Welcome! Thank you for participating in this overview of Florida Department of Children & Families Child Protection Transformation.

My name is Kellie Sweat Darnell, and I’m the Director of the Child Protection Transformation project. In this overview, I will introduce you to some of the key changes that we will experience this year, and the benefits that you can expect.

To get us started, I’d like to share a message from Secretary David Wilkins.

Secretary David E. Wilkins Video
Hello, my name is David Wilkins. I’m the Secretary of the Florida Department of Children & Families. Today, many of you all across the state are in situations just like this. Where you’re about to go to a home, knock on a door, and you have no idea what’s going to happen on the other side of that door. Similarly, individuals who you are investigating have no idea of the process you’re going to send them through over the next several hours and potential weeks in investigating the cases of abuse and neglect.

That’s why we’re here today. We believe in this State that we need to provide you with the best tools, technology, processes, and procedures to do your job. So today we’re launching the most significant transformation initiative that this agency has ever undertaken.

These child protection changes are going to affect not only the role of the investigator and what you do when you go out and visit a home. But it changes the way we do case management, it changes the way we perform and provide services to families, and really has an overarching effect in how we will deliver the overall child protection program.

We have tested these programs across the state. We know that these new processes and procedures work. We know that if we follow a standard methodology from Pensacola to Miami that we will get better outcomes in how we protect our children.
The job that you do is one of the most complicated jobs in this state: protecting our most precious children. We as government officials owe it to you to give you the tools and technologies and processes and procedures and organizational support to help you do your job.

This is the beginning of this process. Over the next several months, you’re going to go through very detailed training in how to implement these new programs and procedures in your day to day life. We’re convinced that when we implement this program, you’re going to be able to make better decisions, better informed decisions, better documented conclusions on how you reached those decisions—and most importantly, children in this state are going to be safer because of what you do. Thank you for your commitment to our children. And thank you for all you do for the State of Florida.

Advance slide.

**Agenda**

We’ll begin with an overview of the Child Protection Transformation project, why we’ve undertaken it, and some of the challenges — and benefits – we will face.

Then we’re going to dig a little deeper and look at the new Florida Safety Decision Making Methodology.

And we’ll highlight organizational change and the training activities that will take place this year.

As Secretary Wilkins mentioned, we have tested the new methodology over the past year. Interspersed throughout this course will be front-line perspectives from some of your colleagues in Circuit One who have given their time to test the new approach and provide ongoing feedback to improve our how we work together.

Don’t worry about taking notes. You can review this course as often as you like. And on the site where this is posted, you’ll find links to materials you can download, save, and print out.

Advance slide.

**What is the Child Protection Transformation project?**

Simply put, the Child Protection Transformation project is a collaboration between the Department of Children & Families, Community-based care organizations, and local public and private partnerships to create a world class social services delivery system to serve Florida’s children.
This graphic provides you a visual representation of the project. At the foundation of our Transformation is a new consistent approach to our Child Protection Program call the Florida Safety Decision Making Methodology. Over the past two years, we have been listening to our field and leveraging national best practices in child welfare to create a standardized process customized specifically for Florida. Our statute, administrative code, policies and procedures are fully aligned to support the new methodology, and we are focusing on professionalizing our workforce and creating a training approach that will ready our professionals to implement the new methodology. With our practice fully defined, we are now in the process of implementing technology enhancements to the Florida Safe Families Network that will allow our professionals to execute the new methodology in the most efficient manner possible. Throughout every phase of the project, we are focusing on communication and our requirement to emerge as a fully compliant child welfare system.

Advance slide.

**Vision and core tenets of Florida’s practice model remain**

As we progress through transformation, please know that *why* we do what we do to protect the vulnerable, promote strong families, and advance family resiliency remains unchanged.

*How* we relate to and work with families in Florida will continue to be founded in the core tenets of our practice model.

These core practices will continue to occur within the larger context you know as . . .

Advance slide.

**Family-centered, trauma-informed**

. . . family centered practice . . . and trauma informed care . . .

Let’s take a moment to hear from investigative, case management and provider staff from Circuit One who have worked with the new safety decision making methodology. They will share an aspect of the transformation we’re all dealing with . . . our attitude and response to change.

Advance slide.
Adapting to Change Video

Introductions

- **Tina Wolf**: Unit Manager, Families First Network
- **Dawn Griffin**: Case Manager, Community Drug and Alcohol Council
- **Shannon Xuereb**: Child Protective Investigator, Department of Children & Families
- **Connie Edgar**: Child Protective Investigator, Department of Children & Families
- **Pete Gallas**: Child Protective Investigator Supervisor, Department of Children & Families

Pete speaks.

*I’ve been with the Department for 22 years. And we’ve always gone through different changes. This is the first time that the people above us in Tallahassee have really listened to what we have to say about these pilot programs or whatever you want to call them. We’ve always had pilots but we’ve never... I don’t think we’ve ever gone this far to where we’re giving bigger information, they’re looking at it, they’re changing things based on what we gave them. And I think ....*

Tina speaks.

