

Washington State's Safety Summit Project Summary Report

OCTOBER 2022



Family & Youth Justice Programs

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

CONTENTS

Forward	1
Executive Summary	3
Background.....	3
Washington Safety Decision-Making Practice Follow-up Study	6
Introduction.....	6
Method	6
Data Analysis.....	8
Findings.....	9
Discussion of Findings.....	22
Top Findings Infographic	26
Innovations in Safety Showcase	27
SAFETY FRAMEWORK MOUSEPAD	27
CASE INFORMATION WALK-AWAY FORM	27
QUESTIONS FROM THE BENCH.....	27
HEARING TIMING STUDY	28
SAFETY SNAPSHOTS	28
SAFETY FRAMEWORK ONLINE MODULE.....	28

FORWARD

Washington State’s dependency statute, RCW 13.34, opens with the Legislature establishing that families are a “fundamental resource of American life which should be nurtured” and that families “should remain intact unless a child’s right to conditions of basic nurture, health, or safety is jeopardized... In making reasonable efforts under this chapter, the child’s health and safety shall be the paramount concern.” (RCW 13.34.020). What this means for the child welfare court system is that, when we insert ourselves into the family unit, we must be able to clearly articulate and address the conditions that make a child unsafe – and do this throughout a case. As we work with each family, our primary goals should be creating a safety plan to keep the family together and developing a meaningful case plan that builds the parents’ capacity to provide safety for their child.

For several years, the Court Improvement Program (CIP) (part of the Family & Youth Justice Programs at the Administrative Office of the Courts) addressed this challenge by training judicial officers in the American Bar Association’s safety framework. Judges and commissioners found the framework helpful, but when they used it in court to inquire about safety threats and conditions for return home, caseworkers, attorneys and volunteer GALs struggled to respond. Clearly, we needed to build a common language and understanding of safety across all parties to a case.

Our opportunity to reach the whole system came as part of the Department of Children, Youth and Family’s (DCYF) Program Improvement Process. Working with DCYF staff, we created a multi-disciplinary workgroup to review the ABA safety framework and the Department’s safety model. Once we had agreement that our language and approaches were aligned, DCYF, CIP staff and a coalition of court system partners formed a statewide team to co-design the Safety Summit project. Safety Summits were engineered to be more than a one-time, cross-system training, with the addition of intentional changes to court practice and a robust local action planning process. A key component of this change process was DCYF’s requirement that caseworkers in Safety Summit counties submit their safety assessments and safety plans to the court. We implemented the project in seven counties across the state.

To assess our impact on the court process, we worked with Dr. Alicia Summers, from the Capacity Building Center for Courts, to conduct a pre- and post-summit hearing quality evaluation. As you will read in this document, the evaluation found clear evidence that the Safety Summits resulted in meaningful, positive changes to in-court safety practice. Dr. Summers observed improved safety practice in the documentation submitted to court and in

discussions that occurred during shelter care and review hearings. The Safety Summit Advisory Team is using the evaluation results to further refine its efforts and improve outcomes. And this work is only growing in importance, as recent changes to the law brought about by HB 1194 and HB 1227 expand requirements for courts to inquire about child safety throughout a case.

Our work wouldn't be nearly as successful as it has been without the contributions of the following Safety Summit Advisory Team partners, whom we deeply appreciate:

- **Rob Wyman** (Primary Trainer) - Casey Family Programs
- **Laura Vogel** (Project Lead) and **Susan Goulet** - Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
- **Judge (Ret.) Anne Hirsch** - Jurist-in-Residence, Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
- **Kelly Boyle, Doug Savalesky, Jasmine Hodges, and Melissa Krouse** - Department of Children, Youth & Families
- **Jacob D'Annunzio** and **Tonia McClanahan**- WA Office of Public Defense, Parent Representation Program
- **Ryan Murrey** - WA Association of Child Advocate Programs (WACAP)
- **Katherine Kameron** – Office of Civil Legal Aid, Child/Youth Representation
- **Ambrosia Eberhardt** – Children's Home Society of Washington, Parents for Parents

Finally, the Safety Summit Project would not have been possible without the collaboration and hard work of the local courts and system partners in the seven counties (Chelan County, Grays Harbor County, King County, Kitsap County, Pierce County, Mason County, and Spokane County). It was through their steadfast dedication and commitment to improving the lives of children and families that real practice change was made possible.



