

## **JUDGING PRESENT DANGER, IMPENDING DANGER AND RESPONSE TIME AT INTAKE**

It is not unusual for intake staff to debate whether what has been reported in a particular family is present danger or impending danger. The significance of this distinction and decision is concerned with how quickly the agency will respond to conduct an initial face to face contact. Many agencies respond to reported present danger within 3 or 4 hours but no later than the same day of the report. These agencies respond to reported impending danger within 24 hours of the report. The dilemma intake staff face is based upon what is reported. Present danger is defined as something that is happening at the time of the report or in process. In other words, the reporter is indicating that the child is in a dangerous situation. The danger is reported as existing consistent with requiring an immediate agency response (within 3 or 4 hours or certainly the same day.) The person reporting impending danger is stating that the child is not in immediate danger but lives in a dangerous situation which reasonably could possibly become immediately dangerous (within 24 hours.) Importantly, when a report is received, present danger and impending danger judgments are made in relationship to what is alleged to be occurring and anticipated severe consequences for a child that can occur during specific time designations if no intervention occurs. Here are other ways of thinking about these differences: a) Present Danger: The reporter is reporting danger that is active and in the process the very minute the report occurs. "In process" means the day the report is occurring (which reasonably includes danger continuing until intervention arrives.) Thinking about the relationship to agency responsiveness, what is reported as being in process almost certainly could have an immediate severe consequence the same day of the report if intervention does not occur. b) Impending Danger. The reporter is stating that the child is living in a dangerous situation but is not in immediate danger. Thinking about the relationship to agency responsiveness, what is reported does not include stated situations, observations or opinions about a dangerous situation becoming active before the agency could respond (within 24 hours.) The point here is whether judgments about present danger and impending danger can be qualified by: a child is in danger on the day of the report compared to a child who lives in a dangerous situation but is not current in danger; immediate severe consequences will occur on the day of the report compared to there is no reported indication that immediate severe consequences will occur on the day of the report; and based upon what is reported the day of the report what can agency intervention prevent on behalf of a child if the agency response is within 3 or 4 hours; the same day; or within 24 hours?

Deciding about present danger, impending danger and response times can also involve a philosophy of protection and intervention. This concerns beliefs that influence a decision to respond to a report. Rather than debate the question of present and impending danger with respect to agency response time, ought the overarching belief and, therefore, judging influence be the high need to protect children alleged to be in any danger which elevates empathy for the child's situation. So, in this philosophical frame of reference about judging present or impending danger, the ruling position is if there is any doubt then agency intervention proceeds using the present danger response time. In other words if reasonable debate is occurring about present danger or impending danger – regardless of which is really might be – present danger always wins. The agency initiates a 3 to 4 hour response or no more than a same day contact because of the child.