

Safety Framework Module

Introduction to the Safety Framework

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ABA Child Safety Guide

A publication called the ABA Child Safety Guide, A Guide for Judges and Lawyers. This is built from the same root as the Safety Framework that the department's practice model is built upon. This is the kind of core framework that was created by Jen Renne at the American Bar Association (ABA), now the Capacity Building Center for Courts, and Therese Roe Lund at what is now called the Capacity Building Center for States. They got together to deliver this framework for the purpose of building a language and conceptual framework, and ultimately an analytical framework to be used in dependency courts that can connect the experiences of children and families, social workers, and attorneys living through life throughout time, which is a unique piece of dependency cases that we live through these cases, each decision made in a dependency case is made with all the facts relevant to that family that happened up until the day of that decision. Then the decision that's going to be made in 30, 60, 90 days or six months, is going to be based on what happens between today and that next decision.

It's what I like to think about as a transformational court process rather than what mostly happens in court, which is transactional. We determine guilt or innocence, liability or breach of contract, or not. What happens while those people are involved in their court case throughout their lives is usually irrelevant.

However, in this one area, a lot of what happens in life is relevant all up until the day of a decision and continues to be. For that reason, the laws and statutes and court rules and such like that don't always jive with the experience of the litigants in a case. So partly this language and analytical framework is designed to build a language that flows through time with families and such through their case.

It also builds structure within wide-open discretionary spaces to provide transparency, clarity, and ultimately accountability for our decision-making process.

Decision Making

Accountability

I'm going to offer that the ultimate accountability that we need to put into our system is accountability to the family. That's where the Safety Framework really offers us the idea to use language and structure that produces clarity, transparency, and accountability for the decision-making. One thing I've been asked is, How does this apply to the law?

The simplest way for me to say that is, we're not looking to replace the law with a Safety Framework. This is about how we apply the law. The simplest kind of way to crosswalk is when you talk about safety, look at the legal standard that governs whatever hearing or stage of a case you're in.

And so the question is, how do we analyze facts? How do we organize them into an analytical structure that we can use to make decisions in cases and be able to articulate how we got there?

Quality

Research supports the use of and ability to create broader and deeper discussions in our dependency cases. What the research showed was that tremendous benefits resulted from deeper and broader discussions at the first hearing. A couple of points I want to make, all of us have the ability, so I would say the responsibility to initiate these discussions. The Safety Framework gives us language and analytical framework with which to have broader and deeper conversations that may also have some clarity and accountability to them.

Equity

Even though we make our best efforts, racial bias and racism exist in our system, which is something that we constantly have to be diligent about and address. I want to emphasize that I'm using this because the judiciary can't speak to the issue of bias directly, but this is something for everybody to understand and everybody to take on and to know that this applies to everybody, this idea of bias in our decision making. I raised the cannons here because judges are asked, and we are all asked, through either a moral or professional obligation, to exercise our analysis and decision-making processes without bias. Certainly, especially without race bias.

The difficulty is that one of the things that is a reality in our system is that none of us wants to acknowledge that we have bias. However, one of the things that studies show us is that believing we don't have implicit bias is one of the number one causes of us exercising our implicit bias in our analysis and our decision-making.

Almost everybody thinks we're really good about avoiding racial prejudice in our decision-making, and that is something that suggests to us that we are probably exercising implicit bias in our decision-making because we believe we aren't.

One thing we can do is simply count what is a dramatic difference in Washington. What we see is the general population is not represented in our child welfare system. People of color, in particular in Washington, African American and Native American people, are dramatically overrepresented in our child welfare system.

One thing that we can all acknowledge and understand is that racial bias in our system exists outside the child protection system and comes into the child protection system regardless of any of our behaviors. That's a reality.

This is a super simple data slide about who's in the system, but how much more can we count, and how can we count to bring an understanding of whether we are bringing equality and equity with our decision-making and our practices.

Section 1: Gathering Questions

Six Gathering Questions

The ABA safety guide talks about the six core questions, otherwise called the six guiding questions. These are what I like to consider the trunk and main branches of a tree. We all know that this is the prompt or the beginning of dozens, tens, hundreds of questions that could come from it.

