



CANS AND SDM[®] SYSTEM ALIGNMENT CONSIDERATIONS

California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has informed counties of the requirement and guidelines for implementing the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment as the primary tool for case planning.

As described in [All County Letter 18-81](#), “the CANS will help CFT members to assess the well-being of children and youth.” Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings and case planning must still address issues of safety and permanency, and the Structured Decision Making[®] (SDM) risk reassessment and SDM[®] reunification reassessment will continue to be important indicators of progress toward safety and permanency.

CANS AND SDM SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

Building an effective case plan is an essential first step toward making reasonable efforts to support a child’s safe return home. This requires maintaining a clear focus on addressing the reasons a child was initially brought into care through the provision of accessible, available, and culturally appropriate services.

Consider the way in which the developed case plan informs decisions about safe reunification. Connecting the case plan directly to a family’s safety goal is critical to ensure that families are not held to unreasonable standards or a shifting goalpost. Supporting a family’s capacity to demonstrate safety over time should remain at the center of reunification and permanency efforts, including the structure and content of CFT meetings.

Consider the following about CANS and the SDM system during CFT meetings and case planning.

FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES

- To support successful reunification, it is essential to maintain a clear focus on the caregiver's priority needs that are linked to the SDM safety threats that led to removal.
- Communicating clear expectations for caregiver behavior during visits with children and supporting a caregiver's capacity and skill-building are also essential to successful reunification.

Connecting the needs and strengths identified using CANS with these two aspects of case planning will help align child well-being with safety and permanency.

FOR FAMILY MAINTENANCE SERVICES (COURT-ORDERED OR VOLUNTARY)

- CDSS has clarified that while CFT meetings are not mandated for family maintenance practice, they are encouraged as a best practice.
- Any CANS priority needs that relate to potential safety threats, monitoring of a safety plan, or household risk items on the risk reassessment should be prioritized.
- The SDM safety assessment should be updated when considering case closure.

ACCESS TO FSNA/CSNA TOOL AND SAFEMEASURES® DATA

- The family strengths and needs assessment (FSNA) and child strengths and needs assessment (CSNA) will remain available in WebSDM during the transition to CANS.
- As counties transition from FSNA to CANS, they will not be accountable to SafeMeasures compliance reports around FSNA completion, but these reports will remain available to support and monitor the transition to CANS. Reports about priority needs and strengths will remain available to support learning around alignment of key areas related to caregiver domains that may impact child safety and priority needs for case planning.
- FSNA can be gradually disabled for individual counties as their local CANS implementation progresses. Requests from counties to disable FSNA in WebSDM should be emailed to Evident Change web app support at support@evidentchange.org. Requests to disable related reporting in SafeMeasures should be emailed to the SafeMeasures team at support@safemeasures.org.