

# SDM® SAFETY ASSESSMENT

## Policy & Procedures Manual



**Kentucky Cabinet  
for Health and  
Family Services**

April 2024

## COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

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# SDM® SAFETY ASSESSMENT

Adult Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Intake ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Worker Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Assessment Was Completed With Adult: \_\_\_\_\_ SDM Assessment Input Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ADULT CANNOT BE ASSESSED

- Adult is deceased
- Adult declines assessment
- Failure to gain entry
- Unable to identify or locate adult
- Does not meet statutory definition of adult, abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- None of the above applies.

**IF ANY OF THE ABOVE APPLY, THE SAFETY ASSESSMENT IS COMPLETE.**

## SECTION 1. CONDITIONS AFFECTING SAFETY

Assess for each of the following conditions that may affect the adult's ability to protect themselves from the safety threats in Section 2. Select all that apply to the adult.

- 1. Adult is isolated or has a severely limited formal or informal support network
- 2. Indicators of diminished cognitive functioning (e.g., dementia, intellectual or developmental disabilities, delirium, brain injury), whether diagnosed or not
- 3. Indicators of significant medical disorder, whether diagnosed or not
- 4. Indicators of significant mental health disorder, whether diagnosed or not
- 5. Indicators of significant substance use disorder, whether diagnosed or not
- 6. Indicators of diminished physical functioning and/or dependence on another person for activities of daily living
- 7. Other condition is present. Describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. None of the above applies.

## SECTION 2. SAFETY THREATS

Assess for each of the following factors that, if present, place the adult in imminent danger of injury, death, or loss of resources. Select all that apply to the adult.

- 1. Access to the adult is impeded, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 2. The adult's physical living conditions are hazardous, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 3. The adult's immediate needs for medical or mental health care are not met, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 4. The adult experienced a serious physical injury or threat as a result of abuse, neglect, or self-neglect, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 5. The adult's immediate needs for food/water, clothing, personal care, or supervision are not met, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 6. The adult's financial resources are being exploited.
  - 7. The adult is subject to violence in their living environment, including domestic violence, and the adult's safety is of current concern.
  - 8. Other current safety threat is present. Describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above applies. The adult is not in current danger. Continue to Section 4.**

**IF ANY SAFETY THREATS ARE SELECTED, CONTINUE TO SECTION 3.**

## SECTION 3. SAFETY INTERVENTIONS

Select the safety intervention types recommended to address the identified safety threats. *This section must be completed if any safety threats were identified in Section 2.*

### PART A. SAFETY NETWORK INVOLVEMENT

Other than the adult, has anyone been identified who is willing to participate in a safety intervention?

- Yes. Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- No

**PART B. SAFETY INTERVENTIONS**

SAFETY INTERVENTION	INTERVENTION OFFERED	ADULT ACCEPTED
1. Action by informal supports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Action by formal supports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. APS direct provision of services (do not include the investigation or assessment itself)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Legal action	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable
5. Out-of-home placement or alternative living plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Alleged perpetrator of abuse or neglect will not have physical access to the adult or the adult's resources (voluntarily)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Other intervention (describe):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Are all selected safety threats mitigated by accepted intervention(s)?**     Yes     No

**SECTION 4. SAFETY DECISION**

The safety decision is determined based on whether safety threats are identified and whether the adult accepts recommended interventions and agrees to participate in a safety plan to mitigate the identified safety threats. Select the applicable safety decision from the list below.

- Safe:** No safety threats are selected in Section 2.
- Safe with a plan:** Safety threats are selected in Section 2, and the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) agrees to participate in a safety plan based on acceptance of one or more recommended safety interventions to sufficiently mitigate all safety threats.
- Unsafe:** Safety threats are selected in Section 2, and these safety threats cannot be sufficiently mitigated OR the adult (or caretaker, if applicable) does not agree to the intervention plan.  
*Supervisory approval is required.*

**Additional information pertinent to the safety assessment:**

**SSW:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FSOS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

# SDM SAFETY ASSESSMENT DEFINITIONS

## ADULT CANNOT BE ASSESSED

### ADULT IS DECEASED

The adult died prior to the social services worker (SSW) making contact. The SSW will proceed with the investigation but will not complete the safety assessment.

### ADULT DECLINES ASSESSMENT

The adult refused to meet with the SSW and/or met with the SSW but declined assessment.

### FAILURE TO GAIN ENTRY

The adult, caretaker, or facility staff does not allow the SSW to enter the premises. The SSW may seek assistance from law enforcement.

