

## NEVADA SAFETY THREATS GUIDE

### DETERMINING PRESENT AND IMPENDING DANGER THREATS

The 12 safety threats (present and impending danger threats) contained within the Nevada safety assessment are to be used by CPS workers and supervisors to identify impending danger in families. The examples included within this safety threats reference guide relate to individual and/or family conditions that are consistent with the danger threshold criteria:

- Out of control
- Severe (serious harm)
- Imminent (immediate)
- Observable and Specific

#### **1. Behavior of any member of the household or other persons having access to the child is violent.**

##### Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

- Violence refers to aggression, fighting, brutality, cruelty and hostility. It may be immediately observable, regularly active or in a constant state of unpredictability.
- Violence includes hitting, beating, and/or physically assaulting a child, spouse or other family member.
- Violence includes acting dangerously toward a child or others including throwing things, brandishing weapons, driving recklessly, aggressively intimidating or terrorizing.
- Violent acts within the household are escalating in frequency or severity.
- Family violence involves physical or verbal assault on a parent in the presence of a child; the child witnesses the activity and is fearful for self and/or others.
- Child has been assaulted, or it is likely that the child is in danger of being assaulted due to family violence.
- Family violence has occurred in which a child attempted to intervene.
- Family violence has occurred with children who were present and could be inadvertently harmed even though they were not the targets of the violence.
- Parent/caregiver who is impulsive, exhibiting physical aggression, having temper outbursts or unanticipated and harmful physical reactions (e.g., throwing things).
- Parent/caregiver whose behavior outside of the home (e.g., drugs, violence, aggressiveness, hostility) creates an environment within the home, which threatens child safety (e.g., drug parties, gangs, drive-by shootings).

#### **2. Parent/caregiver describes or acts toward the child in extremely negative ways or has extremely unrealistic expectations.**

##### Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

This refers to a perception of the child that is totally unreasonable. It is out-of-control because the view of the child is extreme and out of touch with reality. This perception could cause the caregiver to react aggressively or totally withdraw at any time.

Serious effects could occur with a vulnerable child such as emotional trauma, serious physical injury, extreme neglect related to medical and basic care, failure to thrive, etc.

This threat is illustrated by the following examples:

- Child is perceived to be the devil, demon-possessed, evil, a bastard or deformed, ugly, deficient, or embarrassing.
- Child has taken on the same identity as someone the parent/caregiver hates and is fearful of or hostile towards, and the parent/caregiver transfers feelings and perceptions of the person to the child.
- Child is considered to be punishing or torturing the parent/caregiver.
- One parent/caregiver is jealous of the child and believes the child is a detriment or threat to the parents'/primary caregivers' relationship and stands in the way of their best interests.
- Parent/caregiver sees the child as undesirable or the child is unwanted.
- Parent/caregiver sees the child as responsible and accountable for the parent/caregiver's problems; blames the child for losses and difficulties that the caretaker(s) experience (job, relationships, and conflicts with CPS/police).
- Parent/caregiver expects a child to perform or act in a way that is improbable or impossible based on the child's age and developmental capacities. Such expectations for the child include: not crying; remaining quiet and still for extended periods of time; not soiling themselves and/or being toilet trained; providing self-care or care for younger siblings; or staying home alone without any supervision.
- Parent/caregiver identifies specific behaviors and/or situations that act as triggers to aggravate or annoy them. These behaviors and/or situations result in making the parent/caregiver want to lash out physically or verbally at the child.
- Parent/caregiver is extremely distressed and overwhelmed by the child's behavior and is asking for relief, or help in very specific terms.

