



The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

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Charting the Course towards Permanency for Children in Pennsylvania

Module 8:
Assessing Safety in Out-of-Home Care

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Ground Rules

- Be on time
- Sign/initial the sign-in sheet each day
- Provide constructive/motivational feedback
- Be respectful
- Take risks
- Ask questions
- No cell phones/text messaging

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Name Tents

County	Name	Unit/Department
Length of time in current position		What is one thing you do now to make sure children are safe in out-of-home care?

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Characteristics of Safety & A Safe Environment

- An absence of or control of threats of severe harm
- Presence of caregiver Protective Capacities
- A safe home is experienced as a refuge
- Perceived and felt security
- Confidence in consistency

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Information Explored to Identify Characteristics of Safety & A Safe Environment

- How the children are behaving in the home
- How caregivers are performing
- How the family is operating
- The caregiver(s)' capacity to sustain continued safety
- How community connections sustain continued safety

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Goal & Purpose of the Training

To provide a specific approach for workers to assess, judge, and determine that a child will be safe when first placed with a kinship care provider, in a foster or pre-adoptive home, and in respite, that safety will continue and that safety will be reaffirmed periodically during a child's stay in out-of-home care.

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Overall Learning Objectives

- Identify and provide rationale for standards of care associated with kin (formal and informal) and foster care and evaluate the effect of our beliefs and perceptions on safety in out-of-home care.
- Learn the Pennsylvania specific approach designed to assess, confirm, and maintain child safety in out-of-home care.
- Recognize the nature and importance of quality visitation with children in out-of-home care as a basis for assessing their safety as well as for attending to other critical needs.

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Overall Learning Objectives, cont'd

- Connect information collection skills and methods related to critical attributes of safety in out-of-home care.
- Learn to complete an assessment and analysis of attributes of a safe out-of-home care setting.
- Identify the critical thinking required to reach conclusions and make decisions based on an assessment of safety in out-of-home care.

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What's In It For Me?

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Agenda

Day 1

- Welcome & Introductions
- Defining Out-of-Home Care
- Knowing the Child to be Placed
- Present Danger
- Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care

Day 2


- Focused Information Collection through Quality Visitation
- Analyzing Safety Information & Making the Safety Decision
- Workshop Closure & Evaluations

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Tuning In Activity


Agree **Disagree**



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Glossary of Terms



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Safety in Out-of-Home Care

A family and home situation where there is an absence of perceived or actual threats, a refuge exists, and is experienced, family members have perceptions and feelings of security and there is confidence in consistency.

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Out-of-Home Care



- 24-hour care and supervision of a child outside of the home from which the child was removed; 'out-of-home' care includes both informal and formal care arrangements.

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Formal Care

- Required in situations in which the County Children and Youth Agency has legal and physical custody of the child and places the child in an emergency caregiver's home that has temporary approval from a state-licensed foster care agency, or in a resource home fully approved by a state-licensed foster care or adoption agency.

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Informal Care

Situations in which a child who is not in County Children and Youth Agency custody goes to live with an alternate caregiver on a temporary basis when Safety Threats are present and the child is unable to continue residing with the caregiver(s) of origin.

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Informal Care, cont'd

These arrangements include those:

- made by parents/guardians prior to County Children and Youth Agency involvement or
- agreed upon jointly between the parents/guardians and the County Children and Youth Agency when the situation occurs during the course of County Children and Youth Agency involvement.

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Global Look at...

The Assessing Safety in Out-of-Home Care Model

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Steps to Assess Safety in Out-of-Home Care

- **Step 1: Know the Child to be Placed**
- **Step 2: Provider Selection**
- **Step 3: Present Danger Assessment and safety determination (First Encounter - Provider Interview)**
- **Step 4: Confirm a safe placement setting (Within 60 days, or two months, from the date of placement)**
- **Step 5: Monitor for stability and any changes that could pose a threat to child safety (within 180 days, or six months from the previously confirmation of a safe placement setting)**

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Step 1: Knowing the Child to be Placed

- Does the child contribute in some way to the threat of harm that is present in his or her own home?
- Does the child possess any medical or other special needs?
- Is the child particularly vulnerable?
- Does the child exhibit sexualized behavior?
- Does the child exhibit aggressive behavior?
- Is the child fearful?
- What is the child's perception of the placement?
- Are their sibling group considerations that must take place?

