This script accompanies the movie and PowerPoint® presentation by the same name.

Critical Thinking in Safety Decision-Making:

Welcome and thank you for participating in this e-learning module on Critical Thinking in Safety Decision-Making. In this module we will look at evaluating information sufficiency, reconciling and validating information, and applying the safety threshold criteria.

These three important steps are the essence of critical thinking when applied to safety decision-making.

Advance slide.

Module Objective (1 of 2)

Our objective is to build upon the two previous e-learning modules that introduced the Information Domains and key concepts in safety decision-making and to further enhance your safety decision-making skills.

Advance slide.

Module Objective (2 of 2)

When you have finished this module, you will be able to list the criteria for sufficient information, explain what reconciliation and validation are in information gathering and analysis, and be able to apply the safety threshold criteria.

Advance slide.

Review of Information Standards

Let's begin with a very quick review which establishes the information standards that are the foundation of quality safety decision-making.

Advance slide.

Six Information Domains

The six domains that we have previously explored form the foundation of our understanding and knowledge of the family. These six domains, when fully explored and documented, give us the information which allows us to identify present and/or impending danger.

Advance slide.

Safe or Unsafe?

We gather this information about families because we must arrive at a decision about whether a child or children are safe or unsafe.

Advance slide.

When is it Enough?

So how do we know when we have sufficient information in each of these six areas? When is the information in each of the domains sufficient?

Advance slide.

Why is Sufficiency Important?

Perhaps the easiest way to think about information sufficiency is to remind ourselves that we are collecting this information in order to know whether we have danger threats, the degree to which we have child vulnerability and the extent of caregiver protective capacity.

In short, sufficient information paints a complete picture for us. Gathering sufficient information does not leave us wondering about certain areas of child or adult functioning which are critical to understanding vulnerability or protective capacity. Insufficient information does not leave us wondering what this family is like "most of the time"….

Advance slide.

Judging Sufficiency of Information (1 of 5)

We are going to review five essential criteria which every good decision maker should use when judging the sufficiency of information in the six information domains.

First we judge the information according to whether it describes the particular domain in full and acceptable ways, so that a picture of what has or is happening can be understood.

Advance slide.

Judging Sufficiency of Information (2 of 5)

The second criteria to judge sufficiency is to evaluate whether the information is relevant ONLY to the particular domain. A key step in critical thinking is to separate information in order to be able to evaluate significance….so we must be able to isolate information about each of the six domains, so that we are not duplicating information or repeating ourselves.

Advance slide.

Judging Sufficiency of Information (3 of 5)

Our third essential criteria is that the information is pertinent to gaining a full understanding of the domain. Let's use child functioning to illustrate this. Child functioning should include a description of the child's peer interactions. In describing pertinent information about the child's peer interactions, we would expect to read about whether the child has friends and where and when they interact, and the quality of that interaction. Additional details, such as the name of every friend, may have been learned in interviewing a child, especially in rapport building, but they are not pertinent to our understanding of child functioning.

Advance slide.

Judging Sufficiency of Information (4 of 5)

Achieving the fourth criteria for information sufficiency means that information collection on the six domains provides adequate information to fully inform our understanding of the safety constructs used in the determination of child safety. Without adequate information our understanding of danger threats, child vulnerability and caregiver protective capacity is extremely compromised. When our information collection is sufficient we have full confidence in the conclusion of safe or unsafe.

Advance slide.

Judging Sufficiency of Information (5 of 5)

The fifth and final criteria for judging information sufficiency provides a critical thinking focus for you as the decision maker. You must be sure that the information in the domain covers the principal or core issues associated with that domain. Every family is unique and different

and will present its own challenges in terms of how easily you will be able to collect information. And remember, as we've previously discussed, your sources of information will be numerous. For example, information about adult functioning will come not only from your interview and observations of the adults, but from information provided by the children, other family members, collaterals, and professional providers.

Advance slide.

Reconciling and Validating (1 of 2)

Let's move now to part two of this module, reconciling and validating information. As we have said, information collection involves the use of numerous sources and methods. We interview, observe, and read reports or other documents. It is not uncommon for the information to be different, depending on the source. For example, a parent might tell us that his or her child fell down the stairs and that is how the child was injured, but the doctor's evaluation may indicate that the injury was caused by someone twisting the child's arm. This is information from two sources about the child's condition, and as the decision-maker, you have to reconcile that information.

