

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN'S DIVISION
Safety Assessment (CD-17)

Purpose:

The safety assessment tool is used to make safety decisions about whether a child in a particular setting is "safe" or "unsafe".

Safety Decisions:

Safe - A child can be considered safe when there are no threats of danger to a child within the family/home or when the caregiver's protective capacities within the home can manage or control the threats of danger.

Unsafe - A child is unsafe when a child is vulnerable to a threat of danger within a family/home and the caregiver's protective capacities within the home are insufficient to manage the threat thus requiring outside intervention.

When the safety decision is safe, a safety plan is not required.

When the safety decision is unsafe, safety planning is required to control the identified threat of danger.

Safety interventions may be categorized on a continuum from least intrusive to most intrusive. The most intrusive intervention would be to remove a child from the household. The least intrusive safety interventions are actions to keep the child in the home and would consist of the family's own resources, in the family's own network. Worker's should utilized the least intrusive interventions that will control the threat of danger.

The safety assessment is composed of the following:

- Assessment and Analysis of Safety Components
 - Threats of Danger
 - Child Vulnerability
 - Caregiver Protective Capacity
- Safety Factor Identification
 - Safety Threshold Criteria
- Safety Decision
 - Safe
 - Unsafe

Cases Which Require the Completion of a Safety Assessment

Safety assessments are completed in the following circumstances:

- Initial contact - Investigations/Family Assessment;
- Initial contact - FCS opening or FCOOHC opening where there are children in the home (unless recently assessed during the investigation or family assessment)
- At least every 90 days (at the end of a treatment period) - all open FCS cases and all FCOOHC cases for children who are in are in the home:

- Any time new information becomes available or the family situation changes which may result in an increased threat of safety for the child regardless of the “type” of case (i.e., CA/N investigation/Family Assessment, FCS, FCOOHC child in trial home placement or home visit, etc);
- Workers should always be on the alert to changes in the family, new dynamics, the interaction of multiple threats of danger and other “red flags” that indicate that the threat to the safety of a child is no longer manageable.

Assessment and Analysis of Safety Components

The CD-162 Safety Information Collection Tool can be used as a guide for workers in the information collection and safety analysis process prior to completing the CD-17.

Safety assessment and analysis, based on the basic Framework for Safety model is based on the relationship between the following components:

- Threats of Danger - *refers to a specific family situation or behavior, emotion, motive, perception or capacity of a family member that is out-of-control, imminent and likely to have severe effects on a vulnerable child.*
- Child Vulnerability - *refers to a child's capacity for self-protection.*
- Caregiver’s Protective Capacity - *refer to a specific family situation or behavior, emotion, motive, perception or capacity of a family member that is out-of-control, imminent and likely to have severe effects on a vulnerable child.*

The worker must have a thorough understanding of the safety components and how they interact in order to make an appropriate safety decision. Each threat of danger must be considered in relation to the children vulnerable to that threat and whether the caregiver has sufficient or insufficient protective capacity to control the threat and protect the child.

Safety Factor Identification

The safety factor identification section is a list of 11 behaviors and/or conditions which may or may not affect the immediate safety of the child(ren) being assessed. The list is written broadly enough to apply to any safety threat identified in the safety analysis. The worker considers the analysis of the safety components to choose the applicable factor and then apply the safety threshold criteria to make the safety decision.

The Safety Factors (*SDM safety definitions*) to be considered are as follows:

- 1. Child(ren) is in danger because parent/caregiver’s behavior is violent or out of control.**
 - Extreme physical or verbal, angry or hostile outbursts at the child(ren) or between household members;
 - Use or threatened use of brutal or bizarre punishment (e.g., scalding with hot water, burning with cigarettes, forced feeding);
 - Use of guns, knives, or other instruments in a violent or threatening way;
 - Violently shakes or chokes baby or child(ren);
 - Behavior that seems out of touch with reality, fanatical, or bizarre;

