FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Timely Submission and Approval of Structured Decision Making (SDM) Tools

In the summer of 2018, NCCD Children's Research Center (CRC) began Part I of a two-part SDM System Fidelity Review to enhance system implementation for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). This extensive review aims to answer organizational practice questions about SDM system use at the macro departmental level, the supervisory level, and the client level (i.e., how CSWs use the assessments in their direct work with families). Part I, which was recently completed, specifically examined the "front-end" areas of Hotline/Intake and Emergency Response. CRC analyzed policy, practice trends, and departmental data, and made several suggestions for enhancing policy as it relates to SDM. As a result, numerous policies are being revised in order to incorporate these recommendations. A "foundational" policy regarding the entire SDM system is also being finalized.

In addition, the California State Auditor recently conducted a review of LA County DCFS's referral investigations and ER over 30-day investigations, and among their findings they noted the lack of a formal policy containing measurable guidelines for SCSW approvals of SDM tools submitted by CSWs. To address this gap until the formal comprehensive SDM policy is finalized, please refer to the attached table that summarizes timeframes for both CSW submission and SCSW approval of SDM tools.

CRC recommends that when SCSWs review SDM tools for approval, SCSWs also reference related documentation for narrative support of the tools. (The table below includes some suggestions for where SCSWs might look for such supportive documentation for each SDM tool). CRC also recommends that, when reviewing tools, SCSWs should:

- Review the use of overrides and the use of "other" (e.g., Safety Assessment #10).
- Compare the answers with SCSW's knowledge of family for overall consistency (e.g., SCSW is aware that the child was placed in foster care, but the Safety Assessment shows "Safe").
- Look for obvious internal and cross-assessment consistency (e.g., the Safety Assessment indicates a substance abuse problem but the Risk Assessment indicates no such problem).
- Look for consistency with bottom-line recommendations in court reports and/or case actions.
- Use revision of tools as an opportunity to coach/mentor CSWs (i.e., the use of definitions, households).
- Conduct "spot checks" of tools by comparing one (1) or two (2) random item scores with a documented narrative, and/or compare prior history items with the CWS/CMS record or SafeMeasures history page. (Note: CSWs with less experience using the assessment should have more frequent spot checks.)

SCSWs can refer to the Children's Research Center's (CRC) WebSDM Supervisor Guide for more reviewing and approving tips and other information (password: training). The Children's Research Center's (CRC) current SDM Policy and Procedures Manual can be viewed within SDM Live [▨] or by clicking here.

Pending the release of a forthcoming foundational SDM policy, the time frames for CSW submission and SCSW approval of SDM tools will be as follows:

SDM Tool	Time Frames for CSW Completion in WebSDM	Time Frames for SCSW Electronic Approval in WebSDM	Examples of Supportive Documentation for SCSW Review
Hotline Tools Screening Decision & Response Priority	Before the end of the shift	Within twelve (12) business hours of submission for approval	CWS/CMS Referral, Screener Narrative (as applicable), SDM Decision Trees
Safety Assessment / Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Safety Assessment ❶	Within two (2) business days of initial face-to-face contact	Within twenty-four (24) business hours of submission for approval	ER Referral, all referral/case contacts (including collaterals), any collateral documentation (e.g., medical results, police reports), SDM Safety Plan (if any) ❷
Risk Assessment	Within thirty (30) calendar days ❹ of first face-to-face contact, but before closing the referral or promoting to a case	Within forty-eight (48) business hours of submission for approval (and within 30 calendar days ❹)	ER Referral, all referral/case contacts (including collaterals), CLETS/ LiveScan, FCI hit results, Investigation Narrative, any collateral documentation
Family Strengths & Needs Assessment (FSNA) ❸	Initial - Prior to Initial Case Plan\n\nUpdate/Review ❺\n• **Voluntary**: within 30 days prior to case plan;\n• **Court**: within 65 days prior to case plan	Within forty-eight (48) business hours of submission for approval and prior to approving case plan)	ER Referral, all referral/case contacts (including collaterals), CLETS/ LiveScan, FCI hit results, Investigation Narrative, any collateral documentation, Minute Orders (for court cases)
Risk Reassessment (for in-home cases) ❺	Court cases: No more than sixty-five (65) calendar days prior to case plan completion or case closure recommendation.\nVoluntary cases: No more than thirty (30) calendar days prior to case plan completion or case closure recommendation	Within forty-eight (48) business hours of submission for approval (and prior to approving court report/case plan)	Case contacts since last court hearing, Minute Orders (court cases), assessments (e.g., MAT, UFA, CANS, etc.), LiveScan/Rap Backs, any Safety Reassessments\n\nVFMs: Contacts, Initial Case Plan, service provider progress/compliance letters
Reunification Reassessment (for out-of-home cases) ❺	No more than sixty-five (65) calendar days prior to: case plan completion, reunification recommendation (i.e., HOP), or permanency plan change (sooner if there are new circumstances or new information that affects risk)	Within forty-eight (48) business hours of submission for approval (& prior to approving court report/case plan)	Case contacts since last court hearing, parental visitation, progress letters from service providers, Minute Orders, assessments (e.g., MAT, UFA, CANS, etc.)

❶ The SCP Safety Assessment tool is only used when the child resides in family-based care (e.g., RFHs, FFAs, approved NREFMs, emergency placements, SFHs, open-dependency LG homes, adoptive homes) and not for children residing in residential or institutional care (i.e., group homes, STRTPs, institutions, residential treatment facilities).
❷ SDM Safety Threats were revised in 11/2015. Refer to the current Safety Plan form, page 2 (revised 1/2018) for a list.
❸ The FSNA will eventually be replaced by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment.
❹ The Risk Assessment must be completed and approved within 30 calendar days.
❺ The Reassessment tools and FSNA are completed every six (6) months and correspond with the Case Plan and Court Report timeframes.

As reminder, since the introduction of SDM 3.0 in November 2015, staff have had the ability to access and complete SDM assessments remotely on smart phones or tablet devices via https://ca.sdmdata.org (an internet connection is necessary). In addition, in SDM Live's "! My Alerts" section, both CSWs and SCSWs can choose to receive daily email summary alerts notifying them of overdue, upcoming, or incomplete assessments, or assessments that are pending approval.