

## Chapter 4

COMPLETING THE FAMILY FUNCTIONING ASSESSMENT – ONGOING  
(FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS FOR EXPLORATION)

4-1. Purpose. The ultimate purpose of family engagement is to jointly explore with the parents or legal guardians what must change in order for the agency to close the case. The FFA-O is the department's formal assessment that provides the basis for the case plan. The family engagement standards for exploration described in this procedure are intended to promote the case manager's interactions with parents/legal guardians in order to raise self-awareness, recognize and diffuse any parent resistance, and build constructive working relationships. The exploration standards facilitate deeper information gathering about adult functioning, parenting, caregiver protective capacities, and the relationship of all to the identified danger threats. The exploration stage lays the final groundwork for developing a family change strategy, including the child's need for a safe and permanent home.

4-2. Assessments Required.

a. The Family Assessment-Ongoing (FFA-O). The FFA-O must be completed within 30 calendar days of case transfer. The primary focus of the FFA-O is on the household of the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) responsible for danger threats that lead to an unsafe child as determined by a child protective investigation.

(1) The FFA-O will contain a current description of all household members as required in CFOP 170-1, [paragraph 2-3](#), Focus of Family Assessment. In FSFN, the information that automatically populates from the FFA-I to the FFA-O is for ease of review by the case manager and should be deleted, edited and/or added-to in order to provide a current and more in-depth assessment of the family's functioning.

(2) When there is a non-maltreating parent/legal guardian in a separate household the non-maltreating parent/legal guardian does not get added to either the FFA-I or FFA-O. However, information should be included in the FFA-O in the child functioning domain to describe the child's relationship with the non-maltreating parent/legal guardian. To the extent that the child has on-going contact with the other parent/legal guardian, information may be included in the parenting and discipline domains for the parent who is the focus of the FFA-O when it is relevant and important to know.

(3) When there is a parent/legal guardian in a separate household who, as a result of an investigation, has been found responsible for conditions that resulted in the child being unsafe (two maltreating households), a separate FFA-I and subsequent FFA-O for the other parent/legal guardian will be developed.

b. Other Parent Home Assessment (OPHA). When a child requires an out-of-home safety plan, AND only the removal parent/legal guardian has been found responsible for the unsafe child, an OPHA must be completed per requirements in CFOP 170-7, [Chapter 5](#).

(1) If the OPHA was completed prior to case transfer, the case manager will conduct the following activities:

(a) Discuss the findings in the completed OPHA with the non-maltreating parent.

(b) Determine if there have been any changes in the parent/legal guardian's circumstances or goals with respect to the child(ren).

(c) When the child has been released to the parent/legal guardian as part of an out-of-home safety plan, assess the sufficiency of the safety plan and the parent/legal guardian's care of the child, including any specific child needs that need to be addressed.

(d) Update the OPHA as necessary if the parent/legal guardian's situation has changed or significant additional information is learned.

(2) If the OPHA was not completed due to the parent/legal guardian not being located prior to case transfer, the case manager will continue the diligent search to locate the parent/legal guardian until released by the court to complete the OPHA per requirements in CFOP 170-7, Safety Planning and Management, [Chapter 5](#).

(3) A staffing with Children's Legal Services (CLS) must be held when the case manager and supervisor determine that there should not be any case plan goals, outcomes, or family time which involves the non-maltreating parent/legal guardian.

#### 4-3. Activities to Assess Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s).

a. The activities of the exploration stage are described in a logical sequence, but the order in which they occur is controlled by the specific circumstances of the case. The case manager must engage with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) in a positive manner to gather additional information in the domain areas, understand danger threats, and develop a deeper understanding of caregiver protective capacities. When there is another parent in a separate household, information will be gathered from each parent to inform the FFA-O as well as the OPHA, when required.

b. The case manager will work with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to identify the diminished protective capacities which may have resulted in the identified danger threats. The case manager will:

(1) Explain information to parent(s)/legal guardian(s) about protective capacities.

