



Structured Decision Making® (SDM)  
Safety Assessment and Safety Mapping:  
An Integrated Approach to Family-centered  
Assessment

# Learning Objectives

- Participants will gain an understanding of the Safety Organized Practice (SOP) framework and the process of safety mapping;
- Participants will learn how safety mapping can enhance family engagement.
- Participants will learn the “3 Houses” technique for interviewing children regarding danger & safety
- Participants will learn how SDM<sup>®</sup> safety assessment increases reliability in the safety-mapping process.

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- Discuss at your tables:



# SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment

- Benefits

- Systematic
- Defined criteria and thresholds for items—increases equity and objectivity for families
- Results in a presumptive decision/recommendation
- Focuses on a specific point in time

- Challenges

- » Looks like a checklist—  
not conducive to  
completion in the field
- » Language/terms may be  
intimidating to families
- » Linear process

# Safety organized practice (Sop)

A family-centered approach to gather, organize, and document  
child safety information

# Safety organized practice (SoP)

Refers to the implementation of the ideas conveyed in these books:

- *Signs of Safety* by Andrew Turnell and Steven Edwards, W.W. Norton and Company, 1999
- *Working With Denied Child Abuse* by Andrew Turnell and Susie Essex, Open University Press, 2006

# Practice principles for building partnerships—

Adapted for use in SOP from the work first done for Signs of Safety

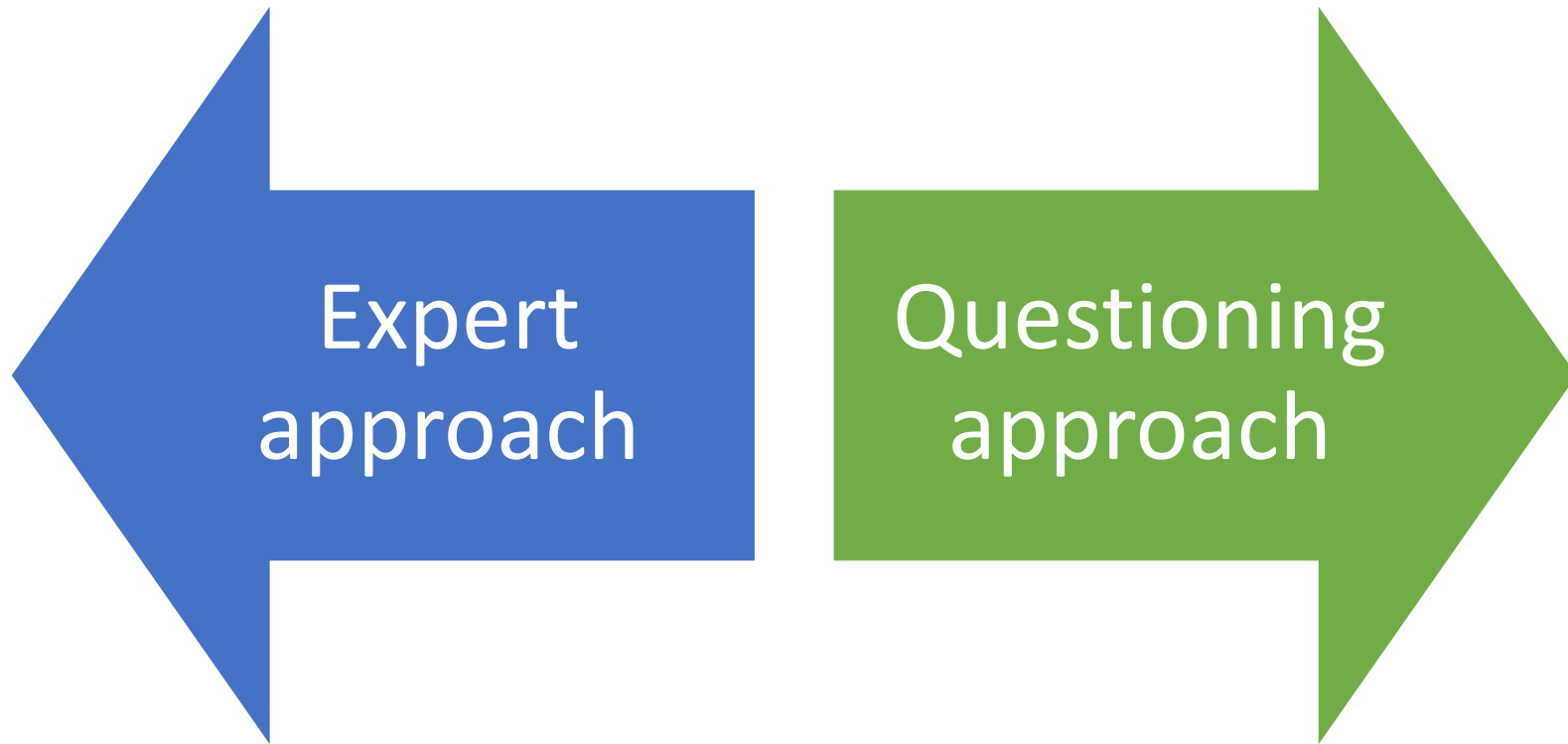
1. Respect service recipients as people worth doing business with.
2. Cooperate with the person, not the abuse.
3. Recognize that cooperation is possible even where coercion is required.
4. Recognize that all families have signs of safety.
5. Maintain a focus on safety.
6. Learn what the service recipient wants.
7. Always search for detail.
8. Focus on creating small change.
9. Don't confuse case details with judgments.
10. Offer choices.
11. Treat the interview as a forum for change.
12. Treat the practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions.