Kelly Warner-King

Family and Youth Justice Programs Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts
kelly.warner-king@courts.wa.gov

www.wacita.org



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the [Safety Summit Project](#) and the outcomes of this year-long effort to improve safety practices in dependency courts through a strategic combination of cross-system training and action planning. The full version of the [Washington Safety Decision-Making Practice Follow-up Study](#) and a one-page infographic depicting the most significant findings of the evaluation are included. Findings provide compelling evidence for improved safety practices in dependency systems through systemic utilization of the safety framework. Many new innovations were developed by local court sites through the strategic plans developed at each respective summit and are showcased in the final section of this report.

BACKGROUND

The Safety Summit Project is the result of a training partnership between the Administrative Office of the Courts, Family & Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) and the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF). Originating from a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategy initiative (Strategy 4.2), Safety Summits were designed to help local courts and system partners enhance safety practice by developing a common framework and language for addressing child safety and ensuring that courts engage parties in meaningful inquiries about safety planning and case planning. As part of the partnership with DCYF, Dr. Alicia Summers and the national Capacity Building Center for Courts conducted the [2020 Washington Baseline Safety Hearing Quality Report](#) in seven court communities across the state: Chelan County, Grays Harbor County, King County, Kitsap County, Mason County, Pierce County, and Spokane County. The findings from this evaluation are being used to identify opportunities for increasing shared understanding of safety and encouraging improvements in practice, along with providing baseline data to

Safety Summits 2021-2022		
County	Event Date	Attendees
King County	October 4, 2021	107
Kitsap County	October 20, 2021	107
Pierce County	October 27, 2021	188
Chelan County	December 8, 2021	64
Mason County	December 9, 2021	67
Spokane County	February 10, 2022	125
Grays Harbor County	May 6, 2022	49

Figure 1

measure changes in process and outcomes associated with the Safety Summits.

Safety Summits revolve around a half-day training event that focuses on helping local dependency court systems develop a shared understanding of how safety is assessed. Within the context of a crosswalk of the [ABA Child Safety Guide](#) (“Safety Framework”) and DCYF’s Child

Safety practice, this training will show systems how to effectively apply the Safety Framework to crucial aspects of cases in tangible ways that ultimately result in a more effective dependency system and better outcomes for families.¹ The training included a joint presentation by Rob Wyman, Judicial Education Consultant with Casey Family Programs, and DCYF’s Safety Program Manager, who presented the crosswalk of the two safety frameworks in the areas of safety assessment, safety planning, conditions for return, family time, and case planning.

The final hour of the Safety Summit involved action planning sessions where summit attendees were guided through two breakout room activities (one mixed-discipline; one discipline-specific). The first activity included randomly assigned groups of attendees who generated a shared vision of how their court system would like with enhanced fidelity to safety framework practiced. The second activity involved breaking attendees into their respective disciplines (e.g., court staff, DCYF, AGO, etc.) to generate tangible action steps their discipline could take to support the system achieving the larger vision.

FYJP used the action planning information generated at the summits to create drafts of Strategic Plans for each of the counties participating in the project. Every Safety Summit site received a strategic plan that contained the shared process and outcome visions for the system, defined action steps for discipline groups, and support available from FYJP to implement system improvements at the local level. Sites continue to use their strategic plans as a “working document” as they work within their local team dependency court teams to implement action items from the plan. Figure 2 depicts a summary of the four-phases that FYJP used to guide sites through the Safety Summit Project and the primary Summit activities that occur in each phase.

