

IMPENDING DANGER SAFETY THREATS AND DESCRIPTORS GUIDE



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

Identifying Threats of Danger to a Child

Impending danger refers to a child being in a continuous state of danger due to caregiver behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions, and/or situations posing a specific threat of severe harm to a child. Impending danger is often not immediately apparent and may not be active and threatening child safety upon initial contact with a family. Identifying impending danger requires thorough information collection regarding family and parent/caregiver functioning to sufficiently assess and understand how family conditions occur.

In order to determine if a child is in impending danger, the information gathered on the six domains of family functioning must be sufficient to indicate whether a safety threat exists and if so, how it meets all five safety threshold criteria. The safety threats and descriptors of each threat are as follows:

Parent, guardian, or custodian leaves child alone or fails to provide adequate supervision and child is not capable of caring for self, or leaves child with persons unwilling or unable to provide adequate care, and as a result, the child is likely to suffer serious or severe harm.

- Parent, guardian or custodian makes inadequate and/or inappropriate babysitting or child care arrangements and/or demonstrates very poor planning for the child's care.
- Parent, guardian or custodian makes impulsive decisions and plans that may leave the child in precarious situations such as unsupervised or supervised by an unreliable person.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is/has been absent from the home for lengthy periods of time, no other adult is available to provide basic care.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has abandoned the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian arranged for care by an adult, but caregiver's whereabouts is unknown, or caregiver has not returned according to plan, and the child is with a caregiver who is unable or unwilling to care for the child now.
- The child has been abandoned at an institution or with someone who does not know who the parent, guardian or custodian is.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has left the child with someone, but the caregiver has not returned according to plans, or did not express plans to return, or has been gone longer than the person keeping the child expected or would be normally acceptable.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has an unexplained absence which exceeds a few days.

Parent, guardian, or custodian deliberately harmed the child, has caused serious or severe harm to the child, or has made a threat to cause serious or severe harm to the child.

- Parent, guardian or custodian states he/she will harm the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian describes conditions and situations that stimulate him/her to think about harming the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian talks about being worried, fearful, preoccupied with abusing or neglecting the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian identifies things the child does that aggravate, annoy the caregiver in ways that the caregiver wants to attack the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian describes incidents involving discipline that have gotten out-of-hand.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is distressed, "at the end of their rope" and is asking for some relief in either specific terms ("take the child") or general terms ("please help me before something awful happens").
- One parent, guardian or custodian is expressing a concern for what the other caregiver or someone in a caregiving role is capable of or may do.
- The incident was planned; had some element of premeditation.

- The nature of the incident or use of an instrument can be reasonable assumed to heighten the level of pain or injury (e.g., cigarette burns, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian's motivation to teach or discipline seems secondary to inflicting pain and/or injury.
- Parent, guardian or custodian can reasonably be assumed to have had some awareness of what the result would be prior to incident.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's action was not impulsive; there was sufficient time and deliberation to assure the actions hurt the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian does not acknowledge any guilt or wrong doing and intended to hurt the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian shows no empathy for the pain or trauma the child has experienced and intended to hurt the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian may feel justified; may express that the child deserved it and intended to hurt the child.

Parent, guardian, or custodian's explanation for the child's injury or physical condition is inconsistent with the observed or diagnosed injury or condition.

- The child has a credible account of the injury, which contradicts the explanation of the parent, guardian or custodian.
- Parent, guardian or custodian acknowledges the presence of injuries and/or conditions, but does not explain them or seem concerned.
- Parent, guardian or custodian acknowledges the presence of injuries and/or conditions, but plead ignorant as to how they came to be.
- Parent, guardian or custodian may express concern for child's condition, but is unable to explain it.
- Family appears to be totally competent and appropriate with the exception of the abuse or neglect and the lack of an explanation or an explanation that makes no sense.
- Battered Child Syndrome case circumstances are present, in which the family appears to be competent, but the child's symptoms do not match the family appearance and there is no explanation for the child's symptoms.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's explanations are far-fetched.
- Facts related to the conditions, the incident and injury, as observed by DCS and/or supported by other professionals, contradict explanations.
- History and circumstantial information are incongruent with the parent, guardian or custodian's explanation about the injuries and conditions.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's verbal expressions do not match emotional response and there is not a believable explanation.

