

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL	
	Chapter 4: Assessment	Effective Date: December 1, 2009
	Section 24: Strengths and Needs Assessment	Version: 2

POLICY

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will conduct a [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) for all assessments that result in a finding of “substantiated”.

The results of the [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) is one of the factors that DCS will examine to determine the appropriate level of services.

DCS will place equal emphasis on the family’s strengths and their needs, recognizing that a family can build on its strengths.

Code References

N/A

PROCEDURE

In order to complete the [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) the Family Case Manager (FCM) will do the following within five (5) working days of completing a [Risk Assessment](#):

1. Answer all questions on the Indiana Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs Assessment tool;
2. Determine the overall **needs level** based on the total score; and
3. Determine the appropriate **level of service intervention** by examining the needs level in the context of the risk level. See separate policy, [4.26 Determining Service Levels and Transitioning to Ongoing Services](#).

Additionally, the FCM will incorporate the “priority needs” indicated by the assessment into the family [Case Plan \(SF 2956/CW0046\)](#) as soon as practical after discussion and validation of these needs during a family team meeting. See separate policy, [5.8 Developing a Case Plan](#).

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

N/A

FORMS AND TOOLS

1. [Risk Assessment](#) – Available in ICWIS
2. [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) – Available in ICWIS
3. [Case Plan \(SF 2956/CW0046\)](#) – Available in ICWIS

RELATED INFORMATION

Determining Overall Needs Level

Strengths and Needs Assessment Score	Needs Level
0 – 9	LOW
10 – 15	MODERATE
16+	HIGH

General

The [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) is the companion piece to the [Risk Assessment](#). It helps with planning effective services because it systematically identifies critical family problems as well as strengths of the family that will help them to resolve the identified problems. The [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) has several benefits:

1. It is designed in such a way that it ensures all workers consistently consider each family's strengths and challenges in an objective format when assessing the need for services;
2. It provides an important case planning reference; and
3. When the initial assessment is followed by periodic reassessments, it helps to identify changes in family functioning and thus the evaluation of the impact of services on the case.

Completing the Assessment

For each item, the FCM records the score for the primary, and if present, secondary parent, guardian, or custodian. The FCM (Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS)) then takes the highest score for either the primary or the secondary parent, guardian, or custodian and records it in the column labeled "Highest Score." The highest score column is totaled to arrive at a final score for the family's needs.

Primary Caregiver

ICWIS requires that a primary caregiver be designated at the time the case is opened. The primary caregiver is the person who spends the most time caring for the child and there will be no question if the child lives in a one (1) parent household. If the parents are together and appear to share an equal role in caring for the child, the FCM should designate the mother as the primary caregiver unless the father is the primary caregiver. This action will not affect the results of the risk assessment as the highest risk score is selected in the end, regardless of whether the score is associated with the primary or secondary caregiver.