



Part 2

Introduction

This continues our look at Family Functioning Assessment (FFA) – the second assessment within a comprehensive assessment process that is part of and supports a safety intervention system. Family Functioning Assessment (traditionally referred to as investigation) includes Safety Assessment. These two assessments result in the identification of families that are in need of CPS because children are unsafe and caregiver protective capacity is diminished.

In January, Part 1, we covered the foundation of the FFA with respect to philosophy, purpose, and decisions. Now in February, Part 2, we turn our attention to the Family Functioning Assessment Initial Intervention Standards. We will consider worker competency, identifying and responding to present danger, and information collection. In March, Part 3, we complete the series with FFA decision making and case management.

Family Functioning Assessment Initial Intervention Standards



The Family Functioning Assessment (FFA) as a functional component of the safety intervention system operates in accordance with standards. These standards provide a specific description of what this function does which in turns provides clarification for how it continues and fits within the safety intervention system. The FFA initial intervention standards consider worker competence, information collection methods, and protocol. Here we see the emphasis of the FFA as a family-centered service which requires essential and professional behavior.

The Family Functioning Assessment (FFA) worker possesses knowledge of and considers Safety intervention concepts as the foundation for conducting FFA information collection and decision making.

Child safety is the operating concept applied during FFA and throughout safety intervention. All assessments that form the safety intervention comprehensive assessment process are designed to evaluate the presence of danger to children and consider caregiver protective capacities. The FFA worker understands the importance for knowing and using essential safety concepts and practices that form the comprehensive assessment process and are necessary to perform effective practice and decision making. The essential safety intervention concepts applied during FFA are:

- ▶ Safe and unsafe
- ▶ Present danger
- ▶ Impending danger
- ▶ Safety threshold
- ▶ Allegations of child abuse and neglect
- ▶ Present danger protective plan
- ▶ Safety intervention analysis
- ▶ Reasonable efforts
- ▶ Safety plan

The FFA worker communicates and behaves in ways that engage the children, caregivers, and relevant family members interpersonally in the information sharing and collection exchange.

The FFA employs a family system – family centered approach for interaction with all who are involved in the FFA information and decision-making process. This approach incorporates essential principles:

1. Respect and courtesy
2. Prompt response
3. Engagement
4. The family as the primary source of information
5. Support and encouragement
6. Professionalism
7. Enabling and promoting participation and involvement
8. Providing necessary information

Engaging communication and behavior that prevail at initial contact and continue throughout the information collection process include:

- ▶ Beginning where the caregiver is;
- ▶ Respecting the civil and human rights of all involved;
- ▶ Assisting the children, caregiver, and family members to purposefully express their emotions, thoughts, and concerns;
- ▶ Viewing the family and each of its members as unique and individual with respect to their perceptions, interests, concerns, and needs;
- ▶ Reinforcing that the family and its members are the best source for producing necessary information and understanding;
- ▶ The caregivers as the authorities and executives of the family are dealt with through respect and deference in regards to participation and involvement;
- ▶ Caregivers have a right to self-determination and can be helped to understand the consequences of their choices;
- ▶ In so far as possible and as explained, privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

Engaging communication and behavior is intentional, conscious, and purposeful. Engaging communication and behavior occur as a result of the application of pertinent interviewing skills and effective interview management.

The FFA worker applies a neutral approach to the information collection and evaluation process. This means that the FFA worker's efforts to understand a family and what is going on are objective rather than subjective or evenly biased one way or another. There is no intention to seek positive or negative information about the family. The FFA worker's intention is to exercise an intervention that results in a balanced and accurate reflection, depiction, or representation of the family; how it operates; and caregiver performance.

The FFA worker possesses knowledge of and facility for using the FFA Information Collection Standard.

The effective FFA depends on successfully gathering sufficient, relevant information which reveals or is indicative of present danger, impending danger, diminished caregiver protective capacities, and/or child abuse and neglect. The FFA worker exerts diligent effort to collect information from children, caregivers, family members, and collateral sources in order to reach conclusions regarding child safety and who CPS must serve.

Specific information is needed to make critical judgments about the presence of maltreatment, present, and impending danger. To complete these judgments, the FFA worker collects behaviorally specific, detailed information as identified below.

