

Assessing a Child's Situation

Assessment of Risk

1. What is the current and immediate safety threat? Has the threat diminished? If not, how can the risk be ameliorated or removed?
2. What harm has the child suffered? (type, frequency, severity, length of occurrence)
3. What is the likelihood of recurrence and why?
4. What kind of long-term or permanent damage could result if the situation goes unchecked?
5. Was removal of the child necessary for his or her protection?
6. What services, short of removal, are necessary to adequately reduce risk?
7. How would the family access these services?
8. Which services were made available to this family prior to removal (or prior to this hearing)? What outcome was observed for each service?
9. Are professional assessments necessary to fully answer any of these questions?
10. List any additional factors which increase the level of risk, i.e. age of child, substance abuse, domestic violence, caregiver abused as a child, history of court involvement with other children, etc.
11. How does the parent manage his/her own life?
12. How does the parent discipline the child?
13. What circumstances accompanied the maltreatment? (i.e. substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, etc.)
14. If the child has been removed, what actions would be necessary to allow the child to return home immediately and safely and what services would be required to support the child's return?
15. If the safety threat is too high for the child to return home how have the conditions for return been conveyed to the parent, family, and child and do they understand the conditions?
16. What specifically prevents the parents from being able to provide the minimally adequate standard of care to protect the child?
17. Have the family's cultural background, customs and traditions been taken into account in evaluating the event and circumstances that led to the removal? Have the parent(s) cultural or tribal liaison/relevant other(s) been asked if there is a culturally-based explanation for the allegations in the petition?
18. What was done to create a safety plan to allow the child to remain at home or in the home of another without court involvement?
19. Have non-custodial parents, paternal and maternal relatives been identified and explored? If not, what is the plan to do so?

20. How has the agency intervened with this family in the past? Has the agency's previous contact with the family influenced its response to this family now?
21. How are the parents, extended family and children being engaged in the development and implementation of a plan for services, interventions, and supports?
22. Does the family believe that these services, interventions and supports will meet their current needs and build upon strengths?
23. How are the services, interventions and supports specifically tailored to the culture and needs of this child and family?
24. What evidence has been provided by the agency to demonstrate that the services/interventions for this family have effectively met the needs and produced positive outcomes?

Assessment of Primary Caregiver

1. What is the caregiver's understanding of the situation?
2. Can the parent read and understand English? If so, do they understand the allegations?
3. Has paternity been established and if so, how?
4. If paternity hasn't been established, have efforts to identify and locate fathers been sufficient? What has been done?
5. If one of the child's parents has not been involved, what is the history and current status of the relationship between the caregiver and the other parent? Has the caregiver made any effort to contact the other parent? Why or why not?
6. Are there issues in the case that are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act?
7. What other family members should be involved in this process and what diligent search efforts were used to identify other family members?
8. Have home studies and background checks been completed?
9. What level of motivation and cooperation has been shown by the caregiver?
10. What is the caregiver's level of parenting skills? Are there health and/or intellectual concerns?
11. Are there any co-occurring problems (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health problems)?
12. If so, what is the impact on their ability to parent, duration, severity and recovery history?
13. What kind of support is available from spouse, significant other, extended family and/or friends?
14. If one of the child's parents has not been involved, what is the history and current status of the relationship between the caregiver and the other parent? Has the caregiver made any effort to contact the other parent? Why or why not?
15. How has the caregiver demonstrated cooperation with service providers or lack of it?

16. Does the caregiver have the ability to protect the child or remedy the situation?
17. Did the parents have an opportunity to participate in treatment planning and if so were the parents' and child's needs, strengths, and cultural background thoroughly assessed?
18. Which services been identified to achieve case goals? Are there indications that case goals are being met?
19. Is the caseworker periodically visiting with the child and parents?
20. If the child is nearing permanency, is there a plan to continue needed services for the child (and parents, if appropriate) after custody is transferred?
21. What progress has been made by the caregiver in eliminating the need for placement? What barriers still exist?
22. Are professional assessments necessary to fully answer any of these questions?