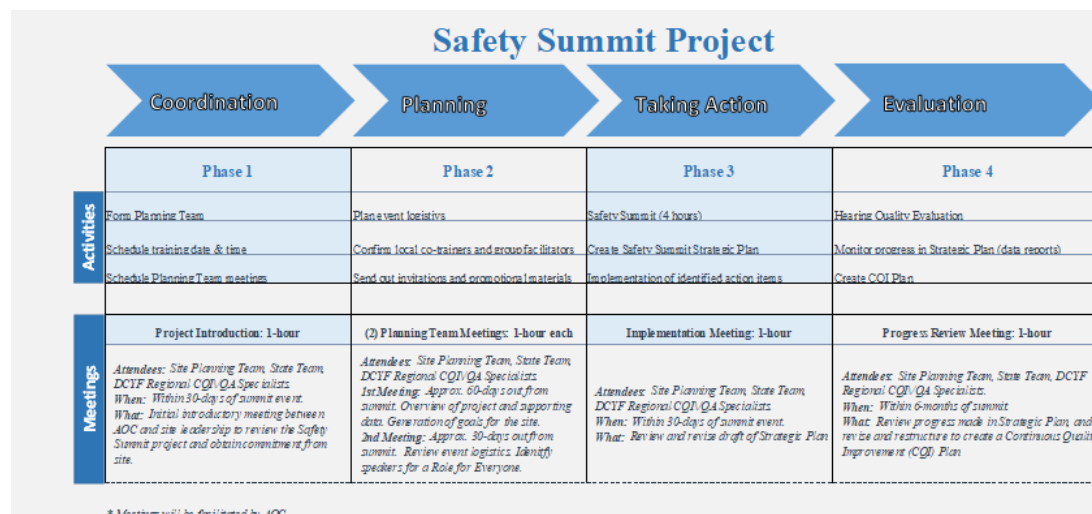


Figure 2

¹ Spokane County held a modified version of the curriculum as their 2022 Hope Summit.

A total of 665 people participated in the safety summit training across the seven sites from October 4, 2021 through May 6, 2022. Safety Summits provided these sites with high-quality training on safety framework practices within the context of a change management process. This was made possible through the strategic partnering of state-level agencies and local court jurisdictions. The planning, implementation, monitoring and continued development of the Safety Summits is overseen by the multi-disciplinary Safety Summit Advisory Team (SSAT). The SSAT works collaboratively with individual court sites at all phases of the project, including in the formation of the original planning teams that were instrumental in preparing the summit events and in implementing the strategic plans developed at each respective summit. Information and materials for each Safety Summit are available in the online [Training HUBs](#) housed on the FYJP website.

The Safety Summits provided intensive multi-disciplinary training and action-planning for the sites with the goal that court systems would make practice changes related to the safety framework. Four of the sites were evaluated 3-5 months after the training to compare post-summit practice to the baseline findings. The post-summit evaluation was conducted by Dr. Alicia Summers and Dr. Sophia Gatowski of the Capacity Building Center for Courts. Published in 2022, the [Washington Safety Decision-Making Practice Follow-Up Study](#) presents the methods and findings from that pre-post Safety Framework training evaluation. The findings are being used to identify areas where practice has changed as well as opportunities for enhanced efforts to improve safety practices in dependency court systems across the state.

For more information about the Safety Summit Project, please contact Laura Vogel, Child Welfare Training and Court Improvement Specialist at laura.vogel@courts.wa.gov.

WASHINGTON SAFETY DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION²

The Washington Court Improvement Program (CIP) is working with the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to improve practice in the state. Goal 4 of Washington’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is focused on improving permanency in the state. Strategy 4.2 states that “DCYF staff and court partners will develop, understand, and articulate consistent language regarding DCYF’s Safety Framework and implement changes in caseworker and court practice related to the Safety Framework.” As part of this effort, a multidisciplinary group, including CIP, DCYF, AGO, the Court Improvement Training Academy, and the Office of Public Defense (OPD), with support from the Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC) developed an evaluation plan for a Hearing Quality Project related specifically to the safety framework. The evaluation provided baseline data to the PIP workgroup on practice within the courts on safety decision-making to inform planning for trainings and practice change efforts for the state. A series of Safety Summits were designed based on the baseline identified need and were implemented in the project sites between October of 2021 and February of 2022. These Safety Summits provided intensive multidisciplinary training and action-planning for the sites so that they could make practice changes related to the safety framework. Sites were evaluated 3-5 months post training to compare practice to the baseline hearing quality assessment. This report presents the methods and findings from that pre-post Safety Framework training evaluation. The findings should be used by the multidisciplinary group to identify areas where practice has changed as well as opportunities for enhanced efforts.

