

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Technical Assistance Site Report



Prepared for Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
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Dates of onsite technical assistance summarized in this report:
May 12, June 7 & 28, July 12 & 14, September 11 & 13, 2006

Situation and Technical Assistance Request

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) requested technical assistance (TA) for the following purpose:

“DCFS is requesting T/TA from the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services to assist DCFS in improving internal policies and procedures regarding safety plans. Off-site and on-site T/TA will assist DCFS in revising official policies and designing more effective curricula to train casework staff on revised policies.”

The request further identified that this target area for assistance was in an effort to comply with the Federal CFSR/PIP process, specifically to reduce repeat maltreatment.

Site Visits

May 12th site visit

Terry Roe Lund from the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services (NRCCPS) provided technical assistance to the DCFS on this date.

Decisions made thus far were discussed as well as their implications. These include:

Decision	Implications/Meaning
Clear, practical definitions of risk and safety	Allows for decision making about who to serve; clarifies difference between risk and safety assessment; helps with any backlog; affects permanency/reunification decision making; helps decide what must be managed
Clarify criteria for when risk factor reaches threshold for safety threat	Continues to model precision, rigor; gives clearer guidance; sets standard criteria
Formally state and place expectations in one place: information collection standards. What at a minimum must be known to decide about safety?	Reinforces critical thinking: decisions must be backed by data; moves away from erroneous thinking that workers will naturally infer what must be collected because of a form they must complete; wider scope of minimum standards moves away from incident focused thinking
Define protective capacities; what can be learned that is associated with protectiveness	Helps decide what safe means; helps with safety planning; will become essential part of the case plan
Threats to safety will be defined and staff expected to address threats as they really play	Tied specifically to information collection standards: helps assure safety up front but

out and are learned about.	recognizes that threats may still exist and must be assessed after full information collected; implications for permanency by revisiting any protective action at the end of info collection.
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The decisions made thus far begin to form a skeleton of a case decision making flow:

- Initial contact
 - Assess safety threats (must still be defined)
 - If present, respond with plan to control
- Continue with information collection (defined in information standards)
 - When complete, assess safety threats (must still be defined)
 - If present, look at how/if protective action can be changed (if one had been created) to be more comprehensive safety plan

A discussion among the meeting participants was held regarding the specifics of the standards for information collection. It was agreed that these standards will involve 7 categories:

- Maltreatment
- Surrounding circumstances of maltreatment
- Child functioning
- Discipline
- Parenting
- Caregiver functioning
- Family functioning

Training and procedural guides will be needed to support this approach to information collection, the group agreed.

The site visit concluded with plans to return to work on one of the decisions made: defining safety threats.

June 7th site visit

Given the significance of the group's agenda (defining safety threats), time was taken during this site visit to discuss, answer questions, and illustrate the different approaches taken by other jurisdictions regarding safety threats.

Some factors that were influential in considering whether staff would be able to successfully use 1 set of safety threats for both the assessment of present and impending danger were:

- ✓ The strength of the "safety means right now" kind of thinking: would 1 set of the threats meant to be used two different ways be beneficial in turning that thinking around?
- ✓ Ease of use: would staff find 1 set that requires different mental processes easier?

- ✓ The desire by staff to be told “what to do:” would staff find 1 set clear enough to meet their needs?
- ✓ Development of a comprehensive model for child safety: does this decision have any impact on the overall goals regarding model development?

The decision reached was that 2 sets of safety threats would be proposed.

The remainder of the TA involved facilitating discussion and decisions regarding which of the CERAP threats might meet the definition of present danger.

June 28th site visit

Group work accomplished between the site visits had identified a number of questions and struggles, so the first half of the site visit was spent revisiting many issues.

Considerable discussion was held regarding how threats are learned about: how information, access to the family and skill all play into what you learn and when. The process is not as linear as depicted in visual flow charts.

Using another jurisdiction’s list of standardized safety threats that are the more immediate and volatile (i.e., present danger), the group decided which of these threats were possibly usable, if modified.

July 12th site visit

TA helped facilitate a similar process with the group as the June 28th site visit, this time focusing on impending danger threats. 17 different threats were talked about at length, to decide if they were usable for DCFS and, if so, what kind of work would be needed to improve it.

The afternoon’s work was centered on reviewing the work of June 28 together with the morning decisions to consider what further modifications were needed.

July 14th site visit

TA was provided to the DCFS staff regarding safety plans and their purposes. Discussion centered on the many practice mistakes seen between the assessment of safety and the development of the actual plan to control for any threats.

As a result of the discussion, the group proposed an expectation of a formal (documented) analysis of how threats are occurring and whether certain factors exist to justify what type of plan is needed and feasible.

A further decision was made that the control plan for safety will have two different names depending on when in the case process it is implemented.

Therefore, the decisions made so far help flesh out further the case process:

- Rule in/out threats (group is calling these threats “set #1”)
- Control for threats (name #1)
- Collect information
- Rule in/out threats (set #2)
- Decide how to control for threats
- Develop, implement, manage a control plan (name #2)

It was agreed that between this site visit and the next, the group will use a case to walk through the process thus far contemplated.

September 11th site visit

The TA initially helped address some concerns regarding successful implementation of some of the decisions being contemplated by the group. A key issue will be supervision. The group agreed that they must try to avoid creating processes and particularly forms that attempt to “do or ask everything” to compensate for worries whether supervisors will rigorously attend to these standards.

The afternoon of TA was spent addressing questions regarding the threshold for when a risk issue becomes a threat to safety. The criteria are:

- The condition being studied is out of control
- The children are vulnerable
- The time period is the present through the next few days or weeks
- Consequences to the children will be severe
- There are observable, describable behaviors, emotions, etc. that can justify concerns

The group agreed that its proposed safety threats must have definitions that meet these criteria.

Additional time was spent with an overview of the work done between site visits on protective capacities assessment (to decide if an adult can/will protect). Issues of content and formatting were discussed, with note taken of where changes are needed.

September 13th site visit

This last day of TA for the 2006 fiscal year was spent helping the group with some remaining significant decisions prior to their department retreat, where their proposals for safety decision making would be examined.

Terry Roe Lund presented the group with information about safety plans, and how they differ from treatment or service plans. (i.e., control versus change)

A facilitated discussion led to the identification of the following principles or characteristics the group believes should be part of safety planning:

1. purpose is to control for identified threats
2. safety plan is temporary until sufficient protective capacities exist or an alternate permanent plan is developed
3. people involved in safety plans must have the capacity to carry out their role and responsibilities AND CPS has the responsibility to assess and assure this
4. safety plans are specific, action oriented and have time frames
5. plans must be implemented in a timely (immediate) way
6. plans must be based on identified threats and an analysis of what will work to control
7. plans will be developed using a least to most intrusive approach, exploring a range/continuum of interventions, providers, etc.
8. safety plans are formal, written, agreed by family, approved by supervisor
9. safety plans must have specific details: who what when
10. safety plans sufficiently control for frequency of threats, what triggers them, etc.
11. safety plans must specify how the worker will know the plan is being implemented
12. safety plan will specify how the worker will know if the plan is really controlling the threats
13. safety plans must have an immediate effect
14. safety plans are developed with the family.

The group decided that the 1st plan for control only differs from the 2nd plan for control in terms of:

- information known
- rigorous analysis capability (subject to amount of information known)
- how long and until when will the plan last (until information collection vs. until threats reduce or protective capacities increase).

Next Steps

The September 13th site visit concluded all technical assistance for DCFS during the 2006 fiscal year. It is the intention of the state to request further technical assistance to continue with the facilitation and information dissemination for staff who are contemplating safety decision making standards and processes.