



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: COLLABORATING WITH FAMILIES OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

FEBRUARY 2025 CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE AND THE CHILD WELFARE EXPERIENCE

Why Our Topic for 2025 is Important

Compared to older children, national data reveals that the child welfare system is more likely to identify young children, especially infants under the age of 1, as victims of abuse or neglect and young children are more likely to be placed outside of the home than older children.

Wisconsin's number trend similar, and higher in some areas, than the national average. In WI, child maltreatment is almost **4 times** more likely to be identified for males aged 0-3 than 12-16. In 2022 the number of substantiated maltreatment allegations for ages 0 to 7 was 2,309. That number is **51% higher** than substantiated maltreatment for children ages 12-16+ (exact number is 1,180).

Assessment of Children Birth to Five

Children in this age category are automatically vulnerable per Wisconsin Safety Intervention Standards, however, not everyone understands why that policy exists. From birth to 5, a child's brain grows to 90% its full development. Part of this is genetics but the other part is quality of child's experiences.

Assessment, and the potential of CPS involvement at this stage of life, requires an understanding of how both nature and nurture shapes our understanding of safety. Family centered practice combines using our knowledge of development and parenting practices to ascertain parental protective capacities.

This age category requires specific knowledge and skill from Child Welfare Professionals. Without the ability to obtain relevant and sufficient information from the child verbally, the professional must rely on observations of behaviors, reactions and understand each child's developmental stage in terms of growth, cognitions and social/emotional milestones.

Assessment of parents with children in this category requires an understanding of parental protective capacities that match the child's individual needs and an ability to adapt with the quickly changing needs of small children.

Professional Development

Children from birth to age 5 are highly dependent on their parents/caregivers to meet their basic needs. In addition, they are extremely vulnerable to their surrounding environment. The 2025 learning collaborative series will expand knowledge in these areas, and more, to increase awareness of how this age category presents unique challenges in assessment and safety planning that requires special attention.



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Reflection on Content

**How can bias play a factor in assessment of children from birth to five years of age?
How do we remain objective in our assessment to discern between what children must
have for safety rather than what we think they should have?**

Action Item

**When assessing or safety planning for a child between the ages of 0 and 5, consider
your list of questions to ensure there is connection between the child's individual
developmental stage and how you will speak with parents/caregivers on their
capacities to meet those needs.**