**3. A member of the household has caused serious physical injuries or is threatening serious physical harm to the child.**

Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Inflicted injury on the child (e.g. fractures, poisoning, suffocating, shaking, shooting, choke marks, burns, serious bruises/ welts, bruising in the head/face or genital areas, bite marks, etc.)
- Child has multiple and/or different kinds of injuries (e.g. burns and bruises).
- Parent/caregiver has used torture, physical force, or acted in a way which bears no resemblance to reasonable discipline; or punished child beyond the duration of the child's endurance.
- Injuries appear to be premeditated; injuries appear to have occurred as a result of an attack, assault or out-of-control reactions (e.g. serious bruising across a child's back as if beaten in an out-of-control disciplinary act).
- Injuries appear associated with the use of an instrument, which exaggerates method of discipline (e.g., coat hanger, extension cord, kitchen utensil, etc.).
- Parent/caregiver use specific threatening terms, such as identifying how they will harm the child or what sort of harm they intend to inflict.
- Parent/caregiver threats are plausible, believable; may be related to specific provocative child behavior.
- Parent/caregiver describes conditions and situations, which triggers them to think about maltreating.
- Parent/caregiver talks about being worried, fearful of, or preoccupied with maltreating the child.
- A child has died as the result of maltreatment by the caregiver.
- The parent/caregiver has previously abused a child, and the severity of the maltreatment and/or the caregiver's response to the prior incident (lack of remorse, justification for maltreatment, retaliation toward the child for disclosure) suggests that child safety is of immediate concern.

- Parent/caregiver are distressed or “at the end of their rope,” and are asking for some relief in either specific (e.g., “take the child”), or general terms (e.g., “please help me before something awful happens”).
- One parent/caregiver is expressing concerns about what the other parent or caregiver is capable of or may be doing to the child.
- Parent/Caregivers describe discipline that has exceedingly gotten out of hand.

**4. There is reason to believe that the family is about to flee; caregivers overtly reject CPS intervention; refuse access to the child; and/or the child’s whereabouts cannot be ascertained.**

Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

Overtly rejecting CPS intervention and the lack of accessibility to the child is the primary issue; it represents present danger because of the inability to assess the situation. This safety threat applies also when there are indications that a family will change residences, leave the jurisdiction, or refuse access to the child. In all instances when a family is avoiding any intervention by CPS, the current status of the child or the potential consequences for the child must be considered severe and immediate. Rejection of CPS could be an expression of a parent/caregiver’s rights; however, until access to the child can be gained through legal means, the conclusion about the rejection representing a safety threat remains the same.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Parent/caregiver manipulate in order to avoid any contact with CPS; make excuses for not participating; miss appointments; go through various means and methods to avoid CPS involvement and any access to a child.
- Parent/caregiver refuses to allow CPS to see or speak with a child; do not inform CPS where the child is located.
- Family is highly transient, which may prevent information gathering about the family and child safety.
- Family has little tangible attachments (e.g., job, home, property, extended family).
- There is precedence for avoidance and flight (i.e. Family has fled previously in response to a CPS investigation, or has kept the child at home away from peers, school and others for extended periods of time.)
- There are other potential civil or criminal complications, or other circumstances prompting flight (e.g., warrants, false identities uncovered, criminal convictions, financial indebtedness).

**5. The caregiver is unwilling or unable to meet the child’s immediate protection needs for supervision, food, clothing, and/or shelter, which could result in serious harm.**

Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

“Immediate protection needs” refers to the family’s lack of (1) minimal resources to provide supervision, shelter, food, and clothing or (2) the capacity to use resources if they were available.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Child is malnourished.
- Family has no food, clothing, or shelter, and no resources or financial ability to obtain minimal food, clothing or shelter.
- Family finances are insufficient to support needs (e.g. medical care) that, if unmet, could result in a threat to child safety.
- Parent/caregiver is unable or unwilling to use resources when they are available.
- Family is routinely using their resources for things (e.g., drugs) other than their basic care and support thereby leaving them without their basic needs being adequately met.
- Child’s basic needs exceed normal expectations because of unusual conditions (e.g., disabled child) and the family is unable to adequately address the needs.

- Parent/caregiver does not attend to the child to the extent that the need for care goes unnoticed or unmet (e.g. caregiver is present but child can wander outdoors alone, play with dangerous objects, play on window ledge, or be exposed to other serious hazards.)
- Parent/caregiver has left and/or frequently leaves child alone (time period varies with age and developmental abilities.)
- Parent/caregiver makes inadequate or inappropriate child care/supervision arrangements.
- The Parent/caregiver is unavailable; hospitalized, incarcerated, or whereabouts are unknown and appropriate child care/supervision arrangements were not made.

