



Iowa Department of Human Services **Field Guide for Assessing and Planning for the Safety of Children**

The safety of children is paramount and the Department's primary purpose is the protection of children. The use of a structured decision-making safety assessment tool provides clearly defined and consistently applied criteria to assess the safety of a child. This tool promotes consistency and validity for identifying present danger as well as impending danger.

A supervisor's role in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the safety assessment and safety plan from a family's initial involvement with the Department through the life of the case is crucial to assure quality, consistency, and clear expectations. This field guide provides direction regarding the assessment of child safety at all points in a case. It also reinforces the goal to keep children safe at home with their families, whenever possible.

Key Decision Points To Assess Safety

Department policy is to conduct formal safety assessments and follow up with supervisory consultation to determine if a child is safe at key decision points throughout the life of the case. Safety assessments are required:

- ◆ Within 24 hours of first contact with the child in a CPA
- ◆ At completion of every child abuse assessment
- ◆ At the completion of a family assessment if initial safety assessment was safe with a plan
NOTE: If at the completion of a family assessment, the safety assessment does not verify the child is safe, the family assessment must be reassigned as a child abuse assessment.
- ◆ Whenever circumstances suggest the child is in an unsafe situation
- ◆ Before the decision to recommend unsupervised family interaction
- ◆ Before the decision to recommend reunification
- ◆ Before the decision to recommend closure of protective services

Safety Assessment Outcomes

At any key decision point, the worker presents facts used to reach the safety assessment outcome. The supervisor and worker discuss the final outcome, using critical thinking.

- ◆ If outcome is "safe": How is the child safe? Is there consensus? If not, determine if the child is more appropriately assessed as safe with a plan or unsafe.
- ◆ If outcome is "safe with a plan": How is the identified danger being mitigated? Are the actions to keep the child safe adequately documented in a safety plan? Are all participants of the safety plan in agreement with the plan?

- ◆ If outcome is “unsafe”: What is the identified danger? Are the threats of maltreatment and child vulnerabilities greater than the parental protective capacities? If so, consider the 4 questions to prevent removal:
 - What can we do to remove the danger instead of the child?
 - Can someone the child/family knows move into the home to remove the danger?
 - Can the caregiver and child go live with a relative or fictive kin?
 - Could the child move temporarily to live with relative or fictive kin?

NOTE: If removal is prevented, the child is “safe with a plan” and a safety plan is required.

Which Household To Assess

The determination of which household is assessed depends on several factors, including the location of the household where the child resides, the location of where the abuse occurred, custodial status, etc. A safety assessment is always completed on the immediate household composition. Even if a child is removed, the safety assessment continues to be completed on the household from which they were removed. For example:

- ◆ A child who must remain out of their home or who requires a safety plan is not considered “safe”. A child is only determined to be “safe” when there is no danger identified.
- ◆ A child is “safe with a plan” if the danger can be controlled with a safety plan.
- ◆ A child is “unsafe” if the danger cannot be controlled with a safety plan and removal of the child is required or continues to be required.

Child Protective Assessments – Initial Assessment of Safety

- ◆ Supervisor reviews allegation, household composition (noting victims, siblings, and ages), collaterals, additional information, and any other information that may be of concern.
- ◆ Supervisor consults with assigned CPW before they go out to see the family, as needed (based on worker experience, complexity of case, etc.) to discuss the approach to assure safety.
- ◆ Supervisor confirms CPW has thoroughly reviewed the intake and all DHS history, including:
 - Any worker safety concerns
 - Assessment for vulnerabilities (age of children, disabilities)
 - Rejected intakes, prior CPS, and CINA assessments (STAR)
 - Concerns involving any licensed/registered provider
 - Criminal history/sex-offender registry
 - Collateral contacts (current or previous SWCM, current or previous FCS worker, collaboration with law enforcement)
- ◆ CPW completes supervisory consultation within 24 hours of observing the child.
NOTE: If there is a need to consider a delay of contact, see RC-0150, *Field Guide for the Observation of Children and the Delay of Observation Timeframes*.

Child Protective Assessments – Subsequent Assessments of Safety

- ◆ CPW completes supervisory consultation following any subsequent safety assessment.