## Safety Organized Practice Tools

- ❖ **Three Questions**
- ❖ **Solution Focused Interviewing**
- ❖ **Safety Mapping**
- ❖ **Harm, Danger Statements and Safety Goals**
- ❖ **Three Houses/Safety House**
- ❖ **Safety Circles/Safety Networks**
- ❖ **Safety Planning**

## SoP Is a Process of Inquiry



# Shared Definitions

- The terms and language we use with families matter.
- Shared definitions lead to more reliability, accuracy and understanding.
- Key terms in SOP (adapted from SOS)
  - Danger
  - Harm
  - Safety
  - Risk
  - Cultural factors

# The Three Questions

What are we worried about?

What's working well?

What needs to happen?

# What Is Safety Mapping?

Safety mapping and the different mapping models

- A key practice of the SOP framework.
- A facilitated process of exploring the ***impact of a caregiver's actions on a child.***
- A continuous effort to gather information and organize it in a way that helps social workers and families better understand the presence of safety in relation to the presence of danger (safety threats) for children and what actions are necessary to promote child safety.
- Grounded in the three questions asked at all times in each encounter with families, providers, and stakeholders and within supervisory responsibilities or case reviews.

# Question 1

What  
are the  
worries?

Asking collaterals or reporters to describe the worries that they have about a particular family is a facilitated process of gathering a broad range of information that may describe the presence of danger (i.e., safety threats).

An effective way of engaging caregivers and other family members about the concerns for the children.

## Question 2

What's  
working  
well?

It is just as important to search for the moments of success that caregivers have in their parenting.

An inquiry approach that focuses on the things that are going well for the family can reveal the strengths (resources, skills, attributes, and attitudes) of a caregiver.

More importantly, asking what works well is a process of unveiling the presence of protective capacities

## Question 3

What  
needs to  
happen?

During each interaction or at each point of decision making, explore danger, safety and risk in order to develop and implement a plan of action.

Asking “What needs to happen?” at all times of all people involved in a case generates shared commitment and stronger buy-in to the safety or service plan.




This approach also encourages a broader, community-based perspective on how to best meet a family’s needs.

# Setting the context: Safety Mapping

*Danger* ← → *Safety*

What are the worries?	What's working well?
What needs to happen?	
Specific safety plan: 1. 2. 3. 4.	

## SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment and the Three Questions

- Are **safety threats** present that place a child in danger of immediate serious harm?  What are the worries?
- If so, are there **protective actions** and **household strengths** present that make interventions possible?  What is working well?
- Are **interventions** available and appropriate to create a **safety plan** that would allow the child to remain in the home? Or must the child be placed?  What needs to happen?

# Setting the context: safety mapping

*Danger*



*Safety*

What are the worries?	What's working well?
<i>SDM safety threats</i>	<i>SDM protective actions that represent acts of protection</i>
What needs to happen?	
<i>SDM interventions</i>	
Specific safety plan: 1. 2. 3. 4.	

## SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment and Safety Mapping: Why Use Them Together?

SDM safety assessment is designed to be the child protection worker's professional decision-support tool.

- It is not designed in a format intended to be completed with the family although that can successfully be done in some situations.
- While it provides an analytical, reliable, data-driven foundation for decision making and increases consistency and equity in the assessment process, it is difficult to use as a means of engaging families in cooperative safety planning.

## SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment and Safety Mapping: Why Use Them Together?

- Safety mapping, in the absence of defined criteria, can result in inconsistency and is likely to decrease reliability of workers' assessments of safety.
  - The assessment process may be unduly influenced or driven by participant bias (worker, family members, collaterals).
  - Potential for assumptions that everyone is defining and interpreting behaviors and circumstances the same way.
- Developing the skills to do safety mapping can greatly improve accuracy of the SDM safety assessment

## How to Do It: Practice Principles

**Understand the position of each family member**

**Find exceptions to the maltreatment**

**Discover family strengths and resources**

**Focus on goals**

**Scale questions and progress to enable comparisons between the family's view and the worker's view**

**Assess willingness, confidence and capacity**

# Exploring the Positions of Family Members

- From the report, you can see how others view things. What is your perspective on this situation?
- How would you describe what is happening in your family as a result of this issue?
- How is this a problem for you?
- How do you make sense of what he does?
- How do you explain what you did?
- How do you think your son would explain what happened?

## Exploring the Exceptions

- Have there been any times when you have been really angry but resisted the urge to hit your daughter?
- Tell me about the times when you get your child to listen to you without hitting her.
- Can you tell me about times when you have seen this parent manage her son's behavior well?

## Exploring the Solutions/Interventions

- Why do you think that course of action would be most helpful?
- What makes you think that these plans won't make any difference?
- Some people might say you need to do \_\_\_\_\_ in this situation. What do you think about that?
- If you were to suggest that he do \_\_\_\_\_ (or that we will do \_\_\_\_\_), what would be the best way of explaining that to him/her?

## Exploring the Agency's Relationship With the Family

- How hopeful are you that I/we can be of assistance to you?
- I'm sure many people would say we're not interested in your opinions and what you want. Do you think that's true?
- It seems to me that your opinion could be summarized as \_\_\_\_\_. Is that right?

## Exploring Family Strengths

- We have been talking about some very serious matters. To give me a more balanced picture, can you tell me some of the things you feel are good about this family?
- What do you like about being a parent?
- What did you do to keep your child safe after you found out about this?
- Can you tell me what you like about your dad?
- What do you like about your son? What would you say he's good at?
- Who could best support you in dealing with these problems?

## How to Do It: Using the SDM® Safety Assessment and Safety Mapping Together

### **Brainstorm the three questions with the family on the map**

- Done at first face-to-face contact
- Conduct your interview according to the three questions

### **Under each question on the map, flag the items that meet SDM safety assessment definitions**

- Safety threats: point out that among all the things that are worrisome, not all things represent danger
- Protective actions and household strengths: emphasize which strengths represent protective actions
- Safety interventions

### **Develop the safety plan**

- Formulate the ideas generated about “what needs to happen” into specific actions and agreements to keep children safe.

Three houses

# The Three Houses: Nikki Weld and Sonja Parker



House of Good Things



House of Worries



House of Wishes/Dreams

## Which children?

Pause

- Too young?
- Too old?
- Already providing clear verbal information

Yes

- Old enough to understand instructions and draw
- Expressing more easily via drawing (MOST kids)

# Before the child interview

Obtain permission from parents:

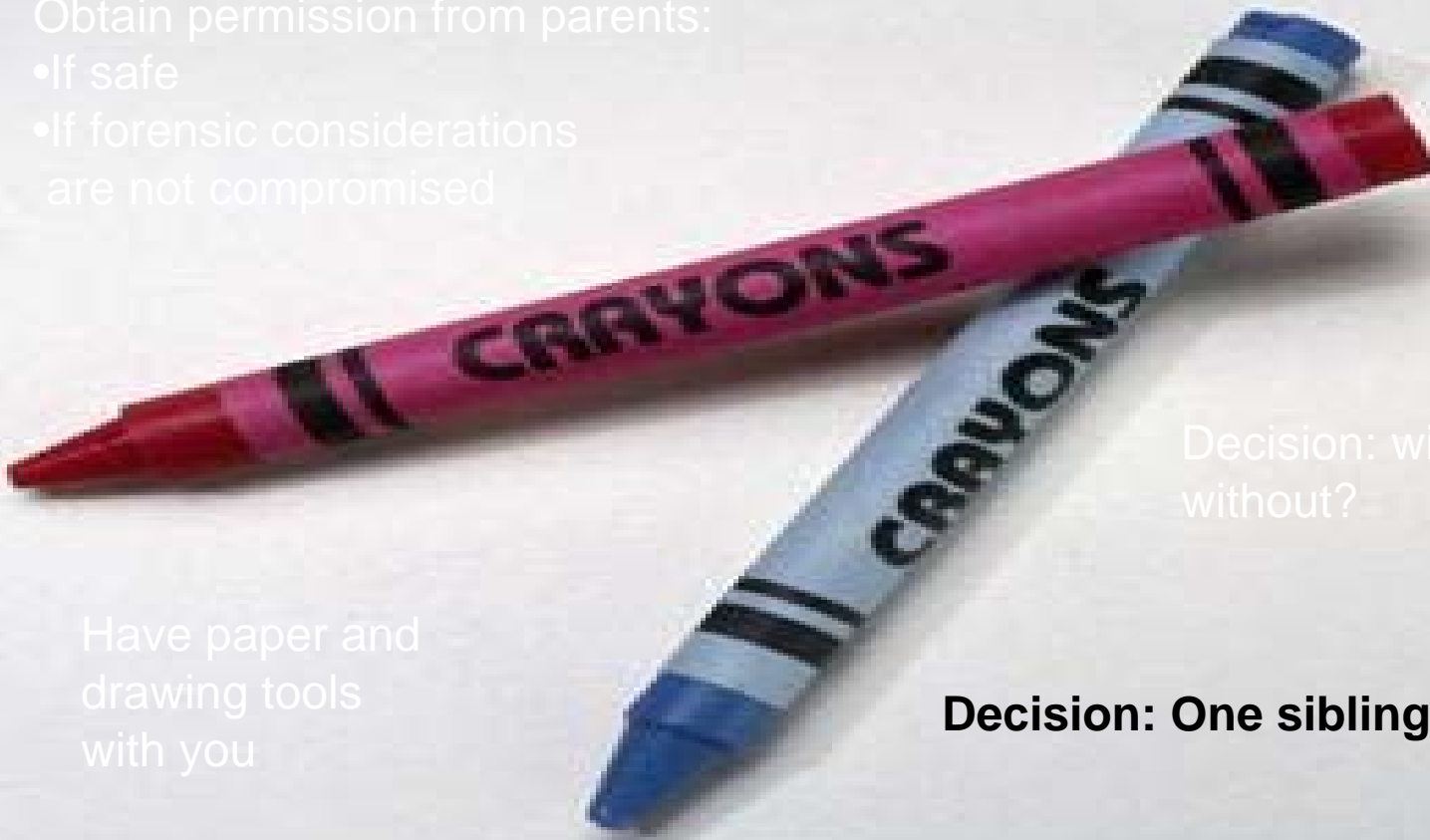
- If safe
- If forensic considerations are not compromised

Select a **conductive** location

Decision: with parents or without?

Have paper and drawing tools with you

**Decision: One sibling or more?**



# Introducing Three Houses with Children

Explain to the following to the child:

- “In the first house we will include the things that you like in your life. That’s the house of good things.”
- “In the second house we will write or draw your worries. That’s the house of worries.”
- “In the third house we will write or draw how things would be if they got better. That’s the house of dreams.”

## Prompts while drawing Three Houses

- Ask child to draw happy or sad faces next to their pictures or words.  
“Do any of the happy faces help with the sad faces? Which faces are those?”
- “Is there anything that you would like to be different in the house?”
- “Who lives in the house? Girl or boy? Grown up or child? Pets? Who visits?”
- “What are some of the things you like to do inside or outside of the house? Friends? Activities?”
- “Sometimes things happen inside or outside our houses that make us feel scared, angry or sad. Are there things that make you feel...”

## During the drawing

- Clarification, details
  - » “And then what happened?”
- Awareness of child’s process
  - » “Do you want to take a break?”
- Developmental awareness
  - » “What does the word ‘hurt’ mean?”
- Non-leading
  - » “What else do you think I should know about that?”
- Above all: It is an interview

# Adaptations



Created by Vania da Paz, Perth

# Talking to child about the drawing



- Compliments
- Thank yous
- Permission to share
  - » Who do you think already knows about....
  - » Who do you think needs to know about....
  - » Who could help us with these worries?

Deciding what to do with child's information

- How to share it with parent
  - » Show whole drawings?
  - » Summarize?
  - » Hold some information that could be incendiary until child safety is secure?

