

Research Brief

Safety at Screening



Table of Contents

Safety Along the Life of a Case: Safety at Screening	1
Fairness Correction and Application of Scores	2
Implementation of Screening Tool	3
Expected Outcomes	4

Safety Along the Life of a Case: Safety at Screening

Child Welfare is responsible for investigating allegations of abuse reported in Oregon. Every report must be evaluated to determine if Child Welfare should investigate the allegation further and open an assessment on the family to ensure child safety. This determination of further investigation is decided by a screener and the process is referred to as screening. It is important for Child Welfare screeners to consider the incident being reported, as well as the ongoing safety of children identified in a report. Deciding whether a report of child abuse should be assigned for investigation by Child Protective Services is a complex, high-stress endeavor. The screener must perform a rapid integration of information from a wide variety, and sometimes unreliable, sources. Creating tools for screeners can assist in decision-making about if a report to the child abuse hotline should be closed at screening or assigned.

Screening Predictive Model

The Safety at Screening tool estimates the likelihood of two separate outcomes. The first estimate is the likelihood of a child to be named on an assigned screening report of abuse in the next 2 years (named “Assignment”). The second estimate is the likelihood of a child being removed from their home and placed into substitute care in the next 2 years (named “Placement”). These are two separate outcomes that can create disruption in a family unit and a child’s life. The two predictive models combine the current screening report information with a year and a half of historical administrative data pulled from the Department of Human Services (DHS) statewide online data system, OR-Kids. The combined information generates the estimates. For families or children without historical information, the models rely on the current screening report information to generate the estimates. The models use machine learning to leverage more than a hundred different variables (i.e., individual pieces of information) into thousands of combinations to generate the estimates. Estimates of safety are displayed in OR-Kids after the current allegations and participants are added during screening. Each child listed on the report will receive the two estimates, Assignment and Placement. A score between 1 and 4 will be given for each of the estimates: A score of 1 means this outcome has a low likelihood to occur, a score of 2 represents a less than average probability for the outcome to occur, a score of 3 signifies a higher than average probability for the outcome to occur, and a score of 4 represents a higher likelihood for the outcome to occur.

Safety Along the Life of a Case: Safety at Screening

Fairness Correction

A fairness correction has been implemented with these estimates to reduce race- and ethnicity- based disproportionality of outcomes. The fairness correction procedure reduces the race- and ethnicity-based disproportionality in misidentified risk. This improves the predictions of Assignment and Placement within two years for each of the racial demographic populations served by Child Welfare.

Application of Safety at Screening Scores

Child Welfare is under resourced to investigate the number of allegations of abuse resulting in high caseloads. The implementation of the Safety at Screening tool is to support screeners in decision-making about reports of child abuse. The tool provides estimates that should be coupled with professional discretion and the use of information collected during screening. The use of Safety at Screening tool is intended to improve how screeners determine whether to assign reports of abuse or close reports at screening. Over time it is expected these changes will result in Child Welfare using resources to serve those children and families at greatest risk.



Safety Along the Life of a Case: Safety at Screening

Implementation of the Screening Tool


In December 2018, the Screening Predictive Analytic Tool (Screening Tool) was implemented with a small group of Screeners in two districts. The two Districts were District 3 (Marion, Polk, and Yamhill) and the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH). From December to mid-February only 11 Screeners were trained and had access to the Screening Tool to use in their decision making. This small group of Screeners assisted in informing policy, procedure, and training for large scale implementation at the newly formed ORCAH. Also occurring during this time was the consolidation of all district child abuse hotlines into one centralized hotline, ORCAH. This statewide hotline consolidation finalized in April 2019. The consolidation of locations across the state to one centralized hotline in Portland required ORCAH to hire about 70% of their staff from outside of Child Welfare and the remaining from different disciplines within Child Welfare, resulting in all employees learning the new screening process. Training cohorts were established to train 20-30 staff per cohort. The Screening Tool was incorporated into the newly developed Screener training curriculum.

Training cohorts are still in progress at ORCAH, the seventh cohort (as of 7/1/2019), is currently being trained with at least one more cohort still to be trained. Access to the Screening Tool is restricted until the screener has been trained. To date, approximately 90% of screeners have been trained and are using the tool in the in the decision-making process.

Oregon Child Abuse Hotline Educator's Guide

The Basics

- The state has begun to transition to one central hotline for reports of child abuse.
- The Oregon Child Abuse Hotline will go live in April 2019 with a focus on safety, consistency and customer service.
- When in full operation, the Hotline will be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.



What's new

- One statewide phone number open 24/7/365.
- Multilingual and language line services.
- Improved training for staff to better screen for suspected child abuse.
- Enhanced abilities to capture data. This will help to continually improve quality and call metrics.

What won't change

- Relationships built by DHS, teachers, school counselors, law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.
- Our commitment to engage our educators.
- Our commitment to provide training and consultation when there is a need.



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Safety Along the Life of a Case: Safety at Screening

Expected Outcomes

With the state-wide centralization, changes in screening practice, hiring of 70% new staff from outside of Child Welfare, and the implementation of the Screening Tool, there have been many changes to the screening process since October 2018 to June 2019. Identifying the impact of one individual change may be difficult, but below are expected outcomes of these changes by December 2019:



Lower rate of 'low risk' cases (score of 1 or 2) assigned



Higher rate of 'high risk' cases (score of 3 or 4) assigned



All Screeners trained and using the Screening Tool in decisions to assign or close at screening calls of concern



Increase in assigned reports resulting in the following dispositions:

- **Founded**
- **Unsafe**
- **Placements**
- **In-home plans**



Decrease in closed at screening reports that result in a future assigned report or placement within two years



Decrease in disproportionality of placements for children of color

CONTACT

Research.Implementation@dhsosha.state.or.us