



Key Concept: “Protective Capacity”

This week’s message introduces you to the concept of “**Protective Capacity.**”

Protective capacities are the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that can specifically and directly be associated with a person’s ability to care for and keep a child safe.

Fundamentally, **protective capacity** is concerned with the question of whether a caregiver can and will protect a child.

Protective capacities are specific qualities that can be observed and are a part of the way a caregiver thinks, feels and acts; thus protective capacities are contained in the behavioral, cognitive and emotional functioning of the caregiver. Protective capacity is a unique parental strength that contributes to a child’s overall safety.

Things to Consider When Assessing Protective Capacity

- A caseworker’s initial judgment about whether a caregiver can and will protect a child takes place during a crisis. This means the caregiver’s emotional state may include anger, shock, denial, confusion, dismay and distrust. Since they are operating primarily from emotions, they are more likely to be self-revealing. So, pay attention to information coming from caregivers that may best reflect indications of their protective capacity.
- Caregiver’s statements about their capability or intent will not do as the basis for establishing the presence of sufficient protective capacity.
- Look beyond what a caregiver says and assess what they intentionally or unintentionally reveal about themselves. For example, does their body language say something different than their verbal message or do they lack the intellectual or emotional capacity to follow through with what they say they are going to do.



- A history of being protective is a significant indicator.
- If a caregiver's plan to protect the child is do-able and makes sense, it is a good sign of their protective capacity.
- The non-offending caregiver is a primary source of information for reaching a conclusion about protective capacity. Others who know the caregiver can also provide information about the caregiver's ability; although you will need to judge their reliability and truthfulness.

For more information about **protective capacity**, you are encouraged to reference the Child Welfare Procedure Manual, Chapter 3, Sections 1, 2, 4, 9 and 10. The Procedure Manual can be found at http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety_model/index.html#pm

Definitions from Oregon Child Welfare Administrative Rule that support this concept are as follows:

“Protective capacity” means behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that can specifically and directly be associated with the person's ability to care for and keep a child safe.

“Safe” means there is an absence of safety threats, the child is not vulnerable to identified safety threats, or there is sufficient parent or caregiver protective capacity to protect the vulnerable child from the identified safety threats.

“Safety threat” means family behavior, conditions or circumstances that could result in harm to a child.