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**ORANGE COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY  
CFS OPERATIONS MANUAL**

**Effective Date: December 6, 2006**  
**Current Revision Date: October 7, 2016**

**Number: D-0311**

## **Structured Decision Making**

<b>Purpose</b>	To provide guidelines for the completion of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools and Orange County (OC) Safety Plans.
<b>Approved</b>	This policy was approved by Gary Taylor, Director of CFS, on October 7, 2016. <i>Signature on file.</i>
<b>Most Recent Revision</b>	<p>This revision of the Policy and Procedure (P&amp;P) incorporates Safety Organized Practice (SOP) concepts and SDM 3.0 into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)</i></li><li>• <i>OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)</i></li></ul>
<b>Background</b>	<p>The California SDM Model brings structure and consistency to each decision point in the child welfare system through the use of evidence-based, objective, and comprehensive assessment tools. SDM tools aid in the assessment of families and provide structured response guidelines at specific decision points in the life of a case ranging from a report to the Child Abuse Registry (CAR) through the last service contact with Children and Family Services (CFS).</p> <p>Orange County began using the California SDM Model in 1999 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide structure for client interviews</li><li>• Assess major safety factors</li><li>• Promote consistency in decision making among staff</li><li>• Guide decisions to remove a child from the home based on an analysis of safety threats and available interventions</li><li>• Facilitate the goal of maintaining children safely in their homes whenever possible and appropriate</li><li>• Target resources on families most at risk</li></ul>

- Facilitate the tracking of outcomes
  - Identify training needs
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## Definitions

For the purpose of this P&P, the following definition applies:

**Safety Organized Practice (SOP):** An approach to day-to-day child welfare casework that is designed to help key stakeholders involved with a child (e.g., parents; extended family; child welfare worker; supervisors and managers; lawyers; judges and other court officials; and the child) to keep a clear focus on assessing and enhancing child safety at all points in the case process.

This adapted approach integrates the best of Signs of Safety - a strengths and solution-focused child welfare practice approach with SDM (research based decision support assessments) to create a rigorous and balanced child welfare practice model.

**Safety Network:** A group of family, friends, and professionals involved with a child, communicating openly about harm/danger concerns and who are willing to support the family and participate in developing and implementing a plan to enhance child safety.

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## POLICY

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### SDM Application

The California SDM Model utilizes a web-based application for tool completion. SDM receives data from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) and includes the following tools:

- Hotline Tools (Screening Tool and Response Priority)
- Path Decision Tool (OC does not use)
- Safety Assessment
- Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Safety Assessment
- Risk Assessment
- Family Strengths and Needs Assessment
- Risk Reassessment (In-home cases)
- Reunification Reassessment

In addition, SDM includes:

- A user guide of how to navigate through the screens
- A policy manual on the proper usage of each tool
- Definitions utilized for each tool

## SDM Tools

SDM tools will be completed in SDM at key decision making points while a family is receiving child welfare services. SDM tools require supervisory approval.

**Note:** Two county specific SDM-related tools, *Orange County (OC) Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* and *Orange County (OC) SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* are located in hardcopy form in the CFS Forms Room.

### A. **Hotline Tools:**

- Screening Tool—Determines whether or not a referral meets the statutory threshold for an in-person response
- Response Priority Tools—Determine how quickly to respond for each type of abuse (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse)

Refer to CFS P&P [Child Abuse Registry \(CAR\) \(M-0109\)](#) for guidelines for assessing child abuse and neglect allegations and determining disposition, response time, and assignment of child abuse reports.

### B. **Safety Assessment:**

Provides information concerning the danger of **immediate** harm/maltreatment to a child. Guides the decision of whether a child may remain in the home with no intervention, remain in the home with safety interventions, or must be protectively placed. If a safety threat is identified, and a child can remain in the home with safety interventions, see “OC Safety Plan” Policy section for further direction.

**Note:** This tool is not used for allegations against out-of-home caregivers (see section C. below, SCP Safety Assessment).

### C. **SCP Safety Assessment:**

Provides information concerning the danger of **immediate** harm/maltreatment to a foster child by a SCP. Guides the decision to remove a foster child from the SCP’s home based on whether threats to safety are present and whether interventions are available and appropriate to maintain placement. If a safety threat is identified, and a foster child can remain in the SCP’s home with safety interventions, see “OC SCP Safety Plan” Policy section for further direction.