## Talking to caregivers about the Three Houses

- Start with house of good things.
- Worries should be presented as things the child is worried about (vs. “truth”).
- Become partners in thinking through the implications.
  - » “CPS must act ‘as if’ until proven otherwise.”
  - » “How do you think I should react if I see this as true?”
  - » “What do you imagine I will need to see happen next?”
- Parent reaction IS information

# a Three houses interview by Sonya Parker



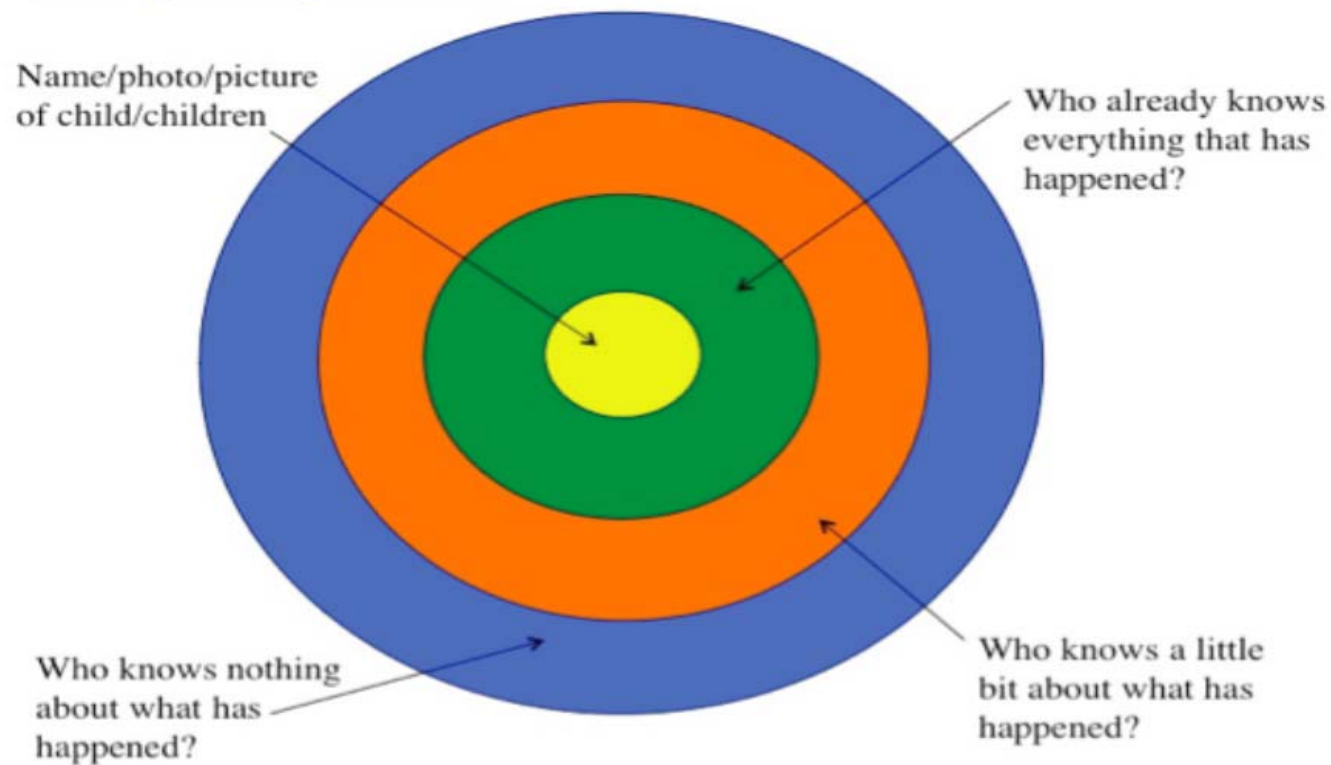


## Safety Network Development and Safety Planning With Families

- When?