**6. Caregiver(s) is unwilling or unable to meet the child's exceptional needs for acute, debilitating, or life threatening medical or mental health condition.**

Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

Exceptional or acute needs suggest that a child's condition has immediate implications for serious harm (e.g., extreme physical medical symptoms, extreme emotional vulnerability, extreme antisocial conduct, suicidal thoughts or actions). The caregiver's failure to obtain treatment will most likely result in the child's condition becoming worse or not improving.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Parent/caregiver refuses to seek treatment for the child's immediate, chronic, and or dangerous medical condition or does not follow the prescribed treatment for such conditions.
- The child has physical injuries or symptoms that require medical care and the caregiver does not recognize the seriousness of the condition.
- The child's emotional state (suicidal, self mutilating, abuses substances and may overdose, or runs away frequently putting self in dangerous situations) is such that immediate mental health care or intervention is required and the caregiver does not or cannot take protective action.
- Parent/caregiver views the child's mental health condition as less serious than it is or does not recognize the condition.
- Child has exceptional needs, such as being medically fragile, which the caregiver does not or cannot meet.
- Parent/caregiver lacks the capacity to fully understand the child's physical or mental health condition or the safety threat.

**7. Child expresses extreme fear or terror of the home situation, a caregiver, other household member; or other persons having access to the home.**

Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

To meet this criterion, the child's fear must be obvious, extreme, and related to some perceived danger that child feels or experiences.

The basis for the child's fear is active, currently occurring, or frequently occurs and is an immediate concern of the child.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Child exhibits severe anxiety or depression or demonstrates emotional and physical responses indicating fear of the home or people within the home (e.g. crying, jitters, inability to focus, withdrawal, nightmares, or insomnia).
- Child expresses fear and describes people and circumstances that are threatening.
- Child recounts previous experiences which form the basis for fear(s).
- Child demonstrates withdrawn social and/or behavioral responses that are associated with fear of parent/caregiver, the home situation, and/or other individuals who have access to the home and who might pose a safety threat.
- Child describes personal threats, which are believable.

## **8. The child's physical living conditions are hazardous and are an immediate threat of serious harm.**

### Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

Based on the child's age and developmental status, the child's physical living conditions are hazardous and immediately threatening.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- The family home is being used for methamphetamine production. Products and materials used in the production of methamphetamine are being stored in the home or residential area, such as a shed or garage.
- There are natural or man-made hazards located in or close to the home. These include chemicals, explosives, guns or weapons that are within reach of, or are otherwise accessible to the child.
- Housing is unsanitary, filthy, and/or infested with vermin that create a health hazard for the child.
- There is excessive garbage or rotted food in the residence.
- There is evidence of human or animal waste in the living areas.
- The house's physical structure is decaying and/or falling down.
- Wiring and plumbing in the house are substandard or are exposed.
- Furnishings or appliances are hazardous.
- Heating, fireplaces, stoves are hazardous and accessible to the child.
- The home has easily accessible open windows or balconies in upper stories.
- Persons under the influence of substances who are routinely in the home, or have frequent access to the home, and who demonstrate violent, sexual or aggressive behaviors, may threaten the safety of the child.
- Persons who engage in criminal behaviors, such as selling drugs, and who frequent the child's residence, may present a safety threat to the child and/or attract other persons or related activities that may threaten the safety of the child.

## **9. Caregiver(s) emotional stability, developmental status or cognitive deficiency seriously impairs their current ability to supervise, protect, or care for the child(ren).**

### Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

The lack of the caregiver's ability to meet the immediate needs of a child may be due to a physical disability, significant developmental disability, or mental health condition that prevents adequate parental role performance. The disability or condition is significant, pervasive and consistently debilitating, to the point where the child's protection needs are being compromised.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- The parent/caregiver's mental, intellectual and/or physical disability prohibits his/her ability to adequately and consistently assure that a child's essential basic and safety needs are met.
- The parent/caregiver exhibits a distorted perception of reality and the disorder reduces his/her ability to control his/her behavior (unpredictable, incoherent, delusional, debilitating phobias) in ways that threaten safety.
- The parent/caregiver exhibits depressed behavior that manifests feelings of hopelessness or helplessness and is immobilized by such symptoms resulting in a failure to protect and provide basic needs.
- The parent/caregiver is observed to be acting bizarrely and is unable to respond logically to requests or instructions.
- The parent/caregiver is not consistent in taking medication to control his/her mental disorder that threatens child safety.
- Parent/caregiver's intellectual capacities affect judgment in ways that prevent the provision of adequate basic needs.

