

STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING (SDM): CAREGIVERS AND HOUSEHOLDS GUIDE

Household: SDM assessments are completed on “households.” Generally, a household is all the people living under one roof (or in one apartment, etc.). In SDM, a household is defined as **a group of people who have significant in-home contact with the child**, such as those individuals who have a familial or intimate relationship with any person in the home (but who may not physically live in the home themselves). This may include a parent’s boyfriend or girlfriend, or it may include a relative whom the legal parent allows to make parenting and caregiving decisions. A child may be a member of two (2) households if, for example, they have two (2) legal parents who live separately and the child spends time with each legal parent, or if they reside with a legal guardian but also spends time with a legal parent.¹ Sometimes, more than one (1) household can live under one (1) roof (e.g., mom and her children live with a maternal aunt and her children).

Caregiver: ¹ **An adult, parent, or guardian in the household who provides care and supervision for the child.** Caregivers are designated as Primary or Secondary in SDM.

To complete an SDM assessment, first determine who is a **caregiver** and who is a **household member**. For example:

Example Circumstance	Caregiver?	Household Member?
Mother’s live-in boyfriend who never provides care for child	NO	YES
Mother’s live-in boyfriend who sometimes babysits	YES	YES
Mother’s boyfriend who doesn’t live there, but spends lots of time there and sometimes babysits	YES	YES
Mother’s ex-boyfriend who no longer contacts her	NO	NO
Uncle who visits occasionally and babysat once in the past 12 months	NO	NO

Then, if there is more than one (1) caregiver, determine who is the Primary and Secondary caregiver. Consider:

1. Is the caregiver the **legal parent**?
2. Does the caregiver have **more than 50%** of the parenting responsibilities?
3. Is the caregiver the **alleged perpetrator**?²
4. If both caregivers are alleged perpetrators, which caregiver is alleged in the **most severe**/concerning allegation?

For example:

Circumstance	The Primary Caregiver is:	The Secondary Caregiver is:
Two (2) legal parents living together	The parent who provides the most (i.e., 51%) child care/supervision (Note: A primary caregiver must have legal responsibility for the child). If care/supervision is precisely 50/50, select the alleged perpetrator as Primary . If both are alleged perpetrators, select the caregiver contributing the most to abuse/neglect as Primary. (If there is no alleged perpetrator or both contributed equally, pick either).	The other legal parent
Single parent, no other adult in household	The only parent	None
Single parent and any other adult living in household	The only legal parent	Another adult in the household who contributes the most to care of the child. If none of the other adults contribute to child care, there is no Secondary caregiver.
Non-Custodial Parents	If the alleged perpetrator is a non-custodial parent, also assess the custodial parent <i>if there is an allegation of failure to protect</i> . If a child is being removed from a custodial parent, also assess any non-custodial parent identified if s/he will receive child welfare reunification (FR) services.	

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¹ For a CWS/CMS Referral in [WebSDM](#), only one (1) household can be assessed on each Risk Assessment. If a child is a member of two (2) households and there are allegations in both households, CSWs should complete a Risk Assessment on both households – starting with the most concerning household’s Risk Assessment first. A second, blank Risk Assessment can be printed (a paper form) from within [WebSDM](#), completed manually, and added to the investigation documentation; or, after a referral is promoted to a case, an additional Risk Assessment can be created for the CWS/CMS Case in [WebSDM](#).

- A **caregiver** is not to be confused with a **Substitute Care Provider (SCP)**, which is a person providing out-of-home care to children, including resource family homes, approved relatives or non-related extended family members, licensed foster homes, foster family homes, and/or small family homes. For allegations against SCPs, utilize only the SCP Safety Assessment tool. Do not use the SDM Risk Assessment for referral allegations against Substitute Care Providers (SCPs), as it was designed specifically for parents/guardians.
- Once the Primary and Secondary caregiver(s) is/are determined, keep these roles consistent throughout future SDM assessments (i.e., do not switch them around).

² **Always** assess the household where the alleged perpetrator lives (i.e., the household in which the child abuse/neglect incident is alleged). This may be the child’s primary residence if it is also the residence of the alleged perpetrator, or the household of a non-custodial parent if that is the residence of the alleged perpetrator.

Safety Threat

vs.

Risk



For further information, please refer to the [Evident Change SDM definitions and Policy and Procedures within WebSDM](#) or the [pdf version of the Evident Change SDM Policy and Procedures Manual online](#).