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Step 2: Provider Selection

- **Formal Living Arrangements**
 - Review the total database available concerning a prospective foster home: home studies, case records, current and previous workers.
 - Evaluate evidence of minimum care, maltreatment or risk of maltreatment, threats of harm, successful care and current and past placements.

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Step 2: Provider Selection, cont'd

- Informal Living Arrangements
 - Complete background checks and other clearances as required.
 - Check agency information sources: central registry and agency records.
 - Consider other children and adults in the home.

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Step 3: Present Danger Assessment and Initial Safety Determination

- First encounter and interview with provider.
- Consider others in the home/impact of them on the placed child and child's impact on them.
- Consider immediate safety issues.
- Decide if the provider home is safe or unsafe.
- If minor changes can eliminate threats – go for those quick fixes.
- Otherwise, if not safe, another placement is needed.

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Step 4: Confirm a Safe Placement Setting

- Within 60 days or two months from placement, conduct the first comprehensive assessment by conducting as many face-to-face and phone contacts as possible with the placed child and placement family to gather information.
- Monitor placed child's family Safety Plan.
- If there are concerning circumstances, put supports in place (not a Safety Plan).
- Make decision about safety of the child in this setting.
- After placement, safety is assessed at every contact.

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Step 5: Monitor for Stability

- Over the next 180 days or six months from the previously confirmation of a safe placement setting.
- Confirm that conditions that create safety for child continue.
- Monitor for any changes that could pose a threat to child safety
- Remember, safety is assessed at every contact.

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
 - Something I need to know more about...
 - Something I will apply to my job...

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Knowing the Child to be Placed



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Incidence of Children Entering Out-of-Home Placement

- Children under six represent the largest group of children entering out-of-home placement.
- Children under five are the largest and fastest growing subpopulation involved in the child welfare system.
- Children under four represent 31.9 percent of all children experiencing child maltreatment.
- Children under six represent 34 percent of all children in out-of-home placement.

Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2007

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Incidence of Children Experiencing Trauma

- More than 60 percent of children surveyed by the Center for Disease Control in 2009 were determined to have been exposed to violence within the past year.
- Children experiencing six or more traumatic events are likely to have an average lifespan of 19 years shorter than other children who do not suffer the same degree of trauma.

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Incidence of Children Experiencing Trauma, cont'd

- Adverse childhood experiences have a significant negative impact on later adult functioning.
- The greater the number of exposures to trauma in childhood results in the greater likelihood of adult health risk behaviors, poor health status, and disease.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta: CDC, (2006). Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/index.htm>.

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Grief Reactions to Separation / Loss

- Shock
- Anger/Protest
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Resolution



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Purposes of Child Preparation for Placement

- Alleviating anxieties/reducing stress.
- Assessing children's strengths and needs and communicating this information to caregivers.
- Establishing supportive relationships with children.
- Connecting new caregivers and children to ease transition.
- Providing supportive services.

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Speaking to Children about Placement

- Discussion points, including use of specific interactional skills such as: Tuning in to Self, Tuning in to Others, Reaching Inside of Silences, Reaching for Feedback, *etc.*
- Pay particular attention to the child's developmental stage.
- Key points for consideration in preparing the child including independent living concerns for 16-year-old Carley.

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
 - Something I need to know more about...
 - Something I will apply to my job...

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Principles for Choosing an Appropriate Placement Setting

- If non-custodial parent can provide a safe home, placement is not necessary.
- Consider Kinship Care as a 1st option.
- Include the family in the selection of the placement setting and in pre-placement visits.

