

**Policy and Procedures Review Guide:
Supporting Strong SDM® Implementation in California**

Objectives

- Explore the ways in which local policy can integrate reference to Structured Decision Making® (SDM) practice to support a high-fidelity practice implementation.
- Discuss key opportunities for alignment across the SDM® system and local policy.
- Identify strategies to build consistency and fidelity across worker implementation of the SDM system.

A careful review of local policies and procedures and how they align with SDM policy is a critical piece of a high-fidelity SDM implementation. This may uncover conflicts or gaps that need to be resolved so that SDM policy can integrate smoothly into existing policies and procedures. Identifying and revising policies that may complicate or leave questions around accurate use of SDM assessments is essential to improving the consistency and fidelity of tools completed by workers. Such a review may also surface implementation questions that require leadership attention and agency guidance. This guide identifies key areas for initial review. Most importantly, reviewing and updating local policies and procedures provides an opportunity to step back and fully articulate the agency's decision-making practices in alignment with behaviors and activities of the agency's practice framework.

Local policy review should focus on three key outcomes.

- Identify and resolve ambiguity or direct conflicts with SDM policies.
- Establish key areas to incorporate SDM guidance into policies and routine practice.
- Identify and elevate implementation questions that may require leadership guidance.

Review of local policies and procedures is often accomplished by forming a subcommittee or workgroup, made up of "SDM experts" working to identify concerns and propose revisions. Such workgroups require representation from across departments and leadership levels to provide varied expert guidance. Including the voice of workers and supervisors who have used the tool in practice is critical to developing clear and concrete recommendations. Aligned policy should not only be free from conflictual or missing information but also provide clear guidance for worker use of the SDM system in daily practice.

The following outlines key policy and procedure issues related to SDM Implementation and alignment:

General

- Does each program policy reference conducting SDM assessments in collaboration with families during the casework process and in procedures related to documenting these assessments?
- Where in the child welfare services case management system (CWS/CMS) will workers incorporate narrative reflecting specific observations that led to assessment choices?
- Is there a specific format for court report writing? How can information and decisions supported by SDM assessments be incorporated?
- For which child welfare subpopulations does the SDM system not apply, and for which may only some portions of the SDM system be used?

Hotline Tools

- Do local policies/practices address calls that do not fall within the scope of child welfare services (e.g., information and referrals, non-reports)?
- Does local policy incorporate guidance regarding use of the structure and definitions of the SDM hotline tools to guide screening interviews? Eliciting information about family strengths and networks, or prompting clarifying questions to elicit details central to screening and response priority thresholds?
- Do local policies/practices address responding to and handling reporter concerns that do not meet the screening criteria threshold?
- Do local policies/practices address circumstances that require an immediate or mandatory response, regardless of SDM guidance?
- What is the guidance within local policy about supervisory consultation related to response and response priority decision?
- What is the review/approval process for SDM tools? What are agency expectations around approval for overrides?

- Who enters the referral into CWS/CMS, and how is SDM guidance documented?
- If a county uses the path decision tools, what guidelines or policies exist to support workers in selecting the path?
- Does a county policy exist regarding response time for allegations in out-of-home care? Law enforcement reports? New referral on an open case? Reports of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking?

Safety Assessment

- Do local policies or procedural guidance address expectations around conducting the SDM safety assessment during an investigation?
- Do any local policies require/prohibit removal under certain circumstances?
- What policies/practices address assessing safety of non-allegation households?
- Is there clear guidance within local policy around when a safety plan is appropriate to address existing safety threats and how to use it?
- Does written policy guidance outline expectations for safety planning practice in the field (e.g., inquiry regarding network supports, engagement and assessment of commitment by legal parents to develop a rigorous safety plan as part of a household safety assessment)?
- Does the local agency have a safety plan document that meets SDM specifications? Does policy clearly set minimum expectations and best practice guidance for safety plan creation?
- What is the review/approval process for safety assessments and safety plans? What expectations does the agency have around approval for overrides?
- What local policies address who can conduct removals and protective holds?
- Does policy exist for voluntary placements? Kinship placements? Timelines?

Risk Assessment

- What local policies and expectations address which investigations require a risk assessment?
- Is there guidance in local policy regarding practices for gathering information to complete the risk assessment? Sharing purpose and results of risk assessment with families?
- What decisions does the risk assessment inform (e.g., case opening, contact guidelines, referral to prevention services)?
- Do any local policies require opening or closing certain cases regardless of risk level?
- Do local policies describe processes for consultation or approval when case action differs from SDM case promotion guidance?
- What is the review/approval process for risk assessments? What are agency expectations around approval for overrides?

Family and Child Strengths and Needs Assessments

- Are strengths and needs ever assessed *before* a case is transferred from investigations to ongoing services?
- Who completes the case plan? When?
- Do policies or procedures outline agency expectations around practices related to engaging the family in assessment and prioritization of needs and strengths related to case plan goals?
- Do programs/services exist that would be ideally targeted toward specific priority needs?

Risk Reassessment

- Do local policies or procedures specify when reassessments are conducted and what decision they inform? Are expectations clear around proper use of SDM assessments for new allegations in an ongoing case?

- Do local policies or procedures outline expectations regarding engaging families and their network in the reassessment (perhaps in Child and Family Team [CFT] Meetings) and formulating recommendations and next steps?
- To what extent does local policy define when and how a case should close?
- Are other tools and practices used to help inform the case closure decision?
- Do local policies specify the conditions under which a case may/must remain open?
- What is the review/approval process for risk reassessments? What are agency expectations around approval for overrides?

Reunification Reassessment

- Do local policies or procedures specify when reunification reassessments are conducted and what decision they inform? Do these policies outline expectations regarding supervisor/group consultation and engaging families and their network in the reunification reassessment (perhaps in CFT Meetings) and formulating recommendations and next steps?
- Do local policies address planning for and assessing visitation, and do these policies reference and integrate the reunification reassessment's visitation evaluation section?
- Do local policies specify the circumstances under which children may/may not be returned home?
- Do local policies specify how long reunification services may be offered?
- Do local policies specify when the permanency plan may/must be changed?
- Do policies/practices address handling sibling groups?
- Do any policies/practices outline how a case will be monitored following reunification?
- What is the review/approval process for reunification reassessments?