*I think when it first initially came out, everybody was really nervous, everything is going to change. So, once we got past being scared of change the process was a natural process. Once ... it just made sense... and it just... it flowed... everything was a lot easier... so, really – it wasn’t hard to learn once we just got over the initial ‘oh we don’t want any change.’ And, we are so glad that it changed because things are just so much easier now. It is just ... I don’t know what we were scared of... except for just the word change.*

Advance slide.

**Why is the Department of Children & Families (DCF) transforming?**

Now let’s take a closer look at WHY we are transforming. While any one of the following issues would alone be problematic...

... an early evaluation identified a myriad of challenges that are creating an uphill battle for even our most experienced and dedicated staff:

- high staff turnover
- ineffective staff development and support
- high rates of re-abuse and repeat investigations
• technology and system inefficiencies
• all contribute to inconsistent practices across the state

Advance slide.

**What are we going to achieve?**
We also want you to understand the positive gains we hope to achieve as well.

A structured and strategic transformation will result in . . .
• improved safety decision making by front-line staff and supervisors
• reduced re-abuse and fewer repeat investigations
• policy and technology improvements for efficiency
• a professionalized and stable work force
• consistent statewide child welfare practices
• and finally higher quality casework and better outcomes for all children and families involved in the child welfare system

Advance slide.

**Think differently — Practice differently**
We’re now going to take a closer look at how the safety decision-making methodology will help bring about these positive changes.

As you begin to understand the methodology, you will start thinking differently about child safety in a variety of ways including the use of . . .
• new safety threat definitions
• new assessments focused on present and impending danger
• new definitions for a safe and unsafe child
• more guidance for assessing caregiver protective capacities

All of these new concepts will be incorporated in a suite of tools, processes and protocols to support the Family Functioning assessment process to manage safety throughout the lifespan of a family’s involvement with the child welfare system.
Once you start thinking differently about child safety you are ready to take the next step to practicing differently.

Over the next several months, an emphasis is going to be placed on skill development through E-learning modules, classroom instruction, and coaching activities to develop and refine your assessment and decision-making practices.

These enhanced skills will be evidenced by improved information collection and analysis, solution driven interviews, mobilizing family resources and networks, engaging community expertise, and planning and implementing interventions specific to caregiver protective capacities.

Advance slide.

**Safety Decision Making Methodology Intro**

So far we’ve had a fairly broad discussion on why we are transforming, the anticipated outcomes we hope to achieve, and why we want to think and practice differently. Now let’s take a closer look at the actual methodology.

Advance slide.

**Safety Decision Making Methodology (1 of 6)**

This slide provides a snapshot of all the major elements and processes that go into determining child safety.

A key aspect of the methodology is information collection and analysis. Within the transformation we will introduce a standardized approach to how we gather sufficient information to support our decisions. Connie Edgars is going to provide us with a short description for each of the respective domains listed above.

Advance slide.

**Connie Edgars, Child Protective Investigator Video**

Connie speaks.
The first one is about the nature of the maltreatment and what has been alleged. The second part is basically what was going on, so if you have a child who said that they got spanked and they have a mark, you’re going to want to find out: what was going on this whole day before it lead up to the spanking. The next part is about child functioning where you’re talking to the child and you’re talking to the parents about how does this child function: how do they get along with others, how are they doing in school, what are their behaviors like. And you’re going to talk to the schools about... not just, do they come to school, do they get good grades; you’re trying to find out – how do they function intellectually, academically – how are they performing, what are their behaviors like, how do they get along with other kids. And then you talk about adult functioning – is the next domain. And when you talk about adult functioning, you’re looking at history of substance abuse, history of domestic violence, criminal history – you’re looking at all those things – work history, if they ever worked; trauma, how do they... do they have a support system – do they have friends. And then the next domain is parenting general where... and I think that is the hardest for people to answer: How do you see yourself as a parent? – and they’re like, “Well, what do you mean?” They’ve never really thought about that. And then the last one is parenting discipline. What do you do when your kids misbehave and what kind of things would they have to do for that to happen.

Safety Decision Making Methodology (2 of 6)
Our current practice primarily tends to focus on the first two information domains – the nature and extent of the maltreatment, and the surrounding circumstances. This tendency unintentionally reinforces a focus on symptoms and compliance with services rather than the specific family changes that must occur to achieve and manage child safety.

We know that when we have sufficient information on the family our assessments are more accurate, we make better safety decisions and we construct better safety plans to manage safety threats.

Safety Decision Making Methodology (3 of 6)
Advance slide.

Let’s take a minute to listen to Pete, Connie and Shannon describe their prior business practices before they started testing the methodology and compare it with their more recent experiences.

Advance slide.
Front-line Perspectives Video (1 of 2)

Pete speaks.
We get a lot more information from the parents and the family... because we have cases that we go out on - on and on and on... all the time. We went out and the kid had a bruise and we went out and we addressed the bruise.

Connie speaks.
Well I think before, one of the things that we focused on is mainly the maltreatment and how they felt about what had been alleged and what had gone on... and this was a more... I guess holistic approach as far as not just focusing on what had been reported but on them as a family and showing them that we really cared about how they were as a person and a parent.

