**Pre-Service Module: Initial Assessment**

**Section 1: Introduction to Initial Assessment**

**Section Learning Objectives**

By the end of Section 1: Introduction to Initial Assessment, child welfare professionals will be able to:

* List the individuals who must be interviewed for an initial assessment
* Recognize the categories of information that must be gathered
* Describe how to make safety, maltreatment, and maltreater determinations
* Explain how to comply with the requirements of the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act
* Explain the final steps of why and how a case moves to case closure or opens in Ongoing Services

**Section Themes and Key Points**

Below is a summary of the themes and key points covered in this section. This summary is intended to remind learners of the key learning points addressed and assist supervisors / coaches in understanding what was covered in order for them to guide and support the application of learning for new child welfare professionals related to this section.

1. This section emphasizes that an Initial Assessment should be conducted “with” families, not “to” families in a collaborative manner that includes respect, honesty, equity, self-determination, and transparent communication. Balancing the roles of both a helper and a person with authority are also addressed.
2. This section stresses that decision-making and critical thinking are extremely important during the Initial Assessment process and are guided by statutes and standards. Specifically, it addresses:

* The 4 types of reports that can come to the agency: CPS Report, Child Welfare Services, Child Required Services, Youth Justice Referral.
* The 3 types of CPS reports: Primary Assessment, Secondary Assessment, and Non-Caregiver Assessment.
* The response time for when a child welfare professional must have initial face-to-face contact with the alleged victim and/or parents and assess the threats to a child’s safety. The four response times outlined in the Standards are reviewed.
* The face-to-face contact requirements for an initial assessment.
* The requirements of the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA) at Initial Assessment, including asking all families about American Indian heritage and the additional considerations to keep in mind when implementing a Protective Plan with American Indian families.
* The requirements to see the home, contact non-custodial parents (if possible), and gather information from collateral contacts during the assessment process.
* The seven categories of information that must be gathered for a thorough assessment and why they are critical to understanding and making decisions related to child safety.
* The circumstances when children may be unsafe or in need of services.
* A description on how maltreatment and maltreater determinations are made.
* An explanation of the final steps of the 60-day Initial Assessment period and why and how a case moves to case closure or opens in Ongoing Services.

1. This section outlines the major decisions that are made at Initial Assessment:

* Present and Impending Danger Threats
* A safety determination of whether a child is safe or unsafe
* Maltreatment Determination
* If applicable, a Maltreater Determination

**On-the-Job Application Activities**

Listed in this section are optional transfer of training activities to support the learner in applying the knowledge acquired during the Initial Assessment Pre-Service Module to their CPS roles and responsibilities.

These three activities are optional and are provided only to aid the child welfare professional and supervisor/coach in supporting transfer of learning from pre-service to the agency. The child welfare professional, with input from their supervisor/coach, may choose to complete all, some, or none of these activities or substitute in other activities.

Each of the three activities are described below, and a resource section to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with the child welfare professional follows the description of each activity.

**Option 1: The Seven Categories of Assessment Activity**

* Pull out your Access and Initial Assessment Standards.
* Go to “Appendix 1: Information to be Gathered and Analyzed in Primary Assessment Cases”.
* If you need to access a copy of the Access & Initial Assessment Standards, you can find them on the DCF website page: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy> in the “Standards” section. If you need help finding them, ask your supervisor/coach for assistance.
* Review the definitions of each of the seven categories.
* Arrange with your supervisor to shadow an experienced Initial Assessment professional to observe 1-2 Primary Assessment referrals.
* Spend time with the Initial Assessment professional as they prepare for the initial contact with each family and observe them during the initial contact.
* Document in the table below/next page the types of questions the Initial Assessment professional asked to gather the information in the 7 categories.
* When your observations and the form are complete, discuss and review with your supervisor/coach.
* TIPS: Engagement at the information collection point is crucial; how can you ask the questions in a way that engages with the family? Put yourself in the shoes of the families: how would you want to be treated?

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| **Seven Categories of Assessment** | **Questions the IA Professional asked for each Category** |
| **Maltreatment** |  |
| **Surrounding Circumstances** |  |
| **Child Functioning** |  |
| **Adult Functioning** |  |
| **General Parenting** |  |
| **Parenting Discipline** |  |
| **Family Functioning** |  |

**Resource for Option 1: The Seven Categories of Assessment Activity**

This resource section is provided to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with their child welfare professional after completion of Option 1 around the Seven Categories of Assessment Activity.

Information gathered and analyzed in Primary Assessments is critical to understanding and making decisions related to child safety, behaviors that may result in maltreatment, services needs and the occurrence of maltreatment.

The CPS Access and Initial Assessment Standards require that thorough information be gathered in the following areas:

* Maltreatment including alleged maltreatment, and any other type of maltreatment occurring within the family.
* Surrounding Circumstances including circumstances leading up to maltreatment and the parent’s/caregiver’s response.
* Child Functioning including general functioning, disabilities, or special needs of all children in the household, effects of any maltreatment, and child vulnerabilities.
* Adult Functioning including general functioning, mental, emotional and physical health, disabilities, and enhanced and diminished Parent/Caregiver Protective Capacities.
* Parenting Practices including enhanced and diminished parent/caregiver protective capacities and
* general parenting practices and
* parenting discipline practices
* Family Functioning including strengths and current stresses.