There is evidence of abuse or neglect and the parent, guardian, or custodian cannot produce the child, refuses access to the child, is likely to flee with the child, or is actively avoiding DCS.

- Family is highly transient.
- Family has little tangible attachments (e.g., job, home, property, extended family, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian is evasive, manipulative, no-shows, suspicious.
- There is precedence for avoidance and flight.
- There are or will be civil or criminal complications that the family wants to avoid.
- There are other circumstances prompting flight (e.g., warrants, false identities uncovered, criminal convictions, financial indebtedness, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian refuses to speak with DCS.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is openly hostile and physically aggressive toward DCS.
- Parent, guardian or custodian refuses access to the home.
- Parent, guardian or custodian hides the child; refuses access to the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian avoids all contacts, fails to keep appointments, never shows up, and is never home.
- Parent, guardian or custodian constantly lies and deceives in respect to the child, the child's condition, home conditions, events and circumstances related to the report and DCS intervention.

Child sexual abuse is suspected and perpetrator access places the child in immediate serious or severe harm.

- Parent, guardian or custodian cannot control their own sexual impulses (e.g. sexual activity with or in front of the child).
- Sexually abusive caregiver has unsupervised access to the child.
- Sexual abuse has occurred in which: the child discloses; family circumstances including opportunity may or may not be consistent with sexual abuse; and the caregiver denies, blames the child or offers no explanation or an unbelievable explanation.
- Child is a victim of sex trafficking or is likely to become exploited for sex.

Physical conditions of the home are hazardous and may directly cause serious or severe harm to the child.

- Housing is unsanitary, filthy, infested, a health hazard (e.g., human/animal feces, undisposed garbage, access to dangerous objects or harmful substances, etc.).
- The physical structure of the house is decaying, falling down.
- Wiring and plumbing in the house are substandard, exposed.
- Furnishings or appliances are hazardous.
- Heating, fireplaces, stoves, etc. are hazardous and accessible.
- The home has easily accessible open windows, balconies, etc. in upper stories.
- The home is being used for drug manufacturing; products and materials used in the production of drugs are being stored and are accessible in the home.

Child is profoundly fearful of parent, guardian, or custodian, other family members or other people living in or having access to the home.

- Child describes threats against him or her that seem reasonable and believable.
- Child has reasonable fears of retribution or retaliation.
- Child demonstrates emotional and physical responses indicating fear of the home or people within the home (e.g., crying, inability to focus, withdrawal, nightmares, insomnia, etc.).
- Child expresses fear and describes people and circumstances that are reasonably threatening.
- Child recounts previous experiences that form the basis for fear.
- Child's fearful response escalates at the mention of home, people or circumstances associated with reported incidents.
- Violent situations involving physical and verbal assault on a parent, guardian, or custodian in the presence of a child and child is fearful for self and others.

The behavior of a child living in the home threatens serious or severe harm to him/herself or to others and the parent, guardian, or custodian cannot control the behavior or is unwilling or unable to arrange or provide necessary care.

- Child exhibits risk taking behaviors (e.g., sexually or physically acting out, aggressive, running away, gang affiliation, etc.)
- Child does not demonstrate the ability to self-protect.
- Child seeks out or stimulates physical aggression as a means of gaining attention.
- Child threatens or attempts suicide.
- Child talks about suicidal thoughts or engages in/expresses desire to self-injurious behaviors.
- Child's emotional state is such that immediate mental health/medical care is needed and parent, guardian or custodian will not provide the care.
- Child is capable of and likely to self-harm and parent, guardian or custodian is not equipped to handle it.
- Child is a physical danger to others.
- Child abuses substances; may overdose and the parent, guardian or custodian has no strategy to deal with it.
- Child is so withdrawn that basic needs are not being met.
- Child exhibits severe anxiety or depression.

Parent, guardian, or custodian's behavior is violent, bizarre, erratic, unpredictable, incoherent, or totally inappropriate and may cause serious or severe harm to the child.

