

Key Concepts

Caregiver Protective Capacities: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that can specifically and directly be associated with a person's ability to care for and keep a child safe. Document how the protective capacities are confirmed or diminished by the care provider. These are the characteristic that prepare the person to be protective; the characteristics that enables or empowers the person to be protective, characteristics that can be related to acting or being able to act on behalf of the child; and the characteristic that must exist prior to the Department's involvement.

Conditions for Return: refers official written statements that must exist or be different with respect to specific family circumstances, home environment, caregiver perception, behavior, capacity and/or safety service resources that would allow for reunification to occur with the use of an in-home safety plan.

Immediate Danger: refers to safety threats that are actively occurring or in process of occurring and will likely result in actual or substantial risk of physical or psychological harm to a child and requiring protective action.

Imminent: refers to the belief that dangerous family behaviors, conditions, or situations will remain active or become active within the next several days to a couple of weeks. This is consistent with a degree of certainty or inevitability that danger and severe harm are possible, even likely outcomes, without intervention.

Impending Danger: refers to a child in a continuous state of danger due to parent/caregiver behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions and/or situations posing a specific threat of actual or substantial risk of harm to a child.

In-home Safety Plan: refers to safety management so that safety services, actions and responses assure a child can be kept safe in his own home. In home safety plans include activities and services that may occur within the home or outside the home but contribute to the child remaining home. People participating in in-home safety plans may be responsible for what they do inside or outside the child's home. An in-home safety plan primarily involves the home setting and the child's location within the home as central to the safety plan, however, in-home safety plans can also include periods of separation of the child from the home and may even contain an out of home placement option such as on weekends.

Observable: refers to family behaviors, conditions or situations representing a danger to a child that are specific, definite, real, can be seen and understood and are subject to being reported and justified. "Observable" does not include suspicion, intuitive feelings, difficulties in worker-family interaction, lack of cooperation, or difficulties in obtaining information.

Out-of-Control: refers to family behavior, conditions or situations which are unrestrained resulting in an unpredictable and possibly chaotic family environment not subject to the influence, manipulation, or ability within the family's control. Such out-of-control family conditions pose a danger and are not being managed by anybody or anything internal to the family system.

Out-of-Home Safety Plan: Refers to safety management that primarily depends on separation of a child from his home, separation from the impending danger and separation from caregivers who lack sufficient protective capacities to assure the child will be protected. Out of home safety plans can include safety services and actions in addition to separation or out of home placement. Out of home safety plans always should contain a caregiver-child visitation plan based on the unique circumstances of each case. Out of home safety plans can contain some in home safety management dimension to them. Out of home safety plans can include safety service providers and others concerned with safety management besides the out of home care providers. All kin or foster placements are out of home safety plans.

Protection Plan: refers to an immediate – same day, short term and sufficient protective action from identified safety threats in order to allow completion of the initial assessment (i.e., investigation or family functioning assessment.) A Protection Plan usually occurs during the initial contact with a family. A Protection Plan occurring the same day that safety threats are encountered provides a child with responsible adult supervision and care and compensates for both actual harm and substantial risk of harm to a child. Typically a Protection Plan includes a straight forward, immediately achievable protective action such as relying on a non-maltreating caregiver to protect the child; arranging and confirming that the maltreating caregiver will leave and remain away from the home; arranging for the non-maltreating caregiver to leave home with the child; using people and resources available to the family to immediately protect the child; and placing the child in kin care, foster care or appropriate temporary shelter facilities.

Reunification: refers to a safety decision to modify an out of home safety plan to an in home safety plan based on an analysis that a) impending danger threats have been eliminated or reduced; b) caregiver protective capacities have been sufficiently enhanced; c) caregivers are willing and able to accept an in home safety plan; and d) conditions for return have been met.

Risk Indicators of Maltreatment: While there is no specific profile for an adult that makes him/her likely to maltreat, there are contributing risk factors that may include but are not limited to: Physical or Mental Health, Substance Use, Developmental Ability, Hazardous Living Environment, Grief and Loss, Traumatic Experience/Response, Financial and Residential Stability, Family Conflict, Domestic Violence within the home or community (witness to or victim of), Engagement in High Risk Behaviors or Criminal Activity.

Safe Home: refers to the required safety intervention outcome that must be achieved in

order for a case that involves an unsafe child to be successfully closed. A safe home is a qualified environment and living circumstance that once established can be judged to assure a child's safety and provide a permanent living arrangement. A safe home is qualified by the absence or reduction of actual, or substantial risk of physical or psychological harm to a child(ren); the presence of sufficient parent or caregiver protective capacities; perceived and felt security by a child; and confidence in consistency and endurance of the conditions that produced the safe home. The term "safe home" is used in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) as the objective of CPS intervention.

Safety: refers to the absence of immediate or impending danger to a child or sufficient caregiver protective capacities to assure that a child is protected from danger.