METHOD

The evaluation included both the case file review and the court observation instrument utilized in the original baseline assessment so that comparisons could be made. One addition was made to the case file review instrument – whether a safety assessment was provided to the court prior to each hearing. This was noted in King County’s action plan, so the evaluation included it

² This report is authored by Dr. Alicia Summers and Dr. Sophia Gatowski of the Capacity Building Center for Courts. For questions or more information, please contact Dr. Alicia Summers at Alicia.D.Summers@gmail.com

as a fidelity measure. Data collection and analyses were performed by the Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC).

Court Observation. A structured court observation instrument was used to capture data elements related to the safety framework, such as what specific language regarding safety is used at hearings, how often there is discussion related to safety threats, vulnerabilities, protective capacities, safety planning, conditions for return home, and what is preventing the child from returning home today. Court observation also tracked the judge and jurisdiction.

Case File Review. A structured case file review instrument was used to assess language provided to the court regarding safety decision-making, including safety planning, parent’s protective capacities, threats, and vulnerabilities. The case file review instrument was also designed to capture details about family time, including whether language about family time includes the safety threat and justification for why a visit should be supervised. The case file review allows an opportunity to determine how information changes over time with updates that demonstrate ongoing safety assessments for the family.

Administrative Data. DCYF provided administrative data for seven counties (six that are CFSR counties) and Washington statewide for safety planning practice, including the percentage of cases with an in-home safety plan that result in removal within 6 month or 12 months. These data were provided at baseline and at follow-up (Spring 2022) for all sites that had a Safety Summit.

Sampling Strategy

The original evaluation included six of the eleven counties involved in the CFSR (Chelan, Grays Harbor, King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Spokane) and one additional county (Mason). However, the timing of the Safety Framework trainings did not allow for all sites to be included in the follow-up study. In order to be included in the follow-up, sites needed time to implement change. Therefore, only sites that had a training in 2021 were included in the follow-up sample. In addition, we needed site cooperation to get the information for the study.

Baseline. The baseline sample included cases opened in 2020 to ensure that it included case that were recent enough to be reflective of current practice. For court observation, CBCC examined a minimum of 10 Shelter Care hearings for each of the seven sites, to explore current practice related to safety threats. In addition, for four select sites (Grays Harbor, King, Mason, and Spokane), CBCC also conducted court observation of the first review hearing on the case (if there was one), in order to allow an opportunity to examine discussion at two points in time. For the four “intensive study sites,” CBCC also conducted a structured case file review of the court case management system to review agency documentation (e.g., reports, petitions, case

plans) and court orders related to the early case process, including Shelter Care through the Review hearing process.

Follow-up. The follow-up sample included fewer cases. Only five of the seven sites completed their training within the timeframe for the study (Chelan, King, Kitsap, Mason, and Pierce). Of those, we asked for a minimum of 10 Shelter Care hearings for each of the sites. For King and Mason, we asked for review hearings and access to a sample of case files. We were unable to coordinate data collection with Mason County, leaving only four of the original seven project sites in the follow-up sample.

DATA ANALYSIS

CBCC worked with the sites to collect data in a timely manner so that reporting could provide information back to the Washington PIP Team by the end of June, 2022. All data collected were aggregated into multiple datasets in Excel that were then exported to statistical packages for more robust analysis. There were some limitations to the data collection that impacted both the collection of data and ability for further analysis. The case file review was limited to the documents provided to the court and included in the court case management system as part of the record. That means that many of the agency documents associated with the case were not included as part of the review. Case plans, for example, were never included in the court case file, although petitions and some reports were provided and reviewed for this analysis. In addition, some of the case numbers randomly selected for inclusion in the study were not in frame for the current study. For example, there may be a transfer case that did not have the Shelter Care process in the county of interest or may not have had any documentation relevant to the questions of interest. This rarely occurred, but it did impact numbers for the sample. Finally, not all cases had made it to the review stage of the case process.

Samples

Because this study has a pre-post methodology, only sites that provided data in both timeframes were included in the evaluation. The court observation sample included 136 hearings, primarily Shelter Care from each of the four counties identified. Four of these hearings were dropped from analysis because they were continued (continued hearings are not complete hearings and do not include all of the discussion or findings of interest to this study). In addition, the King County sample included review hearings. Only King County included a case file review sample in the pre-post assessment. Table 1 below illustrates the total number of observations by county.