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Principles for Choosing an Appropriate Placement Setting, cont'd

- Place the child(ren) in a home/facility where they can continue to attend the same school.
- Carefully assess the child's needs prior to choosing the placement.
- Select the substitute caregiver based upon their capability to meet the child's special needs.

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Placement Considerations in Pennsylvania Policy


- Registry
- Relatives/Kin
- Least Restrictive
- Education Considered



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PRESENT DANGER



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Present Danger Defined

An immediate, significant, and clearly observable family condition (severe harm or threat of severe harm) occurring to a child/youth in the present tense, endangering or threatening to endanger a child, and therefore requiring prompt response.

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Assessing Present Danger

- Identify current danger.
- Identify immediate threat of danger.
- Confirm current danger or threat of danger as necessary by fully exploring and understanding the nature of the harm or threat of harm.
- If after exploration you determine that Present Danger exists, respond/take action accordingly e.g., address the threat, avoid the home as a placement, or locate the child to another home (if the child is already placed).

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Safety Responsibility Standard

- In no instance should a child be placed or remain in a kin or foster placement if Present Danger is apparent and cannot be immediately addressed.

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PRESENT DANGER: DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care

- Out-of-home caregiver(s) or others in the home are acting violently or out of control.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) describes or acts toward the child in predominantly negative terms or has extremely unrealistic expectations.
- The out-of-home caregiver(s) communicates or behaves in ways that suggest that they may fail to protect child(ren) from serious harm or threatened harm by other family members, other household members, or others having regular access to the child(ren).

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- The out-of-home caregiver(s)/family refuses access to the child, or there is reason to believe that the family is about to flee.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) is unwilling or unable to meet the child's immediate needs for food, clothing, or shelter.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) is unwilling or unable to meet medical needs including their own, other placed children, or children to be placed.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) has not, will not, or is unable to provide supervision necessary to protect child from potentially serious harm.

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- Child is unusually fearful/anxious of home situation.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) has previously maltreated a child, and the severity of the maltreatment or the caregiver's response to the previous incident(s) suggests that safety may be an immediate concern.
- The physical living conditions are hazardous and immediately threatening.
- The out-of-home caregiver(s)' drug or alcohol use seriously affects his/her ability to supervise, protect, or care for the child.

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- Out-of-home caregiver(s)' emotional instability or developmental delay affects ability to currently supervise, protect, or care for the child.
- Domestic violence exists in the home and poses a risk of serious physical and/or emotional harm to the child(ren).
- Child has exceptional needs or behavior which the out-of-home caregiver(s) cannot/will not meet or manage.

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- Child is seen by either out-of-home caregiver as responsible for the child's caregiver(s) of origin's problems, or for problems that the out-of-home caregiver(s) is experiencing or may experience.
- One or both of the out-of-home caregiver(s) are sympathetic toward the child's caregiver(s) of origin, justify the caregiver(s) of origin's behavior, believe the caregiver(s) of origin rather than the CCYA, and/or are supportive of the child's caregiver(s) of origin's point of view.
- One or both of the out-of-home caregiver(s) indicate the child deserved what happened in the child's home.

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Present Danger in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- Out-of-home caregiver(s) has history of or active criminal behavior that affects child safety, such as domestic violence, drug trafficking or addiction, sex crimes, other crimes of violence against people or property.
- Out-of-home caregiver(s) or family members will likely allow the caregiver(s) of origin unauthorized access to the child.
- Active CCYA case or a history of reports and/or CCYA involvement that indicates that history will compromise the safety of the child if placed in this home.

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THE HAWES FAMILY EXERCISE

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Transition Points are a Time of Child Vulnerability

- At the time of the initial placement
- At the time of any subsequent placement moves

Regardless of agency policy, special attention needs to be paid to safety at these points in time.

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
 - Something I need to know more about...
 - Something I will apply to my job...

