

DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER

FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILD WELFARE SERVICES 04-05

To: County Directors of Social Services

Attention: DSS Family Support and Child Welfare Supervisors

DSS Family Support and Child Welfare Social Workers

Subject: Revisions to Structured Decision Making Tools

Date: May 9, 2005

Effective Date: Immediately

The Structured Decision-Making Model and its tools were introduced in North Carolina in April of 2002 as a part of our federal Child and Family Services Program Improvement Plan. Since that time there have been many questions and varying interpretations about the policy and procedures for utilizing the forms. As a result, the Division in collaboration with the Services to Children and Families Committee of the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services created a work group to clarify and enhance the usefulness of the forms. The work group presented their revisions to the Services to Children and Families Committee in April, 2005, and they were approved at that time.

The primary changes to these tools are about policy, procedures, and formatting. The tools themselves and the assessment items remain the same. All of the tools now have MRS compatible language, consistent terminology, and changes in formatting to improve the flow of the content of the tools.

The Safety Assessment definitions now appear under each factor so that the criteria are readily accessible and social workers will not have to flip the pages or rely on memory. Two examples under factor number twelve (12) related to improper discipline were added. The distinction between primary and secondary caregivers was removed. Some instructions for the safety response were added, as well as several clarifications under policies and procedures.

Since the Risk Assessment is research-based, the items assessed on the scales for abuse and neglect have not changed. Any changes in these items would potentially change the reliability and validity of the forms. There are several definitions that have been clarified, however. Factor N2 clarifies the use of the central registry for counting prior reports; Factor A3 contains MRS compatible language; and Factor A12 clarifies that this factor refers to abuse incidents only.

The Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs has been changed by deleting the primary and secondary caregiver distinctions. In order to be consistent with standards, well-being needs of the family (not just the child) were added along with the definitions of Child/Family Well-Being Needs. Factor S-8 was also clarified by adding the word “substantiated.”

The Case Decision Summary/Initial Case Plan was reformatted. The policies and procedures were moved to the back to be consistent with the other tools. MRS compatible language was added. The four questions that guide the

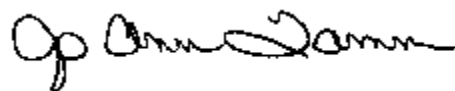
case decision were added to the top of the case decision summary page. A category was added for documenting recommendations regarding child care, group care, or institutional care. Finally, a page was added for supervisors to document the rationale for the case decision/disposition when the case decision is different than that indicated by the Structured Decision-Making Tools.

The Risk Reassessment was changed to clarify definitions R1 and R7, and the override policy was changed to be consistent with other tools. The Recommendation Summary on the Reunification Assessment has been reformatted and instructions clarified.

The Structured Decision-Making Model and its tools are a package and should not be used in isolation. They are a means of organizing data and guiding the decision-making process. Social workers must still use their professional judgment and their social work skills when completing assessments and making decisions about the case. These tools do not take the place of complete documentation in the case record.

Please begin using the revised Structured Decision-Making tools immediately as you work with your families. These tools will be incorporated into the Child Protective Services and Child Placement manuals in upcoming months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Ann Lamm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "A".

Jo Ann Lamm, Section Chief

Family Support and Child Welfare Services

JAL/rh

Attachments

Cc: Pheon Beal

Sherry Bradsher

Children's Program Representatives

Work First Representatives

FSCWS Team Leaders

Local Business Liaisons

[**DSS-5226, NC Family Risk Reassessment of Abuse/Neglect**](#)

[**DSS-5227, NC Family Reunification Assessment**](#)

[**DSS-5228, NC Case Decision Summary/Initial Case Plan**](#)

[**DSS-5229, NC Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs**](#)

[**DSS-5230, NC Family Risk Assessment of Abuse/Neglect**](#)

[**DSS-5231, NC Safety Assessment**](#)