### D. **Risk Assessment:**

Identifies families with low, moderate, high, or very high probabilities of **future** abuse or neglect. Provides an objective

appraisal of the likelihood a family will abuse or neglect a child in the home in the next 18 to 24 months. Allows for resources targeted to higher risk families with the greater potential to reduce subsequent maltreatment.

E. **Family Strengths and Needs Assessment:**

Evaluates the presenting strengths and critical family needs in order to plan effective goals, objectives, and interventions in a case plan.

F. **Risk Reassessment (In home cases):**

Evaluates a family's progress toward case plan goals and guides whether to keep a case open or close a case.

G. **Reunification Reassessment:**

Structures critical case management decisions for children in placement who have a goal of reunification by:

- Monitoring critical case factors that affect goal achievement
- Structuring the case review process
- Expediting permanency for children in substitute care

The Reunification Reassessment guides decision making to return a child home, maintain out-of-home placement, and/or terminate reunification services and implement a permanency alternative.

For specific information on the purpose of each tool, when to use each tool, and the programs responsible for completion, see [Attachment 5—SDM Tools](#).

Program-specific tool completion guides are summarized in the following attachments:

- [Attachment 1—SDM Completion Guidelines—Emergency Response](#)
- [Attachment 2—SDM Completion Guidelines—Family Maintenance Collaborative Services \(FMCS\)](#)
- [Attachment 3—SDM Completion Guidelines—Court Services and Specialized Family Services \(SFS\) Investigations](#)
- [Attachment 4—SDM Completion Guidelines—Continuing Family Services \(ICS, PSP, SFS Continuing, VFS\)](#)

Program-specific procedural guidelines are detailed in [Attachment 6—SDM Process Guidelines](#).

## Overrides

The Hotline Tools, Risk Assessment, and Reunification Reassessment allow overrides of the decision, risk level, or support level.

There are two types of overrides:

A. **Policy Overrides:**

When specific conditions pre-determined by CFS exist, a change in the tool's finding is mandatory.

B. **Discretionary Overrides:**

Used when a Senior Social Worker (SSW) obtains information not captured in the tool or unique circumstances exist that suggest a change in the tool's finding is appropriate.

CFS staff will read each override option carefully, as overrides differ for each tool and may allow for:

- An increase or decrease in the response time of a referral
- An increase or decrease in the risk level assigned to a family
- A change in the permanency plan for a child

## OC Safety Plan

Safety plans allow for clear documentation of reasonable efforts to maintain a child safely in the home. CFS staff **must** complete an *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* when each of the following conditions apply:

- A safety threat is identified in a SDM Safety Assessment
- A safety intervention is specified in a SDM Safety Assessment
- A child will be left in the home

*OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* will be:

- Completed before the child is left in the home
- Designed to address specific, immediate safety threat(s) identified
- Completed in the family's declared primary language, if available
- Developed in collaboration with the family (e.g., parents, children, adults fulfilling a parental role, and extended family members) as available and appropriate
- Signed and dated by parents or legal guardians
- Provided to parent or legal guardian

Contents of *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* will:

- Be written in simple, easily understood terms
- Be reasonable, achievable, time specific, and service specific
- Identify a follow-up mechanism to ensure completion of clearly identified activities and safety threats are mitigated

Members of the safety network will be encouraged to contact CFS staff immediately, if:

- Assistance is needed with any aspect of the plan
- There are concerns regarding the safety or well being of the child

In addition, the following guidelines apply:

- A. CFS staff will follow up with the family according to time frames agreed upon in the plan to assess whether identified safety threats are being mitigated and the plan is being complied with.
- B. CFS staff will seek supervisor consultation regarding the appropriateness of an OC Safety Plan while in the home.

If supervisor contact is successful, modify the plan as necessary and use the *Telephonic approval of Safety Plan* check box.

If supervisor consultation is unsuccessful while in the home:

- Inform family that supervisor approval must be obtained, and the *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* is subject to change
  - Supervisor consultation and approval will be obtained by phone or in person within one business day of the development of the OC Safety Plan
- C. Supervisors will review safety plans for accurate and thorough completion and provide signature approval within seven calendar days of the SSW's development and review of the OC Safety Plan with the family.