(2) Encourage the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to offer their perspective as to which diminished protective capacities led to an unsafe child. As necessary, the case manager should help the parents understand specifically what makes the child unsafe. Discuss with the family what the current family behaviors, conditions, and circumstances are that create danger threats. The case manager will explore the following through conversational interviewing:

(a) What has changed in the family that creates the unsafe situation.

(b) What has/hasn't worked in the past around that change.

(c) The information necessary to develop the information domains as outlined in CFOP 170-1, Chapter 2, [paragraph 2-4](#).

(3) Reach agreement with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) as to which diminished protective capacities directly impact child safety. If the parent(s) are unable or unwilling to offer their perspective, offer suggestions as to which protective capacities may be diminished and ask for feedback.

(4) Encourage the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to offer their perspective as to which enhanced protective capacities (strengths) could be built upon to address the identified danger threats. If the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are unable/unwilling to offer their perspective, offer suggestions as to which protective capacities may be enhanced and ask for feedback.

(5) Explore what the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) might do to enhance protective capacities and improve diminished protective capacities.

c. The case manager should determine if an expert evaluation for either a parent/legal guardian(s) or the child is appropriate to help inform case plan outcomes when there is a specific condition or behavior that requires additional professional assessment, including situations such as:

(1) The parent(s)/legal guardian(s) or child is displaying unusual or bizarre behaviors that are indicative of emotional or behavioral problems, physical illness or disability, mental illness, trauma assessment, suicidal or homicidal ideation.

(2) Other conditions where there is a need for additional information regarding an individual's functioning in the area of the professional's specialized knowledge; or to develop a better understanding of whether the individual's functioning impacts his or her protective capacity or child functioning.

#### 4-4. Develop Danger Statement.

a. The case manager will review with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) the danger threats identified by the investigation and re-evaluate if the parent(s) are denying the presence of danger threats, are in partial agreement, or are in near complete agreement.

b. The case manager will co-construct the danger statement with parent(s)/legal guardian(s) when possible. The danger statement is a behaviorally based statement in very clear, non-judgmental language which states the following:

(1) What are the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' actions?

(2) What is the impact on the child?

(3) What are the case manager's ongoing concerns?

c. When there is no full agreement, the danger statement includes the case manager's concerns and who is not in agreement.

d. The case manager will ensure that the Danger Statement is written, to the fullest extent possible:

(1) Is simple enough so the youngest person in the family with the ability to comprehend understands.

(2) Is in the family's primary language as it serves as the framework for effective safety planning.

4-5. Establish Permanency Goal for Child. All case plans established for unsafe children, whether or not they are court supervised, will include the department's permanency and placement goal(s) for the child(ren). The case manager should explain to the parent(s)/legal guardian(s), as well as any substitute caregiver(s) involved, the goals for the child that the department has identified. Case plan goal options are as follows:

a. "Maintain and strengthen" means to maintain the child with parent and strengthen the parent's ability to fulfill their responsibilities.

(1) If a child has not been removed from a parent, even if adjudication of dependency is withheld, the court may leave the child in the current placement with maintaining and strengthening the placement as a permanency option.

(2) If a child has been removed from a parent and is placed with the parent from whom the child was not removed, the court may leave the child in the placement with the parent from whom the child was not removed with maintaining and strengthening the placement as a permanency option.

(3) If a child has been removed from a parent and is subsequently reunified with that parent, the court may leave the child with that parent with maintaining and strengthening the placement as a permanency option.

b. "Reunification" means the court has reviewed the Conditions for Return and determined the circumstances that caused the out-of-home placement and issues subsequently identified have been remedied to the extent that the return of the child to the home with an in-home safety plan prepared or approved by the department will not be detrimental to the child's safety, well-being, and physical, mental and emotional health.

c. "Adoption" means that a petition for termination of parental rights has been or will be filed.

d. "Permanent guardianship" of a dependent child under s. [39.6221](#), F.S.

e. Placement in another planned permanent living arrangement under s. [39.6241](#), F.S., under certain limited circumstances for children age 16 years and older.

f. Transition from licensed care to independent living for a young adult who satisfies the conditions outlined in s. [39.6251](#), F.S.

