



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

CPS Assessments Track Training: A Job Aid for Supervisors Division of Social Services

CPS Assessments Track Training: A Job Aid for Supervisors

The CPS Assessment Track Training is designed to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of a CPS Assessment worker, including safety organized practice, interviewing skills, assessing safety and risk, family strengths and needs, utilizing safety networks, reasonable efforts, and the assessment decision process.

Day 1

- Purpose and Legal Basis
- Overview of CPS Assessment Process
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Courageous Conversations
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
- Trauma-Informed Care

Day 2

- Family-Centered Practice
- Engagement
- Interviewing
- Safety, Protective Factors, and Risk
- Assessing
- Three-Column Mapping
- Three Houses
- Harm and Worry Statements

Day 3

- Interviewing
- Role of Observation in Assessing Safety
- North Carolina Safety Assessment Tool
- Assessing Safety and Risk
- Safety and Danger Indicators
- Harm and Worry Statements

Day 4

- Safety Planning and TPSA
- Safety Interventions and Safety Decision
- Applying Cultural Humility to Safety Assessments and Safety Planning
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Cases Involving Special Circumstances
- Considerations for Worker Safety

Day 5

- Engaging the Family in CPS
- Risk Assessment Tool
- Protective Factors
- Crucial Conversations
- Quality Contacts
- Assessing Family Strengths and Needs
- Family Strengths and Needs Assessment
- Worker Safety: Secondary Traumatic Stress

Day 6

- Ongoing Assessing
- Safety and Risk in Comprehensive Family Assessments
- Safety Networks
- Collateral Contacts
- Formal Evaluations
- Documentation

Day 7

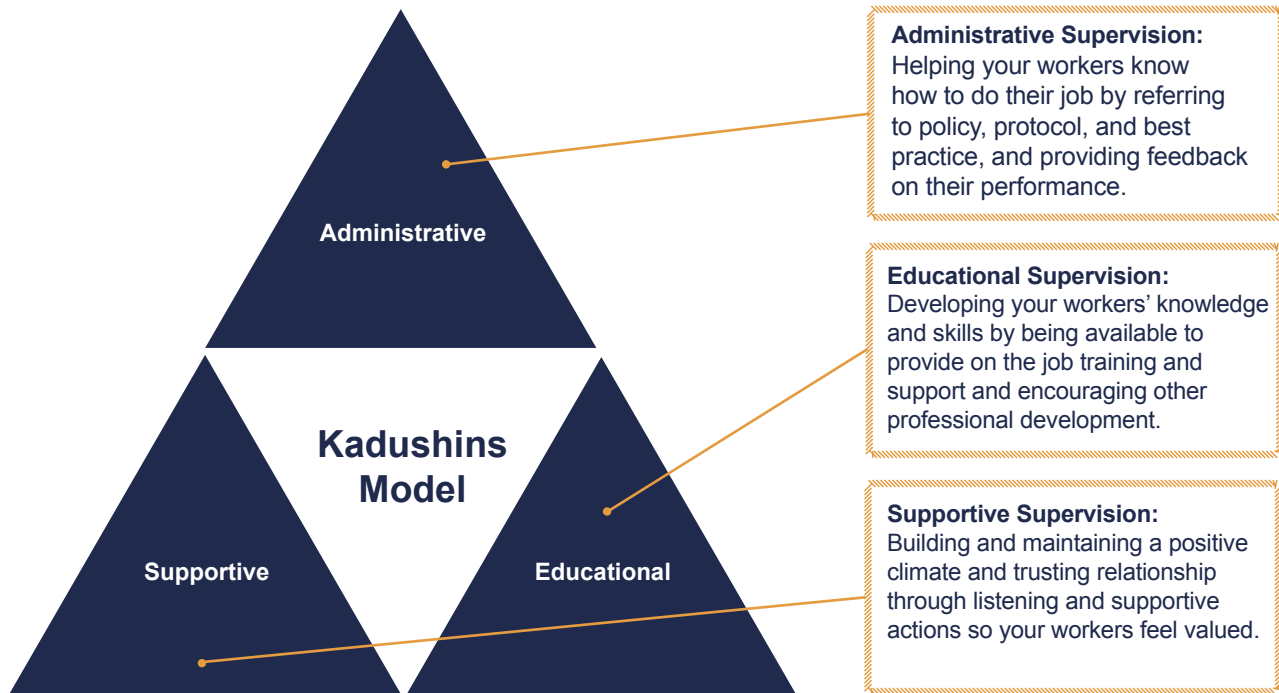
- Well-Being as an Outcome
- Reasonable Efforts and Removals
- Active Efforts
- Filing a Juvenile Petition
- Engaging Families in Placement Decisions
- Worker Safety when Emergency Custody is Necessary