If *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* is revised after consultation with supervisor, CFS staff will meet with the family again, as soon as possible, to review the changes.

- D. If parent, legal guardian, or age-appropriate child refuses to:
- Sign an *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)*, –or–
  - Implement a previously agreed upon plan, –or–
  - Develop a safety plan

CFS staff will evaluate whether or not the refusal to sign jeopardizes the child's safety. The need for and use of other protective interventions may be considered as outlined in CFS P&P [Abuse Investigations—Protective Interventions \(A-0414\)](#).

If it appears a parent or legal guardian will be protective despite refusal to sign an *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)*, a child may be left in the home and the referral or case may be closed as appropriate. Indicate “*refused to sign*” on signature line.

CFS staff will document a parent's or legal guardian's reason for refusal to sign an *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* under the “Safety Plan” heading within the Investigation Narrative, in CWS/CMS Contact Narratives, and appropriate Court Reports.

**Note:** If parents or legal guardians refuse voluntary services, after previously agreeing to accept services as part of an initial safety plan, the assigned SSW will reassess the child's safety in the home and complete a new *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* if necessary.

- E. A child will not be left in a home, when an active safety threat exists and no safety intervention has been implemented that mitigates the imminent risk to the child.
- F. If domestic violence is a threat in the home or there is a current restraining order against one of the parents or legal guardians, CFS staff will meet separately with each parent or legal guardian to develop and sign an *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)*.
- G. CFS staff will summarize the parameters and outcome of safety plans developed with a family under the “Safety Plan” heading within the Investigation Narratives, in CWS/CMS Contact Narratives, and appropriate Court Reports. Documentation will address:

- Whether the safety plan was developed in collaboration or agreement with parent or legal guardian
- Parameters of the safety plan
- Parental signature or refusal to sign
- Whether a copy of Safety Plan was provided to the parent/legal guardian
- Date of supervisor consultation regarding appropriateness of the safety plan

H. CFS staff will include the approved *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)* with the referral packet submitted to the SSSS at the conclusion of the ER investigation.

A copy will be included in the ER Referral packet for the program where the referral will be assigned upon promotion to a case, as applicable.

I. The assigned SSW on an Open Case will follow-up on ~~any~~ safety plan actions outlined in *OC Safety Plan (F063-25-453)*, as applicable.

### **OC SCP Safety Plan**

Safety plans completed with out-of-home care providers allow for clear documentation of reasonable efforts to maintain a foster child safely in a SCP home. CFS staff **must** complete an *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* when each of the following conditions apply:

- A safety threat is identified in a SDM SCP Safety Assessment
- A safety intervention is specified in a SDM SCP Safety Assessment
- A foster child will be left in the SCP's home

SCP's include:

- Resource Families
- Relatives
- Non-relative extended family members (NREFMs)
- Licensed foster parents
  - Certified foster family agency (FFA) providers
  - Small family homes
  - Adoptive parent if the adoption has not yet been finalized
  - Legal guardians where dependency remains open

OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549) will be:

- Completed before the foster child is left in the home
- Designed to address specific, immediate safety threat(s) identified
- Completed in the SCP's declared language, if available
- Developed in collaboration with the SCP's family (e.g., care provider, children, and extended family members) as available and appropriate
- Signed and dated by the parent or legal guardian
- Provided to parent or legal guardian
- Shared with the assigned SSW within two business days
  - If the assigned SSW is not available, contact the assigned SSW's SSSS or back-up SSSS

Contents of OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549) will:

- Be written in simple, easily understood terms
- Be reasonable, achievable, time specific, and service specific
- Identify a follow-up mechanism to ensure completion of clearly identified activities and safety threats or concerns are mitigated

Members of the safety network will be encouraged to contact CFS staff immediately, if:

- Assistance is needed with any aspect of the plan
- There are concerns regarding the safety or well being of the child

In addition, the following guidelines apply:

- A. CFS staff will follow up with the SCP according to time frames agreed upon in the plan to assess whether identified safety threats are being mitigated and the plan is being complied with.
- B. CFS staff will seek supervisor consultation regarding the appropriateness of an OC SCP Safety Plan while in the home.