### UNABLE TO IDENTIFY OR LOCATE ADULT

The SSW has made legitimate attempts to identify or locate the adult but was unable to do so. Legitimate attempts may include but are not limited to:

- Multiple attempts to contact the adult face to face;
- Phone calls to the adult;
- Phone calls to the referral source;
- Letters sent to the adult;
- Search of local family support records and/or LexisNexis to look for additional addresses;
- Check at local hospitals and/or jails; and
- Attempt to find forwarding addresses for the adult.

### DOES NOT MEET STATUTORY DEFINITION OF ADULT, ABUSE, NEGLECT, OR EXPLOITATION

Upon contact with the report victim, the individual does not meet statutory definition of adult, abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

## **SECTION 1. CONDITIONS AFFECTING SAFETY**

### **1. ADULT IS ISOLATED OR HAS A SEVERELY LIMITED FORMAL OR INFORMAL SUPPORT NETWORK.**

The adult may have no friends, family members, or community resources, or the adult may be geographically isolated from community resources or from family or friends on whom they can rely for assistance. Also select this item if the adult's family, friends, or community resources are unwilling or unable to provide any social support, if the adult is unwilling or unable to accept any support, or if the support person poses a threat to the adult.

### **2. INDICATORS OF DIMINISHED COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING (E.G., DEMENTIA, INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, DELIRIUM, BRAIN INJURY), WHETHER DIAGNOSED OR NOT**

The adult demonstrates behaviors or displays symptoms that may suggest problems with cognitive functioning. Examples include but are not limited to inability to understand the negative impact of their choices; and problems with reasoning, orientation, thought process, recall of recent events, or capacity for judgment. This item may be selected based on a diagnosis or on observed behaviors.

### **3. INDICATORS OF SIGNIFICANT MEDICAL DISORDER, WHETHER DIAGNOSED OR NOT**

The adult exhibits symptoms and/or behaviors that suggest the presence of a significant medical disorder, generally indicated by the chronicity of the condition. For acute injuries, consider whether "Diminished physical functioning and/or dependence on another person for activities of daily living" may be more appropriate for selection.

Examples of medical disorders include but are not limited to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, failure to thrive, congestive heart failure, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, urinary tract infection, renal disease or failure, sepsis, and any other unmanaged medical disorders that interfere with daily functioning.

### **4. INDICATORS OF SIGNIFICANT MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER, WHETHER DIAGNOSED OR NOT**

The adult exhibits symptoms or behaviors that suggest the presence of a significant mental health disorder. Examples of mental health symptoms and behaviors include but are not limited to sensory hallucinations or delusions; extreme apathy, hopelessness, or loss of interest in normal daily activities; self-injurious behavior; or aggressive behavior toward others.



## **5. INDICATORS OF SIGNIFICANT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER, WHETHER DIAGNOSED OR NOT**

The adult exhibits symptoms or behaviors that suggest the presence of a significant substance use disorder. A significant substance abuse disorder is one that interferes with daily functioning. This includes the abuse of alcohol or abuse of illicit, prescription, over-the-counter, or other drugs.

## **6. INDICATORS OF DIMINISHED PHYSICAL FUNCTIONING AND/OR DEPENDENCE ON ANOTHER PERSON FOR ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING**

The adult has difficulty with use of limbs and requires a walker, wheelchair, transfer assistance, or hands-on assistance in order to be ambulatory; or the adult has diminished vision or hearing.

OR

The adult requires assistance with activities of daily living. This includes but is not limited to communication with others for provision of food, shelter, transportation, bathing, dressing, and medical care. For example, the adult may receive care from a public or private agency.

## **7. OTHER CONDITION IS PRESENT.**

The adult has another condition affecting safety not listed above.

## **8. NONE OF THE ABOVE APPLIES.**

## **SECTION 2. SAFETY THREATS**

Circumstances suggest there is a current threat to the adult's health or physical safety, and it places the adult in imminent danger of injury, death, or loss of resources. Select all that apply to the adult.

### **1. ACCESS TO THE ADULT IS IMPEDED, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

The SSW is unable to assess the situation due to the adult or alleged perpetrator's efforts to restrict access or information, and the adult's safety is of current concern. Examples may include but are not limited to the following.

- Access to the home or adult is denied under suspicious explanations.
- The alleged perpetrator does not allow the adult to be interviewed alone.
- The caretaker restricts the adult's access to family, friends, or service providers.

- The caretaker exerts other forms of undue influence to coach or coerce the adult in an effort to hinder the assessment process.