This starts us on the process of gathering information that would inform an assessment of safety. One thing I like to note, as a parent's counsel for years, you sit down and talk with a client and say I need to talk to you about your family and yourself and your life relative to your parenting because that's what is involved in this case. So tell me everything, because what in your life is relevant to parenting? So you just have this massive amount of factual information that can come to you, and it's always hard to organize. Okay, who's the judicial officer? Who's making the decision? What do they like to think about? What's their orientation and such? We use the assessment of Safety Framework, which you'll see in a minute. As a north star toward which we are gathering information.

How do I understand whether there's a threat to child safety in the home? How do I understand whether the children in the home are vulnerable to it? What does the parental protective capacity look like to try and protect the vulnerable children from threats? That's where we're looking to go with our gathering of information, and so these questions guide us in this way.

What's the nature and extent of maltreatment?

The main point of all this, and I think of this question right here, is that it's not asking what the incident was about, which somebody called. This is not an incident-based answer. This is a parenting practice type answer. What's going on in the home through either affirmative or omission of actions that are causing threats to child safety.

What circumstances accompany that maltreatment?

Does it get triggered by things? Is it 24/7? Is it at the beginning of the month when money comes in? Is it late in the month when money runs out? Is it when a protective parent is not around? Is it when the kids are in school or out of school? Things like this.

Understanding the nature of the threat in part helps us understand what we need to do to address it. It is also giving us information to start thinking about what a safety plan needs to cover if we're going to make a plan to keep children safe. What does that need to look like?

How does a child function day-to-day?

A really good question that guides us to hearing, understanding, and listening to children. I caution against it being a panacea because we all know of children who are doing very well out in the world and come from really difficult living situations. And we also know children who are struggling in the world and who come from perfectly adequate homes.

How does the parent discipline the child?

How does a parent manage his or her own life? This is about things going on for a parent that cause that parent not to bring their adequate parenting self to every situation that calls for it.

One note I'll say there, you're going to hear me talk about adequate parenting and safe enough, that's because that's where our business is. Best parenting self, that's for somebody else to determine. I'd love for us all to encourage the best parenting self of everybody we know, but the court's business is adequate parenting self, so I'll use that language.

Section 2: Assessing Safety

This is the foundation of the whole thing. Are there threats to child safety? Are children vulnerable to those threats? Do the parents have the capacity to protect vulnerable children from threats to their safety that exist in their home?

We just built a three-part structure with which to organize and talk about all of the factual scenarios that come to our courts.

Assessing Safety

1. Threats

How do we know what a threat is? What you'll see in the ABA Safety Guide and in the department's policy and practice manual is a list of 16, in the department it's 17 threat statements.

For instance, there are no adults in the home providing proper supervision due to substance abuse. That's a common one. This is a generic language about these threats, but there's no reason that those are the only threats or the only way to express them. Very often, we might have disputes about whether something's a threat or not. So we have this way of talking about it.

Is it specific and observable?

Can I describe it? Can I see it?

Is it immediate or liable to happen soon?

We're not talking about a 2-year-old and saying when they go to school in three years, this is going to be a problem. That's not a threat, that's an issue for the future.

Will it create severe consequences?

Serious threat of substantial harm. This maps right into your statute here.

Is it out of control?

Is it something that's not being addressed, or is it being put under control?

2. Protective Capacity

This is the richest part of the framework. Understanding what the protective capacity of a parent looks like? How do we look at it? How do we assess it? There's a whole school of thought and a next-level thing to think about. How do we assess parental protective capacity across cultural observations?

If we're going into a home that's unfamiliar to us. Not just because we've never been there, but because we're in a cultural system that's different. How do you assess protective capacity? This is a very rich part of it, but the guide gives us three ways of looking at protective capacity.

Cognitive

Do I understand that electrical outlets are a threat? Do I just get that? That's electricity, my 2-year-old sticks a paperclip in there, it could at least harm him or her. It could even kill them. Do I understand that intellectually? Sometimes that can indeed be a situation, even with something that simple.

It can also be that the threat we're identifying is not something that we all agree on. For instance, corporal punishment. Are we a spare the rod, spoil the child person? Or, are we, when you hit your child, you are hitting your child, and that's harmful? That's a social conversation. The law gives us a line for what's acceptable and not, but that's up for conversation.

So, does the parent understand cognitively the nature of the threat?

Behavioral

Do they do anything about it?

"I get that electrical outlets are potentially harmful, but the kids gotta learn somehow. So we'll just leave it open and see what happens."

A really valuable learning approach in some instances, probably not with regard to electrical outlets and two-year-olds.