If supervisor contact successful, modify the plan as necessary and use the *Telephonic approval of Safety Plan* check box.

If supervisor consultation is unsuccessful while in the home:

- Inform SCP that supervisor approval must be obtained and the *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* is subject to change
  - Supervisor consultation and approval will be obtained by phone or in person within one business day of the development of the OC SCP Safety Plan
- C. Supervisors will review safety plans for accurate and thorough completion and provide signature approval within seven calendar days of the SSW's development and review of the OC SCP Safety Plan with the family.

If *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* is revised after consultation with supervisor, CFS staff will meet with the SCP again, as soon as possible, to review the changes.

- D. If a SCP or foster child refuses to sign an *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* or to implement a previously agreed upon plan, or to develop a plan to mitigate one or more identified safety threats, CFS staff will:
- Assess the reason for refusal or lack of implementation
  - Seek supervisor consultation
  - Consider other protective interventions pursuant to the following CFS P&Ps:
    - [Abuse Investigations—Foster Care \(A-0101\)](#)
    - [Abuse Investigations—Open Case \(A-0402\)](#)
    - [Abuse Investigations—Protective Interventions \(A-0414\)](#)
- E. A foster child will not be left in a placement home when an active safety threat exists and no safety intervention has been implemented that mitigates the imminent risk to the foster child. This includes an SCP's unwillingness or inability to comply with a safety plan.
- F. CFS staff will summarize the parameters and outcome of SCP safety plans developed with out-of-home care providers under the "Safety Plan" heading within the Investigation Narrative and in Contact Narratives. Documentation will address:

- Whether the safety plan was developed in collaboration or agreement with SCP
  - Parameters of the safety plan
  - Whether a copy of the Safety Plan was provided to the SCP
  - Date of supervisor consultation regarding appropriateness of the safety plan
- G. CFS staff will include the approved *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* with the referral packet submitted to the supervisor at the conclusion of the ER investigation.
- H. CFS staff or designee will send a copy of the *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)* to:
- Assigned SSW for victim child
  - Applicable or Assigned RFA Supervisor
- I. Assigned SSW on Open Case will follow-up, as necessary, on actions outlined in the *OC SCP Safety Plan (F063-25-549)*, as applicable.

**Supervisor Oversight and Approval**

Senior Social Services Supervisors (SSSSs) will monitor the consistent and timely completion of all appropriate SDM tools, *OC Safety Plans (F063-25-453)*, and *OC SCP Safety Plans (F063-25-549)*. SDM tool assistance in referral and case decision making may be discussed in case conferences and case reviews.

SSSSs will approve or modify SDM tools within 30 calendar days of the date the tool is submitted for approval, with the following exceptions:

- CAR SSSSs will modify and/or approve the SDM Hotline Tool when the hard copy is received. For additional details, refer to CFS P&P [Child Abuse Registry \(CAR\) \(M-0109\)](#)
- SSSSs will review and approve a SDM Safety Assessment within seven calendar days of the date the tool is submitted for approval
- For cases, SSSSs will approve SDM tools prior to or on the same day as electronic case plan approval within CWS/CMS

SSSSs and SSWs may use the [Safe Measures Application](#) to monitor compliance of SDM tool completion. The Safe Measures application includes an instruction manual.

## Documentation

### A. **Filing:**

- **ER:** Safety Plans are filed in the CAR/ER File
- **Case:** Any printed SDM tools and Safety Plans are filed on *SDM Acco (F063-25-1122)*
- **RFA Supervisor:** SCP Safety Plan are filed in the RFA file

### B. **CWS/CMS:**

SDM data will be incorporated under the “Safety and Risk Assessments” heading of Investigation Narratives and in CWS/CMS Contact Narratives. Factual elements from each tool (i.e., the identified safety threat, risk factor, strength, or final risk level) will be included.

### C. **Court Reports:**

SDM data will be incorporated into court reports without identifying actual tools. Factual elements from each tool (i.e., the identified safety threat, risk factor, strength, or final risk level) will be included in appropriate sections of the court report.