## **2. THE ADULT'S PHYSICAL LIVING CONDITIONS ARE HAZARDOUS, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

A hazardous living situation or physical environment jeopardizes the minimum health and safety of the adult. Examples may include but are not limited to the following.

- Lack of access to working utilities or plumbing
- Lack of access to working smoke or carbon monoxide detectors
- Significant damage to the structure of the home or residence
- Environmental toxins, which could include methamphetamine production in the home, presence of feces and urine, etc.
- A current or impending lack of shelter jeopardizes health or safety.
- The presence of animals, pests, or vermin that pose an imminent danger to the adult's health, safety, or well-being
- Hoarding conditions such as impassable walkways or excessive garbage

## **3. THE ADULT'S IMMEDIATE NEEDS FOR MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CARE ARE NOT MET, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

Unmet medical or mental health care jeopardizes the minimum health and safety of the adult. Examples may include but not limited to the following.

- The adult is demonstrating immediate, chronic, and/or dangerous medical or mental health condition(s).
- The adult is experiencing severe symptoms related to substance use, including alcohol.
- The adult is agitated and/or experiencing delusions and is threatening to others.
- The adult is suicidal or expressing intent to self-harm, and no protective action has been taken.

## **4. THE ADULT EXPERIENCED A SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY OR THREAT AS A RESULT OF ABUSE, NEGLECT, OR SELF-NEGLECT, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

The adult experienced a serious injury or serious threat to their life or safety, whether from abuse or neglect. Examples may include but are not limited to the following.

- Bone fractures, bruises, dislocations, sprains, internal injuries, poisoning, burns, scalds, severe pressure sores, or severe cuts. This does not include minor injuries.

- Evidence suggests sexual abuse or act of sexual violence against the adult.
- Severe neglect incident resulting in serious injury (e.g., pressure sores, burns, scalds, broken bones).
- Verbal or physical threat by another person to cause physical harm to or retaliate against the adult.
- Use of unauthorized physical or chemical restraints.

## **5. THE ADULT'S IMMEDIATE NEEDS FOR FOOD/WATER, CLOTHING, PERSONAL CARE, OR SUPERVISION ARE NOT MET, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

The adult's basic needs are not met, jeopardizing the adult's minimum health or safety. Examples may include but are not limited to the following.

- *Food/water:* The adult's minimal nutritional needs are not met, resulting in danger to the adult's health and/or safety, or the adult appears malnourished as a result of inadequate care.
- *Clothing:* The adult is without clothing appropriate for the weather conditions.
- *Personal care/hygiene:* The adult has unmet personal care/hygiene needs, resulting in injury, chronic condition, or concerns such as skin breakdown or chronic urinary tract infections.
- *Supervision:* The adult has inadequate supervision and conditions of the adult make them subject to dangerous and/or illegal activities.

## **6. THE ADULT'S FINANCIAL RESOURCES ARE BEING EXPLOITED.**

The adult's personal resources—including but not limited to funds, assets, or property—are being wrongfully used, mismanaged, or misappropriated. Examples may include but are not limited to the following.

- Misusing or stealing the adult's money or possessions (in home or alternative care setting)
- Not executing the duties of conservatorship, fiduciary, power of attorney, or trustee, or doing so improperly
- Persuading the adult to change their will to secure a share of their estate
- Persuading the adult to transfer ownership of a house or account.

## **7. THE ADULT IS SUBJECT TO VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIVING ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND THE ADULT'S SAFETY IS OF CURRENT CONCERN.**

Violence exists in the living environment and is threatening to the adult's life or safety. Examples may include the following.

- Injuries to the adult resulting from domestic violence
- Use of weapons to threaten or intimidate the adult

- Property damage as a result of violent incidents
- Adult is fearful of others in the home.

## **8. OTHER CURRENT SAFETY THREAT IS PRESENT.**

This includes any condition that poses a current threat to life or safety not covered in the previous items.

## **NONE OF THE ABOVE APPLIES. THE ADULT IS NOT IN CURRENT DANGER. CONTINUE TO SECTION 4.**

No conditions covered in items 1 through 7 are present. Continue to Section 4, Safety Decision.

## **SECTION 3. SAFETY INTERVENTIONS**

Safety interventions are actions recommended specifically to mitigate any identified safety threats and should address immediate considerations for safety. Select all relevant recommended interventions, and then indicate whether the adult (and natural supports, if applicable) accepts the intervention.

### **PART A. SAFETY NETWORK INVOLVEMENT**

#### **Other than the adult, has anyone been identified who is willing to participate in a safety intervention?**

An adult has the right to choose who will be involved in their safety interventions. Select “Yes” if the adult has a person who will engage in the planning process and be included in the safety intervention to the extent of accepting interventions on behalf of the adult. Select “No” if the adult does not have an additional caretaker or other person who will be participating in the safety plan.

