

Child Protective Services: Investigation

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2104.17 Safety Assessment (Form 455A)

Safety Discussion

Assessing safety begins when a report is received. At intake, the decision is made of whether a report is assigned for investigation and, if assigned, whether it will be an immediate to twenty-four hour response or a five-day response. This decision is based on all available knowledge of a child's current circumstances and available family history. In addition to information in the report, a check of county files, SUCCESS, IDSONline and its links may provide additional information that helps determine the intake decision. Knowledge of what situations require an immediate to twenty-four-hour response (see 2103.15 and 2103.16) provides the intake worker with additional clues about a child's safety. Using **all** available information, the intake worker and supervisor make one of the following decisions, based on how safe a child is perceived to be at that moment:

- Circumstances require an immediate to twenty-four hour response;
- Circumstances require a five day response;
- The report does not contain the components of a report; however, a check of history verifies previous reports. A decision may be made, based on risk, to assign the report for investigation (see 2103.18);
- The report does not contain the components of a report; however, the family may benefit by a referral to available preventive services.
- The report does not contain the components of a report, and there is no identified family need, at this time, for referral to preventive services.

The assigned case manager (at both investigation and ongoing) must always maintain awareness of a child's present safety and of any changes within the family that may make that child less safe or unsafe. At any time safety issues are identified, steps must immediately be developed to ensure that the child is safe or conditionally safe. The Safety Assessment (Form 455A) is the tool used to identify safety concerns (Assessment of Behaviors and Conditions). This section evaluates specific safety concerns that, if found to exist, alert the case manager that the child is probably unsafe and that development of a plan of action for ensuring the child's safety is required. The Reasonable Efforts Checklist section helps identify any available resources that, when in place, may determine whether a child can remain safely in the home. The Safety Plan (Form 455B) is the tool used to respond to each identified safety concern and the steps that must be taken to ensure a child's safety (see 2104.18).

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A Safety Assessment is always required at investigation; however, safety is assessed throughout the life of the case. Any change in circumstances (e.g., new report received, new persons in the household, a case plan reassessment that indicates risk level is higher, etc.) may require a new Safety Assessment to determine how new conditions affect a child's safety and whether current plans are meeting changed circumstances.

Requirement

Be alert to the safety of each child at all contacts with the child and family.

Evaluate safety for each child who is part of a CPS investigation. [Exception: a safety assessment is not completed when the alleged maltreater is a day care provider, foster parent, school employee or an agency standing *in loco parentis*.] Any child who was not part of the original report but is found at risk as the investigation progresses, requires a safety assessment. Use the Safety Assessment (Form 455A) to document this evaluation.

When evaluating safety, it is necessary to:

- **Observe** on a child the location, pattern, seriousness and number of marks and document observations. Observe and document conditions in the home that make it unsafe for the child's basic needs. Observe and document actions of parents and other caretakers that place a child in an unsafe environment.
- **Interview all persons** who were present or who have knowledge of the reported incident. In addition to alleged maltreaters and other persons in the home, this includes interviewing examining physicians, emergency response persons, law enforcement officers and others with knowledge of the reported maltreatment. Get each person's explanations of events and injuries. Are explanations of allegations, as given by alleged maltreaters and others in the household or who have caretaking responsibilities, consistent? Do explanations change during the investigation? How do they differ? Document all information obtained from all sources and specifically include how it supports or refutes reported allegations and other concerns discovered during the investigation;
- **Visit and carefully observe** the location where reported incidents occurred and determine whether explanations of events could have happened as explained by alleged maltreaters and others with knowledge

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of the situation. Are explanations consistent with what is observed and with the explanations given by others interviewed, or do explanations differ from what is observed and interviews with others? Describe in documentation all inconsistencies. Document all responses and provide a description of the site;

- **Document and respond to all** additional child safety issues (not reported) that are identified during the investigation.
- **Contact** additional collaterals, as needed, for information to support or refute all explanations given by alleged maltreaters (see 2104.21). Document all contacts and findings; and,
- **Document** observations and/or knowledge of other events that affect the safety of a child in the home of the parent/alleged maltreater.
- **Document** all above collected information on the Investigative Conclusion (form 454) and Contact Sheets (form 452).

