

Safety Management During Ongoing CPS

Introduction

We are now beginning to see the child welfare field move beyond conceiving of safety intervention as beginning and ending with the CPS initial assessment, and, thankfully, sufficient development of safety intervention has occurred so that we are able to think more substantially about safety management during ongoing CPS. There is no longer room for platitudes and cryptic expectations about remembering that safety is something you attend to throughout CPS.

There are two case management responsibilities for which you as an ongoing CPS worker are accountable: (1) managing safety plans and (2) facilitating (change) case plans. This is no small challenge. Certainly both responsibilities can be intertwined respective of working directly and indirectly with caregivers and providers. However, it is important that these two responsibilities are fully understood in terms of their distinctiveness in purpose and activity.

The first step in safety management during ongoing CPS is your acceptance of that responsibility. This means that you must be conversant and skilled in all aspects of safety intervention such as safety assessment and safety planning; it means that you must be vigilant with respect to oversight of safety plans; and you must simply accept that you are as much of a safety manager as the guy in your office that does initial assessments.

This article provides a summary of some of the key issues that form safety management during ongoing CPS. You may want to review some of the articles we've written previously that will provide you with a context for safety management during ongoing CPS. Many of the 2005 articles consider safety intervention during ongoing CPS. In particular, you may want to review May 2005 concerned with provisional safety management.

A Best Practice Standard

We now know enough that we can talk about a best practice standard for continuing safety management. That's what you do during ongoing CPS. The best practice standard is: *CPS ongoing must take a cooperative and assertive role in regulating and maintaining the objectives of the safety plan involving families and providers in assuring the utilization of necessary safety services at the level of effort required. This includes no less than weekly oversight.* Once it has been initially confirmed by you, as the ongoing CPS worker, that the safety plan established by an initial assessment worker is sufficient, it becomes the (your) primary responsibility as the CPS ongoing worker to take charge in supervising that plan and managing safety. The key words in the best practice standard describe in practical terms what effective continued safety management is:

- Assertive means not waiting for crisis to occur before taking action.
- Encouraging cooperation among all parties involved with the safety plan produces a dynamic characterized by shared responsibility.
- Weekly oversight expresses the significance of qualifying safety management by the nature and intensity of impending danger threats.

As a part of best practice related to continuing safety management, you should always consider whether the objectives for the safety plan are being achieved. In other words, routinely answer three questions: (1) Is the plan effective? (2) Are safety responses adequate? (3) Are providers involved and active as prescribed by the safety plan?

Effective Management of Safety Plans

We are of course referring to effective management of safety plans that exist during ongoing CPS. These continuing safety plans manage impending danger

threats while case planning, service delivery and client change are occurring. It is important to reinforce the fact that safety plans may employ in-home safety response options, out-of-home placement as the primary safety response option, or combinations of in-home and out-of-home options. This needs mentioning in order to emphasize that safety management during ongoing CPS is required and generally the same no matter what kind of safety plan is in place (in-home or out-of-home) or where a child is located.

Todd Holder, a national CPS consultant and trainer, conceives of effective management of safety plans existing as *the hub that keeps the wheel turning*.



Think of yourself as the hub and safety management tasks as the spokes. This is a pretty good metaphor for understanding safety management responsibilities. A hub is the axis or center of a wheel. It is a focal point where all the spokes come together creating stability. The safety management function that you accomplish as a CPS ongoing worker is similar to the purpose a hub serves as part of a wheel. In the same way that a hub connects the parts of a wheel in order to maintain performance, you have the essential function of binding and securing together the various requirements, agreements, activities and individuals that form a safety plan. Because it is improbable, if not impossible, for you to be available to the case every day providing safety intervention, it is necessary, where child safety is concerned, for you to be in the managerial role. When you think literally about the word “manager” or “management,” what comes to mind in terms of defining the necessary activities you are responsible for to assure a child is safe whether through an in-home safety plan, out-of-home safety plan, or a combination of the two?

Continuing with the hub and wheel metaphor, here are the spokes that comprise the safety management wheel:

□ *Coordinate Safety Interventions*

Safety plans vary with respect to complexity. Some safety plans involve several different safety responses along with several people who are involved in carrying out the safety plan. The purpose, activity, timing and implementation of all that comprises safety intervention within a safety plan must be well understood by you and others, must be managed by you to assure that people are where they are supposed to be, that activities are occurring according to the safety plan, that the purpose of each activity is being achieved.