- Behavior that seems to indicate a serious lack of self-control (e.g., reckless, unstable, raving, explosive).
- 2. Parent/caregiver describes or acts toward child(ren) in predominantly negative terms or has extremely unrealistic expectations.**
- Describes child(ren) as evil, stupid, ugly, or in some other demeaning or degrading manner, or objectifies child(ren) (e.g. calling child(ren) "it" or "them");
 - Repeatedly curses and/or belittles child(ren);
 - Parent/caregiver targets a particular child(ren) in the family by extreme placement of blame for family or community problems (e.g., truancy, delinquency, etc.);
 - Expects a child(ren) to perform or act in a way that is impossible or improbable for the child(ren)'s age (e.g., babies and young child(ren) expected not to cry, expected to be still for extended periods, be toilet trained or eat neatly, expected to care for younger siblings, expected to stay alone);
 - Child(ren) is seen by either parent as responsible for the parents' problems;
 - Uses sexualized language to describe child(ren) or name calling (e.g., whore, slut, etc.).
- 3. Parent/caregiver caused serious physical harm to the child(ren) or has made a plausible threat to cause serious physical harm.**
- Intentionally or by other than accidental means caused serious abuse or injury (e.g., fractures, poisoning, suffocating, shooting, burns, significant bruises or welts, bite marks, choke marks, etc.);
 - An action, inaction, or threat that would result in serious harm (e.g., kill, starve, lock out of home, etc.);
 - Plans to retaliate against child(ren) for agency involvement;
 - Use of torture or physical force that bears no resemblance to reasonable discipline, or punished child(ren) beyond the duration of the child(ren)'s endurance;
 - One or both parent/caregiver fear they will maltreat child(ren) and request placement.
- 4. The parent/caregiver's explanation of an injury to a child(ren) is inconsistent with the nature of the injury and/or there are significant discrepancies between explanations given by parent/caregiver, other household members, or collateral contacts.**
- Parent/caregiver's explanation for the observed injuries is inconsistent with the type of injury.
 - Parent/caregiver's description of the causes of the injury minimizes the extent of harm to the child(ren).
 - Medical evaluation indicates injury is a result of abuse and parent denies or attributes injury to accidental causes.
- 5. Parent/caregiver is currently refusing access to child(ren) or has refused access to children on prior interventions.**
- Parent/caregiver has previously fled or made threats to flee in response to a present or past intervention.
 - Parent/caregiver has history of keeping child(ren) at home, away from peers, school, other outsiders for extended periods.
 - Parent/caregiver refuses to cooperate or is evasive;
 - Child(ren)'s whereabouts are unknown.

6. Parent/caregiver has not, will not, or is unable to provide supervision necessary to protect child(ren) from potentially serious harm.

- Parent/caregiver does not attend to child(ren) to the extent that the need for supervision is unmet (e.g., although parent/caregiver or household member is present, child(ren) can wander outdoors alone, play with dangerous objects, play on unprotected window ledge, or be exposed to other serious hazards);
- Parent/caregiver leaves child(ren) alone (time period varies with age and developmental stage);
- Parent/caregiver makes inadequate and/or inappropriate baby-sitting or child(ren) care arrangements or demonstrates very poor planning for child(ren)'s care;
- Parent/caregiver's whereabouts are unknown;
- Criminal behavior occurring in the presence of the child(ren) or the child(ren) is forced to commit a crime(s) or engage in criminal behavior.
- Parent/caregiver has not, will not, or is unable to protect child(ren) from violence against other family members.

If the item is identified as a safety factor, indicate if the parent/caregiver's lack of supervision is due to:

- Alcohol or other drug use
- Physical, mental health or cognitive incapacity
- Hospitalization
- Domestic Violence
- Incarceration
- Other

7. Parent/caregiver is unwilling or unable to meet the child(ren)'s imminent needs for food, clothing, shelter, and/or medical or mental health care.

- No food provided or available to child(ren), or child(ren) starved or deprived of food or drink for prolonged periods;
- Child(ren) without minimally warm clothing in cold months;
- No housing or emergency shelter; child(ren) must or is forced to sleep in the street, car, etc.;
- Parent/caregiver does not seek treatment for child(ren)'s imminent and dangerous medical condition(s) or does not follow prescribed treatment for such condition(s);
- Child(ren) appears malnourished;
- Child(ren) has physical or behavioral needs which parent/caregiver cannot or will not meet;
- Child(ren) is suicidal and/or violent to self or others and the parent/caregiver will not or is unable to take protective action;
- Child(ren) displays serious emotional symptoms, serious physical symptoms, and/or a lack of behavior control which is believed to be a result of the child(ren)'s maltreatment.
- Parent/caregiver has removed child(ren) from a hospital against medical advice;

If the item is identified as a safety factor, indicate if the child(ren)'s basic needs are unmet by the parent/caregiver due to:

- Alcohol or other drug use
- Physical, mental health or cognitive incapacity
- Hospitalization
- Domestic Violence

- Incarceration
- Other

8. Child(ren) is fearful of parent/caregiver, other family members, or other people living in or having access to the home.

- Child(ren) cries, cowers, cringes, trembles, or otherwise exhibits fear in the presence of certain individuals or verbalizes fear;
- Child(ren) exhibits severe emotional, physical or behavioral symptoms (e.g., nightmares, insomnia) related to situation(s) associated with a person(s) in the home;
- Child(ren) has fears of retribution or retaliation from parent/caregiver or household members.