The FFA worker diligently gathers sufficient information related to each assessment area in order to support and justify FFA decision making. The FFA Information Standards are:

The Extent of Abuse/Neglect

- ➡ Specific description of the abuse/neglect – type injury or threats that occurred and to whom
- ➡ Severity of the abuse/neglect – frequency, chronicity, and effects (e.g., physical, emotional, behavioral)

The Circumstances that Surround the Abuse/Neglect

- ➡ Detailed description of the incident(s) and circumstances associated with the maltreatment or that rule out maltreatment
- ➡ Caregivers' explanation of what happened including how the child's injuries occurred
- ➡ History and duration of the maltreatment – how long the current situation has existed and whether there have been any prior incidents
- ➡ Contributing or associated factors and conditions (e.g., substance use, mental disability, domestic violence)

Adult Functioning

- ➡ Physical, behavioral, cognitive, and social
- ➡ Life management, communication, and problem solving
- ➡ Mental health and substance use
- ➡ Social supports and relationships

General Parenting Practices

- ➡ Parenting style and history
- ➡ Appropriateness of parents'/primary caregivers' expectations of child
- ➡ Sensitivity to child's needs and limitations
- ➡ Caregiver protective capacities

Disciplinary Practices

(i.e., direction-giving, guidance, punishment and reward, teaching practices)

- ➡ Parents'/primary caregivers' intentions
- ➡ Parents'/primary caregivers' self-control
- ➡ Methods, flexibility, and appropriateness, including responsiveness to child's needs

Child Functioning (all children in the home)

- ➡ Physical
- ➡ Emotional
- ➡ Behavioral
- ➡ Cognitive
- ➡ Social

The FFA worker demonstrates interpersonal skills that facilitate information collection.

While personal style is encouraged, there are two interpersonal skill sets that FFA workers use to promote involvement, encourage participation, generate information, and engage caregivers.

(1) Conversational dialoguing is more of an orientation than specific skills. This is a way of interviewing that avoids an interrogation kind of approach in favor of a “talking together.” It requires communicating in a balanced and equalitarian manner. It works

because the FFA worker lowers his/her authority while seeking a common ground and interest. The person being interviewed is valued as the best source of information available. Conversational dialoguing is characterized by interest, curiosity, information sharing, empathy, support, and encouragement.

(2) Motivational Interviewing (MI) provides specific skills that contribute to guiding the interview while encouraging participation and information sharing. The openness that is apparent in the Motivational Interviewing skill set is productive in “keeping the person talking.” Additionally, MI provides a natural, effective means for probing more deeply into areas of information as well as emotions.

The FFA worker understands that he/she is the most important variable in a successful FFA. The FFA worker’s effectiveness is directly associated with his/her beliefs and values and the manner in which he/she conducts interaction with children, caregivers, family members, and collateral sources. The FFA worker consciously uses himself/herself by employing interpersonal skills, yet does so in a way that feels more like a natural conversation than an inquiry.

The FFA worker meets face-to-face with children and caregivers promptly when there are indications in the intake assessment that children may not be safe.

The Intake Assessment results in the designation of a response time based on indications of present danger or impending danger. The decision about how soon to respond to a report is based on a safety designated timeframe, content within the intake report, supervisory consultation, and logic and reasonable judgment. It is common sense and responsible intention that influence the need to respond

promptly when information about a family indicates that a child is in danger.

The FFA worker diligently attempts to make face-to-face contact with children named in an Intake Assessment. The FFA worker understands the rationale and importance for responding according to the following:

Present Danger – When a child is reported to be in present danger, an FFA worker will want to see the child within 2 hours of the report. In some cases reported information indicates that the child is under the care of a protective adult which can allow the FFA worker to respond the same day the report is received.

Impending Danger – When a child is reported to be in impending danger, the FFA worker will want to see the child within 24 hours of receipt of the report. In some cases reported information indicates that the child is under the care of a protective adult and other reported information supports or justifies a delayed response.

The FFA worker engages the caregivers and other family members in the information and assessment process.

The purposes for engaging a person during the FFA are different than for the Protective Capacity Family Assessment during ongoing CPS. In the Protective Capacity Family Assessment at the onset of ongoing CPS, the purpose is to engage individuals in a process of change. During FFA the purpose is to engage the person in information sharing and the process of information collection. The FFA worker behaves and interacts in ways that encourage the person to “connect” with him/her, to join together in accepting the

task to share and provide information. In addition to the skill sets described in the above standard, engaging children, caregivers, family members, and collateral sources in the information collection process is an interpersonal skill that combines FFA worker values, motivation, intent, and technique.