Assessment of Child

1. Is the child a member of a federally recognized tribe or eligible for membership? If the child's tribe is unknown at this time, what efforts have been made to identify other relatives and/or tribal members for placement of the child?
2. Are basic food and clothing provided for the child when s/he is in the caregiver's home?
3. How does the child function day to day?
4. What is the child's understanding of the situation?
5. Has the child recently received a physical and mental health examination?
6. Are the child's health records up to date and included in the case file?
7. Do the foster parents have the child's health information?
8. Does the child's service plan include recommendations for specialty care? (i.e. glasses, medications, therapy, mental health treatment, etc.)
9. If the child is taking psychotropic medications, does everyone know the physician, diagnosis, recommended treatment, correct dosage of medication, possible drug interactions, side effects, etc.
10. Does the home contain serious hazards to the child's health and safety? Is the caregiver's current home adequate?
11. How does the caregiver meet the child's health and medical needs?
12. What level of supervision does the caregiver provide?
13. What indications of caregiver-child attachment have been observed?
14. What is the child's relationship with his/her siblings?
15. What is the child's experience with discipline, limit setting and consequences in the home?
16. Does the caregiver have realistic expectations of the child?
17. In what ways are emotional nurturing and intellectual stimulation provided by the caregiver?

18. How does the child perform in school academically and behaviorally? Have there been any significant changes recently?
19. Is the child seen as a cause of problems in the home, school or community? Describe any history of delinquent behavior.
20. Is the family's income sufficient to meet the child's basic needs?
21. Did the child have an opportunity to participate in treatment planning?
22. How has the child adjusted emotionally/behaviorally to the placement?
23. Did the child receive a developmental and educational assessment upon entering care?
24. Is the child enrolled in an early childhood program, if applicable?
25. Is the child eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? Is the child participating? Are the parents, foster parents, and case worker participating?
26. Is the child receiving special education services?
27. Are IEP goals being addressed? Is the IEP coordinated with the service plan?
28. Are other education supports (tutoring, after-school programs, speech therapy, occupational therapy, etc.) being provided to the child, if needed?
29. What kind of relationship does the child have with extended family members and have they had with the child? Are the family members aware that the child is in care?
30. Are professional assessments necessary to fully answer any of these questions?

Assessment of Out of Home Placement

1. List all the losses that the child would suffer by being/having been removed from the home.
2. What are the child's wishes regarding placement at this time?
3. Would siblings be placed together?
4. What is the most appropriate type of placement for this child? Is such a placement available, and if so, how soon?
5. Have maternal and paternal kinship care options been fully explored? If not, what is being done to explore relatives? If so, why were the relatives deemed inappropriate?
6. If child is placed in kinship care, what steps have been taken to ensure the relative is linked with all available training, services, and financial support?
7. What will out of home placement provide for the child? What will out of home placement provide for the parent?
8. What visitation arrangements have been made between child and parents, i.e. location, frequency, length, transportation, supervision? What arrangements for sibling visitation, if applicable? Have the parents adhered to the visitation schedule?
9. Is the child placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting, appropriate to his/her needs?

10. Is the child living near his/her parents? Is the child living with his/her siblings? Is the child living near his/her school?
11. What efforts are being made to preserve connections in terms of friends, religious communities, and cultural connections?
12. Does the foster care provider have the information needed to help preserve connections?
13. If the child is Native American, is he/she placed in accordance with ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) placement preferences?
14. From the family and child's perspective, is the current placement culturally and linguistically appropriate?
15. How does the placement support the child's cultural identity? In what way does the placement support the child's connection to the family and community?
16. What are the terms of meaningful family time with parents, siblings and extended family members?
17. Do the terms of family time match the safety concerns? Is it supervised? Specifically, why must it be supervised? Is the time and location of family time logistically possible for the family, and supportive of the child's needs?
18. How does the placement support the family/child's involvement in the initial plan?
19. What are the terms of meaningful family time with parents, siblings and extended family members?
20. Do the terms of family time match the safety concerns? Is it supervised? Specifically, why must it be supervised?
21. Is the time and location of family time logistically possible for the family, and supportive of the child's needs?