4-6. Establish Family Goal and Change Strategies.

a. The case manager will work with the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to establish a mutually agreed-upon family goal and assess their motivation for change. This should happen after the protective capacities which resulted in the identified danger threats are better understood. The family goal should be established collaboratively with family members. When that is not possible, the case manager should provide some choices for the family that would be acceptable to the agency.

b. The family goal describes what the family hopes to accomplish in order to achieve the permanency goal that has been established for the child. The family goal statement:

(1) Describes agreement between the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and the case manager about what must happen (to parent's protective capacity) for the child's safety to be sustained without the involvement of the agency.

(2) Is written in clear, everyday language.

(3) Describes the presence of new, observable behaviors or actions related to the children (rather than the absence of old, problematic behavior).

(4) The case manager should develop the family goal statement using the family's words, to the extent possible. A family goal is not a description of services or treatment which might be the method for achieving the goal.

c. After a family goal has been established, the case manager will gather information from the parent as to possible strategies for achieving the family goal as follows:

(1) Identify the family's resource network that might be willing and able to assist the parents in achieving the family goal.

(2) Explain to parent(s)/legal guardian(s) any next steps that the case manager will take to inform the completion of the FFA-O.

(3) Gather parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' ideas about interventions, treatment, services.

(4) Explore parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' concerns as to possible barriers.

(5) Seek consideration of case manager ideas that other family members or persons involved have suggested.

d. The case manager will assess the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' motivation to change after all of the activities to gather information from the family has been conducted, including work with the family to establish a family goal and change strategies. Knowing the stage of motivation a parent is currently experiencing will guide the case manager's efforts throughout the life of the case to help the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) move forward through the stages of change. See Appendix A of this operating procedure, "Progress Evaluation Facilitative Objectives."

#### 4-7. Difficulty Engaging the Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s).

a. When there are situations where the parent(s) are unable or unwilling to engage, or the case manager and the parent(s) disagree about the reason for the agency's involvement or what needs to change, it is the ongoing responsibility of the case manager to exhaust all efforts to move the case forward and to continue to actively seek the parent(s)' involvement.

b. The case manager will continue to make diligent efforts to engage the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) in the following ways:

(1) Work diligently to identify and overcome the barriers to the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' participation in family assessment and planning.

(2) Frequently and actively re-invite the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' participation.

(3) Continue to work toward establishing a partnership by stating the case manager's need for the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' perspectives, ideas and input.

(4) Obtain and review all relevant documentation for family strengths that might be the basis for further exploration with the family

(5) Interview other persons who know the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to elicit their suggestions for engaging the parent.

(6) Obtain professional assessments and evaluations.

(7) Obtain professional input as to engagement approaches such as use of a substance abuse, domestic violence advocate, or mental health professional.

c. When the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are incarcerated, the case manager will attempt to meet with the parent personally or, when necessary, through an Out of County services referral to gather information as to their understanding of the child's current status, the child's strengths and needs, their relationship with the child and how it is maintained, and the parent's plans for the future concerning the child.

#### 4-8. Validate and Reconcile Information.

a. As necessary, the case manager will gather information from other persons and professionals to inform completion of the FFA-O.

b. The case manager will seek and validate information from others who know the family as to the behaviors, conditions, or circumstances that led to an unsafe child. This might include other case managers who worked with the family before if there was prior involvement. There may be other professionals who have had past or current involvement with the parent(s) or the child(ren), or current evaluations may be in the process of being completed, such as the CBHA. Activities to complete information gathering will include:

(1) Obtain and complete review any relevant documentation.

(2) Interview other involved persons.

4-9. Qualitative Indicators of Family Engagement. Indicators of effective family engagement are the following:

a. The parent(s)/legal guardian(s) believe that their feelings and concerns have been heard, respected, and considered.

b. The parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are invested in and committed to achieving a family goal and outcomes in a case plan.

c. The parent(s)/legal guardian(s) follow through and take the actions expected.

d. The parent(s)/legal guardians) have trust in the case manager and are open to hear feedback from the case manager as to concerns and non-negotiable expectations.

e. The parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and the case manager have a shared understanding of the danger threats in the family that must be addressed and are working toward the same goals and outcomes.

f. Whether or not it has not been possible to reach a shared understanding and agreement as to the reasons for the family's involvement; the case manager and the parent(s) are able to co-construct a case plan.

