

## iLinc Component C: Overview of Risk

Purpose	To reinforce participants' understanding of risk and to enable them to promote the assessment of risk in child welfare cases.
Rationale	Child welfare supervisors have the responsibility of supporting accurate and timely risk assessment. It is only through thorough and accurate assessments of risk that workers can understand how their clients can effect lasting change in behaviors that cause harm to their children, thereby reducing risk of harm. In order to use the Performance Management Cycle to supervise risk assessments, supervisors must have knowledge of what risk is and how to accurately assess risk in child welfare cases.
Learning objectives	<p>Participants will be able to:</p> <p><i>Cognitive</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• define risk</li> <li>• differentiate between safety and risk;</li> <li>• describe the use of the Risk Assessment Profile in protective cases</li> <li>• describe the use of the Strengths, Needs, and Risk Scales in assessing risk and family functioning</li> </ul> <p><i>Affective</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul> <p><i>Operative</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>
Materials	Handouts, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, RISK ASSESSMENT; PowerPoint slides, OVERVIEW OF RISK (SLIDE #20), RESOURCES (SLIDE #21), PURPOSE (SLIDE #22), DEFINITION OF RISK(SLIDE #23), RISK ASSESSMENT IS... (SLIDE #24), RISK ASSESSMENT IS A PROCESS IN WHICH THE CASEWORKER... (SLIDE #25), RISK ASSESSMENT IS A PROCESS IN WHICH THE CASEWORKER... CONTINUED (SLIDE #26), RISK ASSESSMENT PROFILE (SLIDE #27), RISK RATINGS (SLIDE #28), STRENGTHS, NEEDS, AND RISK SCALES... (SLIDE #29), THE END ... (SLIDE #30).

Time        60 minutes.

## Learning Process

Introduction

Display PowerPoint slide #20: OVERVIEW OF RISK.

State: “Welcome to the iLinc session on the topic of Risk.”

***Ancillary instruction:***

- Make sure all participants are still connected and that headsets and microphones are working properly.
- Ask if all participants can see the PowerPoint slide on the powerboard being displayed. Ask them to respond with a “yes” or “no” by using the feedback area on their palette. If a participant answers “no,” click the circled arrows icon on the upper right corner of the window and ask the question again.

Display PowerPoint slide #21: RESOURCES.

***Ancillary instruction:*** Explain that they should have the handouts, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, which helps them understand what we hope to accomplish and RISK ASSESSMENT, which we will discuss during the training session.

Display PowerPoint slide #22: PURPOSE.

Explain:

- One of your many responsibilities as a child welfare supervisor is to support and promote accurate and timely risk assessments. By doing this, your workers better understand how their families can make lasting changes that reduce the risk of future abuse and maltreatment.
- We recognize that most of you already have an understanding of what risk is and its importance in child welfare practice in New York State.
- This training session informs you on what caseworkers are taught about risk assessment, gets us all on the same page regarding current definitions and language used in New York State child welfare practice and clarifies or confirms that you are aware of the most current policy regarding assessment of risk in child welfare cases.
- The training is designed to *reinforce* your understanding of risk and support you in promoting accurate risk assessments in child welfare cases that you supervise.

- In this session we are offering a foundation for examining the supervision of casework related to assessing risk. Classroom sessions that follow will build on this foundation.

The definition of risk in child welfare cases

Sate: “Let’s begin by defining risk.”

**Suggestion:** Before displaying PowerPoint slide #23, ask participants if anyone can give the definition of risk.

**Ancillary instruction:** Invite participants to use the hand-raising tool if they wish to give the answer.

Display PowerPoint slide #23: DEFINITION OF RISK.

Explain:

- Risk is “the likelihood that a child may be abused or maltreated in the future.”
- The key word in this definition is *likelihood*.
- Risk is a part of daily life for everyone, but it can be measured along a continuum from low to very high.

**Example:**

- A person driving to work is at risk of being in a car accident. However, the risk rises when the person is texting on their cell phone or speeding.
- A child whose parent drinks to excess and who has a history of being abused as a child themselves, is more likely to be harmed by his parent than a child whose parent uses non-violent forms of discipline and who doesn’t drink to excess.
- In child welfare practice, caseworkers, with supervisory support and monitoring, continuously gather information to make the decision, “Is there risk of harm?”
- We use the Risk Assessment Profile as the tool that analyzes the information that has been gathered to determine where on the continuum risk is in a family.
- *All* workers, regardless of their role in the agency (e.g. foster care, preventive, CPS) or whether they are working on protective or nonprotective cases are charged with the responsibility to prevent abuse and maltreatment from occurring. Therefore it is very important that caseworkers assess for the conditions and behaviors that can result in

abuse or maltreatment in *all* families.

