

## 2. Introduction to Managing Child Safety In and Out of Home

Whenever *safely* possible, engaging the family while the child remains in his or her own home is desirable. The decision between a child remaining at home or placed in protective custody is based upon a thorough assessment and safety analysis including the willingness and ability of the parent to protect the child, and the availability of appropriate safety services and safety service providers. The current caseworker has the responsibility of confirming the ongoing safety plan is always the most suitable, least intrusive intervention available.

Safety intervention and safety management by Child Welfare is:

- ***provisional***, until the child's safety can be assured in the parents' home or other permanency options outside the child's family are selected;
- ***temporary***, until the parents can and will protect a child;
- ***conditional***, in that it is required for as long as the child is unsafe and the parents' protective capacities are insufficient to assure the child's safety;
- ***dynamic***, from the point in time a child is determined to be unsafe until parental protective capacity can assure child safety;
- ***an interim intervention***, necessary as long as needed to manage child safety;
- ***parent centered***, in that the caseworker involves the parents in safety planning, safety management and case planning as much as possible;
- ***child centered***, in that the focus of every case is the safety, permanency and well being of the child;
- ***the least intrusive intervention*** possible to manage child safety; and
- ***not voluntary***, in the sense that safety threats exist that cannot be managed by a parent and Child Welfare has determined intervention is required to keep the child safe, even if the child is in the parents' home. Child Welfare is responsible for and in a position to legally protect a child and invoke the court's authority. The parents do not have a choice whether or not the child was determined to be unsafe. The parents *may* have a choice in safety management options Child Welfare offers.

Child safety is always of primary importance throughout Child Welfare casework, and is particularly critical with in-home cases. The children in cases with identified safety threats and the child remains in the parents' home are some of the most vulnerable in Child Welfare caseloads. These cases require diligent, ongoing safety management, and active monitoring of both the ongoing safety plan and the changes in the parents' protective capacity. When a child must be placed out-of-home to manage safety, the case requires active and constant assessment of the changes in the parents' protective capacities and determining when the changes in protective capacity or the behaviors, conditions or circumstances in the family would indicate less intrusive interventions could effectively manage the child's safety.

## Chapter III - Managing Child Safety

Families may be willing and able to engage with Child Welfare without court involvement. On occasion, Child Welfare may seek legal custody of the child, even when Child Welfare determines the child can safely remain in the physical custody of the parents with an ongoing safety plan.

The decision to seek legal custody of children while the children remain in the physical care of their parents has inherent associated risks and responsibilities and must be analyzed carefully on a case-by-case basis. When Child Welfare has legal custody of a child, Child Welfare responsibilities expand to include not only child safety and oversight of changes in parental protective capacity, but also consideration of and attention to the child's permanency and well-being needs.

When a caseworker receives a case with an out-of-home safety plan, the CPS assessment has concluded that it is **not possible** for the child's safety to be managed in the child's home. The case management functions include both safety intervention and safety management as that relates to the identified safety threats and confirming that the child's environment is safe while the child is in substitute care.

It is important to remember that Child Welfare's legal custody of a child does not manage child safety. Courts can order parents to complete services and activities that can be beneficial in making changes in parental protective capacity over time, but safety management is the ongoing casework activity used to assure the safety of a child.