The FFA worker acknowledges the caregiver's civil rights in general but specifically with respect to informing the caregiver of the nature of the report and the role of CPS.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires that caregivers be advised of the reason for CPS intervention. Traditionally it has been accepted that good practice includes informing caregivers and family members of the concern that has been reported to the agency about their family. This standard goes further though by expressing a general attitude and expectation about the value and worth of the caregiver and the family. This expression is carried forth through FFA worker behavior, communication, and interaction that demonstrate respect for privacy and due process as well as basic human rights. Basic human rights are concerned with being informed, being heard, acceptance of individual and cultural uniqueness, being involved, and the right to have others involved according to personal choice (such as an attorney or some other advocate).

The FFA worker maintains the confidentiality of the reporter while conducting the FFA information collection process.

A principle value of safety intervention is confidentiality. That principle also applies to safeguarding the confidentiality of the reporter. This is a long-standing practice in CPS and is required by law.

The FFA worker identifies present danger.

Present danger refers to threats of harm that exist and are encountered by the FFA worker upon entering the case situation at initial contact. Present danger is active and in process. Present danger can have immediate consequences. Family conditions, situations, behaviors, emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and/or motivation within a family that exist as present danger are transparent to, easily observed, or learned by or revealed to the FFA worker. Present danger is obvious, usually occurring right before the observer. The facts and evidence of present danger are usually being displayed in vivid and understandable ways. One often needs no more information than what is before him or her when evaluating present danger. Confirming information (from family members, collaterals, and so forth) is often available to validate observations.

The primary focus of safety intervention at initial contact is for the FFA worker to rule in or rule out present danger. Even when present danger is not apparent upon first encountering children, caregivers, other family members, and the home, the FFA worker continues to be alert for any indication of present danger as interviewing and information collection continues.

When identifying present danger, the FFA worker observes the specific situation and/or behavior that represent the present danger, identifies the child who is vulnerable to the present danger, how the child is vulnerable, and what the potential effects might be on the child. The FFA worker considers all that can be understood about the present danger, knowing that he or she must be prepared to manage the present danger through a present danger plan.

The FFA worker consults with a supervisor as part of identifying present danger. The consultation assists in considering all aspects of what is being observed and provides confirmation to the FFA worker about his or her judgment.

When present danger is identified during the initial contact, the FFA worker performs reasonable efforts in order to prevent placement as the present danger plan.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires workers to make reasonable efforts to prevent children from being placed. Reasonable efforts are defined as all that an FFA worker does in order to keep a child safe without having to remove a child from his or her home. Reasonable efforts are not required by law to occur when emergency circumstances exist. This applies to when children are in present danger. The idea is that in emergency situations there may not be time and opportunity to expend reasonable efforts to prevent placement.

Even with this exception, the FFA worker can perform reasonable efforts to consider available options to keep a child safe without having to remove him/her. The FFA worker consults with caregivers to identify resources within the family network that may be available for the present danger plan. The FFA worker is informed of and considers safety services that may be available and accessible. The FFA worker pursues a least intrusive approach in selecting a present danger plan with placement in foster care as the most intrusive.

When present danger is identified during the initial contact, the FFA worker consults with his/her supervisor to review the observed family situation, discuss identified present danger, and consider the best approach for a present danger plan.

In the comprehensive assessment process, supervision occurs as a dynamic interaction between a supervisor and the FFA worker. That means that in addition to more formal, scheduled supervision, the FFA worker seeks and receives supervision spontaneously available to support field practice and decision making.

The FFA worker consults with a supervisor in order to check out his/her observations and assessment of the family situation in which present danger is in question. The FFA worker seeks input and guidance about the intervention and prospective options that might be taken. The supervisor seeks to qualify what the FFA worker's understanding is and to give guidance to the FFA worker's actions and decisions.

While the need for supervision varies with worker experience and skill, it is reasonable that crucial decisions concerned with child safety and possible separation of children from their families involve supervisory review and approval.

The FFA worker involves caregivers in planning the present danger plan in so far as they are able and the context permits.

When present danger exists at initial contact, a present danger plan must be established the same day. Caregivers do not have a choice about whether a present danger plan will be put in place. Caregivers can be involved in discussions about the present danger and the need for a present danger plan. That discussion can involve the

caregivers in identifying what their concerns are, their interests for the plan, what they are willing to cooperate with, how they can participate, and who is available and accessible to participate in a present danger plan. The caregivers can be helped to understand that they are not responsible for the present danger plan. If the plan is an in-home strategy, the FFA worker discusses the caregivers' willingness and capacity to allow the plan to be implemented as planned. If the plan is an out-of-home plan, discussion should occur about caregiver – child contact that is acceptable and how that will be managed.

