The Safety Intervention System Review
What is Safety Intervention?

Safety intervention refers to the structured approach and process employed by a Child Protective Services (CPS) agency that determines worker – caregiver – family interaction in order to detect threats to child safety; control threats to child safety; and restore parents and caregivers to their protective responsibilities. Safety intervention includes identification of the client population; practice methods; a decision making framework; decision making criteria; assessment and planning strategies; safety and treatment services; and desired safety related outcomes. Safety intervention occurs in a progressive process from receipt of a referral to successful closing of a case. Safety intervention occurs between a worker and a family with the focus on parents or primary caregivers. Safety intervention identifies and manages threats of severe harm in order to assess and enhance parent or caregiver protective capacities.

What is a Safety Intervention System?

A safety intervention system is defined; directs and manages effective safety intervention. A safety intervention system is comprised of seven components:

- Policy
- Procedure
- Training
- Supervision
- Information System
- Quality Assurance
- Program Management

Each component of the system contributes to assuring effective safety intervention being implemented by casework staff. Policy identifies the philosophy and conceptual framework for safety intervention and sets forth the specific requirements for case practice and decision making which governs safety intervention from receipt of the referral to case closure. Procedure provides for how safety intervention will be implemented and includes methods and instruments which operationalize case practice and decision making. Training influences staff competence concerned with client interaction; case practice; decision making; and accountability. Supervision directs; enhances and governs safety intervention. The information system facilitates case practice and decision making; provides a record of case practice and decision making; and provides justification for how safety intervention occurs and its outcomes. Quality assurance reviews the extent to which safety intervention is occurring in accordance with
policy and procedure; provides corrective information and guidance for safety intervention; and verifies agency accountability regarding safety intervention case practice and decision making. Management provides leadership to all efforts and activities associated with the agency’s safety intervention approach; develops necessary planning and resources to support safety intervention; oversees all aspects and quality of safety intervention and the safety intervention system; and interprets the agency’s safety intervention approach to pertinent and necessary community professionals and entities.

What is a Safety Intervention System Review?

The effectiveness of safety intervention applied in each case and applied across all cases is directly related to the quality and effectiveness of the safety intervention system. Successful safety decisions, safety management and case outcomes rely upon the excellence and value of each safety intervention system component independently contributing to effective safety intervention. Additionally it is necessary for all safety intervention system components to operate interdependently as subparts of the system by mutually contributing to and reinforcing the same desired objectives, expectations and outcomes for safety intervention.

A safety intervention system review is a comprehensive study that includes an evaluation of safety intervention case practice and decision making; a review of each component of an agency’s safety intervention system; and criteria based analysis of all components with respect to safety intervention system effectiveness (i.e. how the safety intervention system contributes to effective safety intervention case practice and decision making.) The safety intervention system review results in identification of strengths and limitations; a comparison to the state of the art; a gap analysis; implications of findings; recommendations for enhancement; and, if desired, specific, detailed strategies and solutions for improvement.

How is a Safety Intervention System Review Conducted?

ACTION employs various evaluation methods to examine and understand the quality and effectiveness of a safety intervention system.

Policy and Procedures

The purpose for evaluating policy and procedures is fundamental. Policy and procedure represent the regulatory basis for the CPS intervention system. Policy indicates what is required; procedure indicates how policy is to be implemented. Sound and effective
policy is crucial for directing all that occurs in case practice and decision making. When evaluating the safety intervention system, the logical place to begin is with policy and procedure. All else emanates from policy and procedure.

This off site review examines the quality and effectiveness of policy and procedure as it relates to clearly establishing expectations, requirements and guidance regarding case practice, decision making and workflow across the safety intervention process. This review includes an examination of all regulatory documents, forms, decision making instruments with respect to how well policy and procedure directs a case through the system from receipt of referral to case closure to acceptable safety and permanency outcomes. The methodology involves document review against acceptable state of the art standards. The deliverables include: a summary report; citation of specific policy and procedure concerns; and recommendations for improvement.

