

Florida Safety Methodology

What is it?

The Florida Safety Methodology introduces a new child welfare practice model that emphasizes the engagement and empowerment of parents, utilizing a standardized approach to safety decision-making and risk assessment to achieve child safety. The methodology will be applied systemically from the Florida Abuse Hotline to case management services. The implementation of the Florida Safety Methodology will establish:

1. Common language for assessing safety for both child protective investigators and case managers.
2. A standardized framework for identifying children who are unsafe.
3. A common set of constructs that guide safety interventions for unsafe children.
4. A common framework for case planning to address child needs and diminished caregiver protective capacities.

The key to Florida's Safety Methodology is ensuring that child welfare professionals have the skills and supervisory support to assess families. Florida's Safety Methodology was developed in conjunction with national experts from the National Resource Center for Child Protection and the Children's Research Center.

Why Make the Change?

In March 2011, an independent review panel critically examined the Barahona child death and identified a number of systemic errors and omissions that occurred at various levels of the child protection system, including:

- Insufficient investigative practices and inadequate case management;
- Lack of integrated information sharing;
- Rapid caseworker turnover; inexperience, excessive caseloads;
- Unclear case integration;
- Unclear role of supervisors for case investigation and management;
- Overall substandard quality of documentation by both case managers and investigators.

Short-term actions were taken, including: training, enhancing accountability and expectations over case ownership, requiring corrective action plans, and updating local law enforcement agreements. However, significant and sustainable improvement in child safety and well-being also required long-term changes to the entire child welfare system.

Where We Are Now

- As of November 21, 2013, forty-five percent of the child protection professionals have received the 8-day Safety Methodology training. In addition, the Department is facilitating training of partners and stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to the new practice model.
- Pre-service curriculum is being revised to include 10 training tracks that focus on child safety.
- Major modifications and enhancements have been made to the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) to support the Safety Methodology practice and reduce the amount of time staff must spend entering information. Critical enhancements to support the new Safety Methodology went into effect on November 10.
- Sixteen sites across the State have been approved to fully implement the Safety Methodology. To be approved as an implementation site, all stakeholders (CPI, case manager, children's legal services (CLS) attorney and dependency judge) must be trained and ready to implement the Safety Methodology.
- The Department has established a steering committee that includes judges, community-based care lead agencies, the Guardian ad Litem and advocates, to oversee on-going implementation activities.
- Each week, the Department's leadership, regional champions and supervisors meet to discuss the practice change and use of the automated tools in FSFN.
- Florida Administrative Rules are undergoing major revisions to address mandatory rulemaking in Chapter 39, F.S.