The Conceptual Framework for Present Danger

Concepts and Definitions

Present Danger

Present Danger exists as immediate/occurring now, significant and clearly observable family condition, child condition, individual behavior or action or family circumstance which is in the process of occurring and which obviously endangers or threatens to endanger a child and requires immediate action to protect.

In this definition there are key qualifying words.

"Immediate/occurring now" means that danger in the family is happening right before your eyes. You are in the midst of that which endangers or threatens to endanger the child. The dangerous family condition, child condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances are active and operating. What might result from the danger for a child could be happening or occur at any moment.

"Significant" qualifies the family condition, child condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances as exaggerated, out of control, extreme. The danger is recognizable because what is happening is vivid, impressive and notable. What you encounter-what is happening exists as the dominant matter that must be addressed immediately. Examples that follow will provide more clarity concerned with the idea of significant.

Present Danger is "clearly observable" because what is happening or in the process of happening is totally transparent. You see and experience it in obvious ways. There is no guesswork. Here is a rule of thumb concerned with identifying Present Danger. If you have to interpret what is going on to be Present Danger...then it likely is not Present Danger. Usually when Present Danger exists because of extreme family conditions, a child's condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances, you will know even without conducting interviews. (Of course, when Present Danger does exist, conducting interviews should proceed in accordance with good practice.)

Present Danger Situations

From experience, we know that there are not an unlimited number of situations which constitute Present Danger. While remembering to use the definition of Present Danger to guide your judgment about any situation, you can rely on the following delineation of Present Danger situations to frame your assessments and conclusions. Much of what follows you find in reports to CPS which represent alleged maltreatment. This list categorizes association between Present Danger and the family.

Present Danger Associated with a Child

Maltreatment

Occurring Now- This refers to a child being maltreated when the Assessment Worker makes contact with a child (e.g. being beaten, locked in a closet or basement, a vulnerable child unsupervised, living in a dangerous home setting, etc.).

Multiple Injuries- This refers to serious injuries occurring on different parts of a child's body and different kinds of injuries (e.g., bruising to a child's back and upper legs indicating a beating, physical injuries, and cigarette burns, etc.). This situation suggests a caregiver is out of control and/or violent.

Face/head-This refers to a child who has injuries to his face and/or head. This situation suggests a caregiver is out of control and/or violent.

Serious Injury-This refers to a non-accidental injury that suggests a parent/caregiver is out of control and/or violent.

*Life Threatening Living Arrangements--*As a Present Danger (PD), the danger apparent in the home is acute/immediate placing a child in immediate danger.

Unexplained Injury-This refers to a serious injury. The lack of an explanation results in an inability of the Assessment Worker to judge whether the injury is indicative of additional serious harm the child may be subject to.

Bizarre Cruelty-This refers to torture, tying a child up, keeping a child locked up and isolated, extreme scapegoating, etc.

Child

Unsupervised/Alone for long Periods of Time-This involves vulnerable, younger children who are unable to care for and protect themselves. Unsupervised refers to any amount of time that reasonably places a child in danger. This refers to children being left alone when the Assessment Worker first makes contact and also is a PD when children are unsupervised routinely.

Child Needs Medical Attention- This refers to acute, immediate medical conditions which can result in severe effects if a child does not receive timely medial care.

Child Is Extremely Fearful—This refers to a child who is in terror, who is absolutely so afraid as to be at or near the level of panic. Similar to the unexplained injuries, without other information the fearfulness could represent a significant "red flag" concerning the danger that exists in the home.

Present Danger Associated with a Parent/Caregiver

Parent/Caregiver is Unable/Unwilling to Perform Duties-This refers to physical and mental health conditions that are such that they prevent caregivers from providing basic care and protection. It includes caregivers who are abdicating their responsibilities to provide basic care and protection. It also includes situations where caregivers are absent. Finally, it requires a judgment that no other responsible adult lives in the home to provide basic care and protection.

Bizarre Behaviors- This refers to caregivers who are behaving in inexplicable ways; making no sense; possibly experiencing hallucinations, delusions, reactions to drugs or alcohol, etc. The person is likely out of touch with reality, unable to communicate or understand, certainly unable to provide basic care and protection.

Parent/Caregiver is Acting Dangerously-This refers to caregivers and others in the home who are acting dangerously toward others, who are brandishing weapons, who are threatening others, who are known to be dangerous and to act on their impulses.

Parent/Caregiver is Out of Control-This refers to parents/caregivers who are unable to manage their impulses, who may be emotionally immobilized, who may be bed-ridden or incapacitated, who cannot or will not provide basic care or protection.

Parent/Caregiver is Under the Influence of Substances-This refers to a parent/caregiver who is drunk or high on drugs at the time the assessment worker makes contact, the inebriation is such that the person cannot provide basic care and protection.

Parents/Caregivers Viewpoint of the Child is Bizarre- While this PD situation is located in the child section of the PDA form, it really is more about the parent or caregiver. This refers to an extremely unusual, unrealistic perception of a child such as the caregiver seeing the child as the devil.

Parents <u>Overtly</u> Reject Intervention-This refers to caregivers who refuse access to the home and to the children. This isn't about a lack of cooperation, emotional reactions, or verbal assaults. It is the blatant refusal to allow access to the child. Like other PD situations, overt rejection is not proof that a child is in danger, but the not knowing or reconciling what is going on makes this a PD.

Present Danger Associated with Family/Other

Domestic Violence is Occurring-This refers to domestic violence that is ongoing, happens with regularity, may or may not be predictable, but is imminent given family functions. This is an example of present danger being in process.

Family Hides Child-This refers to children who are not visible to the community. The implication is that something is vitally wrong if families hide their children from others. *Situation Will/ May Change Quickly*-In a pure sense this is not a present danger since

moderate family functioning problems can change quickly. Normally speaking, this ought to be thought of in conjunction with other present danger situations such as a family that avoids intervention and is highly transient and the IA indicates a concern for children being safe.

When judging Present Danger, there are a number of other concerns that you should take into account. Understand that these additional areas of interest do not represent Present Danger, but help to qualify Present Danger.

Magnetic Child is 0-6 Years Old

In all safety assessments, the age of the child is relevant. Above you read about the ability to self-protect which is fundamental to understand child vulnerability. Young children are emphasized here because of the higher propensity to suffer from danger.

History of Reports

Within the context of judging Present Danger, a history of CPS reports on the family is important to consider. To judge Present Danger, it can be helpful to consider the number of reports, reports that indicate progressively more serious concerns in regard to family functioning, and reports of the same kind as the current are of concern.

The Family Situation Will/May Change Quickly

You may have information which describes a current circumstance the family is in which reveals exactly what is going on that could be a Present Danger. Because this situation could change rapidly, the opportunity to gather important information may be lost. In this sense, this influence does not necessarily constitute a Present Danger; however, it is pertinent in judging how you will proceed.

Services Inaccessible or Unavailable

This is a family circumstance which in and of itself is not a Present Danger, obviously, but could become a Present Danger when considered in relation to other family conditions which demand access to services. For instance, a child who has a routine need for a particular kind of medical service which is a life threatening need and the service is inaccessible, a Present Danger circumstance may be apparent.

Accessible to a Threatening Person

This is another issue which must be considered in concert with other Present Danger family conditions. It refers to a situation such as an only parent/caregiver, significant amounts of accessibility or time responsible for a child, and isolation from others.

Samily Isolated

This family situation must be considered along with what is happening in a family. Children are not in Present Danger because their families are isolated from others. However, if you are evaluating and judging Present Danger and a family is isolated, it is crucial to take that into account. This refers to both geographic and social isolation.