Day 8

- Case Decision Process
- Decision-Making SDM Tools
- Decision Making and Critical Thinking
- Two-Level Decision Making
- Case Decisions
- Case Transfer
- Case Closure
- Worker Wellness and Self-Care

A Model for Supervision

Supervisors are the gateway to child welfare practice. They affect the quality and effectiveness of casework practice, influence agency culture, and directly correlate to staff retention. A supervisor’s role with training is to promote the transfer of learning from the training classroom to the work with children and families. New workers must practice their newly acquired skills on the job and receive feedback on their performance. Supervisors should master skills, knowledge, and capacity in three areas:



Supervisor Support for Transfer of Learning

Below are some key concepts taught in the CPS Assessment Track Training that support worker’s skill development. Content is followed by guidance on how supervisors can support the transfer of learning process for that specific topic. The North Carolina Practice Standards provide the behaviors for how workers successfully partner with children, families, and providers. Supervisors parallel the Essential Functions of the Practice Standards as they successfully support their workers.



Two-Level Decision-Making

Two-level decisions and reviews must occur on every CPS Assessment at the following times:

- When the Risk Assessment and Strengths and Needs Assessment are completed;
- Prior to initiating or terminating the use of a Temporary Safety Provider;
- At completion of the Safety Assessment and prior to the implementation of a Temporary Parental Safety Agreement;
- Before modification of a Temporary Parental Safety Agreement;
- Regarding diligent efforts to locate a child/family and when these efforts can end;
- At the case decision;
- Prior to filing a petition; and
- Whenever there is a change in circumstance that impacts the safety and/or risk to a child.



Two-Level Decision-Making

Supervision Strategies to Support Two-Level Decision Making

Supportive

Create a plan for decision-making when there is not agreement between yourself and your worker.

Consider how you will utilize the crucial conversations framework to move through conflicting desires in decision-making.

Provide clarity about when another supervisor, program manager, or others will be brought into the decision-making process.

Educational

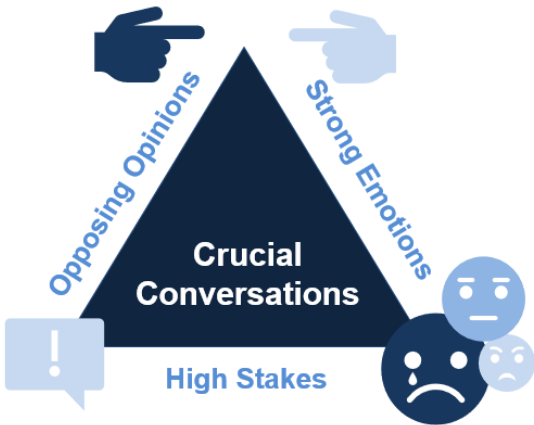
During a team meeting, generate a list of topics that require two-level decision-making or supervisory staffing.

Administrative

Discuss with staff ways to document two-level decision-making so there is clarity and alignment with policy.

Communicating Essential Function

Crucial Conversations



Crucial conversations are conversations that are:

- High stakes
- Have opposing opinions
- Elicit strong emotions

Communicating Essential Function

Supportive

Ask your worker to identify conversations that did not go well and how they could have utilized crucial conversation strategies to improve that interaction.

Coach them through planning their next crucial conversation.

Celebrate their success and provide additional support as needed.

Educational

During a staff meeting, have a new worker and a seasoned worker teach the concepts of crucial conversations.

Have your worker facilitate group discussions on what types of conversations are high stakes with opposing opinions and strong emotions. Then, ask them to facilitate a discussion about crucial conversation strategies that could be used in these instances.

Conduct role plays where your staff practice crucial conversations.

Administrative

Support your worker in identifying when crucial conversations arise in their casework.

