ambulances respond
- Disasters
- Client death

02

03



Specialized Documentation



Mandatory Reporting

Abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults

01



Critical Incidents

- Emergencies where police or ambulances respond
- Disasters
- Client death

02



Other Crises

03



Specialized Documentation



Mandatory Reporting

Abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults

01



Critical Incidents

- Emergencies where police or ambulances respond
- Disasters
- Client death

02



Other Crises

- Safety concerns related to suicidal or homicidal thoughts or actions
- Disclosures of intimate partner violence

03



Tools and Techniques

Improving Quality and Efficiency of Case Management Documentation

01

02

03



Tools and Techniques

Improving Quality and Efficiency of Case Management Documentation

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02

03



What not to include



Opinions or commentary



False or unrelated information



Emotional reactions or value judgments

Practice

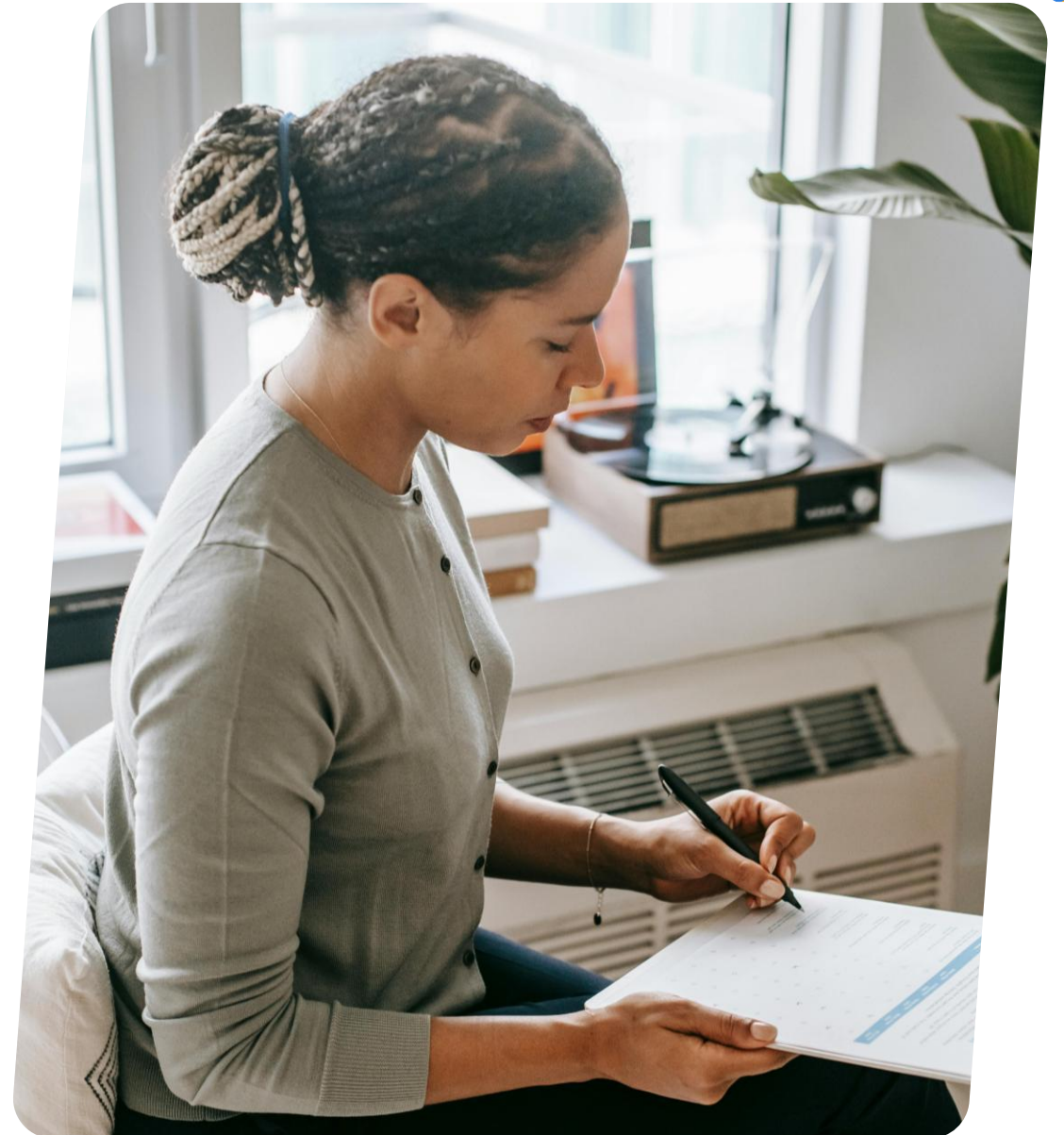


What are some words or expressions used in this case note that you might want to avoid?

“Client and CM met for scheduled appointment to discuss employment. Client doesn’t like any job options I give her and refuses to interview. Client is hard to work with and maybe needs a new case manager.”

