



## Georgia Safety Threats

### **PRESENT DANGER**

**Present Danger**<sup>1</sup> – Present Danger is an **immediate, significant, and clearly observable** family condition, child condition, individual behavior or action, or family circumstance which is in the process of occurring and which obviously endangers or threatens to endanger a child and requires immediate action to protect.

While a child can be in present danger at any time during CPS intervention, usually it is at the first encounter with a family that you observe Present Danger. With Present Danger, the dangerous situation is in the process of occurring. This means it might have just happened (e.g., a child presents at the emergency room with a serious unexplained injury); is happening (e.g. a child is left unattended in a parking lot); or happens all the time (e.g., young children were left alone last night and might be alone tonight). Present Danger situations are active-it exists or is occurring now. When a child is in present danger, the fact of the danger itself is sufficient for you to act. You do not need to know more. When a child is in present danger, CPS intervention must be immediate- the very day it is encountered.

**“Immediate”** means that the danger in the family is happening right before your eyes. You are in the midst of that which endangers or threatens to endanger the child. The dangerous family condition, child condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances are active and operating. What might result from the danger for a child could be happening or occur at any moment.

**“Significant”** qualifies the family condition, child condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances as exaggerated, out of control, and extreme. The danger is recognizable because what is happening is onerous, vivid, impressive, and notable. What you encounter or what is happening exists as the dominant matter that must be addressed immediately.

Present Danger is **“clearly observable”** because what is happening or in the process of happening is totally transparent. You see and experience it in obvious ways. There is no guesswork. Here is a rule of thumb concerned with identifying Present Danger. If you have to interpret what is going on to be Present Danger... then it is likely is not Present Danger. Usually when Present Danger exists because of extreme family conditions, a child’s condition, individual behavior or acts, or family circumstances you will know even without conducting interviews. (Of course, when Present Danger does exist, conducting interviews should proceed in accordance with good practice).

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### **PRESENT DANGER SITUATIONS**

*From experience, we know that there are not an unlimited number of situations that constitute Present Danger. While remembering to use the definition of Present Danger to guide your judgment about any situation, you can rely on the following examples of Present Danger situations to frame your assessments and conclusions. This list categorizes the association between Present Danger and the family.*

#### **Present Danger Associated with a Child**

- 1. Injury/Injuries:** Any injury to a child including but not limited to bruising, cuts, welts, abrasions, lacerations, fractures, dislocations, sprains, punctures, burns and scalding as well as internal injuries.
- 2. Face/Head:** This includes bruises, cuts, abrasions, swelling, or any physical injury to a child alleged to have occurred because of parental treatment of the child.
- 3. Serious Injury:** This situation includes a bodily injury that involves substantial risk of death, extreme physical pain, disfigurement or prolonged loss or impairment of the function of a body part, organ, or mental capability. Examples include burns, head trauma, blunt trauma, internal bleeding, multiple bruising and contusions, lacerations of organs, broken bones and amputation.
- 4. Unexplained Injuries:** This refers to a serious injury that parents or caregivers cannot or will not explain. While this is typically associated with injuries, it can also apply when family conditions and/or when what is happening is bizarre and unusual with no reasonable explanation. For instance, think about children whose visibility within the community is absent – their whereabouts and conditions are unknown and unexplained.
- 5. Several Victims:** This refers to the identification of more than one child who is currently being maltreated. There is no historical context here. Additionally, one must keep in mind that several victims in chronic neglect situations who are not in danger preclude the selection of this present danger situation. Several victims suggest chaos and a lack of control in behavior and care that seems extreme.
- 6. Parent's Viewpoint of Child Is Bizarre:** This is the extreme, not just a negative attitude toward the child. It is consistent with the level of seeing the child as demon possessed.
- 7. Child Is Unsupervised or Alone for Extended Periods:** Although this could involve an older child, to be Present Danger it is more likely to be a younger child. The time of day is as important as is the length of time the child has been unsupervised. To qualify as present danger the child must truly be without care. Present danger would not apply if someone is caring for the child and complaining that the caretaker is supposed to be there, but is not presently. Keep in mind the present time concept here. If the child was unsupervised last night but is not alone now, it is not a Present Danger situation.



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8. **Child Is Unable to Protect Self:** This is similar to a child being alone or unsupervised for extended periods, but in this situation the child is generally older but may possess some sort of emotional, behavioral, or cognitive delay that incapacitates the child and makes them unable to protect themselves.
9. **Child Fearful/Anxious:** This does not refer to generalized fear or anxiety. Children who are described as being obviously afraid of their present circumstance, the home situation, or a person because of a concern of a personal threat would fit this description. Information would likely describe actual communication or a specific emotional or physical reaction that manifests through the child based on their knowledge or perception of their situation.
10. **Child Needs Medical Attention:** To be a Present Danger situation, the medical care required must be acute and significant enough that its absence could seriously affect the child's health and well-being. In other words, if children were not being given routine medical care, it would not constitute a Present Danger situation. It should have an emergent quality.