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## REFERENCES

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### Attachments and CWS/CMS Data Entry Standards

Hyperlinks are provided below to access attachments to this P&P and any CWS/CMS Data Entry Standards that are referenced.

- [Attachment 1—SDM Completion Guidelines—Emergency Response](#)
- [Attachment 2—SDM Completion Guidelines—Family Maintenance Collaborative Services \(FMCS\)](#)
- [Attachment 3—SDM Completion Guidelines—Court Services and Specialized Family Services \(SFS\) Investigations](#)
- [Attachment 4—SDM Completion Guidelines—Continuing Family Services \(ICS, PSP, SFS Continuing, VFS\)](#)
- [Attachment 5—SDM Tools](#)
- [Attachment 6—SDM Process Guidelines](#)

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## Hyperlinks

Users accessing this document by computer may create a direct connection to the following references by clicking on the link provided.

- CFS P&P [Child Abuse Registry \(CAR\) \(M-0109\)](#)
  - CFS P&P [Abuse Investigations—Protective Interventions \(A-0414\)](#)
  - CFS P&P [Abuse Investigations—Foster Care \(A-0101\)](#)
  - CFS P&P [Abuse Investigations—Open Case \(A-0402\)](#)
  - [Safe Measures](#)
  - [California SDM Application](#)
  - [California SDM Definitions](#)
  - [California SDM Mobile App Definitions](#)
  - [Orange County Safety Organized Practice](#)
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## Other Sources

Other printed references include the following:

None.

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## FORMS

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### Online Forms

Forms listed below may be printed out and completed, or completed online, and may be accessed by clicking on the link provided.

Form Name	Form Number
California Hotline Tools	Via SDM
Step I Screening	Via SDM
Step II Response Priority	Via SDM
California Safety Assessment	Via SDM
California <i>SCP</i> Safety Assessment	Via SDM
California Family Risk Assessment	Via SDM
California Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (For Caregivers and Children)	Via SDM
California Family Risk Reassessment for In-Home Cases	Via SDM
California Reunification Reassessment	Via SDM

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**Hard Copy Forms**

Forms that may be completed in hard copy (including multi-copy NCR forms) are listed below. ***For reference purposes only***, links are provided to view these hard copy forms, where available.

Form Name	Form Number
SDM Acco	F063-25-1122
<a href="#">Orange County Safety Plan</a> (English)	F063-25-453
<a href="#">Orange County Safety Plan</a> (Spanish)	F063-25-453Sp
<a href="#">Orange County Safety Plan</a> (Vietnamese)	F063-25-453VN
<a href="#">Orange County Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Safety Plan</a> (English)	F063-25-549
<a href="#">Orange County Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Safety Plan</a> (Spanish)	F063-25-549Sp
Orange County Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Safety Plan (Vietnamese)	F063-25-549VN

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**CWS/CMS Forms**

Forms that may **only** be obtained in CWS/CMS are listed below. ***For reference purposes only***, links are provided to view these CWS/CMS forms, where available.

Form Name	Form Number
None.	

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**Brochures**

Brochures to distribute in conjunction with this policy may include:

Brochure Name	Brochure Number
None.	

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**LEGAL MANDATES**

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[Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) §10601.2](#) mandates counties to conduct self assessments, cases reviews, and develop system improvement plans, which resulted in the implementation of a statewide safety assessment approach for evaluating and managing child safety.

[California Department of Social Services \(CDSS\) Manual of Policies and Procedures \(MPP\), Division 31, Chapter 125](#) outlines the emergency response investigation requirements to include the determination of safety and risk to a child.

[CDSS MMP, Division 31, Chapter 201](#) describes the assessment and case planning process to include the completion of an assessment and identification of service needs.

[CDSS All County Letter \(ACL\) 09-31](#) provides guidance on the consistent and accurate use of standardized safety and risk assessment tools for each child receiving child welfare services in all California counties.

[CDSS All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-62-16](#) provides information regarding enhancements made on November 1, 2015 to the Structured Decision Making® (SDM®) assessment tools.

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## REVISION HISTORY

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Since the Effective Date of this P&P, and prior to the Current Revision Date, the following revisions of this P&P were published:

November 15, 2007  
May 3, 2012  
July 16, 2014  
April 9, 2015