

RISK ASSESSMENT CLARIFICATION

Concern #1: Factor #9 (Access to Children) is unclear and should be rewritten.

Clarification: A rating of “Z” is used by the rater under the following circumstances: When the individual being rated is not the perpetrator of either abuse or neglect. This is also the appropriate rating when there is a case involving status offenses, truancy or in situations where the non-offending caregiver must be assessed for their ability to provide an appropriate level of care and protection for the child(ren) in their care.

Concern #2: Factor #11 (Relationship with Children) is unclear as to which child is to be rated with which adult.

Clarification: This factor must be rated by looking at each adult in the household and rating their most dysfunctional relationship with a specific child in the household. Each adult has a different relationship with the children in their care and that relationship is key in assessing both the safety of children and the need for services. Identify in the narrative the specific child with the most dysfunctional relationship with adults in the household.

NOTE: If an assessment determines that the adult’s relationship is dysfunctional with ALL of the children in the household, then this must be explained in the narrative. However for purposes of choosing a child that would go on the risk assessment matrix, the child most at risk in this circumstance would be the youngest child. So the youngest child would be the child rated on the matrix. If there is a serious “parent-child conflict” situation between an adolescent and the adults in the household and another child, who has been identified as the victim of an INDICATED abuse/neglect, then the child who was the victim of the abuse/neglect would be rated on the matrix. However, the narrative must then explain both circumstances.

Concern #3: The blending of so many factors makes the narrative longer and more time consuming.

Clarification: Risk Assessment narratives do not necessarily have to be long or time consuming to adequately document the rating justification for each factor under consideration. Each factor attempts to target a specific aspect of an assessment in which facts need to be gathered. Each rating of High or Moderate risk need only the specific reasons in the continuum to make the rating decision. Language from the continuum is often adequate to document a decision.

Overall severity needs to discuss the findings regarding what harm has actually occurred to the child(ren) in question. Factors 2 and 4 are most significant in this regard. Documenting a decision regarding overall risk in the narrative requires a thoughtful analysis of the impact on risk made by interactions of all the factors. So, the narrative should discuss overall risk drawing on and noting information from the factors that were significant for the family.

Concern #4: The PA Model does not address status offenders.

Clarification: The PA Model Risk Assessment has an underlying philosophy that a younger child is usually at greater risk for abuse or neglect than an older child. Normally the Risk/Severity Continuum ratings reflect an increased risk of child abuse/neglect for younger children. This rating tends to decrease with the Child Factors as the age of the child increases. However, this is not a guideline that is absolute.

“Status Offenders” usually involve adolescents whose behaviors include truancy, incorrigibility, episodes of running away, defying curfews, substance use, etc. Sometimes these behaviors result in conflicts between parent and child, where in essence; the parent has lost control of the child. The Protective Services Regulations (PA Code, Title 55, Chapter 3490), which reflects amendments to the Child Protective Services Law (CPS), includes requirements for General Protective Services (GPS).

The definition of GPS was clarified to include conditions that may result in a condition of dependency, which includes behaviors that are considered as status offenses. The Protective Services Regulations require that risk assessments be completed when conducting GPS assessments.

There are two particular Child Factors that may capture the risk to the adolescent exhibiting behaviors known as “status offenses”:

1) **Vulnerability**

Page 7 of the Reference Manual for the PA Risk Assessment Model states: “While typical children have a developmental pattern that is reflective of their age, others, due to physical or mental handicaps, are at greater risk irrespective of their age. Some of the special conditions or factors, which may put children at a higher risk of abuse/neglect, include the following:

- Mental retardation
- Physical handicap
- Emotional/behavioral problems
- Congenital abnormalities
- Premature birth

An adolescent engaged in “status offense” behavior might therefore be more vulnerable to Child Abuse/Neglect and warrant a higher rating in this category.

2) **Extent of Emotional Harm**

This particular rating for an adolescent involved in “status offenses” may be higher *if the behavioral problems can be attributed to Child Abuse/Neglect.*

Again, the reference manual, page 15 states, “children who are maltreated frequently have behavioral problems, psychoneurotic reactions, habit disorders, self-destructive behavior, mood extremes, interrelationship problems or overly adaptive behaviors.” Although we cannot assume that all adolescents involved in “status offenses” have been abused or neglected, child welfare professionals must be aware of the possibility that some of the “acting out” behaviors may be attributed to problems within the home. In this regard, Factor 11 (Relationship with Children) should be assessed carefully and may warrant a higher rating on a matrix when it involves a “status offender.”

Concern #5: PA Model should allow for more than one face-to-face contact to be made prior to the case being screened out.

Clarification: The “Second Screen-out Options” in the Pennsylvania Risk Assessment Model Case Interval Policy (under the screening section) allows county agencies to screen out a referral accepted for evaluation if the *initial contact with the family* determines that the allegations were bogus.

The use of the Second Screen-out Option is appropriate when the caseworker has determined during the initial contact with the family that the allegations were bogus and the caseworker does not plan to have additional contacts with the family for any reason.

Initial contact with the family is defined as one contact with each household member. In addition, those contacts do not need to occur at the same time. For example, each child may have been interviewed at their respective schools, the mother may have been interviewed at the family’s home and the mother’s paramour may have been interviewed at the agency. Contacts do not necessarily have to occur on the same day. However, if contacts could not be made over the course of a few days, the case record should clearly document why there was a delay. For example, a parent is a truck driver and was out of town or one of the children in the family was away from home attending camp.

Bogus is defined as without any merit. If any of the allegations are valid to any degree, the Second Screen-out Option is not used.

The following types of referrals accepted for evaluation are not eligible for Second Screen-out Option:

1. When completing a Child Protective Service investigation (i.e., cases with ChildLine numbers).
2. When any member of the referred family has been a victim or perpetrator of past indicated or founded reports of Child Abuse.
3. When a prior risk assessment regarding the referred family resulted in Overall Severity or Overall Risk rated at a moderate or high level.

Concern #6: Reconsideration should be given to interviewing all household members. There is a concern with the confidentiality of giving information to household members.

Clarification: Caseworkers should interview household members to gather information from the client, not to give them any confidential information. CPS Regulations, Section 3490.55(d), Investigation of reports of suspected child abuse, states, “The CPS shall, if possible, conduct an interview with those persons who are known to have or may reasonably be expected to have information relating to the incident of suspected child abuse.” People living in the home would reasonably be expected to have information and because of their

presence in the home have some impact on the risk to the child. All household members should be interviewed to obtain an accurate assessment.

Concern #7: Rating parents who are not involved with the child seems pointless.

Clarification: The Risk Assessment Reference Manual, page 38, states that all children, parents/adults and perpetrators must be listed. It goes on to say that this may include noncustodial parents, paramours, caretakers, and other children who are not part of the subject child's household, but who may impact on risk to the child. This does not include parents who have nothing to do with their child(ren), do not visit, and do not live in the home. The key is that "*may*" statement which includes the requirement that they "may" impact on risk.

Concern #8: N/A (not applicable) is the most appropriate response when rating certain factors that do not apply to the family's circumstances.

Clarification: In an attempt to simplify the model "N/A" was removed as an option and cannot be used. No risk (Z) must be used in the place of "N/A."