Table 1. Total Number in Sample for Each Site by Data Collection Method

	Pre Sample		Post Sample	
	Case File Review	Court Observations	Case File Review	Court Observations
King	21	39	19	39
Chelan	--	11	--	6
Kitsap	--	10	--	9
Pierce	--	10	--	15
TOTAL	21	70	19	69

FINDINGS

Results are presented below by data collection method. Where appropriate, statistical comparisons are made to identify statistically significant³ changes in practice over time. It is important to consider the findings in the context of the available information. Sample sizes were relatively small, especially considering three of the original seven sites are not included in the follow-up study. Findings are meant to illustrate whether and how practice may have changed related to the safety decision-making framework, and focuses primarily on safety information being presented to the courts. When a statically significant difference is found, it is denoted with an asterisk (*).

Court Observation

Ninety-four (71%) Shelter Care hearings and 38 Review (29%) hearings were observed for the study. Of the 94 Shelter Care hearings, 46 (49%) waived or agreed to Shelter Care, which impacted the discussion at the hearings and 48 (51%) did not. Data are presented by hearing type below.

Shelter Care Hearings

Of primary interest to the study was the safety discussion that was held at each hearing. This was examined both as whether a safety topic was discussed in the hearing and how much that topic was discussed (i.e., at what level). Table 2 and Figure 1 below illustrates the percentage of time a specific topic was discussed at all during a hearing, comparing pre to post Shelter Care

³ Statistical significance is a mathematical way to examine whether two numbers are actually different from each other. Traditional significance testing sets a value at .05 allowing for 5% margin of error. However, due to the limited sample size, we set ours to .10 (10% margin of error). That means we are 90% confident that these differences are not due to chance alone.

hearing samples. Table 2 also breaks this down further whether the Shelter Care hearing was waived (or agreed) or not.

Discussion

Table 2. Percentage of Hearings Where Topic Was Discussed at Shelter Care Hearing

	PRE (Baseline)			POST (After Safety Summits)		
	All Shelter Care (n=50)	Waived SC (n=28)	Not Waived (n=22)	All Shelter Care (n=44)	Waived SC (n=16)	Not Waived (n=28)
Agency efforts to prevent removal	26%	7%	50%	61%	31%	79%
Specific safety threats	34%	15%	59%	66%	44%	79%
Parent’s protective capacities	30%	8%	59%	32%	25%	36%
Vulnerabilities (child)	18%	0	41%	34%	19%	43%
Conditions for return	6%	0	14%	25%	12%	22%
Visitation/Family time (generally)	74%	82%	64%	89%	87%	89%
Visit: Justification for supervision time	24%	25%	23%	45%	44%	46%
Visit: Level of supervisions (who)	42%	44%	36%	52%	56%	50%
Visit: Setting	40%	39%	41%	36%	25%	39%
Safety planning (in-home)	16%	0	34%	32%	7%	46%

Looking at all of the Shelter Care hearings (regardless of whether shelter care was waived or not), there was more discussion of all safety items in the post sample of hearings. The biggest increases were seen in the number of hearings discussing efforts to prevent removal (up 35% from pre to post) and specific safety threats (up 32% from pre to post). Statistical comparisons for discussion are reported in the next section.