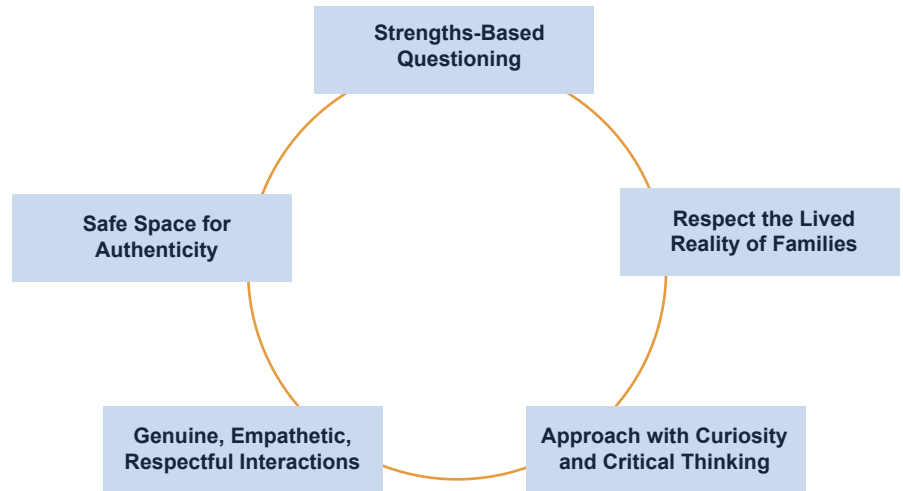
Use crucial conversations language to discuss policy requirements that align with the crucial conversations framework, such as placement or permanency plan changes, CFT meeting conflict, or when progress is lacking on a case plan.

Provide feedback on their ability to use crucial conversation skills. Model the use of the crucial conversations framework with your worker.

Engaging Essential Function

Narrative Interviewing

Narrative interviewing keeps the family at the center of the interview, giving the family member the freedom to express themselves in their own words, maintaining ownership of their experiences, while helping to get the information and context needed to make well-informed assessment decisions. With narrative interviewing, more of the context and integrity of their experiences are apparent, and family members will not feel the pressure to provide prompted responses to the questions we ask to get the information we need to gather to complete the Assessment.



Supervision Strategies to Support Engaging in Interviewing

Supportive

Develop a process to debrief difficult interviews.

- Listen to how your worker felt throughout the interaction and support them in identifying how this impacts their interview.
- Validate the emotional load that exists when interviewing individuals on hard topics. Develop strategies to manage the impact in real-time.
- Consider crucial conversations during interviews and the need to offer strategies to identify when a conversation has become unsafe and safety needs to be restored.

Model strengths-based, solution-focused discussions that are responsive to trauma in your supervision practices.

Educational

Promote your worker's skills in identifying strengths in a problem situation, exploring the past, finding and using expectations for the future, facilitating a positive vision of the future, scaling questions, encouraging commitment, and developing action steps.

Provide education and discussion in supervision and team meetings on how trauma impacts behavior, promoting skills that acknowledge the individual's feelings and convey belief in their experience.

Administrative

Review your worker's contacts and other case documentation. Assess for evidence of the use of open-ended questions and narrative interviewing techniques. Assess the use of Safety-Organized Practice tools to support the interview process, such as Three-Column Mapping or Three Houses.

Confirm that documentation reflects an acknowledgment of strengths and sensitivity to trauma and feelings of shame.

Develop verbiage with your worker that is reflective of their qualitative efforts with families and can be used in documentation and planning.

Assessing Essential Function

Safety and Risk

Safety is the absence of an immediate threat of moderate-to-serious harm to a child. Risk is the likelihood that a child will be maltreated in the future. The safety continuum describes conditions that range from safe, to safe with a plan, to unsafe. The Risk continuum is low, moderate, or high.

To fully assess a child and family, we must assess their safety and the ongoing associated risk. To be classified as a safety threat, a situation, condition, or behavior must meet the safety threshold. The safety threshold is the point when a parent's behaviors, attitudes, emotions, intent, or circumstances create conditions that fall beyond the mere risk of future maltreatment and have become an actual imminent threat to the child's safety. These conditions could reasonably result in the serious and unacceptable pain and suffering of a vulnerable child. Safety threats are conditions that are specific, observable, out of control, imminent, and the conditions can have a serious effect on the child. The effect on the child is critical to understanding safety.

