



Part 1

Introduction

Last month we considered the intake function as the first component in a safety intervention system. We also identified the Intake Assessment as the first or initial assessment within the comprehensive assessment process that supports safety intervention. Now through March in a three part series we turn our attention to the second function within a safety intervention system – the Family Functioning Assessment which includes the Safety Assessment.

Traditionally this function has been referred to as the investigation. Other terms that have been applied are initial assessment and family assessment. Why refer to this function as the Family Functioning Assessment? Here are the reasons:

- This is not an investigation – a legal concept and method – but an evaluation of how a family is functioning. It is a social service assessment. It considers the presence or absence of maltreatment but goes further to examine individual and family functioning in order to assess for child safety.

- This is not the initial assessment since the initial assessment occurs as the Intake Assessment.
- The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate and understand a family in order to determine whether CPS should serve the family. That determination is based on safety and protection.

The Family Functioning Assessment informs the Safety Assessment and so the standards provided during this three part series combine these two assessments. This month we will consider the philosophy, purpose, and decisions of the Family Functioning Assessment. In February in Part 2 we will identify and discuss Family Functioning Assessment Initial Intervention Standards. Then in March we will wrap up the series with Part 3 concerned with Family Functioning Assessment Decision Making Standards.

Philosophy



The Family Functioning Assessment employs safety concepts and decision-making methods concerned with reconciling information contained within Intake Assessment reports about alleged severe maltreatment and alleged threats to child safety. The Family Functioning Assessment identifies families that are in need of Child Protective Services (CPS). Effective performance of a safety intervention system in general and Family Functioning Assessment specifically is associated with a paradigm or personal view of reality that is formed by certain

beliefs and assumptions. The basic tenets governing safety intervention and Family Functioning Assessment are:

Child Safety as Paramount

The mission of CPS is to assure children are protected. The Family Functioning Assessment fundamentally is directed toward determining who CPS should serve based on the existence of threats to a child's safety and insufficient caregiver protective capacities to protect against the threats. Child safety is believed to be paramount with respect to the position that no other child, caregiver, family, agency or community need, interest or concern surpasses the priority for effectively assessing and managing child Safety.

Permanency as an Integral Part of Child Safety

Permanency refers to the restoration or establishment of stable, enduring protective child living arrangements and environments. The essence of permanency is child Safety. When CPS identifies children during Family Functioning Assessment who are not safe, the question of the child's permanency automatically is in question. That question is not resolved until safety intervention concludes through treatment which reconciles about whether a child's caregivers can and will protect. The importance of permanency is emphasized here even though the application of this concept primarily occurs during ongoing treatment concerned with caregiver protective capacities. It is emphasized since it exists in tandem with child safety as the primary outcome a safety intervention system is designed to achieve.

Rights

Intervention that is respectful of the rights of children and caregivers is a cardinal principle in a safety intervention system and Family Functioning Assessment. Children and caregivers possess human and civil rights. Children

and caregivers are valued and respected for their humanity and basic self-worth. Children have a right to be safe and secure, to be with their families, to be associated with their culture, to experience the least trauma or interference in their lives as is achievable. Caregivers possess rights related to privacy and due process which should be understood and appreciated in specific ways that influence intervention. Caregivers have rights related to being informed, being involved, having and possessing their children, experiencing prompt responses and confidentiality, and the least interference with their family as is necessary.

Respect

Respect for children and caregivers is an overarching value that influences all of safety intervention and is essential to effective practice and decision making. It is a value that is demonstrated by staff communication, behavior, and interaction with children and caregivers occurring during the course of the Family Functioning Assessment. Respect is demonstrated in conjunction with the following client interaction principles: individualization, purposeful expression of feelings, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, self-determination, and confidentiality.

Family System and Family Centered

The sanctity and purpose of the family unit is an underlying value that pervades a safety intervention system generally and Family Functioning Assessment specifically. The family is viewed as consisting of those who have relationship and reside with the children and the network of individuals and relationships that are associated with the family (kin). This belief includes awareness of the significance that relationship, interdependence, and connectedness among family members has in understanding and assessing child safety and in enhancing diminished caregiver protective capacities. To a large extent, the result of the Family Functioning Assessment is a full picture and description of a family system.

Family system intervention emphasizes the executive function adult caregivers perform within the family system. Family system intervention recognizes that the day-to-day case business and case decision making must involve the executives of the family by being focused upon strengthening their role within the system.

Family centeredness promotes certain kinds of intervention behavior and interpersonal skill which emphasizes the family unit as the best source for solutions, engagement, involvement in decision making, and the family network as a supportive resource.

Least Intrusive

An elemental principle in the safety intervention system and, therefore, the Family Functioning Assessment is associated with the reality that CPS is a government, non voluntary intervention. Even in the best of circumstances, CPS intervention represents an interference in a family's life. The defining reasons that CPS intrudes into family life are: (1) to determine if children reported to the Department are in danger and (2) to protect children in impending danger while attempting to restore caregivers to their protective role and responsibility. Anything beyond those interests can be considered to be intruding beyond what is legally and ethically acceptable and should only occur with the consent of the caregivers.

Least intrusive refers to, defines, and limits the Family Functioning Assessment intervention strictly with respect to what is absolutely necessary and essential to (a) assess a child's safety and (b) implement actions, services, and controls that assure a child's safety. The belief is expressed in casework and supervision that recognizes that intervention will only go as far as is necessary to assure protection. This belief is coupled with other philosophical points of view such as respect and rights.

☑ Diligence

This value is concerned with expectations and a mental orientation that results in intervention that is characterized by and operationalizes all the other beliefs and values expressed here. In practical terms, it embraces proficient and effective performance based on values and methodology consistent with “it’s the right thing to do.” Diligence should be apparent in all aspects of intervention with respect to thoroughness, timeliness, availability, and responsiveness.

Purpose



The purpose of the Family Functioning Assessment is to determine who CPS will serve by assessing and reaching conclusions about caregivers who are unable or unwilling to protect their children from impending danger. The Family Functioning Assessment includes the Safety Assessment. These two assessments combine, evaluate, and manage present and impending danger; identify vulnerable children; and evaluate caregivers with diminished caregiver protective capacities.

The objectives of the Family Functioning Assessment are:

- 📄 To respond in a timely manner in accordance with content contained within the Intake Assessment;

- To inform reported individuals of a community concern for the safety of their children;
- To engage caregivers in a process that provides a picture of the family and reveals whether children are in danger;
- To meet emergency needs that are apparent at the onset or during the Family Functioning Assessment;
- To conduct a structured, thorough information collection process that includes relevant family members;
- To keep caregivers informed and appropriately involved in case decision making;
- To reach a finding regarding the existence of child maltreatment consistent with policy and state statute;
- To reconcile reported allegations;
- To conduct a Family Functioning Assessment which includes a Safety Assessment; and
- To establish a sufficient – least intrusive safety plan when indicated.

Decisions



The decisions that are reached at the conclusion of the Family Functioning Assessment are:

➤ Has maltreatment occurred or is maltreatment occurring?

➤ Is a child in this family subject to impending danger?

➤ Is this a family who should be served by ongoing CPS?

If a child is concluded to be in impending danger, then the family is a family that must be transferred to ongoing CPS. In all cases being transferred to ongoing CPS, a safety plan must be in place since the basis for transfer is the existence of impending danger.

Coming Next Month

In February in Part 2 we will identify and discuss Family Functioning Assessment Initial Intervention Standards.