Emotional

This is the richest of the three. There are two big ones that we can talk about here. One, does a parent have the ability to empathize with their child's experience of what we're talking about, threats to child safety?

Do I get what it would be for my 2-year-old to be electrocuted in an electrical outlet? Not what you would think of me as a parent, but what it would be like for my child. Do I empathize with my child's perspective on that?

Secondly, do I have the ability within my emotional self to bring my adequate parenting self to all the situations that call for it?

What we know is that things like substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, conditions of poverty, sometimes prevent parents from being able to bring their adequate parenting self to all the situations to call for it.

3. Vulnerabilities

When we're looking at child-specific vulnerability, we don't generally judge vulnerability in degrees. We can talk about the nature of vulnerability. For instance, a parent who struggles with substance abuse in a real significant way, and they have a 16-year-old and a 2-year-old.

They may both be vulnerable. They may not both be vulnerable. They may both be vulnerable, but in different ways.

A 16-year-old who goes to school, has football practice afterwards, has a job, a car, and friends. They're not life and death relying on that parent, but that's their parent, their emotional support, that's their way of getting through life. And they may be vulnerable to the threat, but in a certain kind of way.

Whereas a 2-year-old might be vulnerable also, but in a very different way.

Electrical Outlet Example

Let me use a super simple example so that I can just walk through the dynamic. And that is the existence of electrical outlets. A hole in the wall, conveniently placed about 16 to 18 inches off the ground, that's open and of access to enough electricity to harm or kill a child.

So a threat to child safety?

I'm going to suggest, yes, it is.

Are children vulnerable to it?

What I'm hoping for after training today is that you would respond to that question by saying, Rob, I need you to tell me about the children because one of the most important points of child vulnerability is that we assess it on each child individually.

I'm going to tell you, we have a family with four children, a one-month-old, a 2-year-old, an 8-year-old, and a 14-year-old. So I'll ask again, are the children vulnerable to the existence of electrical outlets?

The one-month-old, are they vulnerable to electrical outlets in and of themselves? I would suggest probably not. They're not mobile. They're probably not even rolling over, let alone getting up and being ambulatory. They don't have the fine motor skills to hold onto that ever-valuable paperclip. They can't engage the safety threat that is electricity in an electrical outlet.

The 2-year-old is vulnerable to so many things. Electrical outlets are one of the main ones.

The 8-year-old doesn't feel like it. Tell me about the 8-year-old. Gimme a little bit of information, let me know. Are they developmentally on track? Do they understand what electricity and electrical outlets are? Do they just have that basic understanding? Do they like to take risks? Do they need extra supervision? Things like that.

14-year-old, similarly, we're probably out of the scope of vulnerability, but just let me learn a little bit about that child.

That's just a quick example of, we found a threat in the home, and we have four kids, but that doesn't mean all four kids are vulnerable to that threat. We think about threat vulnerability on an individual child basis.

Protective capacity, and this is something that I would guess most of you have exercised and almost all of you have observed, and what do you do to protect a child that is 2-years-old, in this case, from electrical outlets, right? You put covers on them, you supervise them, clean up after them, things like that.

Just a simple way of walking through the assessment framework there.

Process

I think there's a lot of value, especially in the court arena, for us to keep this simple. Don't start getting good at this by skipping steps and going ahead if time is an issue. I know that it is. Build efficiency by going through this conversation well. Then build efficiency in hitting all the steps, but do it quickly and well so that we understand. We go through the analysis, don't just skip it. We know where this is going, so we'll skip steps. That's where we lose track.

It walks through, are there threats to child safety in the home? If not, the child is safe. If yes, we look, are the children vulnerable to those threats? If not, the child's safe. If yes. We look to parental protective capacity. Do the parents have the capacity to protect the children from the threats to which they're vulnerable? If the answer to that question is yes, the children are safe. If the answer to that question is no, the children are not safe as we find them.

Smith Family Scenario

The Smith family scenario is a hypothetical dependency case example. It is not meant to be comprehensive or inclusive of all the information that courts would receive to make decisions for a family. That is because you will not be asked to make determinations such as removal or placement in these activities.

The following is simply an opportunity to practice applying the Safety Framework to a set of facts. Click the blue start button to begin.

The Smith family includes the mother, Margaret Smith, age 31, the father, James Smith, age 36, and two children, Jasmine Smith, age four, and James Smith, who is three months old.