Staff Development and Training

The purposes for examining staff development are to determine a) the quality, relevance and sufficiency of in service training curricula as representative of requirements set forth in policy and procedures and compared to the state of the art for case practice and for training quality; b) the quality and expertise of instruction; c) sufficiency of continuing staff development objectives and strategies including consideration of supervisory involvement in the process.

This off site review includes evaluation of written curricula, other documents or materials associated with training or staff development pertinent to and supportive of safety intervention. Core training curricula as well as other general child welfare curricula which may have relevance to safety intervention can be included in this review. The methodology includes curricula review; document/material review; staff opinion/satisfaction survey; paper review of personnel policies; job descriptions/requirements; recruitment/staff maintenance strategies; or other materials associated with profiling staff; positions and organizational staff development and maintenance issues and review of staff development and training capacity as represented in mission, objectives, operation; design; contractual agreements; written work processes; other documents which describe and explain the training programs and strategies; and resumes/experience of trainers in child welfare, curricula design, in service workshop leadership and training and expertise specific to safety intervention. The deliverables include a summary report; identification of specific strengths and limitations across all training curricula; effectiveness of staff development and training programming; and recommendations for adjustments, modifications, support and improvement.
Case Review

There are several purposes for conducting a focused, standardized case review: a) to evaluate safety intervention case practice and decision making against standards; b) to evaluate compliance with policy and procedure including examples of policy and procedural limitations related to guiding case practice and decision making; c) to evaluate the quality of safety intervention case practice and decision making in high profile or fatality cases and to compare findings against the general case review sample with respect to representativeness; d) to evaluate the work process and workflow of safety related cases from receipt of referral to case closure; e) to seek out explanations for departures from acceptable safety intervention practice and decision making and case management; f) to examine safety intervention case practice and decision making competency as regulated, supported or influenced by supervision; g) and to consider the influence training has on case practice and decision making and indications of apparent knowledge and skill gaps that may be apparent.

The case review can be conducted on or off site. This is an “expert” review that examines a standardized set of variables concerned with quality and competency of safety intervention practice and decision making throughout the safety intervention process; compares the agency’s practice and decision making to state of the art; tracks policy and procedure compliance; identifies safety intervention work process and work flow efficiency and effectiveness; and identifies evidence of case practice and decision making influence and oversight.

The study involves a representative sampling of work produced by staff. Focus will be given to the quality and nature of child safety assessment and child safety planning. Of particular interest will be consideration of the extent to which staff receives sufficient guidance and direction within the child safety intervention system. The study prescribes a case study period and is responsive to reviewing cases and case categories of particular interest to an agency. Methodology includes expert reviewers; standardized review instruments; carefully regulated quality control; secondary reviews; interviews with staff; and staff focus groups. Deliverables include a summary report of findings; specific findings concerned with competency and quality of safety intervention case practice and decision making; specific findings and comparison of high profile, fatality or near fatality cases to case practice and decision making generally; identification of the nature and quality of safety intervention case practice and decision making influences and oversight including policy, procedure, supervision, staff development/training and implications for quality assurance; identification of the nature and quality of the safety intervention workflow process and case movement including a gap analysis; identification of implications for program and work process design; and recommendations for revision and improvement.
**Supervision**

The supervisor is viewed as the driver of the safety intervention system. The supervisor assures that all aspects of the safety intervention system contribute to the desired safety intervention case practice and decision making occurring by caseworkers. The review examines supervisory practice to determine the nature and quality of consultation and direction to casework staff, oversight of individual cases, staff development and competency building, and supervisory decision-making. The analysis of supervisory practice seeks to determine the extent to which agency supervisors are experts in child safety intervention. A criteria base related to supervisor competency is applied. Beyond what the case review and staff focus groups reveal about the quality and nature of supervision, specific methods applied include supervisor focus groups; supervisor survey; and document review concerned with infrastructure that defines and regulates supervision. Deliverables include a summary report; identification of strengths and need for enhancement; a gap analysis concerned with supervisor expertise; a gap analysis of supervisor preparation; support; and job resources and context; and recommendations for adjustment, correction, enhancement and improvement.

