


STATE OF WISCONSIN  
Department of Children and Families  
Division of Safety and Permanence

DSP Memo Series 2011 - 07  
June 28, 2011  
Re: Modifications to the Child Protective  
Services Safety Intervention  
Standards

To: Area Administrators/ Human Services Area Coordinators  
Bureau Directors  
Child Placing Agency Directors  
Child Welfare Agency Directors  
County Departments of Community Programs Directors  
County Departments of Developmental Disabilities  
Services Directors  
County Departments of Human Services Directors  
County Departments of Social Services Directors  
Indian Child Welfare Directors  
Licensing Chiefs/Section Chiefs  
Tribal Chairpersons/Human Services Facilitators

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Administrator

## Introduction

Wisconsin's child welfare practice has long included safety intervention as part of its system. The results of the continuous quality improvement process, however, reveal a need to refine this area of practice. This also mirrors a finding of the 2010 federal Child and Family Services Review. In response Wisconsin's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) includes an action step related to strengthening policy, practice, and training to provide more precision in safety assessment and planning.

To improve practice, the Division of Safety and Permanence received feedback from county child welfare professionals through regional roundtables as well as input from national child welfare professionals about the current Child Protective Services (CPS) Safety Intervention Standards. This resulted in changes to the danger threshold and the impending danger threats as a step in improving safety intervention.

## Danger Threshold

The danger threshold is the point at which family functioning and associated parent or caregiver performance becomes perilous enough to become a threat to child safety. The danger threshold criteria includes family behaviors, conditions or situations that are observable, specific and valid; occurring in the presence of a vulnerable child; are out-of-control; are severe/extreme in nature; are imminent; and likely to produce severe harm.

A child is unsafe when an impending danger threat meets the threshold criteria. Therefore, the "safety threshold" has been changed to "danger threshold" since it more accurately depicts the family situation and conditions. Additionally, the severity definition has been edited to provide better guidance in safety decision-making.

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## Document Summary

This memo improves child welfare practice by revising the danger threshold and the impending danger threats used in safety assessment and practice. These changes are based on input from county child welfare staff and other stakeholders. Changes have been made to the eWiSACWIS system to reflect these changes.

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## Impending Danger

Impending danger is associated with a child living or being in a state of danger or in a position of continual danger. Unlike present danger where a child may be immediately hurt, impending danger threats may not exist at a particular moment or be an immediate concern. Impending danger threats are insidious but are not immediate, obvious, or active at the onset of CPS intervention.

Information is collected in six primary areas of family life (maltreatment, surrounding circumstances, child functioning, adult functioning, discipline, and parenting practices) in order to fully assess and evaluate the presence of impending danger threats and parent or caregiver protective capacities. Assessing these areas on an ongoing basis is an essential safety intervention responsibility for CPS.

A safety plan is implemented to immediately control impending danger threats and co-exists with an ongoing case plan. While a safety plan focuses solely on impending danger threats, a case plan addresses a wide range of family needs to be achieved over time.

The following diagram shows the relationship between the CPS assessment and impending danger threats:

<i><b>Assessment Question</b></i>	<i><b>Impending Danger Threat</b></i>
What is the extent of maltreatment? What are the circumstances that surround the maltreatment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or both parents/caregivers intend(ed) to seriously hurt the child</li> <li>• Living arrangements seriously endanger the child's physical health.</li> </ul>
How does the child function on a daily basis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child is profoundly fearful of home situation or people in the home</li> </ul>
How do the adults function on a daily basis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or both parents'/caregivers' behavior is dangerously impulsive or they will not/cannot control their behavior.</li> <li>• One or both parents/caregivers are violent.</li> </ul>
What are the general parenting practices? What are the disciplinary practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child has exceptional needs which the parents/caregivers cannot or will not meet.</li> <li>• No adult in the home will perform parental duties and responsibilities.</li> <li>• One or both parents/caregivers fear they will maltreat the child and/or request placement.</li> <li>• One or both parents/caregivers lack parenting knowledge, skills, or motivation necessary to assure the child's basic needs are met.</li> <li>• One or both parents/caregivers have extremely negative perceptions of the child.</li> <li>• Family does not have or use resources necessary to assure the child's basic needs.</li> </ul>

A significant change to the CPS Safety Intervention Standards is the modification of impending danger threats used currently in practice. This resulted in decreasing the number of threats from 17 to 11. The following 6 impending danger threats will no longer be used:

- **There is some indication that the parents/caregivers will flee.**  
This is a present danger threat and informs the response time to a CPS report. Throughout the case process, CPS continues to gather and evaluate information to confirm that parents/caregivers are committed to the safety and/or case plan.
- **Child shows serious emotional effects of maltreatment and a lack of behavioral control.**  
A child's lack of behavioral control identifies a potential or a continuing need for treatment for the child which is a case planning issue but does not require a safety management action to control impending danger.

- **Child shows serious physical effects of maltreatment.**  
This is a present danger threat and informs the response time to a CPS report. This information may also indicate a continuing need for treatment for the child which is a case planning issue but does not require a safety management action to control impending danger.
- **Child is seen by either parent/caregiver as being responsible for the parents'/primary caregivers' problems.**  
This information indicates a need for treatment for the parent/caregiver which is a case planning issue but does not require a safety management action to control impending danger.
- **The maltreating parent/caregiver exhibits no remorse or guilt.**  
This information indicates a need for treatment for the parent/caregiver which is a case planning issue but does not require a safety management action to control impending danger.
- **One or both parents/caregivers have failed to benefit from previous professional help.**  
This may be a predictor for case planning or treatment services but not for safety management actions used to control impending danger threats.

Other changes to the impending danger threats were made to improve or clarify wording or definitions. For example, the words "profoundly" and "or other people within the home" were added to the threat "Child is fearful of the home situation" and the definition was expanded to provide better guidance.

### eWiSACWIS

Changes to eWiSACWIS were made to support the modifications to the CPS Safety Intervention Standards. These changes are highlighted below:

- The modified Safety Assessment questions (impending danger threats) will **only** be displayed on newly created pages. For example, if a base assessment page was created prior to the new release, but no Initial Assessment-Primary page was created; then the new Safety Assessment questions will be displayed. However, if the Initial Assessment-Primary was created in the old release, the previous safety questions will continue to be displayed.
- Safety Assessment questions will only copy over from documents with the new Safety questions. Therefore, if an Initial Assessment is completed with the previous Safety Assessment questions, that information will not copy over to the Family Assessment and Case Plan. All other narrative information will continue to copy over as it currently does in the system.

Ongoing technical assistance will be provided to counties through roundtable discussions at regional CPS supervisors meetings and training will be provided by the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System. This new policy and related changes in eWiSACWIS will become effective July 5, 2011.

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Attachment: [The Danger Threshold and Impending Danger Threats To Child Safety](#)

#memo/dsp/2011/Modifications to CPS Safety Standards.doc