The department received a referral regarding 4-year-old Jasmine Smith, the Referent, who is a neighbor and known to Jasmine, found Jasmine walking in the street at approximately 9:45 PM, inappropriately dressed for the weather. The neighbor called out to Jasmine to come out of the street. It took the neighbor approximately 20 minutes to convince Jasmine to come with her.

When asked why she was out in the street, Jasmine said her father was on the couch asleep, and her mother was always asleep, so she decided to leave. When asked what Jasmine meant by always asleep, Jasmine was not able to give details.

The neighbor walked Jasmine back home. The mother was at the door calling Jasmine's name as the neighbor and Jasmine walked up. The mother yelled at Jasmine to get back in the house and swatted her bottom as Jasmine entered the home, stating, "You need to quit doing this. This is the second time this week."

Jasmine was not injured by the swat, but seemed clearly afraid of going inside.

The following day, the department received a call from the office of Dr. Friendly, pediatrician for both children, to report concerns about James's medical care. Dr. Friendly reported that the mother had scheduled and canceled James's well-child check appointment three times. This appointment should have occurred when the baby was two weeks old.

Dr. Friendly reported that the mother did make it to the appointment that day, and they had just ended the visit. Dr. Friendly reported that James has gained only 3.7 pounds of weight since birth, and showed signs of excessive time spent on his back. When asked about the missed appointments, the mother explained that her four-year-old was acting out and causing her tremendous stress and that her husband was not at all helpful.

Jasmine is enrolled in the Daisies and Sunshine Daycare, located about two blocks from the family home. The owner told the social worker that Jasmine was not at the daycare that day and that her attendance was sporadic.

The social worker visited the family home at 2:00 PM on a sunny day. The inside of the home was very dark, as all the window coverings were closed and few lights were on. The father was asleep on the couch, and Jasmine was at the table near the kitchen, drawing on paper. The mother was in her nightgown with bare feet and appeared to have just come out of bed.

The worker asked to see the baby and went to the crib where she observed the baby lying on his back quietly with his eyes open. His diaper smelled strongly, and he clearly needed to be changed.

The mother said she was having trouble getting food consistently for the baby, but that she was feeding him at least every day. The mother restated that she had her hands full with Jasmine and that the father helps out when he's sober, which hasn't been very much lately. The mother said she and the father have been fighting more often about his lack of assistance and support, especially with the new baby.

She showed the worker a bruise on her arm from where the father grabbed her during a recent argument.

The social worker spoke to the mother about family and other support. The mother reported she has a sister who lives about an hour away and who knows the children well. She also said that the father's brother lives in town and comes over sometimes, mostly for holidays. The father also sees his brother out when they play softball or spend time at their mother's home across town.

The mother reported that the paternal grandmother is good with the kids, but was not sure whether the grandmother could actually handle caring for both children. The mother said she used to have a few friends, but now she only has time for taking care of her family.

Section 3: Safety Planning

We use the three elements of the blue triangle to assess whether a child is safe or unsafe within the particular circumstances of the home. If a child is determined to be safe, it means there is no longer a need for intervention. If a child is found to be unsafe, it may be tempting to assume that the child needs to be removed from the home to ensure their safety.

However, the next immediate step is to consider whether a safety plan could be put in place that would allow the child to safely remain in the home while interventions are being made.

Safety Planning Explained

Safety planning is about controlling threats to child safety immediately. That word immediately is important. This is about what we could do to allow the child to be safe, and when we walk away right now, we know the children are safe. What's the plan that allows children to be safe in the home immediately?

Generally, safety planning does not require parents to change their behavior or attitude. Mostly, what we're saying is largely we're not seeking promises to change. This comes under, if a parent is suffering from substance abuse and they're found passed out on the couch and the two-year-old wandering in the street, and this has happened a couple of times, this is the thing that's happening.

A safety plan, for instance, will not include the parent saying, "Okay, I'll stop using."

If there's domestic violence in the home, a safety plan does not generally include the person perpetrating domestic violence in the home saying, "Okay, I'll quit. I'll quit. I'll quit."

What a lot of parents who have been through the system, parent allies will tell you is that most often, parents know what's going on in the home. If they could quit before, they would've, but safety planning does not include that. This understanding that the threats to child safety can instantly go away. That's an incredibly important point. It's something that we have to digest, but the idea that what safety plans do is essentially assume that the threat will continue to exist, but remember the way we talk about threats is whether it's out of control, and the idea of a safety plan is it basically puts threats under control. So, for instance, the parent who's getting loaded and passing out and the two year old wandering in the street. The threat is that there is no adult or person in the home providing supervision to the 2-year-old due to substance abuse.

