



Child Protection: Decision Making

Media contacts: Deborah Huskins, area director, Human Services & Public Health: 612-596-9563
Lynn Lewis, Child Protection: 612-348-3860
LuAnn Schmaus, Public Affairs: 612-348-7865

Fast facts

▲ Families that are at high risk for child maltreatment may receive services from three programs.

- Child Protection **Upfront Services** provides intensive interventions with the goal of reunifying the family.

- Child Protection **Permanency** continues interventions and focuses on finding permanent homes for the child.

- Child Protection Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a combination of Upfront Services and Permanency for families eligible for ICWA services.

How do child protection staff make decisions regarding child safety?

Social workers rely on science and research as well as professional training and education to make decisions about a child's safety and risk in a home. Since 1999, Hennepin County's child protection staff have used a "structured decision-making model" for these decisions.

Structured decision-making model based on research

The structured decision-making model is crafted after research with more than 85,000 families by the Children's Research Center in Wisconsin. This actuarial model is similar to those used by insurance companies. Child protection staff seek answers to dozens of questions that range from "Will the parent give us access to the child?" to "Does the caretaker's behavior seem violent or out of control?" The questions help to determine if the child is currently safe to stay with the family.

But safety at the moment is only one piece of a larger picture. The more challenging question is, "What is the degree of risk for this child's safety if they stay with the family?" Child protection workers use the decision-making model to give each family a rating:

- a low or moderate rating means the probability that maltreatment will occur is low
- a high or intensive rating means the probability that maltreatment will occur is high

Then, Hennepin directs its resources to where they will do the most good. Families assessed to be at high risk of maltreating their child receive intensive intervention. Families assessed to be at low risk of maltreating their child, are not served in child protection and instead are referred to community agencies for services.

Services that families may need include:

- counseling
- help with housing payments
- parenting services
- transportation
- education
- employment and skill training
- homemaker services
- support groups
- recreational services
- child care and respite
- health services