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Safety Indicators

Positive Concerning Negative




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Positive Characteristics



- Describe for us those traits that we attribute to caregivers who are effective, caring, and protective caregivers.
- Similar to the Protective Capacities but within the context of out-of-home care.

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Characteristics of Concern

Family conditions or circumstances that tell us that functioning is

- compromised,
- marginal, or
- deteriorating from a previously higher level.



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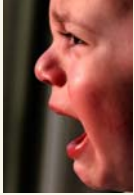
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Negative Characteristics



Those traits, attributes, or conditions that indicate that a placement setting may be unsafe.

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10 Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care

- Child Functioning:** How are the children functioning cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, physically, and socially?
- Adult Functioning:** How are the adult family members functioning cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, physically, and socially?

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10 Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

- Caregiver Supervision:** How are the out-of-home caregiver(s) actively caring for, supervising, and protecting the children in the home?
- Discipline:** How are discipline strategies used with the children in the home?
- Acceptance:** How do the out-of-home family members demonstrate in observable ways that they accept the identified child into the home?

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10 Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

6. **Community Supports:** How does the out-of-home family access/use community supports to help assure child safety?

7. **Current Status:** How do the out-of-home family members respond to the current issues, demands, stressors within the home that affect the child's safety?

8. **Placed Child's Family– Out-of-Home Family Dynamics:** Out-of-Home Family Dynamics: How do the dynamics between the caregiver(s) of origin and the out-of-home family support the safety of the child?

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10 Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care, cont'd

9. **Oversight:** How does the out-of-home family demonstrate that they are agreeable to and cooperative with CCYA and other formal resources?

10. **Planning:** How do the out-of-home caregiver(s) demonstrate that they are capable of and actively engaged in day-to-day planning for the child's day-to-day safety?

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Applying What You Know

- Review each set of characteristics for the indicator.
- Do not consider other indicators at this point.
- Identify all characteristics that apply.
- Consider intensity, frequency, duration, and impact on the child of the characteristics.
- Answer this question: Considering all you know about this child, what set of characteristics, traits, and attributes best represent what you know and have observed?

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Applying What You Know, cont'd

- Think seriously about any Negative Characteristics you have identified in the home and decide if they offset the Positive Characteristics in terms of impact on the child.
- Decide if the indicator is positive, concerning, or negative.

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Small Group Activity

- Think of a case example related to each assigned indicator. Then choose three examples to record on flip chart paper. One example should be "positive", one "concerning", and one "negative."
- Document your examples of the indicator. (on flip chart paper)
- The indicators are assigned as follows:
 - Group 1: Indicators 1 and 2
 - Group 2: Indicators 3 and 4
 - Group 3: Indicators 5 and 6
 - Group 4: Indicators 7 and 8
 - Group 5: Indicators 9 and 10

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Characteristics of Safety & Safe Environment

- An absence of or control of threats of severe harm
- Presence of caregiver Protective Capacities
- A safe home is experienced as a refuge
- Perceived and felt security
- Confidence in consistency

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
 - Something I need to know more about...
 - Something I will apply to my job...

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Agenda

- Day 1
 - Welcome & Introductions
 - Defining Out-of-Home Care
 - Knowing the Child to be Placed
 - Present Danger
 - Indicators of Safety in Out-of-Home Care
- Day 2
 - Focused Information Collection through Quality Visitation
 - Analyzing Safety Information & Making the Safety Decision
 - Workshop Closure & Evaluations

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Research Identifies:

- Caseworker visits and interactions with children are the cornerstone of practice and one of the most important ways to promote positive outcomes for children. The core focus of visits is the protection of children.
- Visits are the mechanism for monitoring safety and providing services to promote the well-being of the child and the child's family and caregiver(s).

Child Welfare Caseworker Visits with Children and Parents, National Conference of State Legislatures, September 2006, adapted by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc. for Substitute Care Visits, October 2009.