The safety plan is going to be a plan that says, how do we have supervision for that child in the home, given that the parent becomes incapacitated to provide that supervision on some semblance of a basis, whether it's 24/7, or in the afternoon, like we talked about before. If that's what safety planning is about.

Elements of Safety Planning

The guide gives us a way, just like with the Safety Assessment Framework. It gives us concepts or words to use to analyze whether a safety plan is adequate. Is it sufficient, feasible, and sustainable?

- **Sufficient:** Does it make the child safe?
- **Feasible:** Can we employ it?
- **Sustainable:** Can we employ this plan for the length of time the plan will be needed?

Sufficient, does it make the child safe? That's a toggle switch, right? That's a binary. Either the child is made safe or not. I understand these are subjective terms and people will disagree, but the idea here is either it makes the child safe or it doesn't. People can agree and disagree, whether it does, but that's a yes or no.

Feasible, can we employ the plan? There may be disagreement about whether we can employ the plan, but basically, the answer we're looking for is either yes, we can, or no, we can't. Those are fairly binary, fairly toggle switch-oriented questions.

Sustainable, I'd say there's a little bit of nuance in there as time passes, even as a parent's engagement in case plan activities, therapeutic activities that are designed to change parents' behavior. As parents change their behavior through whatever means, whether the knock on the door changes their approach and they're going to change their behavior, or they get some sort of resource, or they go through a therapeutic process, they start making some progress. When they've made that progress or digress, we can change in different ways.

Remember, the Safety Assessment will change. When I'm found as a parent, I'm in the morning getting up, getting loaded, passing out on the couch. My 2-year-old is unsupervised, and the child is unsafe, and it's pretty much 24/7 because of where I am in my addiction.

At the 30-day shelter care hearing or disposition, I now have a month or two and a half, three months of time and recovery. I've been providing clean UAs. The therapist is saying I'm in good, strong early recovery, things like this that you're familiar with. Are we ready to say no Safety Plan needed? That person can take care of their child by themselves.

Given where we were when we started, probably not. But the assessment of safety is different. I am in a different place. The nature of the threat of nobody in the home able to provide supervision has changed. So the plan that we put in place at the beginning, when I was getting loaded 24/7, is probably different from the plan that we need today.

So by sustainable, what this means is the plan we're going to employ today is sustainable for the length of the period we can predict that we'll need it.

Reasonable Efforts

Safety planning is where we are looking at framing up reasonable efforts. Reasonable efforts to prevent the removal when we're at the front end of the case. Reasonable efforts to achieve reunification when we're beyond that point.

We remember that having children in the home of one or both parents while the case is open, while the department's engaged with the family, while the court is exercising jurisdiction, that's a Safety Plan question.

Whether the parents can provide safety themselves, they've changed whatever's going on in their home or themselves so that they can provide safety in their home by themselves without the department, without the court. That's a jurisdictional question. That's whether we're going to dismiss a case. That's a case plan goal.

Safety Plan goal: safety now. Case plan goal: change the situation. So safety forever, if you will.

Section 4: Conditions for Return & Family Time Plans

We use the current assessment of safety to determine whether a child is safe or unsafe in the particular circumstances of the home. If a child is found to be unsafe, we then determine whether or not a safety plan could be put in place that would be sufficient to keep the child safe in the home.

If an in-home safety plan can be created that is sufficient, feasible, and sustainable, the Safety Framework tells us that the child should be able to safely return home.

Conditions for Return Explained

This is where the Safety Framework can be used to help determine if DCYF has made reasonable efforts to either prevent the removal of a child or to reunify the family, depending on the posture of the case.

If a child is found to be unsafe and the creation of an in-home safety plan is not possible, the Safety Framework tells us that out-of-home placement is then needed to ensure the safety of that child. This could include placement with a relative, a suitable other person, or into foster care.

The court should set the minimum expectations or conditions for the child to return home.

The court should also establish the amount and type of contact that will be in place for family time visits.

Every single family that comes to court and their children are not in their care deserves an understanding of why the children are out of the home. What would it take to make the children safe in the home? Why can't we employ that plan so the children remain out

of the home, and the parents should be able to walk out of court, and I say, "Hey, what needs to change in your home for your children to come back?"