A child is unsafe when:

- A safety threat exists within the family,
- The child is vulnerable to the treatment, and
- Caregivers have insufficient protective capacities to manage or control threats.

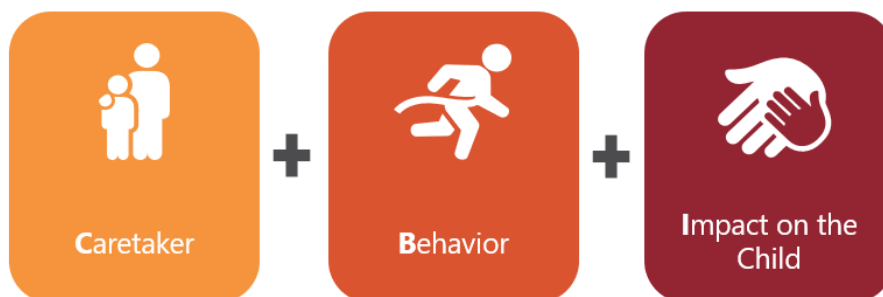
Protective Factors and Protective Capacities

A child is safe when there is no safety threat (immediate threat of danger), or if the parent possesses sufficient protective capacities to manage any threat. To determine parental protection, we consider **protective capacities**. Protective capacities are specific caregiver characteristics related to child safety. A caregiver building protective capacities contributes to a reduction in risk. There are four domains of protective capacity that must be considered: behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and environmental.

Protective factors are characteristics, attributes, and elements within individuals, families, communities, and societies that act to reduce risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development. There are five main categories of protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social-emotional competence of children.

Caretaker Impact on Child

The fundamental difference between risk and safety is the impact to the child. Impact is “when a parent’s behavior, attitudes, emotions, intent, or circumstances create conditions that fall beyond the mere risk of maltreatment and have become an actual imminent threat to a child’s safety.” Impact is a discussion of the harm caused to children because of their parents and caretakers’ behaviors.



EVIDENT
CHANGE

Supervision Strategies to Support Assessing Safety and Risk

Supportive

Support your worker in separating safety and risk when making decisions with families. Listen for the conflation of poverty and neglect. Be aware of language regarding worry and risk when making safety decisions.

Support your worker to actively identify the presence of protection through protective capacities and protective factors.

Utilize the three-question mapping in supervision:

- What is working well?
- What are we worried about?
- What needs to happen next?

Support your worker in separating their own worry from the impact of parent behaviors. Consider biases that may be at play.

Educational

Encourage your worker to attend additional training provided by experts in their field on abuse and neglect topics that will enhance their skills in assessing safety and risk.

Guide your worker in being objective and synthesizing behaviorally specific information. Determine whether they have asked questions to obtain parental protective capacities and protective factors.

Regularly discuss with your worker the different types of information necessary to make decisions:

- Interviews and observations
- SDM tools

Center discussions around impact.

- In team meetings, offer opportunities to staff cases with a focus on impact.
- In supervision, intentionally begin case staffing discussing impact.

Administrative

Review statutory definitions of abuse, neglect, and dependency with your worker often.

Confirm documentation regarding protection is robust and equally emphasized for information that indicates the presence of safety threats.

Provide feedback on how your worker can quickly access policies, and SDM tools, keep up to date on any changes, and how they should utilize them in practice.

Support your worker in understanding how safety organized practice supports policy and completion of required forms.

Behaviorally-Specific Harm and Worry Statements

Harm and worry statements are short, simple, behavior-based statements that workers can use to create a shared understanding of what has occurred, or allegedly occurred, and what the concerns for the future are. These statements allow important, difficult conversations to occur and guide workers as they talk with families about the most critical items to address.



It was reported



What caretaker actions/inaction



Impact on the child



Child

may be



Impacted how?

if/when



Context

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Supervision Strategies to Support Creating Harm and Worry Statements

Supportive

Provide feedback and support in refining the harm and worry statements they develop provisionally with the reporter on the call. The statements should be written in honest, detailed, non-judgmental, and clear language.

Educational

Walk through CPS Assessment cases with harm and worry statements (redact family, reporter, and worker information). Ask your worker to point out strong harm and worry statements and ones that need improvement. Have them identify how those that are not strong could be improved.

Administrative

Set clear expectations for the development of harm and worry statements with your worker. Be clear on how to develop these statements with families.