#### 4-10. Supervisor Consultation and Approval.

a. At any point during the development of the FFA-O, if parents are highly resistant and/or are unwilling to engage with the case manager during or at the conclusion of the exploration stage, a supervisor consultation is required to:

- (1) Provide the case manager an opportunity to assess family dynamics and sources of resistance.
- (2) Support the case manager in considering other efforts to engage and in determining next steps.

b. A supervisory consultation pertaining to the family assessment is required in all cases prior to approval of the family assessment.

#### 4-11. Documenting the FFA-O.

a. After all activities in Chapters 3 and 4 of this operating procedure have been completed, the case manager is ready to complete and document family assessment findings. While facts gathered from the family and other sources are briefly documented in contact notes, the completed assessment provides a critical analysis of all facts gathered. It is important for the case manager to always review and update the child's record prior to documenting the family assessment. This ensures that the child's record is current and provides all of the relevant supporting documentation for the family assessment. The case manager will:

- (1) Ensure that all chronological notes are current.
- (2) Update information about case participants including their relationship to the child and contact information.
- (3) Ensure that Living Arrangement or Placement information is current.
- (4) Ensure that the most current safety plan is in the child's record.
- (5) Update contact information as to other professionals and other persons who are involved with the child's case.
- (6) Update the child's record to ensure it is current for:
  - (a) Accurate placement information (Living Arrangement or Out-of-Home Placement).
  - (b) Child's birth certificate and photograph.
  - (c) Medical/Mental Health information which documents all primary health care and any specialty providers, child health conditions and/or diagnoses, services received including immunizations, and any medications prescribed.
  - (d) Education information which includes current school information (case manager can enter school information which reflects past school attendance history), this section of the child's record is used to document any child's Exceptional Student Education/Individualized Education Plan, as well as diploma and certificate information

b. Document the Family Assessment. There are currently two methods for documenting a family assessment for maltreating parents:

(1) For cases opened prior to implementation of the updated Child Welfare Practice Model (formerly known as “Safety Methodology”), the Family Assessment in FSFN was utilized and may continue to be used until case closure.

(2) For all cases opened after implementation of the updated Child Welfare Practice Model, the FFA-O will be used.

c. The case manager will confirm that the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) whose behaviors need to change are the primary focus of the FFA-O and will determine which other persons will be associated with, and described in, the information domains for the parent/legal guardian. See CFOP 170-1, Chapter 2, [paragraph 2-3](#), “Focus of Family Assessment.”

d. The FFA-O will be pre-populated with information developed by the investigator. The case manager must develop a new description based on further information collected and assessed to provide a basis for the scaling of caregiver protective capacities, child strengths and needs, and the identification of case plan outcomes. The information developed by the investigator should be deleted and replaced with the case manager’s narrative. FSFN will maintain the information developed in the original FFA-I and all domain information will also become part of each participant’s FSFN person record.

(1) The case manager will document the reason(s) for ongoing agency involvement. The danger statement which was crafted with the family will populate this section of the FFA-O.

(2) The case manager will complete the family assessment areas as follows:

(a) Information gathered and assessed about the maltreatment and surrounding circumstances by the child protective investigator (CPI) will automatically populate the FFA-O and will not be editable.

(b) Maltreatment and Surrounding Circumstances. In the “Additional Ongoing Information” section for the maltreatment and surrounding circumstances, the case manager will describe any new information learned about the incident or surrounding circumstances (e.g., the father had been prescribed medications and revealed to the case manager that he was not taking them at the time of the incident). If not already documented in the FFA-I, the case manager must add any findings and recommendations of a Child Protection Team (CPT). For all judicial cases, if the child was not evaluated by a CPT, the case manager must add a statement reflecting that no report exists.

