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POLICY AND PROCEDURES REVIEW GUIDE

Supporting Consistent and Equitable Child Welfare Decision Making and Fidelity SDM® Implementation

A careful review of local policies and procedures and how they align with policies of the Structured Decision Making® (SDM) system is a critical piece of high-fidelity SDM® implementation. This may uncover conflicts or gaps that need to be resolved to support consistent and equitable child welfare decision making.

Identifying and revising policies that may complicate or raise questions about accurate use of SDM assessments is essential to improve the consistency and fidelity of tools completed by workers. Such a review may also surface implementation questions that require leadership attention and agency guidance. Most importantly, reviewing and updating local policies and procedures provides an opportunity to fully articulate the agency's decision-making practices in alignment with the agency's practice framework.

This guide identifies key areas for review, focused on the following goals.

- 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 that will identify concerns and propose revisions. Such workgroups should have members from across departments and leadership levels. 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 conflicting or missing information but also provide clear guidance for workers who use the SDM tools in their daily practice.

The following outlines key policy and procedure issues related to SDM implementation and alignment at each decision point.

GENERAL

- Does 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 should information and decisions supported by SDM assessments be incorporated?

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 on how the structure and definitions of the SDM hotline tools are used 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 local policy guidance on supervisory consultation related to response and response priority decision?

- What is the review/approval process for SDM hotline 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? If not used, has this section been disabled for your county in WebSDM?

SAFETY ASSESSMENT

- Do local policies or procedural guidance address expectations for conducting the SDM safety assessment in the field?

- Do any local policies require/prohibit removal under certain circumstances?

- What policies/practices address assessing safety on non-allegation households?

- Does written policy guidance outline expectations for safety planning practice in the field (e.g., inquiry regarding network supports, engagement and assessment of strengths and protective capacities by legal parents to develop a rigorous safety plan as part of a household safety assessment)?

- Does the agency have a safety plan document that clearly supports connection to the identified safety threat? Does policy clearly set minimum expectations and best practice guidance for safety plan creation (e.g., monitoring plan, inclusion of network, time limit)?

- What is the supervisor review/approval process for safety assessments and safety plans? What expectations does the agency have for supervisor consultation in the field and 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 the purpose and results of the assessment with families?

- Is there clear local guidance on what decisions the risk assessment informs (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, documentation, 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?

REUNIFICATION REASSESSMENT

- Do local policies or procedures specify when reunification reassessments are conducted and what decision they inform? If not, is it clearly specified *how* workers should make recommendations about reunification or alternative permanency consistently and equitably?

- Do policies outline expectations regarding supervisor/group consultation and engaging families and their network in the reunification reassessment (perhaps in Child and Family Team [CFT] meetings) and forming 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 any identified circumstances under which children may or may not be returned home?

- Do policies specify how long reunification services may be offered, and when the permanency plan may or must be changed?

- Do policies/practices address handling sibling groups?

- Do any policies/practices outline how a case will be monitored after reunification?

- What is the review/approval process for reunification reassessments?

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 CFT meetings) and forming 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 or must remain open?

- What is the review/approval process for risk reassessments? What are agency expectations around approval for overrides?