9. The child(ren)'s physical living conditions are hazardous and immediately threatening. *Based on child(ren)'s age and developmental status, the child(ren)'s physical living conditions are hazardous and immediately dangerous. For example:*

- Leaking gas from stove or heating unit;
- Dangerous substances or objects stored in unlocked lower shelves or cabinets, under sink or easily accessible;
- Lack of water or utilities (heat, plumbing, electricity) and no alternate provisions made, or alternate provisions are inappropriate (e.g., stove, unsafe space heaters);
- Open windows or broken or missing windows;
- Exposed electrical wires;
- Excessive garbage, or rotted or spoiled food which threatens health;
- Serious illness or significant injury has occurred due to living conditions and these conditions still exist (e.g., lead poisoning, rat bites);
- Evidence of excessive human or animal waste in living quarters;
- Guns and other weapons are accessible;
- Active meth labs;
- Vermin infestation (e.g., rats, roaches, etc.);
- Vicious animal(s) or excessive number of animals in the home pose a safety concern to the child(ren).

10. Child(ren) sexual abuse is suspected and circumstances suggest that child(ren) safety may be an imminent concern.

- Access by possible or confirmed offender to child(ren) continues to exist;
- Circumstances suggest that parent/caregiver or household member has committed rape or has had other sexual contact with child(ren);
- Circumstances suggest parent/caregiver or household member has forced or encouraged child(ren) to engage in sexual performances or activities;
- Non-offending parent/caregiver is unable/unwilling to protect the child(ren).

11. The parent/caregiver's maltreatment history is significant to the current circumstances, and suggest that the child(ren)'s safety is an immediate concern. *(Note: Prior incidents, in and of themselves, do not constitute a current safety factor.)*

- Prior death of a child(ren) as a result of maltreatment.
- Prior serious harm to child(ren)- previous maltreatment by parent/caregiver that was serious enough to cause severe injury (e.g., fractures, poisoning, suffocating, shooting,

burns, bruises/welts, bite marks, choke marks, and/or physical findings consistent with sexual abuse based on medical exam).

- Termination of parental rights- parent/caregiver(s) had parental rights terminated as a result of a prior CD investigation.
- Prior removal of child(ren)- removal/placement of child(ren) by CD or other responsible agency or concerned party was necessary for the safety of the child(ren).
- Prior CD investigation with a probable cause finding or preponderance of the evidence finding.
- Prior CD investigation with an unsubstantiated finding - factors to be considered include seriousness, chronicity, and/or patterns of abuse/neglect allegations.
- Prior threat of serious harm to child(ren)- previous maltreatment that could have caused severe injury; retaliation or threatened retaliation against child(ren) for previous incidents' prior domestic violence which resulted in serious harm or threatened harm to a child(ren).

Safety Threshold Criteria

The worker must consider each of the above safety factors and then apply the safety threshold criteria to make a safety decision about whether a child is “safe” or “unsafe”. Safety threshold refers to the point at which family behaviors, conditions or situations rise to the level of directly threatening the safety of a child. The safety threshold includes only those family behaviors, conditions or situations that are judged to be out of the parent/caregiver or family’s control. The safety threshold criteria include:

- **Specific and observable** – A family condition that exists as an impending danger is observable and can be specifically described or explained. The danger is real, can be seen, can be reported, and is evidenced in explicit, unambiguous ways.
- **Out of control** - Family conditions that can directly affect a child are unrestrained; unmanaged; without limits or monitoring; not subject to influence, manipulation or internal power; are out of the family’s control.
- **Likely to cause serious harm** - Severity is consistent with anticipated harm that can result in pain, serious injury, disablement, grave/debilitating physical health conditions, acute/grievous suffering, terror, impairment, or death;
- **Present or near future** – The belief that threats to child safety are likely to become active without delay, within the immediate future or near future.

Safety Decision: The result of a safety decision is safe or unsafe.

Safe - A child can be considered safe when there are no threats of danger to a child within the family/home or when the caregiver’s protective capacities within the home can manage or control threats of danger. (A safety plan is not required.)

Unsafe - A child is unsafe when a child is vulnerable to a threat of danger within a family/home and the caregiver’s protective capacities within the home are insufficient to manage the threat thus requiring outside intervention. If any child is considered unsafe, the safety decision is unsafe. Therefore safety intervention is required, which may be in the form of a CD-18 Safety Plan to keep the child or children in the home or if a safety plan can not be developed and

agreed upon to control the threat of danger and keep the child safe, then the child may be removed from the house hold.

Signatures

The worker and the supervisor/Chief Investigator (if applicable). It is not necessary for the parent or caretaker to sign the safety assessment.

Memorandum History:

CD11-86, CD12-68