Assessment of Permanency Plan: Return Home

1. What are the child's needs, wishes, and best interests?
2. To what extent have the parents and agency complied with the case plan and court orders?
3. Did the services alleviate the reasons for removal?
4. What is different now than when the child was removed?
5. How has visitation gone? Has there been a plan to transition home (extended/unsupervised visitation, overnights, weekends, trial home placement) while the court continues to monitor the child's health and safety?
6. What has the agency done to reduce the risk or likelihood of disruption after the child is returned home?
7. What safeguards are in place to protect the child?
8. Will on-going services/monitoring be offered?
9. How does the family foresee handling issues related to child safety without the involvement of the court/agency?

10. What actions would be necessary to allow the child to return home immediately and safely and what services would be required to support the child's return?

Assessment of Permanency Plan: Relative Placement

1. What are the needs, wishes, and best interests of the child?
2. Are there convincing reasons that the child cannot return home or be adopted?
3. Have home studies and background checks been completed?
4. Will the guardian need financial assistance to care for the child?
5. Does the guardian understand his/her rights and responsibilities?
6. Will there be ongoing contact with the child's parents, siblings, and other relatives?
7. Will the agency provide services and/or ongoing monitoring?
8. Does the child have a bond with the custodial family member?
9. Will this custodian make a lifelong commitment to the child?

Assessment of Older Youth in Transition

1. Is there a Transitional Plan (TP)? Is the young person involved in transition planning?
2. Does the Transitional Plan address educational needs (obtaining a diploma, vocational training, post-secondary education), career exploration, employment, and safe and stable housing?
3. Does the Transitional Plan address possible mentors and other avenues to create lifelong connections?
4. Are independent living services being provided to the youth? Is training being provided in daily living skills; budgeting and financial management skills; substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities such as smoking avoidance, nutrition education and pregnancy prevention?
5. What specific services will the youth need upon exiting the system?
6. How will they receive the medical care needed after turning 18/21?
7. Does the youth understand what services he/she can receive after age 18/21?
8. Does the youth have connections beyond their current placement, agency, and school?
9. What is the youth's current level of functioning and how are they expected to provide for themselves after exiting the system?

Assessment of Foster Care

1. How long has this child been in care?
2. How many placements has the child been in?
3. How long has the child been with the current caretakers?
4. What is the quality of the relationship between the child and the current caretakers?

5. What is the best estimate of how soon the child can return home?
6. If the plan is not return home, what is it? What level of permanency would this plan provide?
7. If the child is unable to return home, what level of involvement would the current caretakers have in his or her future?
8. What progress has been made toward the alternative plan? What are the barriers?
9. What is the length of time anticipated to achieve it?

Assessment of Termination of Parental Rights Hearings

1. Is TPR in the child's best interest?
2. Does DHS have grounds for TPR?
3. Is there an exception to not terminate?
4. Can TPR be achieved without trial? Will voluntary relinquishment or mediation reduce possible harm to the child?
5. Are there any other services which could be provided that would materially affect the ability of the caregiver to parent the child in the next six months?
6. Has measurable improvement occurred in the condition(s) that brought the child into care?
7. If some improvement has occurred, what is the estimated length of time before the child could be returned home?
8. What specifically are the plans for the child to be adopted? Has an adoptive placement been identified?
9. If possible, has the child been invited to select possible adoptive placements?

Compiled from *A Question of Balance: Decision Making for CASA/GAL Volunteers*, casaforchildren.org; "Well-Being Checklist," *Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin*, childlaw.unm.edu; "CASA Volunteer General Hearing Preparation Checklist," arkleg.state.ar.us.