□ *Generate, Organize and Administer Resources*

Management or administration involves assuring that necessary resources are available and applied appropriately. Dispensing or doling out that which is necessary to assure safety plans works is a crucial part of safety management during ongoing CPS. A practical example is making sure that transportation is available for caregivers to make appointments or to make sure visitation occurs as scheduled.

□ *Guide Activities, Actions and Tasks*

A paddle wheel that steers a boat requires someone to man the helm. So it is for you as you guide the safety plan. Safety plans consist of activities, actions and tasks that include caregivers, children, family members, others related to the family and professional providers. These activities, actions and tasks occur daily or weekly at different frequencies and for different lengths of time. Someone provides the guidance to (1) make sure that everything is happening and (2) that what is happening is occurring as planned.

□ *Evaluate the Provision of Safety Services*

Are safety services working? Are those involved in the safety plan performing according to the safety plan? Are the children safe? Evaluating

the provision of safety services occurs consistent with criteria for safety services: immediate impact, accessible, available.

□ *Re-Assess Caregiver Commitment and Willingness*

Caregivers are not responsible for safety plans working. Caregivers should be involved in the safety management process, however. Safety plans must include judgment about caregiver cooperation. The question here is about caregiver willingness to accept the safety plan being implemented as planned. That question should be routinely visited upon the caregiver along with some consideration about whether the caregiver has come to a place of understanding regarding the need for the safety plan.

□ *Support and Maintain Plan Performance*

This spoke of the safety management wheel is basically concerned with oversight. This involves weekly communication with those who are responsible for carrying out safety actions, activities and tasks. It includes support and encouragement for all who are involved. It includes double checking on a routine and frequent basis to assure that the safety plan is being implemented as planned and without disruption.

□ *Facilitate Communication*

Safety management or oversight is not simply you checking on how things are being done and making sure they occur as planned. In other words, safety management when it is at its best should be reciprocal with respect to shared responsibility and continual open sharing and discussion about what is occurring, what is changing, what is needed, what is working, and so on. Your objectives related to communication should be to have all those involved in the safety plan to feel well informed about what is expected and how things are going and to be spontaneous in keeping you informed.

□ *Confront, Mediate, Negotiate and Resolve Conflict*

Things don't always go smoothly. Challenges arise concerning relationships of those involved in the safety plan. People may experience reactions to how they are perceived or are acting; they may feel that too much is being expected of them. A variety of issues can arise during

ongoing CPS related to the safety plan. Your management responsibility includes resolving people problems. Your responsibility in this area is influenced by the spirit you bring to the process. Are people partners? Is this a team effort? Is everyone important, well informed and involved? Have you formed a circle of support for caregivers and providers alike?

Continue to Assess Safety

A huge responsibility in safety management is monitoring and assessing impending danger. You should be alert to changes in a family or individuals that have a bearing on impending danger. Safety assessment naturally occurs every time you have face-to-face time with caregivers, are in the home, or meet with children. But also you judge impending danger through the eyes and experience of those who participate in safety plans. Safety management during ongoing CPS demands that you conduct official safety assessments and safety assessments that are documented so that your judgments about the nature and extent of impending danger are placed on record. This certainly occurs during official case evaluations.

Revise Safety Plans

Safety management is provisional – dynamic. That means safety management is always subject to change and adjustment based on what is happening with caregivers and families. Your safety management should be characterized by a flexibility that results in safety activities, actions and tasks being increased or decreased in accordance with the status of impending danger and changes in caregiver protective capacities. Safety plans should never be allowed to continue to exist unregulated with respect to an evaluation of suitability related to the case status, impending danger, and caregiver protective capacities. Revising safety plans as appropriate should be among your highest priorities as you seek to assure that only the necessary level of intrusion is occurring.

Document and Maintain Case Records

Ongoing CPS records usually do not have a place for documenting safety management. So, you should do so within case record notes or case narrative. The type and frequency of your management efforts should

always be documented including dates, the nature of the management activity, and who was involved. The record should contain your judgments about changes within the family that reflect on safety, the status of impending danger, and changes related to caregiver protective capacities. Safety assessments and revised safety plans should be documented on the agency's official formats.

Closing

Safety management during ongoing CPS is concerned with making sure that continuing safety plans are working and are appropriate so that caregiver protective capacities can be enhanced. Vigilance is the most important demand in safety management. Assuring the right level of intrusion is occurring is something you always seek. Remember that flexibility and adjustment are constant objectives for safety management.