Advance slide.

Qualitative Judgment About the Information

Quality safety decision-making requires more than getting a LOT of information. Quality safety decision-making requires *qualitative* judgment about the information. That is what we mean by reconciling and validating.

Advance slide.

Processing of Reconciling and Validating

In the discussion guide resource materials, you will be introduced to the information collection protocol. The protocol lays out a recommended order of interviews which allows for the most complete information gathering process.   We begin our information collection with the child victim whenever possible, and we end our information collection with the alleged perpetrator. If we are presented with a perpetrator who denies involvement or does not acknowledge his or her role in the maltreatment, the information we have gathered prior to this gives us the ability to challenge the denial, and to engage the person in helping us to understand what really happened. This is part of the process for reconciling and validating.

Advance slide.

Reconciling and Validating (2 of 2)

We have given examples of reconciling and validating that relate to maltreatment, but it is important to keep in mind that reconciling and validating must be done for all information domains. We are attempting to form a complete picture for each domain, and that complete picture must be the decision-maker's view of each domain.

Advance slide.

Example: Adult Functioning

Let's take an example of one aspect of adult functioning: substance use. Suppose in our interview with the child that she describes a single father who comes home from work every night and sits in front of the television and drinks 6-10 beers. When we interview the father and ask about alcohol consumption, he says that "he has an occasional beer, usually only on a Friday or Saturday night".

These are very different accounts, and in order to understand a key aspect of his adult functioning, and the father's general parenting capacity, we need to reconcile this information. We may seek the input of our professional partners such as substance abuse specialists. This is reconciling and validating.

Advance slide.

Goal of Reconciling and Validating

The goal is that through the process of collecting information, reconciling and validating the information, we have a "true" picture of each of the information domains. This true picture is what we will use to reach our safety decision.

Advance slide.

Safety Threshold Criteria

In this module, we have explored sufficiency criteria and the concepts of reconciling and validating. The final area we will explore is applying the safety threshold criteria.

The concept of a threshold is critical to determining the point of entry for something, the point that we "cross" over or differentiate between what meets certain criteria and what does not.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria: Out of Control Behaviors, Circumstances and Conditions

We use the word "threshold" in safety decision-making because it helps us to distinguish the point at which a person's behavior, or a circumstance or condition, crosses over into a danger threat. There are five criteria which help us determine if the danger threshold has been crossed: immediacy, severity, the degree that the behavior, circumstance or condition is out-of-control, vulnerability, and is the danger threat observable?   Let's take a few minutes to explain what we mean by each one.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria #1: Immediacy?

The first safety threshold criteria looks at the expected or known timeframe for the maltreatment occurrence. Immediate means that the danger threat is likely to become active without delay and will occur in the near future.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria #2: Severity?

The second threshold criteria is the severity of the anticipated harm to the child or children. Severity means that maltreatment has caused or is very likely to cause serious injury to the child victim. Examples of severe circumstances are serious injury, grave or debilitating physical health conditions, significant impairment, acute suffering, terrorizing, or potentially life threatening.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria #3: Out of control?

The third threshold criteria assesses whether there are behaviors, actions or circumstances of an individual in the household that are out of the control of the family. These conditions are not easily subject to internal influence, are unrestrained, unmanaged, and without limits. Not subject to internal influence means that there is a history or pattern of embedded dynamics that are contributing to the individual's or

family's inability to control the danger threat.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria #4: Vulnerable Child?

The fourth threshold criteria establishes vulnerability.   Vulnerability refers to a child who is dependent on others for protection. As explored in our previous e-learning module, vulnerability looks at numerous individual child factors including age, physical ability, cognitive ability, developmental status and more to determine if the child is vulnerable to an identified danger threat.

It is important to note that many, if not most children in our child protective investigations are physically healthy and within developmentally normal limits with no additional child vulnerabilities but are still considered a vulnerable child in the presence of an active danger threat. Vulnerability is a threshold criteria because if a child is not vulnerable to a danger threat, then we have a safe child.

Advance slide.

Threshold Criteria #5: Observable?