- ◆ Supervisor reviews the CPA (including safety assessments and corresponding safety plans) to assure thoroughness and appropriate service referral, based on case eligibility:
 - *Information or Information and Referral*
 - ◇ Requires the child to be safe
 - ◇ Not Confirmed-low risk CPA
 - ◇ CPW assists the family by identifying any information or community resources the family may want
 - *Referral to Non-Agency Voluntary Services*
 - ◇ Requires the child to be safe
 - ◇ Not Confirmed-moderate to high risk or Confirmed-low to moderate risk CPA
 - ◇ Supervisor assures CPW has discussed this service with the family and the family agrees to the referral being made
 - ◇ Supervisor also confirms CPW has documented what the service plan is to address
 - ◇ Face to face hand off / introduction to the family is required between CPW and Non-Agency Worker
 - *Department Services:*
 - ◇ Child may be safe, safe with a plan, or unsafe
 - ◇ Confirmed-high risk or any Founded CPA
 - ◇ Supervisor assures CPW has identified the appropriate preventative service(s) and documented any foster care prevention strategies
 - ◇ CPW follows hand off protocol, see *CPW to SWCM Transfer Packet Face Sheet*, form 470-5562
- NOTE: Any Safety Plan created during the course of an assessment ends no later than at the conclusion of the assessment. If the child continues to be safe with a plan, the SWCM will need to complete a new Safety Plan in collaboration with the family.

Child Welfare Services – Assessments of Safety

- ◆ Throughout the life of a case, the SWCM is constantly assessing safety every time new information is received or contact with the family is made.
- ◆ At minimum, the SWCM completes a formal safety assessment and follows up with supervisory consultation before a decision to recommend any of the following:
 - Unsupervised family interaction,
 - Reunification,
 - Closure of protective services, or
 - Whenever circumstances suggest the child is in an unsafe situation.
- ◆ Supervisors must routinely discuss safety assessments and safety plans with the SWCM.

- ◆ Supervisors have the following opportunities to oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of safety assessments and safety plans:
 - Supervisory Oversight/Review
 - ◇ Use supervisors' review of documentation (Intakes, CPAs, Safety Assessments, Safety Plans, Case Plans, Family Visits, etc.) to critically assess and identify strengths, needs, and trends for review with SWCM
 - ◇ Track required timeframes/key decision points to assess safety
 - Individual Supervision
 - ◇ Understand the dynamics impacting safety with each family assigned to the SWCM
 - ◇ Discuss how safety is being assured
 - ◇ Use supervisors' knowledge/experience of policy and quality safety assessment and quality safety plans to coach workers
 - ◇ Use available data to drive conversations/decisions
 - Group Supervision
 - ◇ Use team/unit meetings to allow SWCM's to learn from their peers
 - ◇ Highlight good practice examples
 - Child Safety Conferences/Group Care Staffings/Court Hearings, etc.
 - ◇ Consider all of the internal and external activities that provide additional opportunities to evaluate and monitor child safety.
 - Critical thinking through the life of a case
 - ◇ Supervisor asks questions (based on information from the intake, CPA, Case Plan, what is learned from the worker, etc.) to make sure they have the information needed to adequately assess safety
 - ◇ Supervisor assists the SWCM in identifying the presence or absence of danger (distinguishing between present or impending danger versus risk)
 - ◇ Supervisor assures the SWCM creates safety plans that mitigates the danger identified and that they are complete with the family and all person identified as part of plan
 - ◇ Supervisor confirms reasonable efforts to prevent removal occur, including the use of the 4 questions listed in the Safety Assessment Outcomes section.
 - ◇ Supervisor ensures relative notices are complete and documentation regarding family members are entered in the system if removal occurs.
- ◆ Safety is only one element considered with respect to case closure. Before case closure, also assess:
 - Whether the family can manage remaining risks (i.e., are the family's protective capacity and community supports adequate to address any remaining risks);
 - Whether the child's needs for permanency and stability have been addressed; and

- Whether any well-being issues that brought the child to the Department's attention have been resolved.

When A Safety Assessment is Not Required

Safety assessments and risk assessments are not required for out-of-home settings. When abuse occurred or is alleged in an out-of-home facility and child protective concerns do not exist in the child's household, do not complete the safety and risk assessment.

- ◆ Out-of-home settings are: child-care centers, child development homes (but not unregistered child care homes), foster family homes, group care facilities, hospitals, nursing care facilities, ICFs/MR, PMICs, state-operated facilities, and substance abuse facilities.
- ◆ A noncustodial parent's home and a nonregistered child care home is not considered an out-of-home setting. Safety and risk assessments are required when a child is allegedly abused in a noncustodial parent's home or a nonregistered child care home. The assessment is completed on the child's home environment.