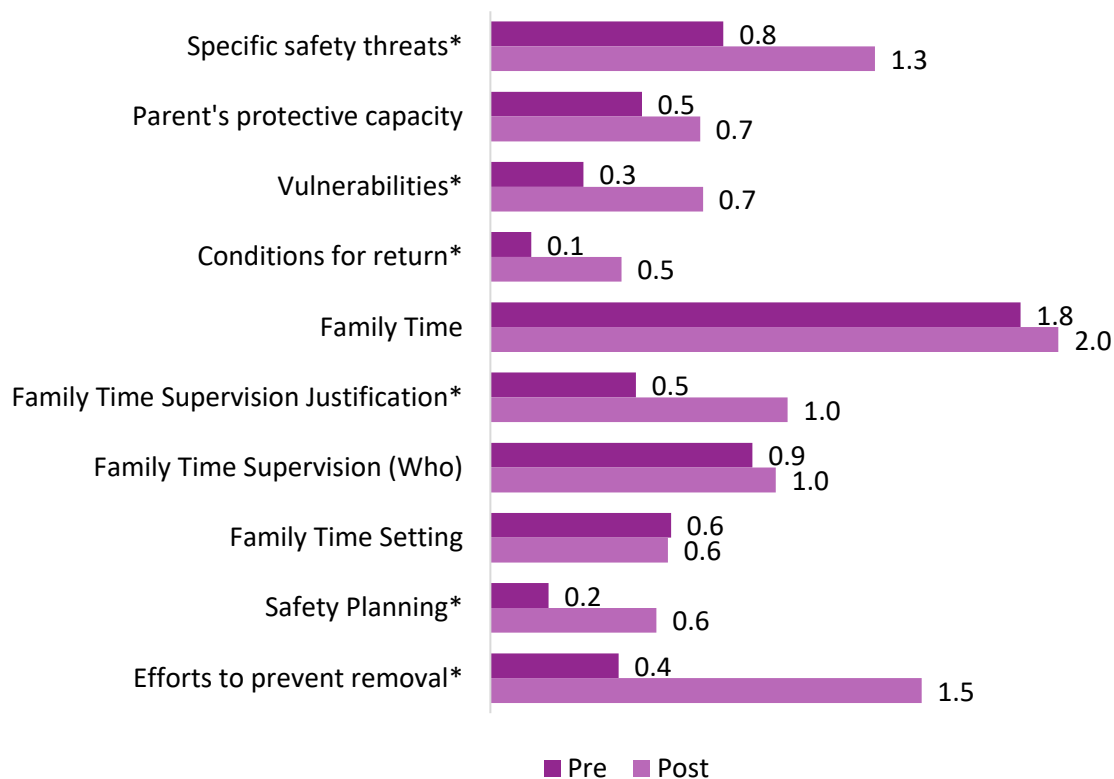
When shelter care was waived, discussion of all safety items went up in the post sample of hearings, with the exception of discussion of visit setting which occurred more often (39%) in the pre-sample than in the post sample (25%). When shelter care wasn’t waived, discussion of all safety items at the hearings increased in the post sample except for discussion of parents’ protective capacities (59% of hearings pre-compared to 36% of hearings post) and discussion of visit setting (41% of hearings pre-compared to 39% of hearings post). Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of hearings when a safety topic was discussed both pre and post training (regardless of whether Shelter Care was waived).

Figure 1: Percentage of Shelter Care Hearings with Safety Topic Discussed (pre n=50; post n=44)



Level of discussion of safety items was coded on a 4-point scale that included 0=no discussion, 1=statement only, 2=2-3 statements, 3=substantive discussion. Average discussion was calculated for each of the safety topics, with higher numbers indicating more discussion. Figure 2 below depicts the average discussion of safety items in Shelter Care hearings in the pre and post samples. Average discussion of all topics increased over baseline (with the exception of discussing the setting of family time, which stayed the same from pre to post). Statistically significant increases from pre to post in average discussion at Shelter Care hearings were found for 6 of the 10 safety topics coded: specific safety threats (from .8 pre to 1.3 post); vulnerabilities (from 0.3 pre to 0.7 post); conditions for return (from 0.1 pre to 0.5 post); justification for supervision of family time (from 0.5 pre to 1.0 post); safety planning (from 0.2 pre to 0.6 post); and efforts to prevent removal (from 0.4 pre to 1.5 post). The biggest increase in average level of safety discussion from pre to post Shelter Care hearings was in discussion about efforts to prevent removal.

Figure 2: Average Discussion of Safety Items in Shelter Care Hearings



* indicates statistically significant difference (p<.10)

Judicial Inquiry

Judicial inquiry was measured as any time a judge asked a question from the bench. Judicial inquiry was coded as a yes/no item for each of the safety items. Table 3 presents the percentage of hearings in both the pre and post samples that judges asked questions about a given safety topic. Compared to the pre-sample of Shelter Care hearings, judges asked significantly more questions in the post sample about: agency efforts to prevent removal (up 10%); vulnerabilities of the child (up 5%); and visitation generally (up 6%).