Risk assessment in New  
York State

Display the PowerPoint slide #24, RISK ASSESSMENT IS....

State: “Regulation 18 NYCRR428.2 (h) states, ‘Risk assessment is a process of information gathering and analysis that examines the interrelatedness of risk elements affecting family functioning and documents them in the form, manner, and time prescribed by OCFS.’”

Display the PowerPoint slide #25, RISK ASSESSMENT IS A PROCESS IN WHICH THE CASEWORKER..., and refer participants to the corresponding handout, RISK ASSESSMENT.

Explain:

- The manner OCFS prescribes for this process is that a caseworker:
  - ✓ gathers information on the presence or absence of a set of circumstances and behaviors in the parent/caretaker’s household(s), i.e. the presence or absence of risk elements.
 

*Comment:* It is not an evaluative judgment of the impact each element may have on the overall risk of the family.
  - ✓ uses the CONNECTIONS system to calculate a risk rating as part of documentation requirements of CPS, foster care, and preventive services staff working with families who are receiving protective services. This risk rating identifies the likelihood of future abuse or maltreatment in the parent/caretaker’s household.
 

*Ancillary instruction:* Display the PowerPoint slide #26, RISK ASSESSMENT IS A PROCESS IN WHICH THE CASEWORKER (CONTINUED)....
  - ✓ determines the ongoing need for services to the family, based upon the risk rating and other circumstances, that will reduce the likelihood of future abuse or maltreatment of the child(ren).
  - ✓ develops a service plan that targets the respective behaviors or circumstances, in the parent/caretaker’s household(s), which are identified as contributing to the risk of future abuse or maltreatment (risk elements).

- Risk assessment is an important process that assists caseworkers in making these decisions:
  - ✓ whether to open a case for services
  - ✓ whether to keep a case open for services
  - ✓ when to return a child from foster care to his/her home
 

*Ancillary instruction:* Remind participants that safety also plays a very important part in the decision to return a child to his or her parent(s) and/or caretaker(s) care and custody.
  - ✓ whether it is likely that a parent will be able to care for his/her child in the future
  - ✓ if a goal of return home might need to be changed to place the child for adoption
 

*Ancillary instruction:* Tell participants that the risk rating, if still high, is a piece of information to consider when looking at goal achievement within a child's time frame.
- The risk assessment process is what we use to determine which families are most in need of child welfare services.
- The risk assessment process is part of the assessment process that assists all caseworkers in determining how to serve a family. Risk assessment helps caseworkers figure out what conditions, circumstances, and behaviors contribute to the risk of future abuse/maltreatment. Services that target these conditions, circumstances and behaviors can then be identified and provided.
- Keep in mind, the full assessment process; safety, abuse/maltreatment, and risk assessment informs service planning.
- Let's now turn our attention to the tool we use to assess risk, the Risk Assessment Profile (RAP).

Risk Assessment Profile  
(RAP)

Display PowerPoint slide #27: RISK ASSESSMENT PROFILE.

State:

- The RAP consists of 15 research-based risk elements that have been statistically determined to influence the likelihood that a child will be abused or maltreated in the future and to determine if a family service case should be opened.

- Each element has an assigned numerical weight based on research findings.
- Therefore, the RAP helps workers identify some major contributing factors that can indicate a likelihood of repeated maltreatment, such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence and mental illness.
- The profile also focuses attention on some other conditions that underlie abuse/maltreatment, such as caretaker perception of the child and perception of the abuse/maltreatment.

**Suggestion:** Before displaying PowerPoint slide #28, ask participants if anyone is willing to state the four levels of risk the RAP identifies.

**Ancillary instruction:** Invite participants to use the hand-raising tool if they wish to give the answer.

Display PowerPoint slide #28: RISK RATINGS.

- There are four levels of risk: low, moderate, high, and very high.
- These are referred to as the risk rating and are based on the risk *score* that is automatically calculated in CONNECTIONS.
- The score is based on the identified presence or absence of risk elements as well as the mitigating strengths and resources in the family.
- In families where the risk level/rating calculation is high or very high, services are considered to be warranted. Services are warranted because the RAP has identified the major contributing factors of the child's abuse/maltreatment and these must be addressed in order for change to occur. If services are not being provided after a high or very high risk rating has been determined, workers must justify the reason for this.