And they say, "We need somebody who can supervise my 2-year-old because I'm not presently available to", they don't have to agree with it. They have to understand that's your determination. That is the determination in their case. That's what conditions for return are about. The conditions for return are based on the assessment of safety, and therefore, the safety plan that would be needed in this family, in this situation, at this time, to keep these children safe.

Then what we can't do in that plan, that's the current conditions for return. As the safety assessment changes over time, what a safety plan needs to be will change over time. And if we can't employ it later, it might need the answer to what needs to change in the home to have your children come home, which might change in the future.

Because the underlying things change. So it's the current conditions for return. This is a parenting court, so parenting-specific behaviors. So it's not just, we need a sober person in the house. We need somebody in the house who's sober and can supervise a 2-year-old. That's the parenting behavior. That's the reason the child's out of the home because we don't have sober supervision. In my example here.

The Smith Family Scenario: New Information

The maternal aunt is not able to come over to help with the family during the daytime hours until she works some things out with her boss regarding her work schedule.

The father denies that domestic violence or substance abuse is occurring in the home. He reports that things have been stressful since James was born, and raising two kids is harder than he thought it would be, but they are good parents and are doing the best they can.

If the father is not willing to engage in services at this time, but is willing to accept assistance with obtaining food and baby formula, his engagement with the department has been consistent but minimal.

The social worker talked with the paternal grandmother, who denied knowing of any abuse or neglect happening in the Smith home. She does not understand why the department is involved, and so the social worker was not successful in talking with her about participating in a safety plan.

The social worker attempted several times to contact the paternal uncle, but was unsuccessful.

Jasmine's daycare unregistered her after too many absences and has a general rule that a family waits until the following quarter to re-enroll.

The following practice activities are based on the assumption that the court ordered that the Smith children be removed and placed in out-of-home care with the maternal aunt.

The assumption can also be made that the maternal aunt is willing to have family time visits with both parents in her home.

The Importance of Family Time

Children experience removal and placement into foster care as a significant traumatic experience in addition to what they might have experienced prior to coming into care. And it often results in feelings of ambiguous loss. Experts say that disruptions in the parent-child relationship can provoke fear in a child, anxiety, and diminish their sense of self.

When children have to be removed from their parents, predictable and consistent family time visits really are critically important to helping them adjust to placement, regulate their emotions, and reduce emotional developmental harms. Including outcomes like depression and anxiety, and developmental delays. They also favorably impact case outcomes. So regular meaningful family time expedites permanency, and it also increases the likelihood of reunification.

The natural environments are best for visits. It enables parents and children to experience being together and for children to actually be cared for by their parents. Supervisors or monitors being introduced into family time change that interaction and we know that from parents and children who have told us that.

Then also recognize that, really, the need for that is to preserve safety. To provide safety for a child.

Family Time Plans

These are just some principles about family time that you'll see in the safety guide.

Quick to start, the law requires that now. I hope that you've been doing your best to practice. There's all the research around the harm of removal and around the way children understand the world around them, and they usually do it through their relationship with parents. Even when they're going to be out of the home, they need that kind of reconnection with their parents to ground their understanding of what's going on. It includes siblings as a part of the law. Obviously, alternative contact has taken a huge jump over the last year and a half. We've found very good, innovative ways to supplement in-person time for parents and children.

Right of Family. When a family member misses a counseling appointment or something like that, we're not going to cancel a visit for basically a non-safety-related reason.

I would hope those are things that we are employing regularly.

The one thing we could always do better, and this again gets to our transparency, clarity, and accountability principles, is that visitation be a written plan and that it explains supervision.

Your jurisdiction probably has some sort of default sort of visitation, twice a week, two hours supervised. Obviously, 1194 has changed how you exercise that, but when there's supervision or when there's visits, there's probably this default order. Let's say it's three times a week, unsupervised, whatever visits are, that's a status, that's a visitation or a family time status. A written plan says, here's why we are where we are and what it looks like, and then says, here's how family time is going to progress, and I would suggest the idea that it has if-then statements in it.

If this happens, we could increase the time. If that happens, we might decrease supervision. If this happens, we can move visits into the home, family time into the home.

That's what a written plan is. I understand it can't be set in stone because things change. These can't be exact statements, but they can offer some understanding to the family and some accountability to our thinking about what this needs to look like.