Understanding the above conditions, behaviors, perceptions, etc. are critical to assessing threats to child safety and risk of maltreatment. Depending on how they present in families, they may contribute to the presence of an unsafe home environment or risk of maltreatment or may provide a buffer against/mitigate threats to child safety or the risk of maltreatment. The assessment of a parent’s/caregiver's protective capacities is critical in being able to arrive at a decision of whether or not a child is safe. Information in this assessment provides for the identification of parent/caregiver protective capacities and strengths that are operating or that can be reinforced and used in case planning. In all families, there are both buffers (protective capacities, positive support networks and other strengths) and risks present. Identifying both creates a more accurate description of the family.

**Ask your staff when they return from the shadowing with Initial Assessment Professional the following:**

* Was it clear what category the CPS professional was asking about?
* Were the questions engaging; have your new staff member give some examples.
* What further questions do you have?

**Option 2: Face-to-Face Contacts Activity**

* Pull out your Access & Initial Assessment Standards.
* Go to the standards, Section 2, Interview Contact.
* If you need to access a copy of the Access & Initial Assessment Standards, you can find them on the DCF website page: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy> in the “Standards” section. If you need help finding them, ask your supervisor/coach for assistance.
* In Primary Assessment cases, all household members must be interviewed to ensure child safety.
* Document the four required face-to-face contacts in the table below.
* Identify what your approaches would be for Primary Case Interviews in order to preserve information and minimize the anxiety felt by the child in the table below.
* Discuss and review with your supervisor/coach.
* TIPS: What do you want to learn from the interview? Where will each interview be conducted? Keep in mind engagement is key to the interviewing process. Talk to your supervisor.

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| **Face to Face Contacts** |
| **1-** |
| **2-** |
| **3-** |
| **4-** |
| **Approaches** |

**Resource for Option 2: Face-to-Face Contacts Activity**

This resource section is provided to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with their child welfare professional after completion of Option 2 around the Face-to-Face Contacts Activity.

Interview Contacts Information from the Access and Initial Assessment Standards states the following requirements: In Primary Assessment cases, all household members must be interviewed by the local child welfare agency to assure that accurate and thorough information is gathered. If a child is too young to be interviewed, then the child must, at a minimum, be observed. In addition to being observed, if a child has a disability that affects his or her ability to communicate, then arrangements should be made to assist in communicating and gathering information (see *Appendix 10: Guidance for Working with Individuals with Disabilities*).

A visit to the home where the alleged maltreatment occurred or threats to child safety exist is required. When conducting a Primary Assessment, refer to *XIII. Consent Requirements*.

The order of interviews must take into consideration preserving information and minimizing the anxiety felt by the child. Face-to-face contact is required with the following individuals:

* Identified Child(ren)
* Sibling(s) and other children in the home
* Non-maltreating adults (if any)
* Alleged Maltreater

When known to the local child welfare agency, collateral sources of information (e.g., parties who may have relevant information about the maltreatment or threats to child safety, including but not limited to physicians, treatment providers, teachers, neighbors, service providers, Birth to 3 Program and Children’s Long-Term Support service coordinators, etc.) must be contacted during the Initial Assessment process in order to use this information to analyze and understand threats to child safety or risk concerns.

**Option 3: WICWA Protocol Activity**

* Discuss with your supervisor the protocol for your agency when a WICWA case is assigned as an Initial Assessment OR when you discover your case is a WICWA case after meeting with the family. Be sure to ask about any information that may be confusing or unclear. Remember:
* For all cases, determine whether child has American Indian heritage
* Notify appropriate tribes
* Document all efforts
* Ask all families about American Indian heritage
* Do not assume American Indian heritage based on looks or location
* Ask all family members—including extended family
* Document using the *Screening for Child’s Status as Indian* form, located on the DCF website at: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/wicwa>. Find the form in the “Forms” tab, under the “Request for Confirmation of Child’s Indian Status” section. It’s one of two forms that is submitted to the Indian child’s tribe along with the *Request for Confirmation of Child’s Indian Status* form.
* Note: The eWiSACWIS *Screening for a Child’s Indian Status* form must be completed for all children, regardless of Indian Status.

**Resource for Option 3: WICWA Protocol Activity**

This resource section is provided to aid the post-activity supervisor/coach discussion with their child welfare professional after completion of Option 3 around the WICWA Protocol Activity.

If the family indicates that they do have American Indian ancestry, the child welfare professional must then gather further information to determine which tribe or tribes they are affiliated with so the tribe or tribes can be contacted. Gathering this information is the first step in complying with the requirements of WICWA. If there is reason to know the child has American Indian heritage, proceed as if WICWA applies until it is determined otherwise.

All efforts to identify, inform and engage the tribes when a child is believed to be American Indian must be documented. Send the tribe or tribes the following information to determine whether or not the child is a tribal member or eligible for tribal membership:

* *Screening for a Child’s Indian Status* form
* Biological Family History
  + Gather as much information about the names and dates of births for the child, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents and make sure to verify the correct spelling of names.
  + Also, include any maiden names for female family members.
* *Request for Confirmation of Child’s Indian Status* form

Regardless of what anyone indicates regarding a child’s eligibility or membership, remember, only the tribe can make the determination as to whether a child is a member or eligible for membership.

If the child is a member or eligible for membership, the tribe or tribes must be invited to help evaluate the family’s circumstances, determine service needs, and ensure any placements comply with placement preferences. There may be times when the family does not want the tribe contacted; let them know that this is required and that the notification must be made.

Remember to document all efforts in asking the family about American Indian heritage and any notifications to the tribe(s) that are made when WICWA applies.