

## Challenges in Safety Intervention

### Foster Care as a Safety Service

Foster care is always a safety service from the point of the original placement. Foster care, of course, is a child well-being service when a child continues in care as intervention proceeds. Traditionally, foster care has not been viewed as a safety service but as an option when safety services (presumably provided in a child's home) do not work; are not available; or are not viable. Despite the progress nationally in the development and delivery of safety intervention, often child welfare managers and staff are surprised with the idea of foster care as a safety service, but readily see its relevance and accuracy. Many agencies report that the most frequent response to a child in danger at the initial contact following a report of child abuse or neglect is child placement. While relatives are considered for those placements as a priority, foster care is often the only alternative. In instances when foster care placement occurs at the onset of CPS intervention it is common for a foster care worker to be involved along with the CPS assessment worker who continues to assess the reported allegations and functioning of the family. This sort of circumstance occurs prior to a real understanding of the family; not knowing whether the danger is typical or an anomaly; and not having reached any decisions about whether this is a family that must be opened to ongoing services because the child is determined to be unsafe. During the time it takes to reconcile all of this, when a foster worker is involved, he or she is primarily a safety service provider and manages the safety plan (foster care) and the placement situation.

#### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Why is this distinction about foster care being a safety service important?
2. What contributes to considering foster care as something separate from safety intervention?
3. Why is the distinction of roles between a foster care worker and a CPS assessment worker important?
4. What difference does it make in how a foster care worker is involved to reinforce the safety management focus during the CPS assessment?
5. Who is ultimately responsible for the foster care safety plan and safety management during the CPS assessment<sup>1</sup>?

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<sup>1</sup> CPS assessment also is referred as investigation, initial assessment, family functioning assessment and similar terms.