Convey to your worker the importance of using harm and worry statements to clearly communicate concerns and worries with the family.

Planning Essential Function

Structured Decision-Making: North Carolina Safety Assessment

The North Carolina Safety Assessment guides workers through a structured decision-making (or SDM) process. Beginning with an assessment of child vulnerability, the SDM asks the worker to consider current danger indicators. After considering Factors that Influence Child Vulnerability (Part A) and Current Indicators of Safety (Part B), the worker comes to their first decision point. At this point, if all Indicators of Immediate Safety 1 through 16 are marked “no,” the home is considered to be **Safe**.

If a determination is made that there are safety indicators present and there is a possibility of immediate danger of serious harm, indicated by a “yes” response to at least 1 of the 16 Indicators of Immediate Safety, the worker will:

- Explore possible interventions to ensure safety within the home.
- If interventions will mitigate safety concerns, a Temporary Parental Safety Agreement (TPSA) plan must be developed with the family (including all parents and caregivers) to ensure safety.
- If interventions are not sufficient to ensure safety or the caregivers are unwilling or unable to participate in a TPSA, the child is then considered “unsafe” and a juvenile petition for court custody must be filed.

If a TPSA is unable to be developed and removal of children through legal action is the only protecting intervention possible for one or more children, the home is found to be **Unsafe**.

If safety interventions are available and a TPSA can be developed, the safety decision is indicated as **Safe with a Plan**.

North Carolina Safety Assessment

Part A: Factors
Influencing Child
Vulnerability

Part B: Current Indicators
of Safety

Part C: Safety
Interventions

Part D: Safety Decisions

Part E: Safety Agreement

Part F: Statements of
Understanding Agreement

Safety Interventions

Identifying safety interventions is a blend of communicating, engaging, assessing, and planning with families. Identification of appropriate safety interventions to address the safety threats in partnership with the child's parent is key to a parent's understanding of how an intervention may or may not be effective. There are four main categories for safety interventions that may be incorporated into safety agreements.

Resource Support

- Safety actions that address a shortage of family resources and resource utilization, the absence of which directly threatens the safety of the child.

Social Support

- Actions that reduce social isolation. Social support may be used alone or in combination with other actions to reinforce and support the capacity of the parents or other caretakers.

Crisis Management

- The purpose of crisis management is to quickly control the threat to the child's safety. Crisis management will often be employed along with other safety actions.

Separation or restriction

- Removal of any household member from the home or otherwise interfering with a parent's custodial rights. Separation is viewed as a temporary action.

In addition to these four categories, safety interventions will also include family interventions, which are documented in Part C of the North Carolina Safety Assessment. Family interventions must consider the resources available in the family and the community that might help to keep the child safe. Family safety interventions include the following:

1. Monitoring and/or use of direct services, which includes actions taken or planned by the Assessment social worker or other CPS staff that specifically address one or more of the safety indicators.
2. Use of family, neighbors, or other individuals in the community in the development and implementation of a safety agreement.
3. Use community agencies or services, such as involving a community- or faith-based organization or other agency in activities to address safety indicators.
4. The alleged perpetrator will leave or has left the home—either voluntarily or in response to legal action.
5. A protective caretaker will move or has moved to a safe environment with the child.
6. Use of a Temporary Safety Provider.

Temporary Parental Safety Agreements (TPSA)

The Temporary Parental Safety Agreement (TPSA) is a safety agreement used only when there is a specific threat to a child in the immediate or foreseeable future. The plan must be created with the family and must be written in practical, action-oriented language. The TPSA describes what tasks will be done to assure safety, by whom, how often, and the duration. The task(s) identified include actions that need to be taken to keep children safe now, address risks to safety, and/or are necessary for the children to be able to return to the home the children are leaving.

Supervision Strategies to Support Planning with the Stages of Change

Supportive

Support your worker to manage their own emotions, worries, and biases that arise during the safety assessment and planning process. Consider the ways that your worker's biases and preferences may impact their safety decisions and planning.

Discuss the discomfort that can occur when your worker witnesses children living in conditions that are minimal and not optimal.

In team meetings, role-play the use of three-question mapping:

- What is working well?
- What are we worried about?
- What needs to happen next?

Educational

Practice communicating various safety concerns in accessible, family-centered language in team meetings and supervision.