### **PART B. SAFETY INTERVENTIONS**

#### **1. Action by informal supports**

This refers to using extended family members, neighbors, church members, or other people to mitigate safety concerns. Examples include but are not limited to engaging a family member, neighbor, and/or friend to provide assistance, shelter, or care to the adult.

## **2. Action by formal supports**

This includes involving a local agency in activities to address safety concerns (e.g., immediate mental or medical health crisis team response or evaluation; welfare check; access to emergency food, shelter, and medication; utility assistance; repair services; animal control). This does not include community or governmental employees providing information for the investigation itself.

## **3. APS direct provision of services (do not include the investigation or assessment itself)**

This refers to actions taken by the investigative SSW or other adult protective services (APS) staff that specifically address one or more safety threats. This includes but is not limited to helping the adult enroll in Medicaid or other government programs, obtaining groceries or other needed goods for the adult, scheduling doctor's appointments, arranging transportation for the adult, making referrals or providing resources to address identified concerns, or requesting a legal conference. Do not include activities of the investigation itself, including interviewing adults or contacts.

## **4. Legal action**

Law enforcement, APS, another agency, or another person will take legal action (e.g., emergency guardianship or conservatorship, victims' services, court-ordered mental health evaluation, eviction advocacy and prevention) to ensure the adult's safety.

## **5. Out-of-home placement or alternative living plan**

The adult will be placed in a licensed care facility, hospital, crisis facility, or other alternative care facility including nursing home.

OR

The adult will be relocated. Relocation may include the adult agreeing to stay with a friend or relative, at a shelter, or at a respite care facility; or adult being assisted in moving to a safe environment.

## **6. Alleged perpetrator of abuse or neglect will not have physical access to the adult or the adult's resources (voluntarily)**

Absent legal action, the alleged perpetrator voluntarily agrees to not be at the home or not have any physical access to the adult or their financial and other resources. (Determine specified amount of time if needed.)

## **7. Other intervention (describe)**

The adult, family, friend, acquaintance, or investigative SSW identified a unique intervention for an identified safety concern that does not fit within items 1 through 6.

## **SECTION 4. SAFETY DECISION**

The safety decision is determined based on whether safety threats were identified and whether the adult accepts recommended interventions and agrees to participate in a safety plan to mitigate the identified safety threat. Select the applicable safety decision.

### **SAFE**

No safety threats are selected in Section 2.

### **SAFE WITH A PLAN**

Safety threats are selected in Section 2, and the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) agrees to participate in a safety plan based on acceptance of one or more recommended safety interventions to sufficiently mitigate all safety threats.

### **UNSAFE**

Safety threats are selected in Section 2, and these safety threats cannot be sufficiently mitigated; OR the adult (or caretaker, if applicable) does not agree to intervention plan. *Supervisory approval is required.*

# SDM SAFETY ASSESSMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of the Structured Decision Making® (SDM) safety assessment is to (1) help assess whether the adult is in imminent danger; and (2) determine what interventions should be initiated or maintained to provide appropriate protection.

**Safety versus risk assessment:** It is important to keep in mind the difference between safety and risk when completing this tool. A safety assessment assesses the adult's *immediate* danger and the interventions currently needed to protect the adult. In contrast, a risk assessment looks at the likelihood of *future* system involvement related to maltreatment or self-neglect.

## WHICH CASES

All in-person investigations. This includes new allegations received on open cases. A new safety assessment is required anytime *there is a change in circumstances that may affect the adult's safety*.

## WHO

The investigative SSW who completes the face-to-face contact with the adult.

## WHEN

### INITIAL

The safety assessment process, which includes considering the safety threats and possible interventions, is completed before leaving the adult's living environment. The SDM safety assessment process should be completed before leaving the home. The SDM safety assessment tool should be completed in TWIST within five business days following the investigative SSW's first face-to-face contact with the adult.

### REASSESSMENT

If one or more safety threats emerge at any point during the investigation, the investigative SSW should complete a new safety assessment and add a new row to the safety plan to reflect changes to the plan. A safety reassessment is required only if there is a change in safety circumstances or there are new allegations.

## DECISION

This information guides the decision about whether the adult is:

- **Safe** in the current environment;
- **Safe with a plan** for safety in place; or
- **Unsafe** because the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) refuses recommended interventions or cannot indicate a preference to accept services.