Evidence collected in the preceding evaluation is used to determine the validity of a report. Although it provides information about a child's safety, it is not the only requirement for determining a child's safety. Each of the following questions explore factors about behaviors and conditions, and each must be answered by observing home conditions, getting answers about specific relationships between children and parents or other caretakers.

- **How does the parent behave toward the child:** is any violence observed? Describe.
- **How does the parent describe the child:** is child discussed in negative terms? Describe.
- **Has the parent caused any serious harm to the child or made any threats?** Describe.
- **Are parents' explanations of alleged maltreatment incidents involving the child inconsistent?** Describe.
- **Does the parent cooperate by allowing the case manager to have access to the child?** If not, describe any problems.
- **Does the parent have an adequate plan for supervision of the child?** Are **all** involved parties in agreement with the plan? Describe plan.

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- **Does the parent have the means available to meet the child's basic needs and is the parent doing this?** This includes food, clothing, shelter, medical and educational needs. Describe any problems.
- **Has the parent previously seriously maltreated a child?** Do current parenting actions demonstrate that the parent is actively and effectively striving to avoid previous problems? Describe.
- **Does child appear to be fearful?** What observations lead to this conclusion? Describe.
- **Are any hazards observed in the physical living conditions that would be hazardous to children in the home.** Describe what has been observed.
- **Is there any suspicion of child sexual abuse?** Discuss what knowledge or observations lead to this suspicion?
- **Does a parent's known or suspected use of alcohol and/or other substances affect parenting of children in the home?** Describe observations and knowledge of this and how the care of children is affected.
- **Is there either suspected or documented domestic violence in the home or other circumstances that affect the safety of a child?** Describe observations and knowledge of this and how the care of children is affected.

Continue the consideration, when exploring these **behaviors and conditions**, of whether the child's circumstances are consistent with the explanation of events.

Based on a discussion with the supervisor of all the information obtained from the above interviews and observations, determine whether a report of maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or emotional abuse) is substantiated. How does each new piece of information affect what is already known about a child's safety? As new information is collected, does current safety planning continue to control for a child's safety, or are new questions raised that suggest additional safety planning is required?

Use all known information about a situation when completing the Safety Assessment (Form 455A). Refer to the definitions in the form instructions when completing the **Assessment of Behaviors and Conditions** section of the Safety Assessment checklist. Consider all caretakers in the home to each child as each behavior or condition's presence or absence is determined. Each behavior or condition that is present is a **safety factor**.

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A **safety response** that ensures protection of children is required for each identified safety factor. The safety responses are the seven choices of the **Reasonable Efforts Checklist**.

Make a **Safety Decision**, based on the availability of identified resources (safety responses) from the Reasonable Efforts Checklist that will provide controls for making the child conditionally safe.

When there are no resources available to make a child conditionally safe, the safety decision for that child is "Unsafe". **Immediately involve law enforcement and/or the Juvenile Court when a safety plan (see 2104.18) cannot be established to ensure the child's safety in the home.**

The supervisor and case manager discuss in conference the final safety assessment. The supervisor signs and dates the Safety Assessment (form 455A), indicating agreement with the plan for each child.

Complete the Safety Assessment (Form 455A) **before** completing the Safety Plan (Form 455B).

Procedures/Practice Issues

Always be alert to any conditions, not reported, that are observed/discovered during the investigation. A reporter often sees a child in isolated circumstances and has little or no knowledge of the family's living situation or of other children in the home. A report may indicate bruises on one child, but this may be only a small part of what the investigating case manager finds after initiation of the investigation. In addition to substantiating or not substantiating the bruising, the case manager may discover other safety concerns, not reported, that require an immediate expansion of the investigation. Thus, the scope of a report can expand tremendously when the investigator takes into consideration all previous history plus observations and findings from the current investigation.

The Reasonable Efforts portion of Form 455A helps identify any controlling interventions that, if available, will ensure a child conditional safety. Presentation of a copy of this completed Reasonable Efforts Checklist to the Juvenile Court is part of the documentation for meeting court requirements when filing a deprivation complaint (see 2102.4).