



Risk Assessment and Risk Re-Assessment April 2010 Practice Bulletin



Introduction: In child protective services, it is critical for staff to understand the differences between conditions in a family that create risk of maltreatment and conditions that create threats to child safety. Safety and risk are distinct elements and use different tools to identify key elements. While risk factors and safety threats describe family conditions, they differ in quality, degree, presentation, and timing.

Safety defined: Safety threats refer to present or impending danger from maltreatment. These threats require immediate action. A child's safety is assessed during the first contact with the child. If a safety threat exists, strategies are identified to control the threat, supplement the caregiver's protective capacity, or reduce the child's vulnerability. This approach is called safety planning. If a child cannot be maintained safely in the home through safety planning, the child is removed from that caregiver.

Risk defined: Risk refers to the probability or likelihood a child will suffer maltreatment in the future. The identification of risk helps determine the focus of the change process. Risk factors identify what needs to change for a family to be successful. A family case plan identifies and addresses the risk factors that increase the likelihood of future maltreatment. Future maltreatment could occur within weeks or months.

Risk and Case Planning: The first assessment of risk is during the Child Protective Services (CPS) Assessment. The information gained through the formal Risk Assessment is one of three criteria, which determine who is served and what, if any, services are needed. This

information, in addition to the risk reassessment process and the assessment of the family's functioning, guides the focus and services for the family.

The Child Protective Worker (CPW) and the Case Manager discuss identified risk factors when the case transfers to the Case Manager. This begins the case planning process. These risk factors guide the initial family case plan development. Best practice includes the participation of the family and all team members at these meetings.

The family's case plan reflects the relationship between identified needs and the goals, tasks, interventions and services used to reduce or control the risk factors. Case plans provide the road map for understanding when work is completed and safe case closure can occur.

Combining the risk reassessment process with the ongoing assessment of the family functioning:

- ❖ Produces a more focused approach to assessment of family progress
- ❖ Helps identify the family's future needs
- ❖ Gives an opportunity for the family, case manager, and provider to review
- ❖ Allows all to celebrate accomplishments/progress and "fine tune" areas of need

Expectations: Federal CFSR standards state an agency is to complete ongoing risk assessments, formal and informal, in several situations:

- ❖ New allegations of abuse (Completed by CPW staff during Abuse Assessment)
- ❖ Changing family conditions
- ❖ Changes to visitation
- ❖ Reunification
- ❖ Case Closure

Federal partners evaluate:

- ❖ The characteristics of the risk reassessment
- ❖ If and when the risk reassessment was done
- ❖ How the reassessment was completed; formally or informally
- ❖ The comprehensiveness of the reassessment
- ❖ If the reassessment was completed at times our partners expect it be done



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Risk changes and needs reevaluation throughout the life of the case. Using the same risk questions/tool at the beginning and during the life of the case can produce errors. The rating on the reassessment reflects changes occurring in family functioning. Risk reassessments provide the case manager with a framework to identify critical factors that indicate changes in a child's threat of maltreatment.

Formal Risk Reassessment: Complete at critical decision-making times during the life of the case, such as:

- ❖ At Case Permanency Plan update
- ❖ Prior to case closure

The risk reassessment tool guides future interventions and services and helps make critical decisions.

Unless another assessment identifies other risk factors, the formal Risk Reassessment tool is **not applicable** for permanency cases such as:

- ❖ Pre-adoptive placements
- ❖ Youth with an APPLA goal who do not need the abusive parent assessed
- ❖ Youth in independent living settings

Risk reassessments in these settings are informal.

The Case Manager will:

- ❖ Document results on **Iowa Department of Human Services Family Risk Reassessment (Form #470-4134)**, which is located and completed in Case Flow, with a copy kept in the case file.
- ❖ Incorporate results into case permanency plan by addressing:
 - Progress on previously identified risk factors and proposed interventions and noting service changes if there is little progress
 - Interventions and/or services needed to address newly identified risk factors
 - Formal and informal supports needed to offset current and future risk factors
- ❖ Narrate process in Comment Section of most applicable domain (Ex: If a parent's mental health issues contribute to risk of future maltreatment, the team's efforts to eliminate or offset the risk is documented in the Comment Section of Parent Capabilities domain.)

Informal Risk Re-assessment: The Case Manager will:

Complete during face-to-face contact with a child, their caregiver or a future caregiver.

- ❖ Document results in the narrative entry in Case Notes, located in Case Flow, for that contact.
- ❖ Address the following:
 - The current risk factors and the factors' impact on the person, family and child's safety
 - The progress made to decrease, minimize, or control these risk factors.
 - The interventions and services/supports needed to eliminate and/or offset the risk factors in the future. This may include changing the service approach if there is not sufficient progress.
 - An assessment of the current environment to ensure identified risk factors are addressed appropriately
 - The immediate action to eliminate or offset the identified risk and how the risk will be handled in future case planning.
- ❖ Consider additional questions related to ongoing risk based on the child's living arrangement. For instance, in a foster family setting, the case manager evaluates:
 - The compatibility of the child and the foster parents
 - If the needs of the foster family are met and, if met, can the foster parents care for this child
 - If the needs of the child are met appropriately by the foster parents