

Number
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Date
February 19, 2025

Of interest to
County Directors
Social Services Supervisors and
Staff
Tribal Agencies

Action/due date
Please read information and
prepare for implementation.

Expiration date
February 19, 2025

Updated Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Policy and Procedures Manual

Topic

Notice of publication of the updated Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Policy and Procedures manual.

Purpose

Provide updated language and revisions to the SDM Safety Assessment utilized in child protection cases.

Contact

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Signed



Rebecca St. George
Assistant Commissioner, Child Safety and Permanency

Terminology notice

The terminology used to describe people we serve has changed over time. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) supports the use of "People First" language.

I. Background

The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (department) partnered with Evident Change and a diverse group of stakeholders to revise the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment Policy and Procedures manual. This comprehensive update involved a dedicated safety assessment redesign workgroup to ensure that the SDM Safety Assessment reflects current best practices in child welfare and addresses any inequities in the assessment process. The updated safety assessment tool is now available in SSIS.

A. Purpose of SDM Safety Assessment

The safety assessment helps assess whether a child is likely to be in immediate danger of serious physical harm that may require a safety intervention. This decision is based on present and immediate safety factors, not risk factors. The safety assessment must be completed in all child protection Family Assessments and Family Investigations within 72 hours.

II. SDM Safety Assessment updates

Key updates include:

- factors influencing child vulnerability
- combined safety factors
- safety factor definition expansion
- safety response section that includes complicating factors and protective capacities

A. Updates to factors influencing child vulnerability

The following child vulnerability factors were removed in the 2025 version:

- repeated victimization of child
- male caregiver provides unsupervised care to child under 3 years of age

The other child vulnerability factors were changed to the following:

- age 0 to 5 years
- diminished developmental/cognitive capacity (e.g., developmental delay, nonverbal)
- significant diagnosed medical or mental health disorder
- isolated with limited community visibility
- diminished physical capacity (e.g., non-ambulatory, limited use of limbs)

B. Updates to safety factors

The following safety factors were removed in the 2025 version:

- 1. Caregiver's current behavior is violent or out of control.
- 8. Child fears caregiver(s), other family members, or other people living in or having access to the home.
- 11. Caregiver's drug or alcohol use seriously affects their ability to supervise, protect, or care for the child.

These safety factors were removed because they relate to multiple factors and should be considered when assessing any safety factor.

C. Updates to safety response section

The safety assessment tool's safety response section was updated to include complicating factors and protective capacities. Complicating factors are conditions or behaviors that create greater barriers to safety, permanency, and well-being, but do not constitute safety factors on their own. These are research-based risk factors. Protective capacities are caregiver characteristics that have a direct impact on child safety.

Please refer to the updated [SDM Safety Assessment Policy and Procedures Manual](#) for full details about the tool's changes.

III. Technical assistance provided on implementation of updated SDM Safety Assessment

For general child protection safety-related questions, local welfare agency staff may contact the Child Safety and Family Preservation unit at dcyf.csp.safety@state.mn.us.

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This information is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities by calling (651) 431-4660 (voice) or by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency's ADA coordinator.