

Caregiver Involvement in Safety Planning

Introduction

In the DuPuy versus McDonald civil suit in Illinois, plaintiff's attorneys claimed that a home safety plan is not voluntary. A county in Ohio provides on its safety plan form in bold type a statement for clients to be sure to read. It states in home safety plans are voluntary. An increasing number of states are embracing family conferencing as a strategy for creating in home safety plans. An expert on family group decision-making says that this method pulls the wider circle of family and community together to make a plan for a child with an emphasis on safety. The family centered movement has established as a tradition in CPS the importance of family involvement. *ACTION for Child Protection maintains that once CPS identifies the presence of present or impending danger, it is CPS' responsibility to assure safety. We do not flinch when it comes to that principle, however, we believe different methods and worker – family interaction can operate subject to CPS's responsibility.* This month's article considers how families, and in particular caregivers, can be involved and participate in safety planning despite the apparent implications concerned with responsibility, authority, personal interests and civil rights.

Responsibility and Volition

It is important to re-emphasize what we said in last month's article. Once CPS identifies the presence of threats to child safety, the responsibility for safety management is solely CPS'. Caregivers are relieved of the responsibility until such time as they can be counted on to return to being in charge of protection. Various people including caregivers may participate in the formation of a safety plan and/or be assigned to participate in the service plan. However, CPS is responsible for the safety plan being designed, implemented and successful.

Fundamentally and realistically safety plans are not voluntary even if they are in home. Caregivers typically have two choices about the level of intrusion of a safety plan. An in home safety plan is a less intrusive option. Obviously if a child is unsafe and a caregiver refuses to choose an in home safety intervention option, then the only alternative is to place the child. So, there is really nothing voluntary about that process.

However, it is important to state that CPS has a responsibility to conduct the safety planning process in such a way that caregivers are included, are well informed and have a reasonable role consistent with their capacity and agreement.

Involving Caregivers in Safety Planning

With increasing frequency and prominence, caregiver involvement in safety planning is an objective CPS is striving to effectively achieve. As difficult as this idea is on the surface there are ways that it can be done successfully.

The first task is to identify, engender and build on common interest. The objective is to create collaboration with the caregiver in which both the worker and the caregiver have a mutually vested interest in assuring the safety of the child. Similar to the line in the movie *Jerry Maguire*, the idea is “help me to help you.” Another way you can say this is allow me to help you do what you need to do and ultimately must do.

A second task relates to the need to effectively deal with caregiver resistance. The difficulty of engaging caregivers in collaborative safety planning is related to the fact that CPS is an involuntary intervention. Caregivers didn't ask you in or want you around. It is actually healthy functioning for caregivers to resist those who jeopardize their power. For you to effectively deal with client resistance you must possess the ability to sort out and understand what purpose it serves for the caregiver. You will need to reframe any natural negative reactions to caregiver

resistance and seek to join with the caregiver through respect and understanding their need for resisting CPS intervention.

The third task in involving caregivers in safety planning is assessment. The caregiver's capacity to participate in safety planning in productive ways must be assessed. Some of what you should evaluate includes their attitude about the need for a safety plan; their attitude about participating in planning; their emotional state; their openness to consider options; and their availability to participate in planning.

The fourth task is concerned with reaching judgments about how caregiver involvement can occur. The following questions assist in gaining some confidence in deciding about how to effectively involve caregiver in the safety planning process:

- What are the reasonable limits one can take in trusting caregivers to be involved?
- Exactly what does involvement mean? Is it a single thing, such as caregivers are involved or they are not? Does it exist along some continuum of degree so that caregivers are involved in different degrees?
- Are signed agreements needed in caregiver involved safety plans? What are the effects of signed agreements? Under what circumstances or with what caregivers can signed agreements be relied upon?
- Are precautions required when involving caregivers and, if so, how does this set up against trust and collaborating?
- Specifically how does one effectively bring up the matter of caregiver involvement in protection? How is the caregiver role in planning explained? What justification is provided? How does one effectively explain the

concept of being involved while having limited power?

