

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P. O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: CHILDREN'S DIVISION AND CONTRACTED STAFF  
FROM: JOANIE ROGERS, INTERIM DIRECTOR  
SUBJECT: STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING® (SDM)  
SAFETY ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to notify team members of the introduction of the SDM Safety Assessment that will be implemented on December 30, 2021, and an update to the Family Risk Assessment Tool policy.

The SDM Safety Assessment tool assists staff in assessing whether a child is likely to be in imminent danger of serious harm that may require protective intervention. The SDM Safety assessment is required for all Investigations, Assessments, Newborn Crisis Assessments, and Out of Home Investigations (OHI) reports. The SDM Safety Assessment will not be required for Non-caretaker Referrals, Preventative Service Referrals, and for now, Juvenile Assessments. The SDM Safety Assessment may also be referred to as a "safety assessment" throughout policy.

The SDM Safety Assessment defines the following:

- Caregiver: An adult, parent, or guardian in the household who provides care and supervision for the child.
- Family: Parents, adults fulfilling the parental role, guardians, children, and others related by ancestry, adoption, or marriage; or as defined by the family itself.
- Household: All persons who have significant in-home contact with the child, including those who have a familial or intimate relationship with any person in the home. This may include persons who have an intimate relationship with a parent in the household (boyfriend or girlfriend) but may not physically live in the home or a relative where the legal parent allows the relative authority in parenting and child caregiving decisions.

## **Types of SDM Safety Assessments**

There are three types of SDM Safety Assessments:

- Initial—Every Investigation, Assessment, Newborn Crisis Assessment or OHI report should have at least one initial safety assessment, completed during the first face-to-face contact with at least one child victim in the household where there are allegations. However, if there are allegations in two households within a single report, there may be two initial safety assessments.
- Review/update--A reassessment of any additional as well as any secondary households. The frequency of safety reassessments is described in Section 1, Ch. 5.4.2. There may be review/update safety assessment completed if the safety of all children was not verified during the initial safety assessment/contact.
- Closing—When the initial safety assessment was determined to be “Unsafe” or “Safe with Plan”, a review/update safety assessment must be completed prior to closing as a case should not be closed if safety threats are still present in a household.

## **SDM Safety Assessment Decision Outcomes**

There are three outcomes of the SDM Safety Assessment:

1. Safe—No safety threats were identified and there are no children likely to be in imminent danger of serious harm and no safety intervention is needed.
2. Safe with Plan—One or more safety threats are present but based on an assessment of protective capacities, an Immediate Safety Intervention Plan and/or Temporary Alternative Placement Agreement (TAPA) can be used to control the threat.
3. Unsafe—One or more safety threats are present. An Immediate Safety Intervention Plan or TAPA were considered, but would have been insufficient to control the threat(s). Protective custody must be requested. Staff will submit a copy of the “Unsafe” SDM Safety Assessment with the Juvenile Office Referral (CD-235).

## **Completing the SDM Safety Assessment**

### **When**

For a new Child Abuse/Neglect Report, the SDM Safety Assessment is completed following the initial face-to-face contact with all child victim(s). The safety assessment should be entered into FACES within seventy-two (72) hours of the report date.

Staff should attempt to see all children (victim and non-victim) per policy timeframes as well as interview the parents within 72 hours of the report being alerted. If all

victim and non-victim children are not present upon initial contact and verification of safety, staff must complete a review/update safety assessment when the other children have been seen and verification of safety has been completed.

The SDM Safety Assessment is completed on households. If a child's parents do not live together, the child may be considered a member of two (2) households. If the alleged perpetrator is not a member of the child's household, but there is a failure to protect allegation of the child's caregiver, complete a safety assessment for the child's caregiver's household.

An initial safety assessment or review/update safety assessment must be completed in the following circumstances:

- Upon initial contact and verification of safety of all child(ren) victims on an Investigation, Family Assessment, Newborn Crisis Assessment or OHI report;
- If an Immediate Safety Intervention Plan was initiated, a review/update safety assessment must be completed every ten (10) days until the child(ren) are considered "safe" before a report can be closed;
- If a TAPA is developed and FCS opened, complete a review/update safety assessment within ten (10) days or at the initial TDM meeting and every thirty (30) days at the ongoing TDM meetings thereafter until the TAPA is terminated;
- If the initial SDM Safety Assessment is marked "Unsafe" or "Safe with Plan", a review/update safety assessment must be completed and the status must be "Safe" prior to closing a report unless a FCS and/or AC case is opened. This is entered into FACES as a review/update of the original safety assessment;
- If a FCS case is opened on the family with a 'Safe' SDM Safety Assessment status at the time of case opening, complete a safety review/update safety assessment within thirty (30) days of case opening, if there is a new safety threat, and/or prior to closing to the case;
- If there is a child(ren) in AC and there are remaining children in the home, a review/update safety assessment must be completed within 30 days of case opening, if there is a new safety threat and/or prior to closing the case of the remaining children in the home. If at any time the remaining children are deemed unsafe in the home, a JO referral will be made;
- Prior to the recommendation of a trial home visit for a child in AC, a review/update safety assessment must be completed on the caregiver's home and the safety assessment status be "Safe";
- If there is an open FCS or AC case, a safety assessment must be completed prior to closing as a case should not be closed if safety threats are still present in a household;

- Any open referrals or cases in which changing circumstances require a safety assessment or review/update safety assessment due to a change in the family's circumstance, a change in information known about the family, or a change in the ability of safety interventions to mitigate safety threats.