**Example:** The family moved and their whereabouts are unknown. Also, services were being provided during the CPS investigation and the issues causing the high or very-high risk level were resolved at that time.

Inquire: "What support do your workers need most often from you in regards to using the RAP?"

*Ancillary instruction:*

Invite participants to use the hand-raising tool if they wish to give the answer.

Encourage answers from CPS supervisors in regards to using the initial RAP as well as foster care and preventive supervisors regarding their workers using the information in the initial RAP they received from CPS as well as using the comprehensive/reassessment RAP.

Strengths, Needs, and  
Risk Scales

Display PowerPoint slide #29: STRENGTHS, NEEDS AND RISK SCALES....

State:

- In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding about the family, workers need to assess more than risk elements. They need to assess individual and family functioning, including the strengths and needs of all of the family members.
- They gather information in a variety of domains.
- The areas to be explored with families during casework contacts are arranged in scales known as the Strengths, Needs, and Risk Scales.
- They are designed to help workers describe how the areas of family functioning generally accepted by the child welfare field as being relevant to our work—children’s well-being and family needs—look in each particular family. Although these scales are an excellent guide, they are not all-inclusive.
- The scales help workers organize, document and convey to you and others working with the family their assessment of individual and family functioning.
- They are used in both protective and non-protective cases since an understanding of family functioning is critical for both types of cases.
- For each item on the scales, there is a range of options that the worker will use to identify the current strengths or needs for the individual or family relative to each scale.
- The SNR scales also prompt workers to look deeper at what creates and/or sustains behaviors and conditions evident in



the family, as well as what contributes to risk or mitigates risk.

- Therefore, in order to fully benefit from this assessment protocol, it is essential to dig deeper than the identified anchor. In other words, the Strengths, Needs, and Risk Scales show us where to look, not what to see.

**Suggestion:** Ask: “How have the SNR scales helped your workers identify strengths and needs in families?”

**Ancillary instruction:** Tell participants to use the hand-raising tool to respond to the question.

Inquire:

- What support do your workers need most often from you in regards to using the Strengths, Needs and Risk Scales?

**Ancillary instruction:** Invite participants to use the hand-raising tool if they wish to give the answer.

- How do you explain the difference between safety and risk to workers who struggle to differentiate them?

**Ancillary instruction:** Invite participants to use the hand-raising tool if they wish to give the answer.

**Comment:** The most significant difference is that safety is related to the presence of danger right now or lurking just around the corner whereas risk is related to the likelihood of abuse or maltreatment occurring or reoccurring in the future.

- With safety, child welfare workers must respond to any immediate or impending danger of serious harm by implementing interventions with the family that protect the child from the dangerous situation by controlling the conditions and/or behaviors causing the child to be in immediate or impending danger of serious harm.
- With risk, workers and families engage in risk-reduction activities that are *rehabilitative* and *reduce* the variables causing risk which have been identified using the RAP and Strengths, Needs and Risk scales. These interventions are change promoting/ risk-reduction activities.

**Comment:** A child may be considered to be safe from immediate or impending danger of serious harm but still at risk for future abuse and maltreatment as well as at risk of placement and/or return to placement.

Summary points

Conclude:

- Child welfare work is frequently driven by the urgent needs of families and children. Some workers may find it challenging to maintain a focus on assessing needs, strengths, underlying conditions, and contributing factors in the crunch of daily tasks.
- The RAP and the Strengths, Needs, and Risk Scales are concrete tools that help you supervise your workers as they approach the assessment of risk and family functioning.

Display PowerPoint slide #30: THE END.

# Learning Objectives

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

## Cognitive

- define risk;
- differentiate between safety and risk;
- describe the use of the Risk Assessment Profile in protective cases;
- describe the use of the Strengths, Needs, and Risk Scales in assessing risk and family functioning;

## Affective

- N/A

## Operative

- N/A

## Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a process in which the caseworker:

- gathers information on the presence or absence of a set of circumstances and behaviors in the parent/caretaker's household(s). Note: these circumstances or behaviors are known as "risk elements."
- uses the CONNECTIONS system to calculate a risk rating as part of documentation requirements of CPS, foster care, and preventive services staff working with families who are receiving protective services. This risk rating identifies the likelihood of future abuse or maltreatment in the parent/caretaker's household.
- determines the on-going need for services to the family, based upon the risk rating and other circumstances, that will reduce the likelihood of future abuse or maltreatment of the child(ren).
- develops a service plan that targets the respective behaviors or circumstances, in the parent/caretaker's household(s), identified as contributing to the risk of future abuse or maltreatment (risk elements).