- How is accountability distributed among the parties involved in safety planning (i.e., CPS, caregivers, other family members, other professionals, others)? Since responsibility and accountability rests with CPS, what kinds of assignments and involvement can exist for others (particularly for caregivers)?
- When talking with caregivers about being involved in a safety management strategy, how does one handle caregiver denial about threats, manipulation/false cooperation, understanding of the protective role and commitments?
- If a plan involves others coming into the home or taking caregiving responsibility for safety, how can one judge that the caregivers' agreement to allow this to happen is reliable?
- Are there types of people/caregivers who should simply not be considered for involvement in planning for safety?
- What are the benefits and risks associated with caregiver involvement in safety management?
- What oversight or monitoring implications exist in caregiver involvement in safety management arrangements?
- What types of caregiver involvement methods exist such as family conferencing? Are there other creative ways to involve caregivers in safety planning and management?

The fifth task is concerned with how to effectively interact and communicate with caregivers in order to achieve successful involvement in safety planning.

This is perhaps the most crucial task for success rises or falls on how business with caregivers is conducted. Consider what CPS should do and how CPS should do it.

Interaction that Promotes Caregiver Involvement in Safety Planning What CPS Should Do

Assess safety: assure safety through safety plans and standard case management responsibilities

How CPS Should Do It

- Be Dependable
- Be Accessible
- Identify Resources Internal to the Family
- Use the Least Intrusive Approaches
- Use Flexible Services
- Utilize Family Strengths and Protective Capacities
- Listen to and Acknowledge Concerns
- Empower Family with Information
- Address Immediate Needs of Family
- Build Rapport

What CPS Should Do

Routinely assure provision of effective and appropriate safety services; maintain time frames.

How CPS Should Do It

- Mediate
- Address Family Concerns

- Advocate for Family
- Adapt Intensity of Safety Intervention
- Encourage Family Independence
- Seek to Limit Length of Service
- Facilitate Continued Family Involvement
- Enhance Protective Capacities
- Promptly Discuss Changes in Safety Needs
- Continue to Join with Parents
- Be Available and Dependable

What CPS Should Do

Guarantee caregiver involvement as appropriate to caregiver capacity.

How CPS Should Do It

- Reach Out to Caregiver
- Express Positive Regard
- Seek Understanding
- Approach from Caregiver=s World View
- Include in Meetings and Discussions
- Include in Decisions
- Share Information Promptly
- Use Caregiver's Language
- Be Willing to Risk with Caregiver
- Have Conversations...Not Interviews
- Convey Dependability
- Reinforce a Common Interest in Child Safety
- Reaffirm Child Safety is the Caregiver Responsibility
- Reassure and affirm that as CPS proceeds efforts will occur to return the responsibility for child safety to the caregiver

What CPS Should Do

Implement a professional approach complying with acceptable standards; assure effective communication

How CPS Should Do It

- Plan and Implement Safety Plans in Consideration of the Caregiver's Perspective
- Use Common Language
- Affirm Caregiver Commitment
- Affirm Caregiver's Intentions
- Continually Seek to Use the Least Intrusive Approaches
- Serve as a Leverage for Change
- Be Candid and Honest
- Lower Authority
- Be Available
- Be Dependable
- Remain Objective

Attitude

We close with a word about attitude. Yours! Involving caregivers in safety planning is far more likely to happen if your attitude supports doing so with a measure of conviction to see that it happens. Sure, there are many instances in which caregivers behave in ways that counter their involvement or at least make it very difficult. However, if your attitude is that caregivers have a right to be involved and need to be involved it is likely that you will find a way to get them involved even if it is in small ways. Remember something as simple as keeping caregivers fully informed in a timely manner is an expression of involvement. Beginning with caregiver involvement at the onset of intervention in the ways you

interact and include them encourages them to be involved throughout the CPS process.