Shannon speaks.
You know some of these families you know and like going back to the lady with the ten reports but even other families that’s had you know even if they’ve only had just 4 or 5 reports just I mean they’ve had like... having that many reports that means they’ve talked to that many different PIs. And you know I’ve had a couple of them say: oh my gosh you know out of all my reports this is the first time you’ve actually asked me all these questions. You’ve asked me about my childhood, my past, you’re actually listening to me.

Safety Decision Making Methodology (4 of 6)

Now let’s take a closer look at how the six information domains are useful in informing the most critical safety decision... is the child currently safe in this home?

While that decision is initially made at the time of the investigator’s first knock on the door it remains just as important during the case manager’s 12th visit to the home.

Collecting relevant information around the six information domains will provide sufficient information to answer three critical questions needed to inform the safety decision and help monitor safety throughout the case.

- Are there threats of danger to a child’s safety?
- Is the child vulnerable to those threats?
- And, does the parent possess sufficient protective capacities to manage the threats to child safety?
These three questions can only be answered accurately and reliably when sufficient information has been collected for all six information domains.

Advance slide.

**Safety Decision Making Methodology (5 of 6)**
Now let’s turn our attention to the next two components of the safety decision making methodology.

First, looking at the safety tasks highlighted in red overtones you’ll see that the considerations and actions required around unsafe children essentially remain the same.

What is different however, is the emphasis on the Family Functioning assessment process which will provide more robust information for investigators to pass on to case managers. Case Managers will then continue the Family Functioning Assessment process in an effort to further evaluate the diminished caregiver protective capacities and child needs. At the same time, the methodology also highlights and reinforces the need for case management to also focus on safety management throughout the life of the case.

Advance slide.

**Safety Decision Making Methodology (6 of 6)**
One additional activity to be implemented at the conclusion of the investigation is the Risk Assessment featured in the grey box. The Risk Assessment will be used to help identify which safe families would benefit most from family support services.

Tina, Shannon and Dawn are now going to summarize what I hope was conveyed throughout this presentation.

Advance slide.

**Front-line Perspectives Video (2 of 2)**
Tina speaks.
The way this process is working, it’s not about the accusations, it’s about what services these families need. So they’re engaged really quickly, we get services right up front. A lot of times before we even get to disposition they’ve got their case plan almost completed because they’ve engaged in services.

Shannon speaks.
Like I had an incident ... I had one case in particular where a lady... some things, some really bad things happened in her childhood, like she was sexually abused. Her mom didn’t believe her. The way her mother was growing up, she kind of adopted that same pattern so then when like she had a pattern of reports with her kids... However, with the old approach, had we not have delved into that and she didn’t tell me about that then we might have been really quick to say: Ok were going to ... this has got to go to dependency.

Dawn speaks.
It’s, I can imagine, a parent’s worst nightmare to have to have someone report them and go through this. And I think they’re on the defense. And I was able to be there and provide that. More of a therapeutic role and to let them let their defenses down and talk about the real issues.

Shannon speaks.
Take the time to be patient with these people and just listen to them, because that is what they want and need.

Tina speaks.
The parents are present at our case transfers, their present for every staffing and case transfer and everybody knows what’s going on, including the parents – right up front. And so, the engagement piece has been just phenomenal and we’re... if it’s a voluntary case, we’re closing cases usually within six months; we’re not seeing them come back; we’re not removing as many children; we’re keeping children in the home where normally we would have removed them in the past, because we’re able to get services in so quickly and we’re not seeing them come back.

Advance slide.

Organizational changes to support you
This brings us to the end of the overview of the Child Protection Transformation project and the new safety decision-making methodology.
To close, I want to make you aware of the many other organizational changes in process to support your adoption of this new way of thinking.

Some of those changes you can expect to see include
- improved hotline intake process and product
- streamlined policies to support practice
- FSFN efficiencies to support your work
- and greater skill building opportunities for front-line professionals and supervisors

Advance slide.

**Upcoming professional development**
You are probably also very interested in how the Transformation will most directly affect you in the coming months. Here is a schedule of implementation activities in the near future.

We will begin by developing safety practice experts across the state with representation from the Hotline Command Center, Investigations, Community-based care lead agencies, Case Management, Children’s Legal Services and Quality Assurance, to assist in both classroom training and field-based application activities for supervisors and front-line staff.

Supervisors will then receive specific training on the safety decision making methodology and supervisor case consultation activities that will support and guide investigators and case managers during their transition to the new safety decision making methodology.

Front-line staff will then begin to attend classroom training with follow-up field-based instruction to be well prepared in advance of their region’s rollout.

Advance slide.

**Thank You**
I hope this presentation was informative and helped you gain a better understanding of the changes on the horizon. With your participation, input, and commitment we have made this transformation possible – and we will be able to deliver on our promise to become a world-class...
social service delivery system.

On behalf of the Secretary, I thank you.

Advance slide.

In Memory of Pete Gallas

*In memory and honor of Pete Gallas’s contribution to Florida’s children and families for 22 years. 1945—2013*

The end.