(c) Child Functioning. Information gathered and assessed by the CPI about child functioning, for each child in the household, will automatically populate the FFA-O and be editable. The case manager will develop this section with analysis of new information learned from all sources about child strengths and needs. This section will support the scaling of child strengths and needs that the case manager will later complete in the FFA-O.

(d) Information gathered and assessed by the CPI about adult functioning for each parent and caregiver will automatically populate the FFA-O and be editable. The case manager will develop this section with analysis of new information learned from all sources about adult functioning. This section will support the scaling of caregiver protective capacities that the case manager will later complete in the FFA-O.

(e) Information gathered and assessed by the CPI about parenting practices, discipline, and child behavior management for each parent and caregiver will automatically populate the

FFA-O and be editable. The case manager will develop this section with analysis of new information learned from all sources.

(3) The case manager will complete scaling of Caregiver Protective Capacities and Child Strengths and Needs using the 4 point scaling criteria provided in CFOP 170-1, [Chapter 2](#), paragraphs 2-6 and 2-7. The case manager will make sure that there is sufficient information in the family assessment areas to support the capacity ratings. The scaling of caregiver protective capacities supports the case manager's confirmation of the diminished protective capacities that will become the focus of the case plan. It is possible that the case manager's further assessment will result in changes to the determinations documented in the FFA-I. Some caregiver protective capacities that the FFA-I indicated were diminished may be determined to be adequate based on further information gathered and assessed. Likewise, some caregiver protective capacities that were identified as adequate in the FFA-I may be determined by the case manager to be diminished.

(4) The completed Safety Analysis must provide sufficient information to support how each of the five safety analysis criteria are met or not met. Refer to Appendix A of this operating procedure, "Progress Evaluation Facilitative Objectives," for a more in-depth discussion of Safety Analysis criteria and examples that demonstrate when the family behaviors or conditions for an in-home safety plan are met or not met.

(5) The case manager will document the "Family Change Strategy" developed with the family in the following areas:

- (a) Family Goal.
- (b) Ideas for change.
- (c) Potential barriers.

(6) The case manager will update the safety analysis criteria to ensure that reasonable efforts are adequately reflected and:

- (a) Update the safety plan as necessary.
- (b) Modify Conditions for Return if needed.

e. The following FSFN resources are located on the [Center for Child Welfare](#) website under the FSFN "How Do I Guide" page:

(1) For basic information about documenting all case participants and their associated demographics, including a child's birth certificate and photo, refer to the [Person Management – How Do I Guide](#).

(2) [Information about updating a case in FSFN, including participants, splitting or merging a case can be found in the Maintain Case – How Do I Guide](#).

(3) For information about updating the placement pages in FSFN, refer to the [Out-of-Home Placements – How Do I Guide](#).

(4) For information about the creation, completion and maintenance of a child's education record, refer to the [Education – How Do I Guide](#).

(5) For information pertaining to life skills for children 13 and older, refer to the [Independent Living – How Do I Guide](#).

(6) For information specific to the creation and completion of the FFA-O, refer to the [FFA-Ongoing – How Do I Guide](#).

4-12. Filing the FFA-O with Dependency Court. An FFA-O must be filed with the court when a case plan is filed. The case manager must submit the completed FFA-O to CLS at least five business days prior to the following time frames for court filing per s. [39.521\(1\)\(a\)](#), F.S.;

a. Not less than 72 hours before the disposition hearing if the disposition hearing occurs on or after the 60<sup>th</sup> day after the date the child was placed in out-of-home care.

b. Not less than 72 hours before the case plan acceptance hearing, if the disposition hearing occurs before the 60<sup>th</sup> day after the date the child was placed in out-of-home care and a case plan has not been submitted pursuant to this paragraph, or if the court does not approve the case plan at the disposition hearing.

c. The court may grant an exception to the requirement for an FFA-O upon finding that all the family and child information required by s. [39.521\(2\)](#), F.S., is available in an FFA-I filed with the court. The case manager is still required to complete the FFA-O.