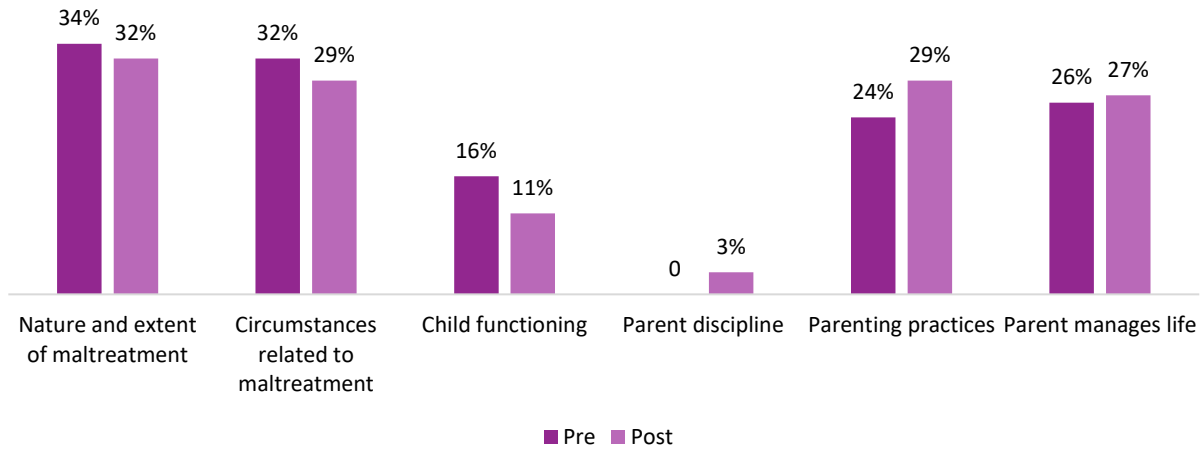
Table 3. Percentage of Shelter Care Hearings Where Judge Made Inquiry		
	PRE	POST
	(n=50)	(n=44)
Agency Efforts to prevent removal*	8%	18%
Specific safety threats	14%	18%
Parent's protective capacities	10%	9%
Vulnerabilities (child)*	0	5%
Conditions for return	4%	5%
Visitation/Family time (generally)*	35%	41%
Visit: Justification for supervision time	12%	5%
Visit: Level of supervisions (who)	18%	2%
Visit: Setting	12%	7%
Safety planning (in-home)	6%	5%

* indicates statistically significant difference (p<.10).

In addition, coders explored how often there was discussion of contextual safety information related to a series of questions that judges could ask to be more informed about safety related decision-making. Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of Shelter Care hearings where these items were discussed by pre and post samples. There was slightly more discussion of parenting practices, how the parent manages his or her life, and parent discipline in the post training sample. But there was slightly less discussion in the post training sample of the nature and extent of maltreatment, circumstances related to maltreatment, and the child's functioning. None of these differences between pre and post were statistically significant.

Judges rarely made active inquiry related to these contextual items. In 4% of hearings, judges inquired about circumstances related to maltreatment or overall parenting practices, and in 3% of hearings judges inquired about how parents managed their own life.

Figure 3: Discussion of Additional Safety Contextual Information at Shelter Care Hearings (pre n=50; post n=44)



Findings on the Record

At 26% of Shelter Care hearings, judges made a verbal reasonable efforts finding in the pre sample compared to 42% in the post training sample. This was a significant difference between pre and post. While judges made significantly more verbal reasonable efforts findings in the post sample, their findings were less likely to include detail (this finding was also significant).

Safety Analysis

Coders observed whether *anyone* in the hearing demonstrated a thorough safety analysis in the discussion. That is, was there something that indicated that someone had considered the safety threats in relation to child’s vulnerabilities. Coders noted some evidence of this analysis in 21% of hearings observed in the pre-sample, and 32% of cases in the post sample. While this trended in the right direction, it did not reach statistical significance.

Advocacy

A final measure in hearings was attorney advocacy. Advocacy was determined by whether the attorney for the parent or advocate for the child argued for something for their client. In particular, in-court advocacy focused on whether there was argument regarding the safety threat, that parent’s protective capacities were enhanced, that conditions for return had been met, or there was argument for enhanced visitation (either longer, or less supervision). There were no differences in advocacy for any of these items between pre and post training.

