Child Protection Transformation and Foster Parents

How does the Child Protection Transformation impact me, the Foster Parent? Two goals of this project are consistency in decision making and partnership throughout the child welfare community. Consistency in decision making from the first call to the hotline, through the investigative process, case management services and foster care. Consistency applied by all the individuals involved throughout this process. Your experience with the Department and community based care agency should be positive and strength-based, with a child and family focus.

Our goal is to maintain, preserve and strengthen families. Partnership and Teamwork are essential components to the success of our families. Partnership starts first with the families we serve and follows our collaborative work with you, the Foster Parent. By the time a child reaches you they have experienced a significant life changing event. While the reason they are brought into care has been traumatic, their experience through the system should mark the beginning of the healing process. It is vital that information be shared with you. You are empowered to support and nurture children when you know what they’ve been through and the direction their life is heading. Circularly, you are also a vital source of information. You will know this child better than anyone else in the system. Service providers need that key information. This partnership keeps children on the path to a better life.

So how are you the Foster Parent impacted? You are an active partner in this collaborative process. Your relationship with our children and families is a key to their success. Through our joint advocacy on their behalf and our shared understanding of how safety decisions are processed and determined, we improve not only our child welfare system, but the lives of the children and families we serve.
Families will be maintained and preserved whenever safe to do so.

The Child Protection Transformation introduces a new Safety Decision Making Methodology that applies a common approach to information collection and a consistent method for making safety decisions and determining the appropriate level of intervention for a family. Child protection professionals will continually evaluate if a child can be safe in their family home based on the following formula:

\[
\text{Threats of Danger} \times \text{Vulnerable Child} + /- \text{Parent Protective Capacities} = \text{Safe or Unsafe}
\]

**Threats of Danger**
- (Out of control, Immediate, Observable, and Severe Consequences)

**Vulnerable Child**
- (Lacks ability to self protect)
- +/-

**Parent Protective Capacities**
- (Vigilance, Preparation and Power to Protect)

Children are reunified with an in home safety plan when danger threats are mitigated and managed.

The criterion for reunification is simple: What were the circumstances that made the Child Protective Investigator decide an in home safety plan would not be sufficient and either an out of home safety plan or removal from the home was required? Do those circumstances still exist? If the answer is no, the reunification efforts for the child MUST be initiated. Reunification efforts will include the development of an in-home safety plan and transition planning. Be ready for these discussions because you will be involved!

**Can an in-home safety plan replace the out-of-home safety plan?**

**Can we step down the intensity of our intervention?**

**Safety Decision Making Methodology expedites and supports permanency**

Every child deserves a forever family. Most times this is achieved with their biological family. Other times it is with relatives. And in some cases it is with adoption. While we are involved with the family we are continually learning about them. We use that knowledge to support and empower them to be self sufficient. We assess the family’s functioning, child needs and caregiver protective capacities; we evaluate their progress on case plan goals. We are then able to identify the right services and provide them in the proper sequence to help the family reach their potential. We have learned that even 100% case plan compliance does not necessarily demonstrate changed behavior. We don’t just want to know that a parent sat through a class or showed up for an evaluation - we want to see that they can demonstrate the skills and knowledge they learned into practice.

In the same way that the Safety Decision Making Methodology expedites and supports reunification, it expedites permanency when a child cannot be reunified. Court cases are strengthened by adherence to the Methodology. Attorneys for children are able to clearly demonstrate the Department’s legally required active and reasonable efforts to support the case in our dependency court. The entire child welfare community collaborated to give the parents the right services and worked together to make them successful.

**Structured Child Needs Assessment**

This new Methodology puts a direct spotlight on children’s needs. Throughout their journey with us children are constantly and consistently evaluated for how they are functioning. A base line is developed at the very start of the case and is evaluated throughout. How was this child functioning when they came into care? Have they shown improvement or have their skills deteriorated? With this tool we can modify services and make sure the child’s full spectrum of needs is being met.

**Where can I go for additional information?**

Please visit the Center for the Advancement Child Welfare Practice site at http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/. Click on the Child Protection Transformation Link on the left sided toolbar. There you will find all the latest eLearnings and up to date information regarding the Child Protection Transformation project and the implementation of the Safety Decision Making Methodology.

The introduction of the Safety Decision Making Methodology will bring consistency and improved quality to the decisions that are made for the children entrusted to your care. A common approach to decision making, by the Child Protection Professionals you work with, will support more predictable and planned decisions. As a Foster Parent, you will be able to enhance your advocacy for children once you have an understanding of how decisions are made within the child welfare system. This will also allow you to enhance your support to foster children as you will be more equip to explain the decision making process of the ‘system.’ This implementation will take time become standard practice and we are all committed to making it work. We appreciate your commitment to the children and families in Florida.