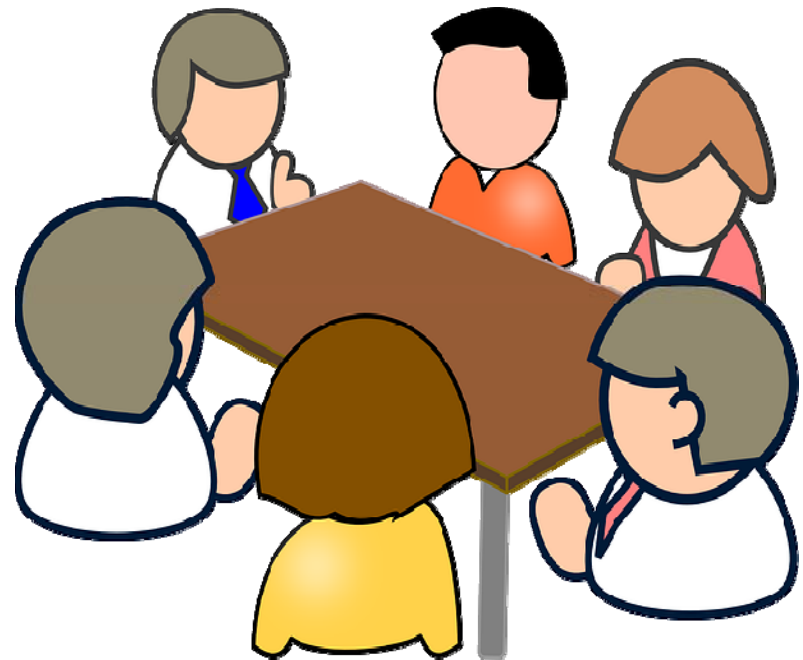
- ☐ Initial Safety Plan (ER)
- ☐ On Going Cases (ER, FM, FR for unsupervised visits)
- ☐ After Care Safety Plan (Case Closure)

### Family Safety Circle:



## What is Red Team?

- R=Review
- E=Evaluate
- D=Direct





# Ready to practice??

# Activity 1

What are the worries?

Do they meet the threshold for a safety threat?



## Jefferson/Baxter Referral-Tammy (Mom)

<b>What are the worries?</b>	<b>List the SDM safety threat item</b>
Doctor reports injuries are likely a result of abuse (placing child at risk of brain trauma). No proof that Tammy was the person who injured Joshua, however.....	
Tammy's explanation of Joshua's injuries does not match the type of injury. Her explanation is questionable.	
Tammy has a past history of abusing Joshua's sibling who is now in the custody of his father.	

## Activity 2

What are the strengths?

Do they meet threshold for a protective action or household strength?



## Jefferson/Baxter Referral-Tom (Dad)

What's Working Well?	SDM Household Strengths and/or Protective Actions?? Identify which.
Dad identifies and acknowledges the problem/safety threat by Mom & took action to respond to get medical help.....	
Dad has a good relationship with his sister who is willing to be part of his safety/support network.....	
Dad is willing to work with CPS to mitigate safety threats.....	

# Activity 3

Mapping a case

**Danger** ←————→ **Safety**

What are the worries?	What's working well?
<p><i>Agency received a report about Mrs. Casera's grabbing Carolina by the shirt, shaking her, and holding her up against a wall, as well as "sounding funny," as if drunk, and then driving away with the children.</i></p> <p><i>Mother is worried about Carolina's aggressive behavior toward Robert and other children.</i></p>	<p><i>Mrs. Caseras has reached out to the children's daycare teachers and pediatrician for advice and guidance about managing Carolina's behavior.</i></p> <p><i>Mrs. Caseras demonstrated affection and nurturing parenting practices with her children.</i></p> <p><i>Parents have stable housing and income and have a history of consistently providing for the family's needs.</i></p> <p><i>Children are well cared for and appear developmentally on target.</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Caseras' sister lives with the family and provides child care support for the younger children.</i></p>
What needs to happen?	
<p>Specific safety plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>.</li> </ol>	

# SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment

- No safety threats identified
- Protective capacities
  - 2. Has capacity to participate in safety interventions
  - 3. Has the ability to access resources
  - 5. Has supportive relationships with one or more persons who may be willing to participate in safety planning, AND caregiver is willing and able to accept their assistance
  - 7. Willing to accept temporary interventions offered by worker and/or other community agencies, including cooperation with continuing investigation/assessment

## SDM<sup>®</sup> Safety Assessment

- Protective capacities (continued)
  - 8. Evidence of a healthy relationship between caregiver and child
  - 9. Is aware of and committed to meeting the needs of the child
  - 10. Has history of effective problem solving
- No safety interventions required because no safety threats were identified
- Safety decision: safe

*Danger*



*Safety*



What are the worries?

What's working well?

What needs to happen?

Specific safety plan:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

# Summary

Key Points

## Key Points

- SOP is a solution-focused, safety-oriented approach to child protection.
- Safety mapping is a key practice of SOP.
- SDM safety assessment and safety mapping are complementary processes:
  - Safety mapping is a clinically intuitive approach to engaging families in solution-focused ways.
  - The SDM safety assessment provides a research and data-driven basis for making critical case decisions that are ultimately the responsibility of the worker and the agency;
  - Together, these processes create a practice framework that maximizes the strengths of each approach.



Thanks for all you do!

- Don't forget to stop and
- smell the roses each day!
- Take care of yourself!