- Parent, guardian or custodian's disorders reduce their ability to control their behavior in ways that threaten safety (e.g., extreme fears, phobias, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian threatens DCS Specialist or other professionals involved with the family.
- Parent, guardian or custodian spends impulsively, resulting in a lack of basic necessities that then threaten safety.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has addictive patterns of behavior (e.g., addiction to substances, gambling, computers, etc.) that are uncontrolled and they leave child in threatening situations such as failing to supervise or provide other basic care.
- Parent, guardian or custodian uses brutal or bizarre punishment (e.g., scalding with hot water, burning with cigarettes, forced feeding, confinement, over-strenuous exercise, etc.).
- Parent is delusional or experiencing hallucinations.

Dynamics in the household include an individual establishing power, control, or coercion over a caregiver in a way that impairs the necessary supervision or care of the child and has caused, or will likely cause, serious or severe harm to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.

- Domestic violence in which assaults on a child occur.
- Domestic violence perpetrator has had recent violent outbursts that resulted in injury or threat of injury to the child.
- Domestic violence in which a child may be attempting to intervene.
- Domestic violence in which a child could be inadvertently harmed even though he/she may not be the actual target of the violence.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's own victimization (past or current) severely interferes with ability to parent or protect the child.

Parent, guardian or custodian is unable to perform essential parental responsibilities due to alcohol/substance use, mental health conditions, physical impairment, or cognitive limitations, and as a result, the child is likely to suffer serious or severe harm.

- Substance use prevents parent, guardian or custodian from protecting or providing for the child.
- Other safety factors are directly related to the use of drugs or alcohol.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has addictions or periods of incapacitation due to substance use or misuse.
- Drugs used in the presence of children or paraphernalia left around and accessible to children.
- Parent, guardian or custodian drives with the child in the vehicle when legally intoxicated or appearing to be incapacitated by substance use.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's disorders reduce their ability to control their behavior in ways that threaten safety.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is emotionally immobilized (chronically or situationally) and cannot control his/her behavior in ways that threaten safety.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is so depressed that he/she is not functionally able to meet basic needs of the child.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's intellectual incapacity affects judgment/knowledge in ways that prevent providing adequate basic care.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is unable to provide necessary protective supervision and basic care because of physical illness or incapacity.

The parent, guardian, or custodian's involvement in criminal activity or the criminal activity of any other person living in or having access to the home may result in serious or severe harm to the child.

- Parent, guardian or custodian's behavior outside of the home (e.g., drugs, violence, aggressiveness, hostility, etc.) creates an environment within the home which threatens child safety (e.g., drug parties, gangs, drive-by shooting, etc.).
- Adult uses child to sell or transport drugs.
- Drug transactions occur in the home.
- Drugs are manufactured within the home.

Parent, guardian, or custodian has extremely negative perceptions of the child, and/or is hostile when talking to or about the child, and/or has extremely unrealistic expectations for the child's behavior.

- Parent, guardian or custodian's expectations of a child far exceed the child's capacity; thus, placing the child in harmful situations (e.g., allows young child to boil water, plug in appliances, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian's expectations of the child are totally unrealistic in view of the child's condition.
- Parent, guardian or custodian expects a child to perform or act in a way that is improbable/impossible given the child's age (e.g., babies and young children expected not to cry; remain still for extended periods of time; not to soil themselves/be toilet trained; eat neatly; care for younger siblings; stay alone, etc.).
- The child is seen as the devil, demon possessed evil, bastard, product of rape, etc.
- The child has taken on the same identity, as someone the parent, guardian or custodian hates is hostile toward, fearful of, and parent, guardian or custodian transfers feelings and perceptions of the person to the child (e.g., mother who hates child's father, etc.).
- The child is seen by the parent, guardian or custodian as deformed, ugly, deficient, and embarrassing.
- The child is considered by the parent, guardian or custodian to be punishing or torturing them.
- One parent, guardian or custodian is jealous of the child and believes the child is a detriment or threat to the parent, guardian or custodian's relationship or stands in the way of the parent, guardian or custodian's best interest.
- Parent, guardian or custodian sees child as an undesirable extension of self and this results in extremely harsh/dangerous treatment of the child.
- Child is blamed and held accountable for DCS involvement.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is unreasonable, treats the child in a hostile manner, associates difficulties in their lives, limitations to their freedom, financial or other burdens, to the child.
- Conflicts that parent, guardian or custodian experience with others (e.g., family members, neighbors, friends, school, police, DCS, etc.) are considered to be the child's fault.
- Parent, guardian, or custodian's negative experiences or losses (e.g., job, relationships, etc.) they attribute to the child.
- Child is openly unwanted.

