

CHILD SAFETY DECISION MAKING CORE CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The Six Domains

Emerging danger is more elusive than present danger and requires focused professional information gathering and assessment. The areas of focus are:

1. Maltreatment: Straightforward information concerned with the facts and evidence which supports the presence of maltreatment, summarizes the allegations and documents all the evidence/facts supporting a worker's determination as to whether or not maltreatment occurred.
2. Nature of Maltreatment: What is occurring in the family that impacts or influences the maltreatment or causes maltreatment.
3. Adult Functioning: The overall daily functioning of the adults in the home without regard to the reported event. Adult functioning is also separate from parenting and discipline.
4. Child Functioning: Each child's daily functioning separate from the report. Every child in the home will be assessed.
5. Parenting-General: The overall parenting styles, perception of the child, tolerant as a parent, interactions patterns with the child, ability to meet the child's basic needs, ability to put the child's needs before their own, parenting knowledge and skills, support and concern for the child, ability to protect, etc...
6. Parenting-Discipline: Worker's analysis of discipline in the home. Disciplinary Methods, concept and purpose of discipline, context when discipline occurs, cultural practices, child's description of discipline. Includes all caregivers in the home.

It is the information gathering and assessment of the interplay among these 6 areas that further informs us about unseen, yet very real threats. A complete safety assessment cannot be done without this focused assessment.

Present Danger

Immediate, significant and clearly observable severe harm or threat of severe harm is occurring to a child in the present requiring immediate CPS protective response.

Emerging Danger

This refers to a family circumstance where a child is living in a state of danger, a position of continual danger. Danger may not exist at a particular moment or be an immediate concern (like in present danger), but a state of danger exists. Emerging danger to child safety or this state of danger is not always obvious or occurring at the onset of CPS intervention or in a present context, but these can be identified and understood upon more fully evaluating individual and family conditions and functioning.

Risk of Maltreatment

The likelihood (chance, potential, prospect) for parenting behavior that is harmful and destructive to a child's cognitive, social, emotional and/or physical development, and those with parenting responsibility are unwilling or unable to behave differently. Risk occurs along a continuum from low to high. All safety threats are risks, but not all risks are safety threats.

Safety Threats

We can think of safety threats as risk factors that have crossed the safety threshold to become present or emerging danger(s). When safety threats are identified within a family, the children are living in a state of danger

Safety Threshold

This refers to the point at which a family condition (or risk factor) reaches the level of a safety threat. The safety threshold is met when the following 5 criteria are assessed to apply.

1. **Severity** is consistent with harm that can result in significant pain, serious injury, disablement, grave or debilitating physical health or physical conditions, acute or grievous suffering, terror, impairment, death.

2. **Will likely occur in the immediate to near future:** A belief that threats to child safety are likely to become active without delay; a certainty about an occurrence within the immediate to near future that could have severe effects.
3. **Out-of-Control:** Family conditions which can affect a child and are unrestrained; unmanaged; without limits or monitoring; not subject to influence, manipulation or internal power; are out of the family's control. No responsible adult in the home can prevent the emerging danger from happening even if they want to do so.
4. **Observable:** Danger is real; can be seen or understood and can be reported; is evidenced in explicit, unambiguous ways.
5. **A Vulnerable Child:** Dependence on others for protection

Unsafe

Children are considered unsafe when there are present or emerging danger threats, and caregivers are unable or unwilling to provide protection.

Safe

Children are considered safe when there are no present or emerging danger threats, or the caregivers' protective capacities control existing threats.

Safety Plan

Safety Plans are actions taken that control present or emerging danger rather than changing the conditions that cause it. A safety plan must control or manage the present or emerging danger, have an immediate effect, be immediately accessible and available and contain safety services and actions only, not services designed to effect long-term change. It must be sufficient to ensure safety. Safety Plans may be done **in the home** or may include **out of home plans** when child safety can only be assured through temporary placement with relatives or in substitute care.