

## Identifying Responsible Adults to Implement Safety Actions

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**Present Danger Plans and Safety Plans must include the most capable people taking the necessary actions at the required times to protect the child from danger. These people are known as **responsible adults**.**



To implement an in-home present danger or safety plan, there must be safety actions capable of sufficiently controlling the identified threats, and a responsible adult who is immediately available, trustworthy, and capable of carrying out the required actions at any time a threat of danger is present.



Remember, if it is unknown how a danger threat is occurring within the family after diligent efforts to gather information, or the danger threat is highly volatile and extreme in effect, it is unlikely that it can be managed with an in-home safety plan, even when a responsible adult is willing and available to be in the home.

A responsible adult may be a parent, guardian, and/or custodian in another household, a relative, or another adult who has a significant relationship with the child and a vested interest in protecting the child.

- If the present danger or safety plan requires the child to live outside of the home with a responsible adult, the responsible adult must be a relative or a person with a significant relationship with the child (licensed caregivers are not identified as responsible adults in a present danger or safety plan).
- People who are not related or do not have a significant relationship with the child (such as service providers, community members, or neighbors that do not know the family well) can be supportive resources in a present danger plan or safety plan, but should not be the responsible adults relied upon to take action to protect the child.

Assessment of a responsible adult includes:

- a DCS history, and public records and local law enforcement criminal background check;
- confirmation that the responsible adult is willing and able to be present and immediately able to take action at any time a threat of danger is present; and
- confirmation of the person's capability to take the specific actions required by the family's unique safety plan and the child's needs.

Prior to implementing the plan, meet in-person with the potential responsible adult to assess the person's capacity to protect the child. Gather information about the person's knowledge and perception of the safety threat(s), relationship with the parents and child, physical and emotional ability to intervene protectively, and specific knowledge required to meet the child's particular needs (such as knowledge about the child's daily care and special health care needs, and safe sleep environment for infants). Make sure that the potential responsible adult understands the expectations to support the parent to be successful and take immediate action to protect the child when a danger is present.

Confirm that the responsible adult knows how the safety threat occurs in the home, and what actions to take and under what circumstances. For example, if the parents of a substance exposed newborn cannot always perform essential parental responsibilities, a responsible adult will need to recognize when the parents are impaired and actively intercede to feed, bathe, clothe, soothe, and protect the newborn.

If there is a continuing criminal investigation, ask the potential responsible adult about his/her understanding of the current situation, and observations about the parents' behavior. The responsible adult will need to know about any injuries or medical issues that require care, and the danger that he/she is protecting the child against.

## Responsible Adult Criteria and Sample Questions to Start the Conversation

- Has demonstrated the ability to protect the child in the past (with or without DCS involvement) while under similar circumstances and family conditions.  
Have you had concerns in the past? Have you ever wanted to intervene to help the child? What actions have you taken (e.g. taken the child to a safe place during a domestic altercation), or what has prevented you from taking actions in the past?
- Believes the child's report of maltreatment and is supportive of the child.  
Do you think it is possible the child was abused/neglected? Medical reports indicate it is likely that the injuries were inflicted upon the child and the child has only been in the care of the parent, what are your thoughts on this?
- Is capable of understanding the specific threat to the child and the need to protect the child.  
What is your understanding of what is happening in the family? Have you ever noticed when the parent is impaired? What does it look like? What do you think needs to happen to make sure the child is safe and protected all of the time?
- Displays concern for the child and the child's experience and is intent on emotionally protecting the child.  
Do you believe the child's account of what happened? What do you think the child is going through right now? What is your understanding of what he or she may need moving forward?
- Has a strong bond with the child and he/she understands the number one priority is the safety and well-being of the child.  
What is your relationship with the child? Tell me about your experience with the child. What does he or she need right now?
- Is physically able to intervene and protect the child.  
Do you have any physical limitations? Can you lift over 15 lbs? The child has a lot of energy, how will you be at keeping up? Are you afraid of parents/ caregivers in the home? Would you feel overpowered by the parent if he or she becomes violent?
- Does not have significant individual needs that might affect the safety of the child, such as severe depression, lack of impulse control, medical needs, etc.  
Do you have any life stressors right now? Have you ever felt anxious or depressed? Do you struggle with substance abuse addiction, or have you in the past? How is your health? Do you take any medications? Have you ever been hospitalized in the past? If I asked you take a drug screening today, what would it tell me? For what condition do you have a marijuana card?
- Is emotionally able to carry out a plan and/or to intervene to protect the child (not incapacitated by fear of the maltreating person).  
Does the parent provide housing or financial assistance to you? Have you ever, or do you now, feel threatened by a caregiver in the home? What do you do when you are stressed? How do you cope with difficult situations?
- Has adequate knowledge and skill to fulfill caregiving responsibilities and tasks (this may involve considering the caregiver's ability to meet any exceptional needs that the child might have).  
What caregiving role have you had in the past? What are the child's daily needs? Have you cared for a child with these needs before (such as a baby)? What would you do if the child had a fever? How much should the baby be eating and how often? Where should the baby sleep? What do you know about the child's medical needs? What is the child's behavior like?
- Has asked, demands and expects the maltreating adult to follow the conditions of the safety plan and can assure the plan is effectively carried out.  
What do you think the parent's role is when you are in the home? What needs to be done to protect the child? What is your role in that?
- Consistently expresses belief that the maltreating person is in need of help and that he or she supports the maltreating person getting help (this is the individual's point of view without being prompted by DCS).  
What are your expectations of the parent moving forward? How do you see the future for the family?
- If having difficulty believing the other person would maltreat the child, the individual describes the child as believable and trustworthy.  
It is sometimes difficult to think a loved one may have harmed their child, do you believe that this may have occurred or is occurring? What do you think or feel about the child's disclosure of what is happening?
- Has adequate resources necessary to meet the child's basic needs.  
The child may need to stay with you for some time, do you have the resources to meet the child's needs? How would caring for the child affect you financially? If a crisis occurred, would you be able to pay the bills? The child requires a lot of medical treatment, would you be capable of safely transporting that frequently?
- Is cooperating with the DCS Specialist's efforts to provide services and assess the specific needs of the family.  
What do you think of the Department's involvement? What do you see as DCS's role with the family?
- Does not place responsibility on the child for the problems of the family.  
Who do you believe in the family needs to make some changes? What is the child's role or responsibility in all of this?