Documentation Considerations

- Include **client voice**
- Be **comprehensive** but **concise**
- Write in **chronological** order
- Track **accomplished** and **remaining** tasks and goals
- Complete at the end of **each day**





Identifying and Incorporating Client Strengths

Determination

Hopefulness

Intelligence

Patience

Family support

Follow-through

Resiliency

**Open-
mindedness**

**Strong religious
beliefs**

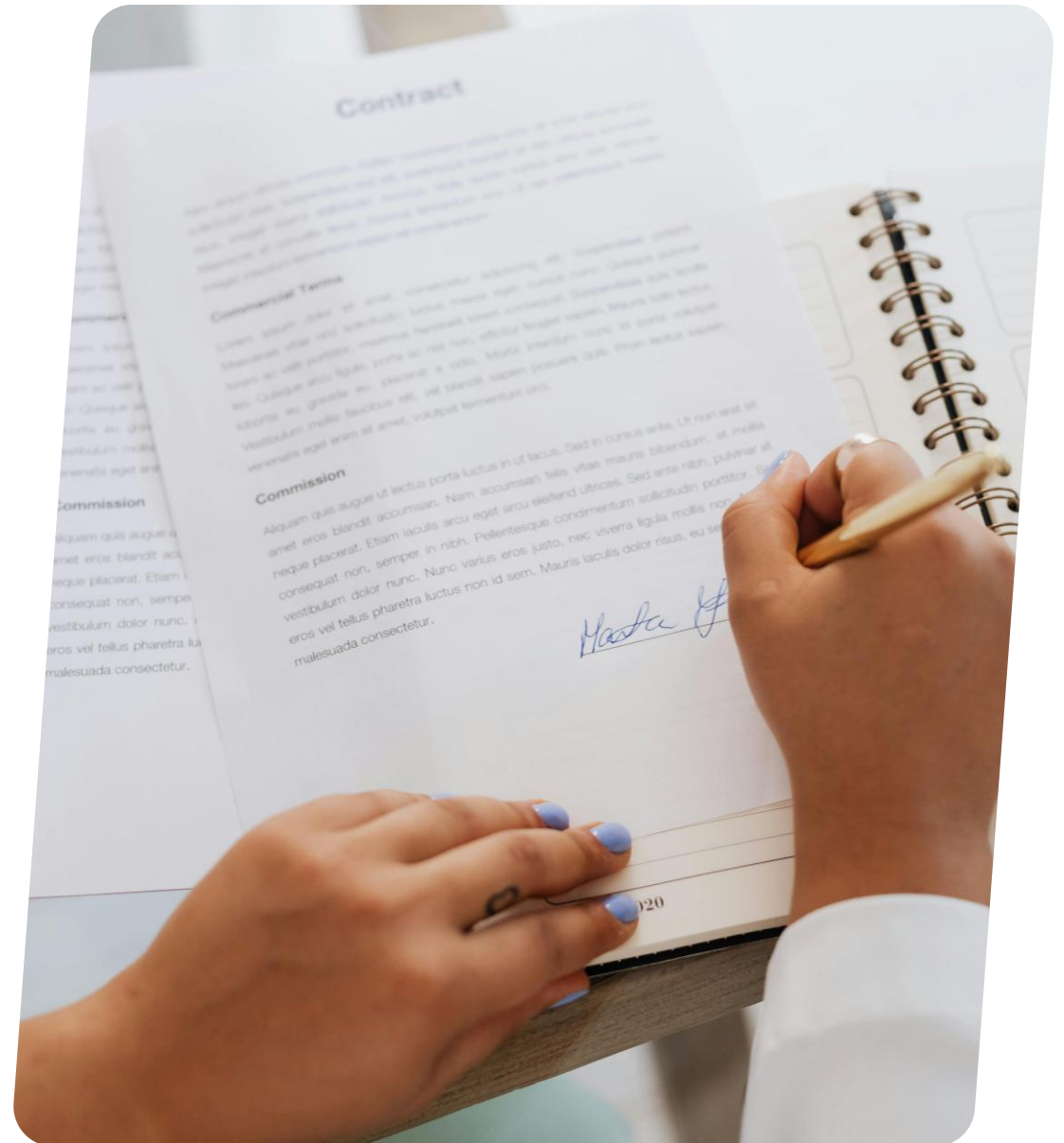
Multilingualism

Friendliness

Honesty

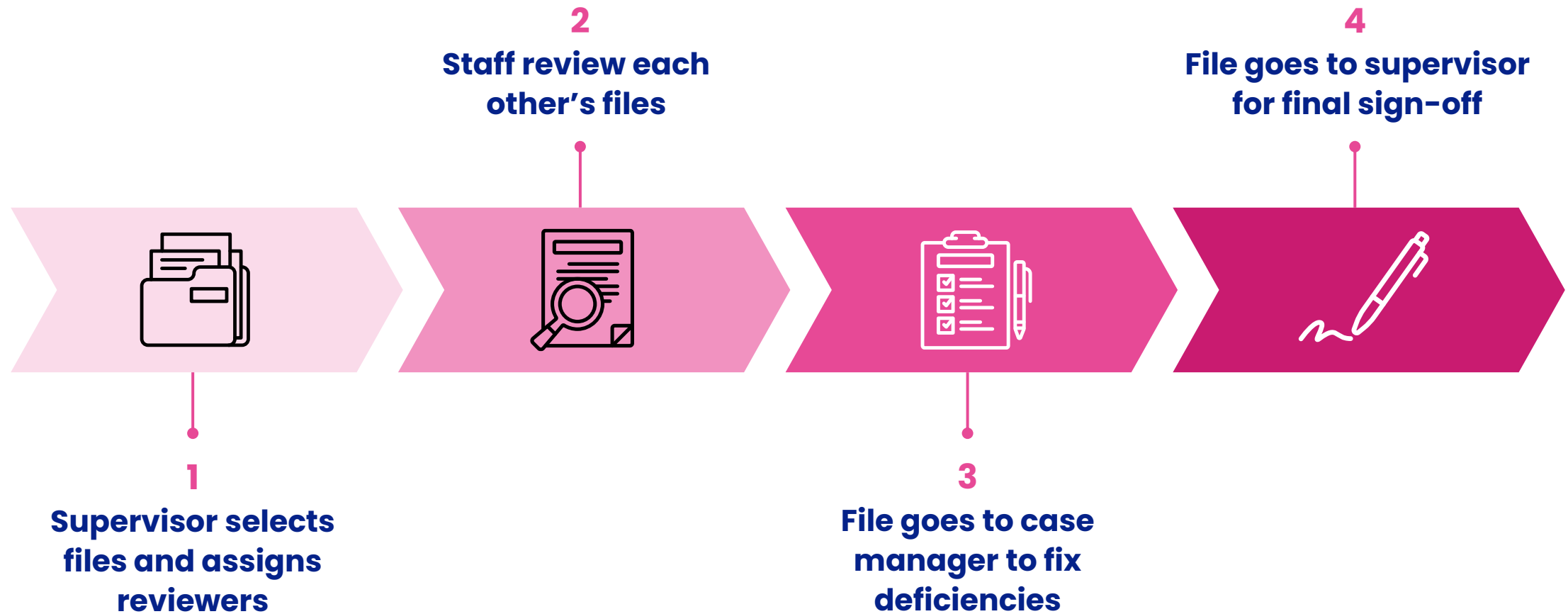
Using Templates and Tools

- Improves **consistency** and **quality** control
- Serves as a **memory aid** for staff
- **Customized** for each program
- **Broad enough** to capture unique elements of each client and allow for client voice





Peer Case File Reviews





It's everyone's responsibility!

Protecting Confidentiality



- Build trust with clients
- Inform clients of limitations to confidentiality
- Use releases of information and encrypted emails
- Lock filing cabinets and screens



Time Management Tips



Prioritize your tasks



Limit distractions



Set boundaries with clients



Don't let it pile up



Schedule time for case notes



Use structured templates



Case Study: Esperanza and Diego





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Recommended Resources

Switchboard

- **eLearning Course:** [Writing Effective and Efficient Case Notes](#)
- **Guide:** [Creating High-Quality Case Management Documentation](#)
- **Tool:** [Case Note Template](#)
- **Guide:** [Considerations for Implementing New Case Management Software in Resettlement Programs](#)
- **Blog:** [Case Management Documentation: Making the Paperwork Work for You](#)
- **Toolkit:** [SMART Indicators Checklist, with Case Study](#)

Center for Victims of Torture

- **Video:** [Case Management 101: Case Notes](#)



Creating High-Quality Case Management Documentation