My experience was that we set up a visitation plan, then we failed to revisit it. The law's going to mandate that we revisit it now. So maybe that takes care of it, but we also should have a plan. How are you going to revisit it? How are you analyzing the family time plan to move it forward or not at each hearing when you're required to look at it again?

Section 5: Case Plans & Evaluation Progress

We use the current assessment of safety to determine whether a child is safe or unsafe in the particular circumstances of the home. If a child is found to be unsafe, we then determine whether or not a safety plan could be put in place that would be sufficient to keep the child safe in the home.

If an in-home safety plan can be created that is sufficient, feasible, and sustainable, the Safety Framework tells us that the child should be able to safely return home.

This is where the Safety Framework can be used to help determine if DCYF has made reasonable efforts to either prevent the removal of a child or to reunify the family, depending on the posture of the case.

If a child is found to be unsafe and the creation of an in-home safety plan is not possible, the Safety Framework tells us that out-of-home placement is then needed to ensure the safety of that child. This could include placement with a relative, a suitable other person, or into foster care.

The court should set the minimum expectations or conditions for the child to return home.

The court should also establish the amount and type of contact that will be in place for family time visits.

This process of using the current assessment of safety to make decisions around removal and placement should continuously occur throughout the life of a case.

We use this analysis to inform case planning and to assess parents' compliance and progress towards reaching their case plan goals.

Case plans that are built on safety contain, intentionally ordered therapeutic interventions, and services meant to directly resolve the identified threats of danger that brought the family to the attention of child welfare.

Case Planning Explained

Case planning now is absolutely about what needs to change in the home. The parents' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors, so that they are providing safety for their children on their own and don't need agency oversight, don't need court jurisdiction, and

we can dismiss the case. Case planning is looking toward the future, looking toward being able to dismiss the case.

Case planning is what we're used to. The important pieces are, again, referring back to the very beginning of the training. Safety Planning stands on the assessment of safety. What are the safety issues in this home that need to be addressed? And the case plan goes to the goal of addressing that safety so that the family can create safety in their home on their own, and everybody can go away.

I was talking about how sometimes we're not really good at defining the pathway. So what my experience is, oftentimes when we issue our dispositional orders, we are good at identifying the service we're providing. Who's going to pay for it? Who's going to refer to it? When do the parents have to go engage in it? What's compliance going to look like?

Indeed, our statute requires us at review hearings to assess both compliance and progress. One of the things that we want to talk about is focusing on progress. Progress, parenting behavior, specific progress. So a lot of times we do a lot of things that are proxy measures.

Somebody's doing well in drug treatment, so they must be improving on their parenting, because we associated those before. I don't mean to say these are completely unrelated proxies, but we measure, for instance, progress on drug treatment to improvement in parenting. Progress in a mental health program leads to improve parenting.

The key piece we're talking about is parenting and parenting behavior. So, assessing progress with parenting-specific language.

Defining the Pathway

So what I want to do is talk about how you can do some small things to improve the clarity of that pathway we're defining with the case plan. And that is to define what progress will look like for this family. We often send families out to say, you need to engage in the service, and you need to make progress. And we'll be back in 2, 4, or 6 months to assess whether you're making progress. We're not really going to tell you at this point what progress looks like. At least write it down in the order.

So what I would suggest is, how can we use the Safety Framework and the analysis of safety in a home to be able to articulate to a family, to a parent or parents, what progress would look like?

Think about that. What threat are we addressing? What do we want? What service or therapeutic process are we going to put in place to accomplish that goal? And what will it look like when the parents are on the way to it? What's progress going to look like?

Section 6: State Application

Washington State

We have a lot of different legal standards that we have to address in different hearings across the dependency court process. The Safety Framework is not designed as a replacement for the law. What we are here to do is talk about the structure of language and conceptual thinking that can help us apply the law.

So the framework is going to talk about safety, and what we're going to suggest is that you calibrate that term safety to the legal standard we're facing at the time. Sometimes what safety means is whether there's an absence of a serious threat of substantial harm. Sometimes it's whether there's imminent physical damage. Using those legal standards to calibrate the Safety Framework.

The framework is about organizing the factual scenarios and presentations, understandings, and inquiries so that we can apply legal standards to families.

Closing

Congratulations, you have completed the Safety Framework Module. You can learn more about this module by clicking on the tabs on the bottom of the screen. Click the done button when you are ready to exit this module.