**Information System**

The review includes analysis of the information system and how it drives and supports child safety intervention and how it accounts for and justifies safety intervention effectiveness. The review considers the extent to which the information system contributes to rather than competes with safety intervention practice and decision making; examines the integrity of requirements, instruments and documentation in relation to preferred safety intervention practice and decision making; reviews capacity for enabling timely supervisor involvement and oversight; and considers the yield of relevant, timely case and aggregate data as part of the continuous improvement effort. Methodology includes using an agency guide to assist in understanding and navigating the information system and how to navigate it followed by a careful step by step case application analysis; staff and supervisor focus groups; and staff surveys. Deliverables include a summary report of general findings and a specific report based on collaboration with agency staff concerning prospective revisions and adjustments to the system.

**Quality Assurance System**

The review examines the quality assurance system and including evaluation of current data. Current data is reviewed in relation to other study areas identified in the design. In addition, current data is considered against anticipated needs given the prospect of potential revisions and enhancements. In additions to the organization and process for quality assurance attention is given to the expertise of quality assurance reviewers with
respect to safety intervention. Attention is given to distinguishing between compliance and case practice and decision making objectives. Methodology includes data review against safety intervention input, process and output criteria; interviews with quality assurance staff; focus group inquiries with supervisors and staff. Deliverables include a summary report and recommendations for enhancements.

**Program Management**

Within a safety intervention system program management is responsible for leadership; planning; resource development; quality control; and community relations and involvement. The review examines the program management concept related to creating and maintaining effective safety intervention and an effective safety intervention system; considers organization, program and strategic plans that contribute to effective program management of safety intervention; identifies how the organization marshals its resources and problems solves with respect to safety intervention; evaluates how quality assurance feedback informs and strengthens the safety intervention system; and considers strategies and activities associated with interaction and relationships with allied community professionals and entities. Methodology includes document review; discussions and interviews with program managers; and can include interviews and surveys with community professionals. Deliverables include a summary report and can include a strategic plan as requested.

**The Children and Family Service Review**

The design incorporates specific attention to the Federal Children and Family Service Review results and, in particular, the agency’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Consideration is given regarding how the PIP acknowledges necessary improvements concerned with safety intervention and/or how PIP strategies can contribute to the process and effort to enhance the current safety intervention system.

**Optional Reviews**

This study can include a review of community relations; community satisfaction and community opinion with respect to the agency’s safety intervention approach and effectiveness. A community review is focused on professional groups, individuals and agencies that maintain a closer interface with the CPS agency as related to cases involving safety intervention. Such a review can examine in more detail interaction and relationships with key entities such as the court or child advocacy centers. This kind of review can involve interviews; focus groups; and surveys.
This study can include a comprehensive examination of the organizational work setting with respect to its influence on safety intervention effectiveness and the value and quality of the safety intervention system. Such a review can consider organization relationships; communication; staff morale; work setting; work operations; and work demand and workload management. Methodology can include staff surveys; focus groups; face to face interviews; work activity – task process mapping and rationale identification; identification and gap analysis of communication strategies; tasks; processes; products; and management methods.

**What is the Cost and Process for Implementing a Safety Intervention System Review?**

Every safety intervention system review is specifically tailored in accordance with an agency’s direction and need. The size and scope of the review determines the level of effort; number of review objectives and activities; preferred form and content for deliverables; and the cost. Review costs are established by a daily professional rate plus expenses. The review can be initiated through teleconferencing or discussion meetings with agency staff to identify the prospective review perimeters and preferences. Initial discussions can result in either a proposal for work or a work plan. The review, as described here, normally can be tailored to an agency’s specifications, organized, implemented and reported on within a six month period.

**Where Have Safety Intervention System Reviews Occurred?**

ACTION has conducted several safety intervention system reviews similar to what is described in this paper during the past three years. In addition, ACTION has evaluated aspects of safety intervention systems in many states across the country.