When present danger is identified during the initial contact, the FFA worker arranges and implements a present danger plan the same day as the initial contact.

The FFA worker understands that present danger means that the child is in danger at the time. The FFA worker knows that conclusion means that intervention must occur immediately. While taking the least intrusive approach possible, the FFA worker rules in and rules out options in conjunction with consultation with the caregivers, other family members, his or her supervisor, and others who may exist as prospective present danger plan participants.

“Arranges” means actually creating a specific plan that meets criteria for an acceptable present danger plan.

“Implements” means actually seeing and knowing that the present danger plan is operating.

In cases that involve kin or foster care placement, the FFA worker has personal contact with the adults who will be caring for the

children and makes a home visit the day of placement when possible.

The FFA worker evaluates the present danger plan within 24 hours of implementation including confirming the safety of placement homes when the present danger involves a placement.

The purpose of evaluating the present danger plan within 24 hours is to assure that it is working according to what was established and agreed to. It includes assessing a child's safety based on the effectiveness of the present danger plan. Personal contact with those responsible for the plan assures understanding of responsibility, acceptable alliance with the FFA worker, agreement with the need for the plan, carrying out any specifics set forth in the plan, and clarifying any aspects of the plan that may be needed. When children are placed with kin or in foster care, this includes a home visit to evaluate the safety of the placement home in accordance with ASFA requirements.

It is important and respectful to have a personal contact with caregivers too in order to check out their feelings and perceptions and to provide them with information and updates concerning the FFA.

The FFA worker documents the identification of the present danger within 24 hours of the establishment of the present danger plan.

The significance of this action both to the family and to CPS is such that a record of what was encountered at initial contact and the resulting intervention is promptly justified in documentation. The FFA worker records what was observed as present danger and

describes the child and family situation sufficiently to explain his/her conclusions.

The present danger plan is documented in detail including what actions are to be taken by whom, who is responsible for assuring the plan is implemented effectively, the suitability of the people involved, when things are to occur, what the caregivers' understanding of the plan is and how they have responded to intervention, access between caregivers and children, and how the plan will be monitored.

The FFA worker includes documentation of the supervisory consultation.

A FFA supervisor approves of the present danger conclusion and present danger plan within 24 hours of the implementation of the present danger plan.

The supervisor may meet with the FFA worker to review the events and decisions occurring during the initial assessment. The supervisor reviews the FFA worker's documentation. Supervisory approval means that the supervisor agrees with the decisions made and actions taken.

The FFA worker oversees the present danger plan through weekly personal contacts with participants in the present danger plan including at least one face-to-face contact with children.

The present danger plan is a stop-gap measure which essentially interrupts or places the family situation, family routines, and family functioning on hold so that the FFA process can continue. The present danger plan serves two purposes. The major purpose is to control the present danger. The second purpose is to keep the

children safe while the FFA worker develops an understanding of the family and what is going on with the family in order to evaluate impending danger. To assure that the present danger plan is serving these purposes, the FFA worker stays in touch with those who are responsible for carrying out the present danger plan. These contacts can be in person, can be in people's homes, can be by telephone, and likely are in association with the FFA worker's continued FFA information collection efforts and activities. The purpose of the oversight – the weekly contacts – is to double check that the present danger plan is actively working, that those who committed to protect the child are doing so, that agreements about caregiver – child access are being carried out, that nothing associated with the present danger identified at first contact(s) is active or threatening the child, and that the child is safe.

The FFA worker expedites the FFA information collection process when present danger is identified at the initial contact.

Since the FFA worker knows that even though present danger is of grave concern it is not in and of itself a conclusive indicator that a child is living in impending danger, the need to reconcile whether present danger is symptomatic, a dimension, or expression of impending danger compels the FFA worker to act swiftly to fully understand what is going on in the family. Additionally, the FFA worker knows that acting expeditiously is necessary because the present danger plan exists as an intrusion into the family's life, routine, and rights. To reconcile the need for that intrusion as effectively and efficiently as possible is the preferred course of action during the FFA.

While the FFA worker balances his/her efforts among families assigned for FFA, there is a general understanding and commitment

to proceed with interviewing and information collection in a conscious, active, and prompt manner. To the FFA worker, *expediting* means attempting to get back to the family after the initial contact as soon as possible to proceed with the interviewing protocol (if that was disrupted during the initial contact). This could mean commencing interviews the day after the initial contact or that same week. *Expediting* means being well organized and strategic about how to proceed including being calculated about whom to see when and where; how to capture the most that need to be interviewed in the most efficient way.

Basic questions influence expediting information collection.