This guide, created by Switchboard, will teach you how to create high-quality case management documentation. You will learn how to: recognize the importance of documentation within the case management cycle; describe and create different elements of a case file, including case notes, service plans, and critical incident reports; and utilize new techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of case management documentation.

| | |
|---|---|
| <h4>The Importance of Documentation in Case Management</h4> <p>Case management is the process by which case managers in refugee services and other social services help clients achieve wellness and autonomy. Case managers use this process to assist individuals in gaining access to needed services, including medical, social, and educational services, employment, and housing. Case managers do this through advocacy, assessment, planning, communication, coordination, monitoring progress, and service facilitation.</p> <p>See EURITA's Introduction to Case Management for Refugee Service Providers self-paced course for more case management basics.</p> | <h4>Why Document?</h4> <p>Fundamentally, documentation is a useful tool to track client progress. Case managers also have an ethical and professional responsibility to keep an accurate record of meetings with clients, compliant with state and funder regulations, as well as professional codes. These standards are in place to protect case managers, the organizations they work for, and clients. In the case of safety incidents that need to be reported, case notes can help demonstrate that staff performed all required actions. Finally, case notes are essential for communication and collaboration within an organization. Supervisors can review case notes to provide support and guidance, as can colleagues who need to become up to date to cover a case.</p> |
|---|---|

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