

ESTABLISHING AND DOCUMENTING OVERALL SEVERITY AND OVERALL RISK

After the fifteen factors have been rated, it is necessary to analyze the information gathered to determine the Overall Severity and Overall Risk within the family. Determining overall severity and risk within the family is not done by simply finding the highest rating on the risk assessment form; rather, the ratings are reached by conducting a thoughtful analysis of the risk factors and determining how those factors might interact with one another.

DEFINITIONS OF RISK LEVELS:

No Risk: The absence of risk and/or the presence of strengths. Factors rated no risk (Z) may represent strengths that are powerful enough to reduce risk within the family.

Low Risk: A significant possibility that a minor form of abuse or neglect will occur in the near future. Low-risk factors are rated with an L.

Moderate Risk: A significant possibility that a serious form of abuse or neglect will occur in the near future. Moderate-risk factors are rated with an M.

High Risk: A significant possibility that a severe form of abuse or neglect will occur in the near future. High-risk factors are rated with an H.

Unable to Assess: Factors that cannot be rated because of insufficient information are rated with an X.

HIGHEST RISK FACTOR SECTION:

To determine the highest rated risk factors, first review each of the ratings found in a particular risk factor. Then select the highest risk rating found. Enter that risk rating in the *Highest Risk Factor* section for the factor being reviewed. An "X" rating should be considered higher than any other risk rating for the purpose of completing the *Highest Risk Factor* section. Note that a rating of "X" only carries over to the Highest Risk Factor column of the matrix. It does not carry over to the Overall Severity and Overall Risk ratings.

OVERALL SEVERITY SECTION:

Overall Severity represents the severity of the current abuse and/or neglect. To determine Overall Severity, review factors 2 and 4, (respectively *Severity/Frequency and/or Recentness of Abuse/Neglect* and *Extent of Emotional Harm*.) If there are no "X" ratings, the highest rating found represents the Overall Severity rating. If any of the ratings in either of the two factors is an "X", Overall Severity should not be rated as "X". Rather the impact of the absent information must be assessed to determine whether the risk level should be raised as a result of the missing information.

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OVERALL RISK SECTION:

Overall Risk represents a logical and thoughtful analysis of the impact on risk made by the interactions of all the risk factors. After determining the overall severity rating, further analysis of the remaining risk factors must be completed. To determine overall risk, locate the highest ratings in Factors 1 and 3 (respectively *Vulnerability* and *Prior Abuse/Neglect*). This is the baseline from which one determines whether there is a need to raise or lower the Overall Risk rating.

Vulnerability and *Prior Abuse/Neglect* should be reviewed closely. Moderate or high ratings for these factors may very well require that the overall level of risk within the family be raised. The two factors represent the history of abuse/neglect coupled with the vulnerable state of the child(ren). All other factors should be closely reviewed to determine how they affect risk. Special consideration should be given to factors of high intensity, long duration and environmental support of the abuse/neglect. Examples are:

- Intensity: feeling blue vs. being clinically-depressed;
- Long Duration: two months of drug use vs. a 15-year drug addiction; and
- Environmental Support: a physically-abusive parent who attends a church that promotes physical discipline of children

Additional concepts to consider when determining Overall Risk include:

- The impact of unknown information (i.e., factors rated X)
 - Overall Risk should not be rated as “X”. Rather the impact of the absent information must be assessed to determine whether the risk level should be raised as a result of the missing information.
- Factors, when found together (*i.e.*, constellations or clusters), should be given added weight
- Dangerous combinations raising “red flags” when found. Examples are:
 - Difficult to care for child in the care of a parent with marginal parenting skills that is socially isolated;
 - Passive mother, violent boyfriend, hyperactive or out-of-control child;
 - Failure-to-thrive baby of depressed young mother that lives in poverty;
 - Male with history of sexual offenses against children that obtained no treatment who lives with a mother with young children and mother denies risk;
 - Single parent with several young children; and
 - Multiple reports with escalating severity
- Strengths; to determine whether they are strong enough to lower risk

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RISK ASSESSMENT SUMMARY:

The Risk Assessment summary must represent a logical progression of thought that indicates the rationale for ratings contained on the risk assessment form that leads a reader to the apparent overall level of risk. The following information should be contained in the narrative:

- Specific evidence supporting all High and Moderate risk conclusions;
- Justification for all Unable to Assess ratings;
- Rationale for the Overall Severity Rating;
- An assessment of safety and the plan to provide safety for the child/ren;
- Conclusions regarding Overall Risk ratings – including information regarding how all factors interact as well as the affects of “clusters” of risk factors and/or dangerous combinations of factors; and
- A prioritization of the concerns within the family and an assessment of how the family strengths can be used in case planning

The Risk Assessment summary is one of the most difficult sections of the Risk Assessment to write; however, it is often the most critical. The summary should be clear, concise and concrete, as the risk assessment is completed prior to the Family Service Plan and serves as the basis upon which case goals are selected.