The fifth and last threshold criteria establishes that the behavior, condition, or family circumstances creating the threat can be seen and described. Observable takes it out of the realm of a "gut" feeling we have about the family and allows you to describe the specific conditions that have been observed by family members and others, or your own personal observations. Even the family's feelings or perceptions are evidenced by specific behaviors, situations or verbal statements that fall into the observable category or range.

Advance slide.

Summary

In this module, we have explored three stages of critical thinking which are integral to quality, consistent safety decision-making. We established five criteria for evaluating the sufficiency of information. We explored the importance and process for reconciling and validating information in all domains. And, finally, we explored the five criteria which we use to determine when behaviors, circumstances, or conditions cross the danger threshold.

Advance slide.

Discussion Guide and Quiz

The discussion guide which you will be using following this module will provide additional resource information to further enhance your understanding of critical thinking in safety decision making. Activities in the guide will include determining information sufficiency and the need for additional reconciliation and validation of information, and using the five safety threshold criteria to determine if out of control conditions are present in the families you are asked to assess.

For now, please proceed to answer the questions which follow and thank you for your participation.

Advance slide.

Q1

Q1: Sufficient information is:

       a. Information that gives us a full picture
       b. Is relevant to the particular information domain
       c. Is pertinent to the information domain
       d. Is adequate and gives us confidence about conclusions
       e. All of the above

Q1 Answer

The correct answer is (e) all of the above. Information sufficiency is dependent upon these four standards and a fifth one – being able to describe principal or core issues associated with each domain - being met which ensures you that you have all the necessary information you need to make the appropriate safety decision.

Q2

Q2: Which is the typical sequence followed in the information collection protocol:
       a. Other children in the home, victim, non-abusing parent, alleged perpetrator
       b. Alleged perpetrator, victim, other children in the home, non-abusing parent
       c. Victim, other children in the home, non-abusing parent, alleged perpetrator

d. Victim, non-abusing parent, other children in the home, alleged perpetrator

Q2 Answer

The correct answer is (c). Because of a combination of factors - safety concerns, children generally being more open and honest, or at least easier to recognize when they are being deceptive, we almost always interview all children in the home prior to the adults. And, the last adult we want to interview is the alleged perpetrator so we can be as prepared as we can with the most information available to us at the time of that interview.

Q3

Q3: Reconciling information means:
   a. Quoting exactly what the parents said
   b. Knowing only what maltreatment occurred
   c. Determining the evidence that is necessary for prosecution
   d. **Settling or resolving differences in information in order to have a true understanding of each information domain**
   e. None of the above

Q3 Answer

The correct answer is (d): settling or resolving differences in information in order to have a true understanding of each information domain. Remember, the foundation for all quality decision making is the accuracy of the information upon which the decision is based so it is essential for you to resolve all critical discrepancies in what has occurred regarding the maltreatment and in what you know about the family in terms of their day to day functioning which reveals impending danger.

Q4

Q4: Which of the following is not one of the safety threshold criteria:
   a. Immediate
   b. Potentially Severe
   c. Out Of Control
   d. **Protective Capacity**
   e. Observable

Q4 Answer

The correct answer is (d): settling or resolving differences in information in order to have a true understanding of each information domain. Remember, the foundation for all quality decision making is the accuracy of the information upon which the decision is based so it is essential for you to resolve all critical discrepancies in what has occurred regarding the maltreatment and in what you know about the family in terms of their day to day functioning which reveals impending danger.

Q5

Q5: The threshold criteria "observable" means you have personally witnessed the action or behavior:

    a. True
    b. False

Q5 Answer

The correct answer is (b) false. In terms of the safety threshold criteria "observable" simply means someone in the family or any second party observer, neighbor, teacher, or any collateral contact has personally seen the action, behavior or circumstance being described. Skilled investigators and case managers try to validate this information from another source whenever possible.

Congratulations!

Congratulations on completing Module Three: Critical Thinking in Safety Decision Making
Within the week you should also complete the discussion guide that accompanies this module. If you are not watching the module as part of a group exercise facilitated by your supervisor or assigned safety practice expert please contact them for a copy of the discussion guide. The discussion guide is intended to provide additional resources and instruction so you can begin to apply the concepts introduced in this module.

One last thing, don't forget to get credit for participating in this e-learning module by going to your individual training screen in FSFN and selecting the training course titled Module Three: "Critical Thinking in Safety Decision Making."

Thank you for your participation!