SAFETY AND RISK DECISIONS AND TOOLS

This practice idea is a result of the work by teams in the BSC on Safety and Risk Assessments. These are practice ideas that you can start doing today that may improve your work with families in conducting effective safety and risk assessments.

| Overview | Agency staff, families, community partners, and other systems all have clear and consistent definitions of what constitutes safety and risk. Other terms, such as protective capacity, purposeful visitation, and culture may also be defined. |
| Why Try This? | The terms risk and safety are used often in the child welfare field, but many teams in this BSC realized that these terms were not consistently defined for staff, families, and community partners. When all parties have shared definitions and understandings of terms, they can more easily communicate concerns, challenges, potential solutions, and successes. Having a common understanding of safety and risk between the agency and the community will result in shared responsibility for supporting families and increased collaboration around minimizing risks for families while increasing child safety. |
| How Can I Try This? | • Engage one community partner in a discussion about the agency’s definitions of safety and risk. • Post definitions on the wall during family team meetings. |
| Success in the BSC | Pomona: “Our community partners have now seriously begun to understand our internal perspective relative to safety, risk, and culture. They have helped us to establish a common language that describes what we do as an agency so that children and families also understand our involvement in their lives.” |
| Things to Think about | • Are your definitions clear and understandable to everyone? Try testing them with some parents and youth. Ask for their input into how to make the definitions more “user-friendly.” • Initial conversations with partners may be uncomfortable and/or negative based on historical relationships. • Communication issues will need to be addressed at multiple levels of agencies and community partners, not only at the leadership level. |
| Tools and Links | Pomona Reminder Card \nPasadena posters |
| Originally Tried | Pasadena, CA \nPomona, CA \nStanislaus County, CA |
TDM Meeting Preparation

In the TDM Meeting CSWs should be able to:

• Explain why the family is at the TDM meeting;
• Describe the safety and risks issues identified through the SDM assessments;
• Describe the family’s behaviors or conditions that must change for the children to be safe in the home;
• Discuss any safety plan that is in place; and
• Describe the protective capacities and strengths of the family.

In the TDM everyone has the right

• To be treated with respect
• To be heard
• To express opinions
• To be part of the decision making
• To ask questions

Important Definitions

Safety: Deciding if a child is in danger of being hurt right now (Decision to remove).

Risk: Looking at the possibility that a child may be hurt in the future (Decision to open case).

Strengths: Are those positive qualities or resources present in every family.

Protective Capacities: Does the parent have the ability or support system available to provide an environment that keeps children free from harm?

Culture: The unique specific traditions and activities of a household or a person in a family.

Cultural Sensitivity: Learning about and considering a household's practices and traditions when making safety and risk assessments and developing a safety plan for the child to remain in the home.

SDM Safety Factors

1. Physical harm/threat
2. Previous maltreatment
3. Sexual abuse
4. Failure to protect
5. Questionable explanation
6. Refuses access/may flee
7. Immediate needs not met
8. Hazardous living conditions
9. Impairment by substance abuse
10. Domestic violence
11. Child is danger to self/others
12. Emotional/developmental/cognitive Impairment

SDM Risk - Neglect Factors

1. Current complaint is for neglect
2. Prior investigations
3. Household has previously received CPS
4. Number of children involved in the CA/N Incident
5. Age of Younger child in household
6. Primary caretaker provide physical care inconsistent with child needs
7. Primary caretaker has a past or current mental health problems
8. Primary caretaker has historic or currently alcohol or drug problems
9. Characteristics of children in the household
10. Housing

SDM Risk - Abuse Factors

1. Current complaint is for abuse
2. Number of prior abuse investigation
3. Household has previously received CPS
4. Prior injury to a child resulting from CA/N
5. Primary caretaker's assessment of incident
6. Domestic Violence in the Household in the past year
7. Primary caretaker characteristics
8. Primary caretaker has a history of abuse or neglect as a child
9. Secondary caretaker has historic or current alcohol or drug problem
10. Characteristics of children household
what are protective capacities?

Inherent family capacities and resources that can be mobilized to actively contribute to the ongoing protection of children.

Capabilities, motives, perceptions, beliefs, or emotions that can avoid or reduce the threat of serious harm to children.
Deciding if a child is in danger of being hurt or neglected right now.
Looking at the possibility that a child may be hurt or neglected in the future.
Visitation with teaching and demonstrating activities to support the reunification of parents with their child(ren).