



Children's Commission[®]

Attorney Resource Letter:

For Attorneys Handling Child Protective Services Cases

September 30, 2016

Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS) and Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA)

During the 84th Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 125, which required DFPS to deploy statewide and in a uniform manner a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive assessment to be administered within 45 days of a child entering conservatorship.

Effective September 1, 2016, DFPS began using the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS) to ensure uniformity and consistency in evaluating each child's needs and strengths, assist in service planning, inform placement decisions, and reduce the number of assessments administered to children in DFPS conservatorship. Along with adoption of the CANS, DFPS adopted a practice model known as Structured Decision Making[®]; a suite of assessments designed to provide consistency, fairness, and accuracy in making decisions about safety, risk, and removal to foster care. Another assessment tool you will likely hear about, along with the CANS, is the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA), which is being used to assess and utilize family strengths to hone in on necessary services customized to address the Department's specific concerns. Although the FSNA and CANS will not be attached to court reports, you may hear CPS staff providing testimony or information regarding findings or recommendations that come from these assessments.

Q: How and when will the CANS and FSNA be conducted?

A: For most of the state, children and youth, ages 3 to 17, who are removed on or after September 1, 2016, will receive a CANS Assessment, completed by a STAR Health clinician, within 30 days of removal. During the same time period, the CPS caseworker will conduct the FSNA of the family, identify targeted interventions, and work with the family to prioritize goals and tasks. In the state's Foster Care Redesign area, near Fort Worth, the Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC), Our Community Our Kids, is utilizing a combination of STAR Health providers and CANS certified staff, employed by residential providers within the SSCC network, to administer the CANS.

Q: How will results and recommendations from the FSNA and the CANS be presented to courts?

A: Recommendations from the CANS and the FSNA will be reflected in the Child's Service Plan and the Family Service Plan, respectively. The Family Service Plan, which is developed jointly and signed by the parent(s), should be filed with the court by the Status Hearing date. Pursuant to Texas Family Code Section 263.106, the Family Service Plan is then incorporated into the orders of the court. DFPS

will continue to include information about the CANS and other progress made in the court reports filed in conjunction with subsequent permanency review hearings.

Q: What if the court schedules a Status Hearings earlier than 60 days?

A: Many courts like to schedule a Status Hearing within a few days of the Adversary or Show Cause Hearings to jump start services to families. To maximize the effectiveness of the new assessment tools, Judges are being encouraged to conduct Status Hearings at around 60 days into the case. The law requires that the CANS be administered within 45 days of removal, and DFPS policy sets the completion date at 30 days. The FSNA is conducted with the family within the first three weeks of removal and is used to inform the CANS. Both the STAR Health clinician and the CPS caseworker need time to utilize the CANS and FSNA tools with fidelity. Allowing time for a thorough assessment and coordination of efforts should produce child and family service plans that set a path toward achieving permanency as quickly as possible for the child and family.

Q: What other assessments are included in Structured Decision Making?

A: DFPS rolled out two other assessments in late 2015 as part of its Structured Decision Making® practice: the Safety Assessment and the Risk Assessment. These assessments are generally used during the investigation stage to assess the family for present danger and likelihood of future maltreatment.

Q: How do I find out more information about DFPS Structured Decision Making tools and the CANS?

A: For CANS related information and questions, please visit the DFPS webpage at [DFPS - CANS](#) or email CANS@dfps.state.tx.us. For questions about the other assessments mentioned, please email CVSSDM@dfps.state.tx.us.

For more information about DFPS' adoption of Structured Decision Making, which includes the Safety, Risk, and Family Strengths and Needs Assessments, please visit the [Transformation](#) webpage or visit [DFPS - CANS](#). See also, PraedFoundation.org.



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