

Safety Framework Practice Model for Child Welfare

ND Children & Family Services Division

Child safety is the primary focus of the Safety Framework Practice Model (SFPM) and attention is provided to children who may be unsafe based on the presence of uncontrolled danger threats. The following definitions are used when making the determination whether a child is safe or unsafe (*Roe Lund, Therese, MSSW & Renne, Jennifer, JD, Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys, American Bar Association and ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., 2009*).

A **safe child** is one in which no threats of danger exist within the family, OR parents/caregivers possess sufficient protective capacity to manage any threats, OR the child is not vulnerable to the existing danger.



An **unsafe child** is one in which threats of danger exist in the family, AND the child is vulnerable to such threats, AND parents/caregivers have insufficient protective capacities to manage or control the threats.



SFPM uses standardized tools and decision-making criteria to assess family behaviors, conditions, and circumstances, including individual child vulnerabilities and parent/caregiver protective capacities, to make **well-founded child safety decisions**. The practice model's approach to safety assessment and management recognizes that issues concerned with child safety change as the child welfare's intervention proceeds.

Caseworkers must consider the following safety determination analysis questions to determine the least intrusive and most appropriate level of effort for controlling and managing the identified danger threats. If the answers to all questions 1-7 are **YES** the use of an in-home safety plan is indicated OR the child is safe and the case can be closed. If the answers to any of questions 1-7 are **NO** the use of an out-of-home safety plan is indicated.



1. Do the child's primary parents have a suitable place to reside where an in-home safety plan can be considered?
2. Is there confidence in the sustainability of the safety plan in the current location of the parents?



3. Is the home environment calm and consistent enough to allow safety services in accordance with the safety plan, and for people participating in the safety plan to be in the home safely without disruption?



4. Are the parents cooperative with child welfare services and willing to participate in the development of an in-home safety plan?
5. Are the parents willing to allow safety services and actions to be provided in accordance with the safety plan?
6. Do the parents possess the necessary ability to participate in an in-home safety plan and do what they must do as identified in an in-home safety plan?




7. Are there sufficient resources within the family or community to perform the safety services necessary to manage the identified impending danger threats?

The caseworker and family determine what **protective action** is necessary to control the identified danger and who, if needed, will serve as the responsible adults to protect the child when danger threats are present or likely to be present. Safety Framework respects the **constitutional rights** of each family member and utilizes the least intrusive intervention to keep a child safe. Below is a list of interventions that progress from least restrictive to most restrictive.

Determine the least restrictive option possible that can sufficiently manage the danger threat to the child:

- The threatening person will leave the home.
- The protective parent and child will leave the home and go to a safe environment.
- A responsible adult is in the home at pre-determined specific times.
- A responsible adult will routinely monitor the home.
- A responsible adult will move into the home seven days per week, 24 hours per day.
- The child will be cared for outside the home periodically.
- The child will live with someone in the family network part-time.
- The child will live with someone in the family network for seven days per week, 24 hours per day.
- The child will be placed in the temporary custody of the Human Service Zone.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE



MOST RESTRICTIVE

SFPM involves multiple assessments of child safety throughout the life of the child welfare case, moving seamlessly from intake into the child protective services (CPS) assessment, and then into case management (ongoing services).

SFPM supports **change-focused** case planning, ongoing **safety management**, and **timely reunification and/or case closure** when children are in safe, permanent homes. As the child welfare intervention proceeds, SFPM's focus shifts to more fully support a reduction in safety threats and bolstering parent/caregiver protective capacities through intervention assessment and strategies.

SFPM supports the use of **child and family team (CFT) meetings** that support case planning and meaningful change within the parents' capacity to protect their children. CFT meetings are held at least every 90 days and are intended to advise and engage the family to develop and accomplish case plan goals and change strategies. CFT meetings increase collaboration and engagement of the family around decisions about a child's safety, permanency, and well-being. They are a tool to increase participation in, and commitment to, the activities, services, and supports needed to accomplish the case plan goals.

When the family has made **significant progress** in achieving the expected outcomes of the case; child safety is being sustained in the child's home, and/or the safety threats have been eliminated or mitigated; and the child's safety can be sustained without the ongoing intervention of safety service providers the case is nearing closure. **Case closure** is more about parents sustaining change/enhanced capacity to be protective of their children and less about completing a checklist of services. The case manager is responsible for managing child safety until the case is closed.