- The parent/caregiver is significantly developmentally disabled and is observed to be unable to provide appropriate care for the child.
- Parent / caregiver's expectations of the child far exceed a child's capacity.
- Parent/caregiver is unaware of what basic care is required for the child.
- Parent/caregiver's knowledge and skills are not sufficient to address a child's unique needs.
- Parent/caregiver does not want to be a parent and avoids providing basic care responsibilities.

## **10. The child has a serious injury for which there is no reasonable or credible explanation.**

### Application of the Safety Threshold Criteria

Parents/caregivers are unable or unwilling to explain maltreating conditions or injuries of a child. An unexplained serious injury is a present danger and remains so until an explanation alters the seriousness of not knowing how the injury occurred or by whom.

This threat is illustrated in the following examples:

- Parent/caregiver acknowledges the presence of injuries and/or conditions of the child, but deny knowledge as to how they occurred.
- Parent/caregiver appears to be totally competent and appropriate, but does not have a reasonable or credible explanation about how the injuries occurred.
- Parent/caregiver accepts the presence of the child's injuries and conditions, but does not explain the injuries or appear to be concerned about them.
- Facts observed by child welfare staff and/or supported by other professionals (such as medical evaluations) that relate to the incident, injury, and/or conditions, contradict the parent's/caregiver's explanations.
- The history and circumstantial information are incongruent with the parent's/ caregiver's explanation of the injuries and conditions of the child.

## **11. Child sexual abuse is suspected and circumstances suggest that child safety may be an immediate concern.**

### Application of Safety Threshold Criteria

To qualify as a safety threat, the safety decision-making elements of immediacy, vulnerability and severity need to be considered.

This safety threat includes the following examples:

- A child is prostituting or is involved in sexual exploitation by parent/caregiver.
- A child discloses that sexual abuse has occurred and the abuser has access to the child.
- There is sufficient indication or evidence of sexual abuse, and the offender has access to the child.
- The disclosure of sexual abuse appears believable, but remains unverified as the investigation continues.
- A parent/caregiver cannot control his/her sexual impulses.
- A parent/caregiver or a member of the household has been criminally convicted or has been substantiated by Child Protective Services for sexual abuse on another child.
- The non-offending parent is hostile or non-supportive of the alleged victim, and appears unwilling to protect the child from contact with the alleged perpetrator.

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## **12. Caregiver's drug or alcohol abuse impairs his/her ability to supervise, protect or care for the child.**

### Application of Safety Threshold Criteria

Impairment suggests that a caregiver's use of substances prohibits him/her from being able to adequately perform his/her parental duties and responsibilities. Drug use includes prescription drugs as well as traditional street drugs.

This safety threat includes the following examples:

- Substance abuse or misuse and related activities, prevent the parent/caregiver from protecting or providing for the immediate or basic needs of the child.
- The parent/caregiver has periods of incapacitation due to substance abuse or misuse while providing care for the child.
- The parent/caregiver uses drugs in front of a child or leaves drugs and/or drug paraphernalia in areas that are accessible to children.
- The parent/caregiver drives with the child in the vehicle when legally intoxicated or incapacitated by substance abuse or misuse.
- The parent/caregiver leaves the household frequently to purchase or use drugs without regard to child care supervision.
- An infant is identified as drug-exposed.
- A child has died as the result of prenatal substance abuse or misuse by the parent/caregiver and there is another child in the home.
- The parental rights of the parent/caregiver have been terminated in the past, and the circumstances surrounding the prior maltreatment, are similar to the current circumstances.