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Information Collection

- Approached from a neutral perspective
- Proactive, not passive
- Respectful of who owns the information

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Practicing Information Collection

- The trainer is acting as the sibling of a mother whose child has been placed there for 1 month.
- Minimum of two deliveries (*i.e.*, questions, clarifications, confrontations, inquiries, *etc.*).
- Ask the questions necessary to gain the information on all of the indicators.
- Record notes during the interview.
- In terms of this being “round robin” information collection, each individual participant should pick up the specific line of conversation/questioning where the last person leaves off.

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Documenting Safety Related Information From Interviews

- Information gathered related to domains and any or all of the 10 Safety Indicators.
- The Safety Decision and Analysis for that decision.
- Supports put into place to address concerns (not a Safety Plan).
- If the decision was made that the child is unsafe but the child is court ordered to remain in the placement, documentation should be included to reflect how child safety will be assured.

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Documenting Safety Related Information From Interviews, cont'd

- Judgments about changes within the family that reflect on safety.
- The status of child safety.
- Changes to the out-of-home caregiver's ability to provide a safe home for the placed child.

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
 - Something I need to know more about...
 - Something I will apply to my job...

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What We Have Learned So Far:

- The step-by-step process for assessing safety in out-of-home care;
- How we recognize Present Danger in placement settings;
- The 10 indicators of safety in out-of-home care and their characteristics;
- How to determine if a Safety Indicator is positive, concerning, or negative; and
- How we collect information through quality visits and effective questioning.

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Safety Analysis

1. Have any changes (positive or negative) occurred within the out-of-home family since your last assessment? Describe the changes and explain what prompted the change. Include in the explanation whether or not the change in the family resulted in a change in response to the 10 Safety Indicators.

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Safety Analysis, cont'd

2. Considering all of the 10 Safety Indicators, are there sufficient positive Safety Indicators present and in operation that give you confidence that the child will remain safe in the setting? Provide your rationale for this judgment.

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Safety Analysis, cont'd

3. Describe, in behavioral terms, any Negative Characteristic and/or Safety Indicators that are present. Include intensity, frequency, and duration of the Characteristic and/or Safety Indicator and the impact on this child. If there are negative Safety Indicators and the decision is to leave the child in this home, describe the rationale and justification for this decision. Supervisory signature below indicates agreement with this rationale.

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Safety Analysis, cont'd

4. A) Consider and describe any Safety Indicators that are rated as "concerning". B) Are there supports (e.g. respite care, child care, training on the child's specific needs, etc.) that will enhance the resource family's ability to provide a safe environment for the child? Provide your rationale for this judgment. For supports already in place, describe the effectiveness/impact/continued need for that support.

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Safety Decisions

Safe:

- Sufficient Safety Indicators exist that cause the undersigned persons to confirm **that the setting remains safe** for this child.

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Safety Decisions, cont'd

Unsafe:

- Sufficient Safety Indicators exist that cause the undersigned persons to conclude that the setting does not remain safe for this child. Child must be removed from the setting. When this decision is made, the following additional steps must occur within the designated timeframe:
 - Review the child's current Safety Plan to determine modifications needed and document any and all necessary changes.
 - If children from another county are placed in the home, concerns, as they relate to those children, should be communicated to the appropriate entities according to your County Children and Youth Agency's policy.

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Safety Decisions, cont'd

Implications of Court Orders:

- Clearly document according to agency policy when County Children and Youth Agency determines that the child is unsafe but remains in this setting as a result of a court order.

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Communicating Safety Concerns...

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The Allison Family

An Exercise
Out-of-Home Safety Assessment

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Action Planning

- Take a moment to identify:
 - Something new I learned...
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Characteristics of Safety & A Safe Environment

- An absence of or control of threats of severe harm
- Presence of caregiver Protective Capacities
- A safe home is experienced as a refuge
- Perceived and felt security
- Confidence in consistency

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Review of Action Plan

Outstanding Questions...


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Knowledge Check



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Wrap-Up and Evaluations

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