Safety Assessment: refers to a focused evaluation that determines and records the existence of immediate and impending danger. A safety assessment is conducted as part of the initial CPS intervention and continues throughout the life of the case. A safety assessment applies criteria comprised of a set number of standardized threats. Safety intervention information collected during the initial assessment and added to during continuing involvement with a family provides the content for safety assessment.

Safety Intervention: refers to all the actions and decisions required throughout the life of the case to a) assure that an unsafe child is protected; b) expend sufficient efforts necessary to support and facilitate a child's caregivers taking responsibility for the child's protection; and c) achieve the establishment of a safe, permanent home for the unsafe child. Safety intervention consists of identifying and assessing threats to child safety; planning and establishing safety plans that assure child safety; managing safety plans that assure child safety; and creating and implementing remedial case plans that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide protection for their children.

Safety Intervention Information Standard: refers to relevant knowledge and facts necessary to assess, analyze, create continuing safety plans and manage threats to child safety. Relevant knowledge and facts are obtained through the collection of information associated with the assessment areas outlined within the Family Functioning Assessment:

- What surrounding circumstances accompany the maltreatment? What is the extent of maltreatment?
- How the family's CPS history is relevant to current circumstances
- How child vulnerability relates to safety and how the child functions on a daily basis
- What maltreatment indicators as related to substantial risk of harm are prevalent within the home?
- How a caregivers protective capacities lend to their ability to care for, and keep a child safe
- What are the overall, typical pervasive parenting practices used by the parent?
- How does the caregiver function in respect to daily life management and general adaptation including risk indicators of maltreatment?

Safety Intervention System: refers to a unified whole comprised of case practice and decision making components or parts. The case practice and decision making parts are related to each other and are progressively connected to achieve two purposes: To protect children in immediate and impending danger and to restore caregivers to their protective role and responsibility.

Safety Intervention System Framework: refers to the agency and program structure essential to producing and maintaining a quality safety intervention system and effective safety intervention. The framework is formed by seven agency operations: policy; procedure; staff development; information system; supervision; program management; and continuous quality improvement.

Safety Plan: refers to a written arrangement between caregivers and CPS that establishes how impending danger threats will be managed. The safety plan is implemented and active as long as impending danger threats exist and caregiver protective capacities are insufficient to assure a child is protected. The safety plan specifies what impending danger exist, how impending danger will be managed using what safety services; who will participate in those safety services; under what circumstances and agreements and in accordance with specification of time requirements, availability, accessibility and suitability of those involved. The safety plan is designed along a continuum of least to most intrusive intervention: in home safety options; a combination of in home and out of home safety options; and out of home safety options.

Safety Services: refers to actions; things provided, supervision identified as part of a safety plan occurring specifically for controlling or managing impending danger threats. Safety services are required to sufficiently address the identified impending danger threat to child safety. Safety services must control the impending danger threats immediately upon being put in place: safety services must have an immediate effect whenever they are delivered; safety services must do immediately what they are intended to do. Safety services are categorized according to the objective they seek to address within a continuing safety plan: behavior management; crisis management; social connection; and resource support;

Safety Service Providers: refers to anyone who participates as one responsible for safety management within a safety plan. Safety service providers can be professionals, para-professionals, lay persons, volunteers, foster parents, neighbors or relatives.

Safety Threshold: refers to the point at which a negative condition goes beyond being concerning and becomes dangerous to a child's safety. Negative family conditions that rise to the level of the safety threshold and become safety threats, are in essence negative circumstances and/or caregiver behaviors, emotions, etc. that negatively impact caregiver performance at a heightened degree and occur at a greater level of intensity.

Severity: refers to the effects of maltreatment that have already occurred and/or the potential for harsh effects based on the vulnerability of a child and the family behavior, condition or situation that is out of control. As far as danger is concerned, the safety threshold is consistent with substantial risk of harm or actual child abuse or neglect. Substantial risk of harm or actual harm includes such effects as defined in Montana law. The safety threshold is in line with family conditions that reasonably could result in substantial risk of harm or actual harm to a vulnerable child. If the risk is not substantial, it does not cross the threshold.

Threat to Child Safety: refers to specific conditions, behavior, emotion, perceptions, attitudes, intent, actions or situations within a family that represent the potential for actual, or substantial risk of physical or psychological harm to a child(ren). A threat to child safety may be classified as immediate and/or impending danger.

Unsafe: refers to the presence of immediate or impending danger to a child and insufficient caregiver protective capacities to assure that a child is protected.

Vulnerable Child: refers to a child who is dependent on others for protection and is exposed to circumstances that she or he is powerless to manage, and susceptible, accessible, and available to a threatening person and/or persons in authority over them. Vulnerability is judged according to age; physical and emotional development; ability to communicate needs; mobility; size and dependence and susceptibility. This definition includes all children who, for whatever reason, are not able to protect themselves or seek help from protective others.