In a staff meeting, ask each worker to share their go-to resource support for families. Provide education and tips to enhance staff understanding of safety interventions.

Support your worker in their ability to use behaviorally specific information to designate whether a safety threat exists, or a danger indicator is present. Consider whether documented explanations are behaviorally specific and clearly indicate that the danger indicator threshold has been met.

Administrative

Review your worker's safety assessment to confirm they can communicate concerns accurately and in family-accessible language.

Review your worker's Temporary Parental Safety Agreement and assess for the individualization of TPSA. Consider whether safety plans are customized to the family, their needs, and resources and supports. Consider whether the actions specified in the TPSA will address the safety threats in the least intrusive means possible.

Confirm your worker is accessing information from a variety of sources to provide a thorough assessment.

Implementing Essential Function

Decision-Making in CPS Assessment

Child protective services are legally mandated, non-voluntary services for families that encompass specialized services for maltreated children and those who are at risk of harm due to the actions of, or lack of protection by, the child's parent or caretaker. Child Protective Services are designed to protect children from further harm and to support and improve parental/caretaker abilities in order to assure a safe and nurturing home for each child. Services provided in the homes of these families are preventive, rehabilitative, and nonpunitive with efforts directed toward identifying and remedying the causes of the maltreating behavior. This is accomplished through parent/caretaker cooperation and consent or, in the event conditions pose serious issues for the child's safety, through the agency's petition to the court.

Removal Decisions

When immediate safety threats are present and the parent does not have sufficient capacity to provide for the safety of the child, a critical decision must be made. A safety threat exists when there are conditions or actions within the child's home that represent the likelihood of imminent serious harm to the child. There are two types of safety threats: present and impending.

Present safety threat refers to an immediate, significant, and clearly observable family condition (severe harm or threat of severe harm) occurring to a child in the present.

Impending safety threat refers to threatening conditions that are not immediately obvious or currently active but are out of control and likely to cause serious harm to a child soon. Impending danger is a threat that can be reasonably expected to result in serious harm if safety action is not taken and/or sustained.

Because parents have a fundamental right to the care, custody, and control of their children, restrictions on those rights impact due process and start as soon as the DSS Assessment is accepted at Intake. In North Carolina, the courts interpret due process to include concepts such as reasonable efforts, diligent efforts, when you might enter a home, the right to immediate notice upon the decision to file a petition, and the right to privacy.

- **Diligent efforts** are the amount of effort put in by the worker to find non-residential parents or caregivers who live outside the home and includes the efforts made by the worker to locate relatives and kin to serve as collaterals and potentially to provide safety for the children, such as serving as a kinship placement.
- **Reasonable efforts** are defined as "providing accessible, available, and culturally appropriate services that are designed to improve the capacity of families to provide safe and stable homes for their children."
- **Active efforts** are affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended primarily to maintain or reunite an Indian child with their family.

When safety threats are present and cannot be safely addressed through a safety plan with the family, three options exist.

- Safety planning with separation or restriction
- Temporary custody in extreme safety situations (N.C.G.S. § 7B-500(a))
- Non-secure custody (N.C.G.S. § 7B-502)

Safety Planning with Separation or Restriction

- Separation is viewed as a temporary action and may involve a child temporarily moving to a safe environment, a friend or relative moving into the home, the protective parent moving with the children to a safe environment, a parent agreeing not to have unsupervised contact with the child, a parent agreeing to forfeit decision-making authority over the child, or the perpetrator agreeing to leave the home. This option is voluntary and must only be used in cases where there is reasonable certainty that safety threat will be resolved in a short period of time.

Temporary Custody in Extreme Safety Situations

- If there is reasonable grounds to believe that the child is abused, neglected, and/or dependent and that the child would be injured or could not be taken into custody if were first necessary to obtain a court order, DSS must take temporary physical custody without a court order. (N.C.G.S. § 7B-500(a))

