

## HOT SPOTS IN WRITING A SAFETY PLAN

The following problems (“hot spots”) are commonly seen in safety plans. Appropriate measures to correct them are included below.

- Hot spot: The only intervention in the safety plan is to have the caregiver promise not to do something again. If the caregiver could do that on his/her own, protective placement would not be under consideration at all.

How to fix it: Make sure at least one other protective participant involved in the intervention will act or call for help.

- Hot spot: The safety plan does not clearly spell out in a behavioral way the actions of the caregiver and the impact on the child. Instead, it simply mentions drug use, mental illness, general neglect, etc.

How to fix it: Use a harm and danger statement format to describe the concern.

- Hot spot: Safety planning was done only with a friend, neighbor, or relative of the family. Remember, the safety plan is a voluntary agreement between a legal parent and the agency that controls a danger that otherwise would require protective placement.

How to fix it: At least one legal parent must agree to an intervention, verbally or in writing.

- Hot spot: The safety plan was written FOR the caregiver, who was told to sign it or face child removal.

How to fix it: Explain the process of safety assessment and planning and involve the caregiver and support network in developing a plan on which they all agree.

- Hot spot: The situation involves domestic violence. Specific examples follow.

» The victim is told that he/she must keep the aggressor out of the home if the aggressor has not agreed to leave. When safety planning, remember that people cannot be forced from their own homes without due process.

How to fix it: Get agreement from the aggressor to leave the home as part of the safety plan and have him/her sign an agreement. OR have the victim parent and child go somewhere else. OR have a family member stay in the home to protect the children at all times.

- » The only safety intervention is a victim's promise to get a restraining order. A restraining order takes time, and help is required to get an emergency protective order. Also, restraining orders often are not effective—other safety interventions that provide protection must be in place.

How to fix it: Ask police to provide an emergency protective order and make sure that at least one method of providing safety as described above is in the safety plan.

- » The victim is expected to "protect" the child when he/she cannot protect him/herself.

How to fix it: A child who is sufficiently old enough and capable of doing so can take some action to keep him/herself and siblings safe. Have another friend or family member involved in the safety plan make sure these actions are effective.

- Hot spot: A parent's constitutional rights are violated. For example, a plan requires a parent to leave the family home that he/she has a right to occupy; a parent with a valid order giving him/her the right to visit is told he/she cannot visit; or someone is allowed to care for a child without the parent's consent or knowledge.

How to fix it: If separation from the parent is needed, the child and protective parent may need to find another place to stay. Get the parent's agreement for the temporary plan. If a parent is unavailable to help with a safety plan, protective placement is the only option.

- Hot spot: A safety plan is written for a case for which protective placement of a child is not under consideration.

How to fix it: Get verbal agreement from the parent and document in the record. Write a "referral closing" letter detailing the verbal agreements.

- Hot spot: Safety plan does not have a time limit.

How to fix it: Always record on the safety plan that it is in effect for a maximum of 30 days. Provide a time and date for plan review and updating.

- Hot spot: Safety plan does not include a clear way to monitor whether it is working.

How to fix it: Write a statement that clearly describes who will act if he/she determines that the plan is failing and who he/she will contact.