

CONNECTIONS Tip Sheet

CPS Safety Assessment – Practice Guidelines

The purpose of a Safety Assessment is to ascertain whether there are any safety factors currently present and to determine if any children are likely to be in immediate danger of serious harm. Based on the information gathered, it is then determined what interventions, if any, need to be initiated or maintained to provide appropriate protection for the child(ren). The Safety Assessment begins with the caseworker's first review of a report of suspected child abuse/maltreatment and initiation of the investigation within 24 hours of receipt of the report. Subsequent contacts are made with the reporter/source, as well as relevant collateral contacts.

Safety is continuously assessed throughout the life of a CPS case. Safety must be documented at the following intervals and under the following circumstances:

- Within seven (7) days of the receipt of an Initial or Subsequent report of suspected child abuse/maltreatment
- Within 24 hours of the receipt of a Fatality Report, if there are surviving siblings
- Within seven (7) days of the completion and submission of the investigation conclusion for approval
- As part of the Family Assessment and Service Plan (FASP) completed on all cases with a Program Choice of "Protective" or when on-going child welfare issues require the continued assessment of safety

Safety Factors

The Safety Assessment should reflect the identification of any safety factors present or impending in the child/family behaviors and/or circumstances. Safety factors are identified based upon the worker's assessment of the information gathered during the investigation. Information is gleaned through interviews with the family, reporter/source and collateral contacts, as well as careful observation of the home and of parent/child behaviors and interactions. For a child in foster care or alternative placement, this means assessing the child's home of origin and the caretaker(s) to whom s/he is expected to return. Safety factors identify behaviors and conditions that may exist in varying degrees and frequency, some of which may place the child(ren) in immediate danger of serious harm.

Select one or more Safety Factors from the list on the **Safety Factors** tab on the *Safety Assessment* window in CONNECTIONS as they apply and record comments describing the presence of identified/selected Safety Factors.

Consider the following guidelines when assessing for the presence of safety factors:

- Is the circumstance, condition or behavior currently present, likely to occur in the immediate future, or has it occurred in the recent past?
- Safety factors should be viewed as "red flag alerts" due to present identified circumstances, conditions or behaviors.
- Are there any safety factors identified that pose a threat to the child's safety, but do not present *immediate* danger of serious harm to the child?
Note: *Safety* refers to the immediate danger of serious harm; *risk* refers to the likelihood of future abuse or maltreatment.
- What is the effect of the combination of two or more safety factors?
- To what degree does the presence of a safety factor or multiple safety factors increase the level of danger for the child?

Assessment of Immediate Danger of Serious Harm

If any Safety Factors are identified/selected, determine which factors place the child(ren) in immediate danger of serious harm by selecting the Safety Factors from the Immediate Danger list at the bottom of the **Safety Factors** tab. Record comments explaining how the selected Safety Factors place the child(ren) in immediate danger of serious harm.

Consider the following guidelines when assessing for immediate danger:

- Immediate danger of serious harm implies present or impending threat(s) to a child's life or health as a result of acts of commission or omission by the child's parent(s) or caretaker(s).
- *Immediate* implies that something is currently happening, is about to happen (impending), or has just happened and is likely to recur.
- Danger of serious harm implies the child(ren) has sustained, or is likely to sustain, serious physical injury or death, sexual abuse, and/or emotional damage.

Mitigating Strengths and Resources

The **Mitigating Strengths/Resources** tab provides a narrative to record the specific family strengths or circumstances and/or family, neighborhood or community resources available that serve to mitigate (lessen) or address safety concerns for the child(ren). Safety factors that pose an immediate danger of serious harm require controlling interventions, *unless* there are mitigating strengths, resources or circumstances present or in place that will directly support the parent/caretaker's ability to address the child's safety needs in the home.

The worker must be able to clearly describe how these protecting factors and/or resources directly protect the child(ren) from the identified safety factors that would otherwise pose an immediate danger of serious harm to the child(ren).

Safety Decisions

A Safety Decision is a conclusion made regarding the safety of the child in a home. This decision is based upon the assessment of immediate danger of serious harm; the presence of family strengths or circumstances and/or family, neighborhood or community resources that mitigate (lessen) or address safety concerns; and the safety interventions that have been initiated.

Only one Safety Decision may be selected in CONNECTIONS; select the Safety Decision that applies to the most serious circumstance(s) and child(ren) safety needs.

The following Safety Decisions are available on the **Safety Decision** tab:

1. No safety factors were identified at this time. Based on currently available information, there are no child(ren) likely to be in immediate danger of serious harm.
2. One or more safety factors are present, however, these factors do not place a child in immediate danger of serious harm and/or the existence of family strengths, resources or other mitigating circumstances utilized (prior to DSS involvement) has effectively removed the threat of immediate danger for the child(ren).
3. One or more safety factors are present, which place a child in immediate danger of serious harm, and controlling safety interventions have been initiated (by DSS). Based on the controlling safety interventions, the child(ren) will remain in the home at this time.
4. One or more safety factors are present, which place a child's life or health in imminent danger and removal to foster care or alternative placement (or continued placement) is the only controlling safety intervention possible for one or more of the children.
5. One or more safety factors are present, which place a child in immediate danger of serious harm, but caretaker(s) has refused access to the child or fled, or child's whereabouts are unknown. Appropriate legal/investigative actions are being taken.

The following must be recorded in CONNECTIONS when selecting the appropriate Safety Decision:

- At least one Safety Factor must be selected before selecting the appropriate Safety Decision; this includes selecting "No Safety Factors Identified" when appropriate.
- Workers must record comments for each Safety Factor selected.

- If Safety Decision #2 is selected, the Mitigating Strengths/Resources narrative must be recorded.
- If Safety Decision #3 is selected, at least one Safety Intervention must be selected.
- If Safety Decision #4 is selected, the *Placement* window opens automatically and information must be recorded. For any child(ren) remaining in the home, record the protecting factors that allow the child(ren) to remain safely in the home.

Safety Interventions

During the course of an investigation, safety interventions are initiated or continued to control the safety factors that are present from creating an immediate danger of serious harm to the child(ren). To document the safety interventions that have been put in place, select one or more Safety Interventions from the list on the **Safety Interventions** tab, indicating which intervening action has been taken and/or continues to support child safety.

If one or more Safety Interventions are selected, comments must be recorded. Comments should explain how each selected Safety Intervention specifically controls or eliminates safety factors present, thereby providing for the immediate health and safety of the child(ren).

Consider the following:

- Safety interventions focus on specific safety factors that pose a danger or immediate threat of serious harm to the child(ren).
- Safety interventions employed must be capable of protecting the child(ren) from the unsafe situation(s) by controlling the circumstances, conditions or behaviors causing the child(ren) to be unsafe.
- Safety interventions are not expected to be rehabilitative in nature, however, may in the long term produce such an added benefit.
- If Safety Decision #3 was selected on the **Safety Decision** tab, workers must select at least one Safety Intervention other than "Placement – Foster Care" or "Placement – Alternate Caregiver."



Refer to the *CONNECTIONS Step-by-Step Guide: Training for CPS Workers* and/or the *CONNECTIONS Case Management Step-by-Step Guide* for more detailed information on recording information in CONNECTIONS. These documents are available on the OCFS CONNECTIONS intranet site.

If you need assistance performing any of the functions on this guide, please talk to your supervisor or contact the NYS Enterprise Help Desk. The Help Desk is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

You can contact the Help Desk at:

**1-800-NYS-1323
(1-800-697-1323)**