Parent, guardian, or custodian has not, cannot, or will not protect a child from serious or severe harm, including harm from other persons living in or having access to the home.

- Parent, guardian or custodian is unable to be objective about the threats to the child due to the relationship with the alleged perpetrator.
- Parent, guardian or custodian sides with the alleged perpetrator and this places the child in danger.
- Parent, guardian or custodian is totally dependent on the perpetrator for living accommodations and expenses.
- Parent, guardian or custodian does not attend to the child; the need for care goes unnoticed or unmet (e.g., child wanders outdoors alone, plays with dangerous object, plays on unprotected window ledge, or is exposed to other serious hazards, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian allows the child to live or be placed in situations in which harm is increased by virtue of the child's condition.
- Parent, guardian or custodian does not know or apply basic safety measures such as keeping medications, sharp objects, household cleaners, etc. out of reach of the child.

Parent, guardian, or custodian is unable or unwilling to perform essential parental responsibilities or to meet the child's immediate needs for food, clothing, shelter, and/or medical or mental health care, which may result in serious or severe harm to the child.

- Parent, guardian or custodian is or will be incarcerated, leaving the home without a responsible adult.
- Failure to be given prescribed medication endangers the child's life or causes illness.
- Child complains of extreme pain for which the parent, guardian or custodian does not seek medical attention.
- Unreasonable delay in obtaining medical or dental services that endangers the child's life or places child at risk of permanent disability.
- Parent, guardian or custodian refuses medical care for the child's serious condition based on religious or social reasons.
- A lack of motivation results in parent, guardian or custodian abandoning their role to meet basic needs or failing to adequately perform the caregiver role which would meet the child's basic needs.
- Lack of hygiene is so dramatic as to cause or potentially cause serious illness.
- Infant has not been fed for 12 hours.
- Food is not provided or only provided sporadically.
- Clothes are inadequate to protect the child from the elements.
- Family has no money, food, clothing or shelter.
- Family finances are insufficient to support unusual need that, if unmet, could result in a threat of harm (e.g., medical needs, etc.).
- Family may be using resources for other than basic needs which leaves the family and children routinely without basic needs being met adequately (e.g., using resources for drugs, etc.).
- Because of unusual condition, the basic need of a child exceeds normal expectations and the family is unable to adequately address (e.g., disabled child, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian does not know what basic care is or how to provide it (e.g., how to feed, diaper, protect or supervise appropriate to child's age, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian's skill in parenting is exceeded by special needs and demands that a child displays in ways that affect safety.
- Parent, guardian or custodian's knowledge and skill is adequate for some children's age and development, but not for others (e.g., can take care of an infant, but cannot control a toddler, etc.).
- Parent, guardian or custodian does not want to be a caregiver and does not perform role, particularly in terms of basic needs.
- Parent, guardian or custodian has an aversion to parenting and does not attend to basic needs.
- Parent, guardian or custodian avoids the responsibilities concerned with parenting and basic care.
- Child has a physical or mental condition, that if untreated, serves as a threat of harm to the child's safety and caregiver cannot or will not control/address it.

Parent, guardian, or custodian previously threatened the safety of a child and/or caused harm to a child and circumstances indicate the person could cause serious or severe harm to the child.

- Household member has past convictions regarding violent behaviors and acts toward others to include assault and battery, homicide, sexual assault or rape, or criminal acts involving weapons.
- Previous involuntary Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).
- Previous death of a child due to abuse or neglect.
- Previous criminal conviction for child abuse or neglect.
- Known DCS history of severe child abuse or neglect.
- No steps were taken by the parent, guardian or custodian to protect the child from abuse or neglect by the current caregiver's partner or other person living in or having access to the home.