### Present Danger Associated with a Caregiver

1. **Maltreating Now:** The caregiver's abuse or neglect of the child is occurring concurrent with the report. This type of maltreatment will typically be physical, verbal, or sexual in nature. Neglect that is chronic may be occurring in the present tense; however, the situation may not rise to the level of the child being unsafe "right now."
2. **Premeditated:** This must be based on facts and indications that support the injuries noted on a child or the child's condition are the result of a deliberate or pre-conceived plan or thought by the caregiver that preceded the injury to the child or the child's condition.
3. **Caregivers Are Unable to Perform Essential Responsibilities:** This only refers to those parental duties and responsibilities consistent with the essential care required to assure safety. This is not associated with whether parents are effective parents generally, but whether their inability to perform basic duties leaves the child in a threatened state.
4. **Bizarre Behaviors:** Unpredictable, incoherent, weird, outrageous, or totally inappropriate behaviors fit this family condition.
5. **Bizarre Cruelty:** This qualifies the maltreatment that has been alleged and usually will require an interpretation. Such things as locking up children, torture, exaggerated emotional abuse, etc. are examples of what may be considered bizarre.
6. **Caregivers Described as Dangerous:** Dangerous parents may be behaving in bizarre ways; however, this is intended to capture a more specific type of behavior. Information would be considered Present Danger here when parents are described as physically/verbally imposing and threatening, brandishing weapons, known to be dangerous and aggressive, currently behaving in attacking or aggressive ways, etc.
7. **Caregiver Is Out of Control:** This situation may include aspects of the two preceding situations. However, this allows for capturing emotionally upset or depressed people who



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cannot focus themselves or manage their behavior in ways to properly perform their parental responsibilities. Their actions or lack of actions may not be directed at the children, but may affect them in dangerous ways or result in dangerous situations.

8. **Caregiver Intoxicated:** Applying the present time context, this refers to a parent who is intoxicated now or is consistently impaired all the time. The state of the parent's condition is more important than the use of a substance (drinking compared to drunk).
9. **Caregivers Overtly Reject Intervention:** This threat refers to situations where a caregiver refuses to see or speak with CPS staff and/or to let CPS staff see the child, is openly hostile or physically aggressive toward child welfare staff, totally avoiding, refuses access to the home, hides child or refuses access to child.

### **Present Danger Associated with Family**

1. **Life Threatening Living Arrangements:** This is based on specific information that indicates a child's living situation is an immediate threat to his/her safety. This would include the most serious health circumstances: buildings capable of falling in, exposure to elements in bitter weather, fire hazards, electrical wiring exposed, guns/knives available, etc.
2. **Family Violence and/or Spouse Abuse Present:** This considers family situations in which the alleged child maltreatment is accompanied by spousal abuse. There is information which indicates that a child is being mistreated and acknowledges that a parent is also being mistreated, thus suggesting a violent situation which is generalized among household members. Concern is heightened if both abuses are presented as occurring during the same time and more concerning if that same time is now.
3. **Family Will Flee:** This may require some interpretation if there is not information specific about this possibility. Transient families, homes that are not established, families with limited possessions, and so forth may qualify under this situation.
4. **Family Hides Child:** This should be thought of in both overt and covert terms. Information that describes a child as being physically restrained within the home, or parents who avoid allowing others to have personal contact with their child can be considered. This may include passing a child around to other adults, relatives, or different homes.

**When judging Present Danger, there are a number of other concerns that you should take into account. Understand that these additional areas of consideration do not represent Present Danger but help to qualify Present Danger situations.**

1. **Child is 0 - 6 Years Old:** In all safety assessments, the age of the child is relevant. The ability to self-protect is fundamental when assessing child vulnerability. Young children are emphasized here because of the higher vulnerability factor and propensity to suffer from danger. Children under six years of age and socially isolated (not in school or day care etc.) who are injured must be assessed to be in present danger.



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2. **History of Reports:** Within the context of judging Present Danger, a history of CPS reports on the family is important to consider. To judge Present Danger, it can be helpful to consider the number of reports, reports that indicate progressively more serious concerns related to family functioning, reports of the same nature as the current area of concern, and so forth.
3. **The Family Situation Will/May Change Quickly:** You may have information that describes a current circumstance occurring with the family which reveals exactly what is going on that could be considered as Present Danger. Because this situation could change rapidly, the opportunity to gather important information may be lost. In this sense, this influence does not necessarily constitute a Present Danger situation; however, it is pertinent in judging how intervention will proceed.
4. **Services Inaccessible or Unavailable:** This is a family circumstance which, in and of itself, is not a Present Danger situation. The issues could become a Present Danger situation when considered in relation to other negative family conditions, which demand access to services. For instance, if a service is unavailable or inaccessible for a child who has a life threatening condition that requires medical intervention, a Present Danger circumstance may be applicable.
5. **Accessible to a Threatening Person:** This is another issue that must be considered in concert with other family conditions. It refers to a situation such as a single caregiver who is responsible for primary care of their child; however, the child may also be required to spend a significant amount of time with a secondary caregiver who isolates the child, exhibits threatening behavior toward the child or the primary caregiver etc. This circumstance can be used to consider current accessibility as well as anticipated accessibility in the near future to the caregiver who is threatening to the child, such as when a child goes home from school or on weekends.
6. **Family Isolated:** This situation does not qualify as Present Danger just because a family may be isolated from others. Present Danger must be considered along with what is actually occurring within the family in conjunction with geographic and social isolation.

### **IMPENDING DANGER SAFETY THREATS**

**IMPENDING DANGER<sup>2</sup>** refers to a child who is in a continuous state of danger due to a parent/caregiver behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions and/or situations posing a specific threat of severe harm to a child. These threats are negative family conditions that are out of control in the presence of a vulnerable child, and therefore likely to have severe effects on a child at any time in the near future. These threats are specific, observable and can be clearly understood and described in the assessment content.

The five (5) criteria used to justify Impending Danger are:

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