

SDM® COURT REFERENCE SHEET: VERMONT FSD STAFF, DEPUTY STATE ATTORNEYS, AND ASSISTANT ATTORNEYS GENERAL

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This resource provides a practice model reference guide that helps workers and Vermont DCF Family Services Division (FSD) attorneys to prepare for testifying in court hearings about the purpose, structure, and findings of the Structured Decision Making® (SDM) decision-support assessments as well as information gathered and discussed with families using practice model approaches and tools.

COURT ORDER/HEARING	INFORMATION NEEDED	SDM ASSESSMENTS USED BY DCF FSD	WHAT WORKERS NEED TO DESCRIBE IN COURT
Petition; contents: 33 VSA § 5310 Emergency care/conditional custody order: 33 VSA § 5305	What is the danger? How is child in need of care and supervision? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caregiver behavior and impact on the child that met SDM danger indicator threshold 	Safety assessment is <i>unsafe</i>	Danger item(s) identified. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is child in need of care and supervision? Specific caregiver behavior and impact on the child that met threshold. Reasonable efforts to create an in-home safety plan.
Temporary care hearing: 33 VSA § 5307 Temporary care order: 33 V.S.A. § 5308	What is the danger? How is child in need of care and supervision? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caregiver behavior and impact on the child that met SDM danger indicator threshold What has been done/offered to mitigate the danger? Were reasonable efforts made to safety plan and prevent removal? 	Safety assessment finding is <i>unsafe</i> /SDM safety plan ruled out or put in place	What is the danger? How is child in need of care and supervision? Reasons why in-home safety plan was not possible and leaves household unsafe and child needing to come into out-of-home care, or a description of the safety plan currently in place, including inception date and reason why court oversight is now needed. Add voice of the child if information was gathered using the Three Houses or Safety House.

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<p>Disposition case plan: 33 V.S.A. § 5316</p> <p>Disposition hearing: 33 VSA § 5317</p> <p>Disposition order: 33 V.S.A. § 5318</p> <p>Parent-child contact and contact with siblings and relatives: 33 V.S.A. § 5319</p>	<p>What are the dangers and risks that need to be addressed in the case plan? What actions of protection are present? What strengths can be built upon?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the behavior change goals for these caregivers? • How will child’s needs be met while in care? • What is the plan for family time (parent–child and sibling contact) and is it being followed? • What kinds of actions, services, and supports are needed to support reunification? 	<p>Any SDM safety reassessments</p> <p>SDM risk level informs agency involvement and intensity of services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver needs related to identified household dangers. • Caregiver strengths related to mitigating dangers. • SDM risk level and whether or not any overrides were applied. • Goal statement: What behaviors the caregiver(s) need to demonstrate over time to increase safety and reduce risk. • What is the child’s perspective on the case plan goal and family time? • Child needs while under court supervision. • Efforts made to identify, engage, and use a family’s circles of safety and support in case planning efforts. • What is the plan for family time (parent–child and sibling contact) and is it being followed? • Recommended next steps for services, with timeframes. • Ensure the case plan document concisely reflects each party’s responsibilities to the case and includes service providers and network members.
<p>Post-disposition review: 33 VSA § 5321</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress made towards case plan goals for behavior changes? • Safety and support network development? • Review of parent child contact (frequency and quality for each caregiver) 	<p>No SDM tool is required at this point in time, however risk reassessment is done every 90 days for CCO cases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other caregiver or household contexts are complicating the situation? • What protective capacities may already exist? • Efforts made to identify, engage, and use a family’s network in creating a temporary safety plan that might prevent removal. • How is family time going so far? Can we increase contact? • Assessment of capacity for a non-custodial parent or relatives residing in another household to assume care and custody. • Assessment of proposed caregiver to provide safe care. • Recommended next steps (e.g., services to parents, consideration of relative and nonrelative caregivers). • What dangers may have been resolved and what remaining dangers have now been identified? • Any progress on action steps, new actions of protection, and whether these have resulted in safety.

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Permanency hearing: 33 VSA § 5321	<p>What is the reunification assessment recommendation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has risk reduced, is family time acceptable and is it now safe for the child to return home? <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a recommended permanency goal change? 	<p>Reunification assessment – completed at least every six months.</p> <p>(return home, continue services, or change goal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the reunification assessment recommendation and justification for the finding. Action steps that have been accomplished and those that still remain on the plan. Any barriers? What is the child’s perspective on the case plan goal at this time? List extended family members or network members with significant relationships to the child who should be considered for a permanent relationship. What are the strengths and needs of each potential permanency option? What are the child’s needs that should be considered in making a permanency decision? List members of the child’s family and network who will commit to some ongoing connection to the child.