

IMMEDIATE DANGER THREATS
Applied at First Contact & Throughout the FFA

Safety Threshold Criteria

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.

- **Immediate** (imminence) refers to the belief that family behaviors, conditions or situations will remain active or become active without delay resulting in or contributing to an event or circumstances that reasonably could result in severe harm to a vulnerable child now or within the next several days. Imminence is consistent with a degree of certainty or inevitability that danger and severe harm are possible, even likely outcomes without intervention.
- **Significant** (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.
- **Clearly 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. The connection of these family behaviors, conditions or situations to posing a danger to a child is evidenced in explicit, unambiguous ways. The criterion “observable” does not include suspicion, intuitive or gut feeling, difficulties in worker-family interactions, lack of cooperation, difficulties in obtaining information, or isolated, even provocative information considered exclusive of family behaviors, conditions, or situations.

Maltreatment

<i>Maltreating Now</i>	The parents' mistreatment of the child is occurring concurrent with the report. The maltreatment will typically be physical, verbal or sexual in nature. Neglect that is chronic may be occurring in the present sense, but does not necessarily meet the criterion of danger.
<i>Multiple Injuries</i>	Although it is acceptable to consider this as injuries on different parts of the body as in bruises to the arms and lower legs, its intent is more accurately related to different kinds of injuries, as in a serious burn and bruising to the arms.
<i>Face/Head</i>	This includes bruises, cuts, abrasions, swelling or any physical manifestation alleged to have occurred as a result of parental treatment of the child.
<i>Serious Injury</i>	Typically, this would include bone breaks, deep lacerations, burns, malnutrition, etc.
<i>Premeditated</i>	There must be information which supports that what has been alleged is associated with and a result of a deliberate, preconceived plan or thinking which the parent is responsible for and which preceded the maltreatment event.
<i>Multiple Victims</i>	This refers to the identification of more than one child who is being maltreated. There is no historical context here.
<i>History of Reports</i>	This refers to reports Child and Family Services have received on this family that may indicate a pattern of abuse/neglect occurring within the family. History alone is not a justification of safe or unsafe but is used in conjunction with other indicators of maltreatment.
<i>Life Threatening Living Arrangements</i>	This is based on specific information reported which indicates that a child's living situation is an immediate threat to his/her safety. This would include the most serious health circumstances: buildings capable of falling in, exposure to elements in bitter weather, fire hazards, exposed electrical wiring, guns/knives available, etc.
<i>Unexplained Injuries</i>	This refers to a serious injury which parents and others cannot or will not explain.
<i>Bizarre Cruelty</i>	This qualifies the maltreatment that has been alleged and usually

will require an interpretation. Such things as locking up children, torture, exaggerated emotional abuse, etc.

Accessible to the Maltreater

This refers to children who are in contact with the alleged maltreater *and* will likely be re-victimized if left in that environment, such as in sexual abuse cases where the alleged abuser is living in the home or has unsupervised access to the child.

Child

Parent's Viewpoint of Child Is Bizarre

This is the extreme, not just a negative attitude toward the child. It is consistent with the level of seeing the child as demon possessed.

Child Is Unsupervised or Alone for Extended Periods

Although this could involve an older child, to be identified as a safety threat it is more likely to be a younger child. The time of day, of course, is as important as is the length of time the child has been unsupervised. This only applies if the child is truly without care, not someone is caring for the child and complaining that the mom is supposed to be but isn't presently. Keep in mind the present time concept here. If the child was unsupervised last night but is not alone now, it is not an immediate safety threat.

Child Unable to Protect Self

This is like the influence above generally but will also include children who are older but may possess some incapacity.

Child Fearful/ Anxious

This does not refer to generalized fear or anxiety. Children who are described as being obviously afraid of: their present circumstance, the home situation, or a person because of a concern of personal threat would fit this influence. The condition(s) contributing to the child's fear is active, currently occurring, and an immediate concern of the child. Information would likely describe actual communication or emotional/physical manifestation from the child's knowledge or perception of their situation. It is reasonable to believe that the source of the child's fear could result in severe effects.

Child Needs Medical Attention

The medical care required must be significant enough that its absence could seriously affect the child's health and well-being. In other words, if children are not being given routine medical care, it may not necessitate an emergent response.

Parents Are Unable To Perform Parental Responsibilities

Parent

This only refers to those parental duties and responsibilities consistent with basic care or assuring safety. This is not associated with whether parents are effective parents generally, but whether their inability to provide basic duties leaves the child in a threatened state.

Bizarre Behaviors

This requires interpretation of the information referred beyond what the reporter might be saying. Unpredictable, incoherent, weird, outrageous, or totally inappropriate behaviors fit this influence.

Parents Described As Dangerous

Parents may be behaving in bizarre ways; however, this is intended to capture a more specific type of behavior specific to caregivers who are physically/verbally imposing and threatening, brandishing weapons, known to be dangerous and aggressive, currently behaving in attacking or aggressive ways, etc.

Parent Out of Control

To identify this safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that the caregiver's impulsive behavior, addictive behavior, compulsive behavior, depressive behavior, etc. cannot be control by the individual. Their actions or lack of actions may not be directed at the children, but may affect them in dangerous ways. The caregiver's lack of self-control places the children in jeopardy.

Caregivers Overtly Reject Intervention

This threat refers to situations where a caregiver refuses to see or speak with child welfare staff and/or to let child welfare staff see the child, is openly hostile or physically aggressive toward child welfare staff, refuses access to the home, hides child or refuses access to child.

Family

Family Isolated

This influence must be considered in relationship to other influences when assessing or deciding about response or emergency protection. This refers to both geographic and social isolation. Family isolation in itself is not a safety threat.

*Domestic Violence
Is occurring*

Refers to specific information suggesting that a caregiver's volatile emotions and tendency towards violence is a defining characteristic about how he or she behaves and/or reacts towards others. There is nothing in the family that counteracts the violence. Concern is heightened if family violence is accompanied by child maltreatment or child exposure to the violence. The family violence may have just occurred, is occurring, or will occur within a reasonable amount of time.

Family Will Flee

Qualifies if child maltreatment and possible safety threats are coupled with concerns about not having access to children. This includes transient families, homes which are not well established, families with limited possessions, etc.

Family Hides Child

This should be thought of in both overt and covert terms. Information which describes a child being physically restrained within the home or parents who avoid allowing others to have personal contact with their child can be considered. This may include passing a child around to other adults, relatives or different homes.

*Situation will/may
Change Quickly*

This may refer to changes in living environments, changes in household members (someone going to/returning from jail, tx, etc.).

Other

*Services
Inaccessible
or Unavailable*

This influence may be considered an immediate danger threat when considered in relation to other influences which demand access to services. For instance, a child who has a routine need for a particular kind of medical service which is a life threatening need and the service is inaccessible, an immediate danger circumstance may be apparent. This refers to specific deficiencies in parenting that must occur for the exceptional child to be safe. Exceptional includes physical and mental characteristics that result in a child being highly vulnerable and unable to protect or fend for him or herself.