

Decision Points in Child Welfare (*handout 1*)

1) Report of Maltreatment received by Child Welfare

- a) Sufficient info gathered to decide if **screened in** for initial assessment (investigation) or **screened out** and closed (referral to community possible)
- b) If screened in, using information to **determine what safety issues are possibly present, a response time (for face to face contact) is assigned**

2) An initial assessment (investigation) commences, with face to face contact occurring within the assigned response time. By the end of the initial assessment, the following decisions are made:

a) Are there current volatile threats to the child's safety?

- i) **If so, secure protection** of the child before continuing the remainder of the assessment
- ii) In securing protection, decide if court intervention is necessary to sanction the protective action
- iii) In securing protection, **assure that any placement resource used for a child is safe**
- iv) **Establish visitation** plan

- b) **Gather information to understand the family:** any maltreatment and its surrounding circumstances; the functioning of the children; the functioning of the adults in the home; the general parenting and the disciplinary approaches of the adults. This information allows the following decisions to be made:

3) Did maltreatment occur (the substantiation decision)?

4) Are there immediate needs for the family that must be met (electricity, food, etc)?

5) Are there impending threats to the children's safety?

- a) If not, the children are safe; if an earlier protective action was taken, terminate that action

b) If impending threats are present, consider how to manage those threats:

- i) **Can the family manage the threats themselves**, without agency intervention because a household adult, not the source of the threat, has the protective capacity to control the threats?

ii) If no one in the household can control the threats, **can an agency managed in-home safety plan sufficiently control the threats:**

- (1) Gauge the level of effort needed by examining how often, what times, how intensely threats occur
- (2) Determine the cooperation and capacity of the adults to follow through with the tasks and actions required through an in-home plan
- (3) Determine what types of tasks and actions will be needed to sufficiently control the threats
- (4) Determine who will carry out tasks for the in-home plan, their ability, reliability to sustain the effort; when exactly people will carry out tasks

iii) **If an in-home plan is not sufficient, feasible and/or sustainable, implement an out of home safety plan**

- (1) If the child is placed out of the home, **establish the conditions that must be present in the home in order for the child to be returned home;** these are conditions and circumstances that would allow for a sufficient, feasible, and sustainable in-home safety plan to be implemented
- (2) **Establish the visitation schedule**
- (3) **Assure that the placement resource used for the child is safe**

6) Is **court action necessary** to sanction either an in-home or out of home safety plan?

7) Regardless of the substantiation, safety and court decisions, **should this case remain open with the agency?**

8) **If the case remains open, what are the issues the family experiences that influence why there are:**

- a) **Safety threats**
- b) **Insufficient protective capacities to control any threats**
- c) **Other needs on the part of the adults that place the children at risk of future maltreatment**

9) What are the characteristics of this family that are associated with **low/high likelihood for change (these issues will influence concurrent planning)?**

- 10) What are the strategies that should be implemented to reduce safety threats and increase protective capacities (the case plan)?**
- 11) What types of services and providers can assist with carrying out those strategies (the case plan)?**
- 12) What types of services and providers can assist in meeting the children's specific needs (the case plan)?**
- 13) What types of services and providers can assist in meeting the needs of placement providers involved in caring for the child (the case plan)?**
- 14) What type of progress is being made?**
 - a) Reduction of behaviors/conditions associated with safety threats**
 - b) Increase of behaviors/conditions associated with protective capacity**
 - c) Favorable changes in the children's condition/needs**
 - d) The placement resource for the child (if applicable) remains safe**
 - e) Change in circumstances to allow an out of home safety plan to transition to a sufficient, feasible and sustainable in-home safety plan while treatment/change continues**
 - f) Continued presence of family conditions associated with low/high likelihood for change (implications for a permanency plan change; concurrent planning needs)**
 - i) Carry out appropriate legal tasks for a change of permanency plan**
 - ii) Assure appropriate resource availability and preparation for an alternate permanent resource**
- 15) When the family can manage safety of the children on their own (i.e., there are no threats or there is sufficient protective capacity that can be sustained without agency or court), or when an alternate permanent plan for the child has been established, finalized, and is secure, terminate services**