A safety plan will be offered to the adult and the caretaker even if they decide to refuse it. For cases where the safety decision is “unsafe,” consider an emergency intervention such as calling law enforcement, 911, or emergency mental health services.



# SDM SAFETY ASSESSMENT COMPLETION INSTRUCTIONS

Consistent use of the safety assessment ensures that the critical factors affecting an adult's immediate safety are assessed during the initial contact.

It is important to become familiar with the items on the safety assessment and the accompanying definitions. Once familiar with the assessment items, the investigative SSW should conduct initial contact(s) with the adult and other relevant individuals using good social work practices (e.g., engagement skills, interviewing techniques, strengths-based approaches) to collect information about the adult's situation and circumstances related to the alleged maltreatment or self-neglect. Make reasonable efforts to elicit information that is pertinent to the assessment on all safety threats.

The safety assessment consists of the following sections.

## SECTION 1. CONDITIONS AFFECTING SAFETY

Indicate whether any conditions affecting the adult's safety are present. Consider these conditions when reviewing safety threats. These conditions provide a context when assessing for safety. The presence of a condition does not automatically mean the adult is unsafe.

## SECTION 2. SAFETY THREATS

This list of critical factors must be assessed in every investigation. They describe conditions that, if present, place the adult in imminent danger of injury, death, or loss of resources.

Review the first seven safety threats and make reasonable efforts to obtain information necessary to assess each item. If any safety threats are present, select the corresponding box.

If circumstances that pose imminent danger to the adult are not described by one of the existing items, select item 8, "Other safety threat is present." A brief description must be provided.

Use the item definitions for consistency and reliability of assessment completion.

## SECTION 3. SAFETY INTERVENTIONS

Complete this section only if one or more safety threats are identified in Section 2. This section lists interventions that the investigative SSW may recommend to address safety threats. Select all

interventions recommended. More than one intervention type may be recommended per safety threat. If one intervention will address multiple safety threats, indicate this in the case plan. When selecting actions for recommendation, begin with the least restrictive interventions that can effectively mitigate safety threats.

### **OTHER THAN THE ADULT, HAS ANYONE BEEN IDENTIFIED WHO IS WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN A SAFETY INTERVENTION?**

Select "Yes" if the adult has a person who will engage in the planning process and be included in the safety intervention to the extent of accepting interventions on behalf of the adult. Select "No" if the adult does not have an additional caretaker or other person who will be participating in the safety plan.

### **ARE ALL SELECTED SAFETY THREATS MITIGATED BY ACCEPTED INTERVENTION(S)?**

Safety interventions are recommended with the intent to mitigate identified safety threats; however, a recommended intervention is not necessarily an adult-accepted intervention.

This question should be answered any time a safety threat is selected in the previous section.

Select "Yes" if the selected recommended safety intervention(s) was accepted by the adult and/or caretaker AND mitigates all identified safety threats. If this response is "Yes," then the safety decision is "safe with a plan."

Select "No" if the selected recommended safety intervention(s) was not accepted by the adult and/or caretaker OR does not mitigate all identified safety threats OR if at least one safety threat is selected and no interventions are selected. If the response is "No," then the safety decision is "Unsafe."

## **SECTION 4. SAFETY DECISION**

The safety decision is determined based on whether safety threats were identified and whether the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) accepts recommended interventions and agrees to participate in a safety plan to mitigate the identified safety threats. Three safety decisions are possible.

### **SAFE**

No safety threats are identified at this time. Based on current information available, the adult is not likely to be in immediate danger of serious harm. *A safety plan is not required.*

## **SAFE WITH A PLAN**

One or more safety threats are present. Safety interventions have been recommended, and the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) accepts necessary services to mitigate safety concerns. *A safety plan is required.*

A physical safety plan (on paper) will be recommended to be completed and left with the adult if it is safe and possible to do so. A copy of that plan will be documented in TWIST upon completion of the safety assessment.

## **UNSAFE**

One or more safety threats are present. Safety interventions have been recommended, but the adult (and caretaker, if applicable) refuses necessary services to mitigate safety concerns or cannot indicate a preference to accept services or not. The adult will likely be in danger of immediate and/or serious harm.

*A safety plan must be offered to the adult and the caretaker. Refusals are noted in the investigation narrative.* If the adult is assessed as unsafe, supervisory review is required. If the adult has capacity, the supervisor will decide if diligent effort is necessary; if adult does not have capacity, the supervisor will decide if legal effort is necessary.

Note: Consider an emergency intervention, such as calling law enforcement, 911, or emergency mental health services.

Provide additional information pertinent to the safety assessment in the space provided.