Non-Secure Custody

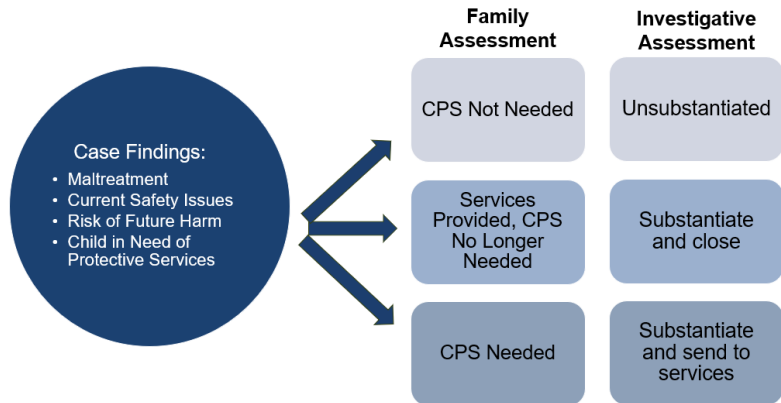
- In cases in which custody of the child has to be removed from the caretaker due to the immediate safety needs of the child, the agency is authorized to obtain an order for non-secure custody under N.C.G.S. § 7B-502.



Case Decisions

Determining whether a child is abused, neglected, and/or dependent requires careful assessment of all the information obtained during the CPS Assessment process. Case decisions must be a shared decision and must include at a minimum the CPS Assessment worker, their supervisor (or supervisor’s designee), or staffing team. The case decision guides you through four essential questions that shape decision-making.

1. Has the maltreatment occurred with frequency or is the maltreatment severe?
2. Are there current safety issues? Would the child be unsafe in the home where the abuse, neglect, or dependency occurred?
3. Is the child at risk of future harm?
4. Is the child in need of protection?



Supervision Strategies to Support the Case Decision Process

Supportive

Look for strengths that your worker has in the areas of developing a safety network and how they make placement decisions. Celebrate their strengths and growth in these areas.

Provide shadowing opportunities of peers that articulate and document case findings in a comprehensive manner. Debrief your worker’s experience shadowing and provide additional support where needed.

Educational

Provide case examples, knowledge, and resources to support your worker’s reasonable efforts and active efforts to keep families safely together.

Provide examples of each of the three removal decisions, safety planning with separation or restriction, temporary custody in extreme safety situations, and non-secure custody, to increase your worker’s knowledge about removal.

Assess how your worker applies the legal definitions to explain the context of abuse, neglect, and/or dependency and how it relates to child maltreatment. Provide education where needed.

Administrative

Refer your worker to policy to obtain requirements for notifications at case closure. Make certain that they understand that the reporter must be provided with written notice within five working days of the completion of the CPS Assessment. The written notice will provide findings, actions taken, and the process for requesting a review.

Prior to or at the time of the case decision, the CPS Assessment case decision must be documented in the Case Decision Section of the CPS Assessment Documentation Tool (DSS-5010). Direct your worker to review the case decision policy. Review their case decision documentation on the DSS-5010. Provide feedback and tips on this process.

Reinforcing Best Practices



North Carolina Practice Model

- Demonstrate and share how you incorporate the Practice Model into your practice.
- Observe staff and provide feedback on their implementation of the Practice Standards and Safety Organized Practice.
- Encourage your worker to complete the Practice Standards Self Assessment.
- Develop plans around strengths and opportunities to enhance their practice.



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- Ask your worker to share how they address and ensure equity in permanency planning.
- Support your worker in identifying cases where there are concerns for equity and disproportionality, and help your worker to address these concerns.
- Share information and organize presentations about community-based services that are culturally relevant to the populations they serve.



Trauma-Informed Care

- Have your worker discuss the impact of trauma on child development and behaviors, and provide feedback.
- Provide information about trauma-informed community resources available to parents, children, relatives, resource parents, and others.
- Have your worker reflect on how trauma may be influencing decision-making, and behaviors in the context of their work and interactions with others. Share how you plan to support them.



Quality Contacts

- Have your team review the components of quality contacts in a staff meeting. Have them provide tips and suggestions.
- Observe your worker during a caseworker contact and provide feedback on their strengths and areas of opportunities.



Worker Safety

- Be clear about any department expectations related to safety and on-call practices.
- Provide your worker with any agency-specific policies related to worker safety.
- Support and address any impacts after there has been a threat to a worker's safety.



Self-Care

- Utilize Reflective Supervision to check-in with your worker about their intake reports and the circumstances to which they have been exposed.
- Review your worker's self-care plan. Assess where they are strong and where they have barriers.
- Coach your worker to discover strategies for themselves to minimize the barriers in their self-care plan.