Workers should always be on the alert to changes in the family, new dynamics, the interaction of multiple threats of danger and other "red flags" that indicate that the threat to the safety of a child is no longer manageable. If such safety threats occur, a new safety assessment should be completed.

A Social Service Supervisor or above has ability to override the safety decision and close a report in the following conditions:

- If a FCS or AC case is not opened and the safety decision is "Unsafe" or "Safe with Plan";  
Examples:
  - The safety decision is "Safe with Plan" and it has been determined that the report should be closed due to no further engagement from the family;
  - The safety decision is "Unsafe" and the Juvenile Office has refused custody. It has been determined that the report should be closed as nothing further can be done.

### **SDM Safety Assessment in FACES**

On December 30, 2021, updates to FACES will be implemented to include the SDM Safety Assessment. The SDM Safety Assessment link is found on the Investigation/Assessment (IA) Home Page and will be available from the IA Monitoring Screen, Family Centered Services (FCS) Monitoring Screen, and Alternative Care (AC) Monitoring Screen.

On December 30<sup>th</sup>, all reports will require a safety assessment to be completed. This includes all reports prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> that are still open. Staff are to complete the SDM Safety Assessment tool in FACES based on their initial safety assurance of the child(ren).

- If no safety threats were identified and the safety decision was safe, the SDM Safety Assessment should reflect a "Safe" finding in the SDM Safety Assessment screen in FACES.
- If a safety threat was identified and an Immediate Safety Intervention Plan was made with the family, the SDM Safety Assessment should reflect a "Safe with Plan" finding in the SDM Safety Assessment screen in FACES.
- If a "Safe with Plan" finding was chosen, a Review/Update safety assessment should be completed in the SDM Safety Assessment screen in FACES prior to closing the report.
- If a safety decision was "Unsafe", the SDM Safety Assessment should reflect an "Unsafe" finding in SDM Safety Assessment screen in FACES.

## Training

Training is currently on-going throughout December. All investigators must sign up for the training before implementation of the safety assessment on December 30, 2021. A link has been added in the Reference and Resource Documents below that will provide a walk-through of entering the SDM Safety Assessment in FACES. Staff are encouraged to watch this walk-through prior to training.

## Family Risk Assessment Tool (CD-14E)

The Family Risk Assessment tool will no longer be required at the Chief Investigator 72 hour supervisor consult. The Risk Assessment will be required to be completed by the investigator prior to the submission of the report for approval. The Risk Assessment should assist in determining safety and risk to the child and not solely used in decision making on whether to open a case. An additional supervisor consult is not required, but may be needed to help determine case decisions.

<b>NECESSARY ACTION</b>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Review this memorandum with all Children's Division staff.</li><li>2. Review revised Child Welfare Manual chapters as indicated below.</li><li>3. All questions should be cleared through normal supervisory channels and directed to:</li></ol>	
<b>PDS CONTACT</b> <u>Cari Pointer</u> <a href="mailto:Cari.A.Pointer@dss.mo.gov">Cari.A.Pointer@dss.mo.gov</a>	<b>MANAGER CONTACT</b> <u>Kara Wilcox</u> <a href="mailto:Kara.B.Wilcox-Bauer@dss.mo.gov">Kara.B.Wilcox-Bauer@dss.mo.gov</a>
<b>POLICY:</b> <a href="#">Section 1, Ch. 9.1.2.2 Monitoring of the Immediate Safety Intervention Plan (CD-263);</a> <a href="#">Section 1, Ch. 9.1.3.5 Team Decision Making (TDM) Meetings and Section 1, Ch. 9.1.3.6 TAPA Monitoring Requirements;</a> <a href="#">Section 1, Ch. 9.1.2.4 Termination of an Immediate Safety Intervention Plan (CD-263) and Section 1, Ch. 9.1.3.11 When the Juvenile Officer Declines a Children's Division Referral (CD-235);</a>	
<b>FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS</b>	
<b>REFERENCE DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES</b> <a href="https://dssintranet.mo.gov/dss-childrens-division/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/12/SDMSA-Walkthrough.mp4">https://dssintranet.mo.gov/dss-childrens-division/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/12/SDMSA-Walkthrough.mp4</a>	
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