

# Arkansas Division of Children & Family Services Practice Guide Series

## *How We Do the Work is as Important as the Work We Do*

### How We Do the Work of Gathering Information to Assess Health & Safety Risk Factors: An Overview

**Purpose** - Provide standard guidance for promising practices when gathering information to assess immediate danger to children.

**Related Policy** - Policy II-D

**Related Practice Model Goals/Principles** -

- Safely keep children with their families.
- Enhance well-being in all of our practice with families.
- Safety for children is achieved through positive protective relationships with caring family and community members.

**How We Do the Health & Safety Assessment**- Although there are various ways an assessor can gather information to complete an accurate health and safety assessment, this document provides one example of a comprehensive approach. Since every situation is different, an assessor's approach may require flexibility during an investigation.

The very fact the state is inserting a worker into a family's life sets up an adversarial situation from the beginning. Under such conditions, it is the responsibility of the assessor to create an atmosphere conducive to a discussion, not an interrogation. You can be in control and get the information you need without being seen as attacking, disrespectful, or judgmental. If you continually have a high rate of conflict with families in comparison with your co-workers, you need to recognize your approach and methodology in interviewing families may be contributing to this issue. You cannot count on families to become more cooperative, so you must examine yourself and make the necessary changes in your behavior and techniques.

*Your goal is to gather enough information to make the right decisions about a child's safety, not to "show them who's boss" or to point out their lack of parenting skills.*

For a safety assessment to be effective in structuring and impacting decision making, it must be conducted during the first contact with the family. However, you will usually not get all the information you need during the initial visit with a family. You may get contradictory statements, one parent may not be home, some of the kids may be unavailable, etc. However, whether you like it or not, **when the assessor decides to leave without removing the children or without implementing a protection plan, a safety decision has been made.** Subsequent contacts may alter that decision.

**Time Frames** -

- Begin investigations of severe maltreatment **within 24 hours.**
- Begin all other investigations **within 72 hours.**
- Complete all interviews **within 30 days** of receipt of the child maltreatment report.

**Documenting the Health & Safety Factors Constituting Immediate Danger** - For each safety factor presenting immediate danger, the assessor should include explanation for injury, facts that support or do not support explanation, quotes, worker observations, and other professional assessments as applicable.

**Outcomes** -

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Resources: 2010 Child Protective Services Training: Structured Decision Making; Hornby Zeller Associates, Inc.