- Has everyone been interviewed that can contribute?
- Have variations and contradictions in information been reconciled?
- Has sufficient information been collected for each of the comprehensive assessment process assessment questions (standards)?
- Has a picture of the family been formed with respect to what's going on, how the family functions generally, what the family is like?
- How well do I understand the family?
- Do I know enough to complete an informed and justifiable safety assessment?

The FFA worker uses an interviewing protocol to assure consistency in the approach to information collection and to maximize the amount and quality of information collected.

The FFA worker uses the FFA Information Collection/Interviewing Protocol to collect information during the FFA comprehensive assessment process. The protocol is family centered. The protocol begins with a preparation phase and continues through a series of interviews where information is collected to make the necessary FFA decisions. The protocol reinforces the importance of supportive interaction with individuals as pertinent and productive to effective information collection during the FFA.

The FFA worker employs a family-centered approach when conducting the FFA. This approach seeks to support and involve children, parents, primary caregivers, and other individuals in all aspects of CPS intervention. The FFA worker makes every effort to constructively engage children, caregivers, and other persons involved with and knowledgeable of the circumstances surrounding the information within the comprehensive assessment process FFA.

Preparation

The FFA worker prepares for conducting the FFA prior to making initial contact with children, their families, and others pertinent to the assessment. Preparation includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ➡ Reviewing all information collected during the intake process including agency case records and child abuse and neglect files; and when the situation involves reports and initial child contact after regular business hours, the case records and child abuse and neglect files must be reviewed the next working day;

- ➡ Contacting reporters, as needed, to clarify vague or inconsistent aspects of the intake information or to obtain additional information needed before making initial contact;
- ➡ Considering threats of serious harm to the children;
- ➡ Planning location(s) and order in which interviews will be conducted;
- ➡ Identifying and securing involvement of other needed individuals (e.g., law enforcement, other agency staff, mental health personnel); and
- ➡ Obtaining consultation with an FFA supervisor as needed.

Interview Protocol Process

1. The FFA worker begins by interviewing the child.
2. Following the interview with the child identified in the intake report, the FFA worker attempts to interview other children in the household if they are available.
3. In two caregiver households, the FFA worker attempts to interview the non maltreating caregiver next if the report provides such information.
4. Following these interviews, the FFA worker interviews the caregiver identified within the intake report as responsible for the child abuse/neglect or threat of serious harm.

The FFA worker conducts sufficient numbers of interviews of sufficient length and effort necessary to assure that due diligence is demonstrated and sufficient information is collected to assess threats of serious harm.

Certain case situations may require a deviation from the information collection protocol. Deviations from the protocol can be considered with supervisory consultation and approval and, of course, are documented.

The FFA worker identifies immediate, emergency unmet needs the family is experiencing and arranges for the provision of immediate, emergency services.

Sometimes FFA workers encounter families that are in crisis, families that are in need of emergency help. At initial contact and during the FFA when an FFA worker recognizes that a family has emergency needs, he/she collaborates with the family to fully understand what the emergency needs are and how best to address the unmet needs. Unmet needs of an emergency nature may be physical or mental health related; concerned with housing or other basic needs; associated with transportation, utilities or other basic financial deficiencies. Arranging and accessing services and resources to meet these kinds of needs often is necessary and facilitative with respect to successfully moving the FFA information collection along. So there is a timeliness of intervention issues in question in this standard meaning to address emergency needs in order to meet unmet need and to encourage engagement in the FFA process.

The FFA worker documents the information standard assessment questions.

The FFA worker collects information in six areas of family functioning in order to understand the family and in order to evaluate safety and caregiver protective capacities. The six assessment areas (questions) are:

✘ What is the extent of maltreatment?

- ✘ What are the circumstances that surround the maltreatment?
- ✘ How does the child function?
- ✘ How do the adults (caregivers) function generally?
- ✘ What are the general parenting practices?
- ✘ What are the disciplinary practices?

The FFA worker knows that when these six areas are fully explored that a description of family function results which provides the basis and accountability for safety assessment and safety management. The FFA decisions depend on sufficient information from these assessment areas.

The FFA worker also understands that what is known based on these six areas of inquiry must be recorded and clearly expressed as the official conclusion and understanding of family functioning which forms the FFA and safety assessment.

Sufficient information as represented by acceptable documentation justifies the FFA worker's due diligence to collect the information and is qualified by what reasonably could have been known from those diligence efforts.

Coming Next Month

In March in Part 3 we will identify and discuss Family Functioning Assessment Decision Making and Case Management Standards.