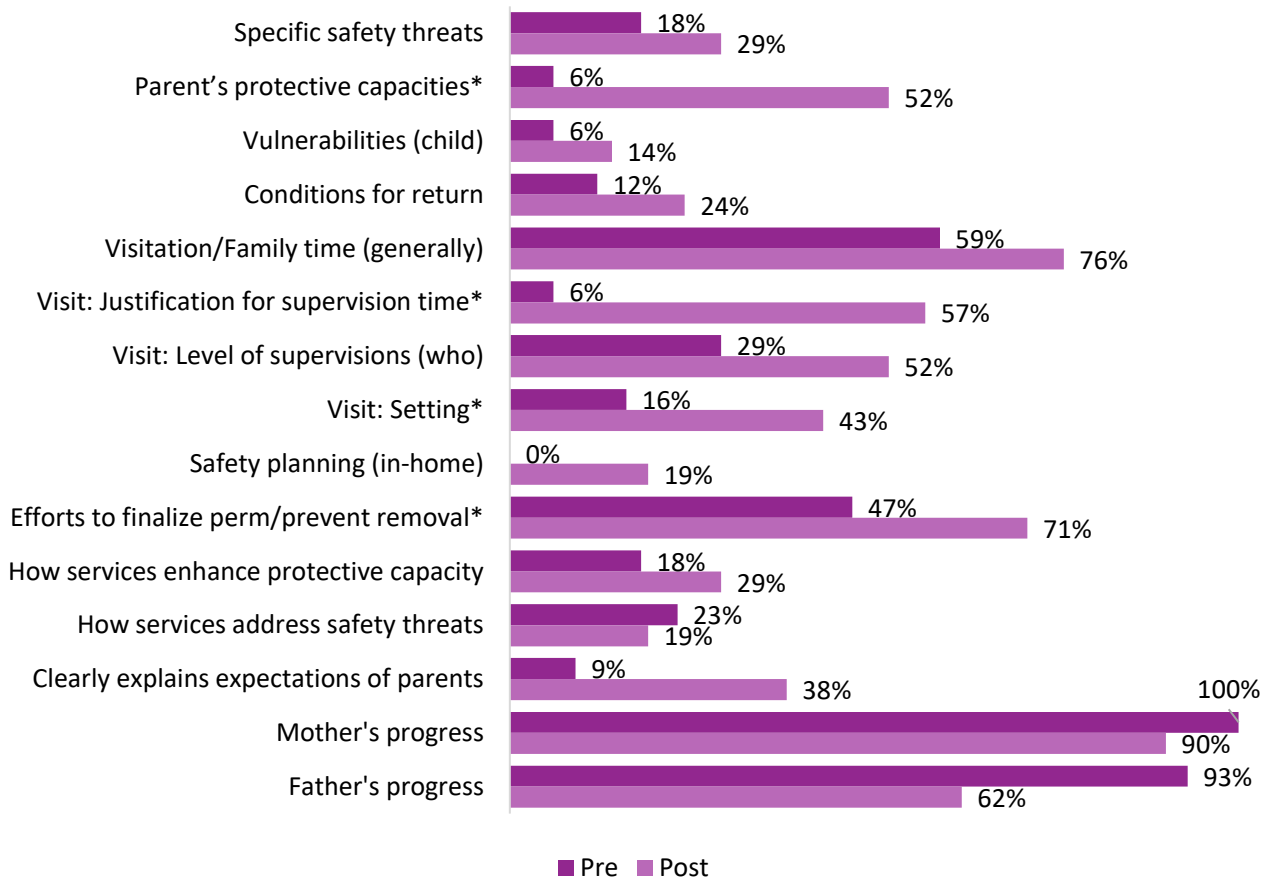
Review Hearings

Thirty-eight review hearings were observed for King County, with 17 in the pre-sample and 21 in the post sample. Similar items were explored for review hearings as Shelter Care hearings, including discussion, judicial inquiry, and findings on the record.

Discussion

Figure 4 shows the percentage of Review hearings where a specific safety item topic was discussed. Significantly more Review hearings post-training discussed parent's protective capacities (up 46%); justification for supervision time (up 51%); visitation setting (up 27%); and efforts to finalize permanency (up 24%). An additional 8 safety items also saw increased discussion post-training, although those differences from pre-training were not statistically significant. Three safety items (how services address safety threats, mother's progress and father's progress) were discussed in more Review hearings pre-training. These differences were also not statistically significant.

Figure 4: Percentage of Review Hearings with Topic Discussed

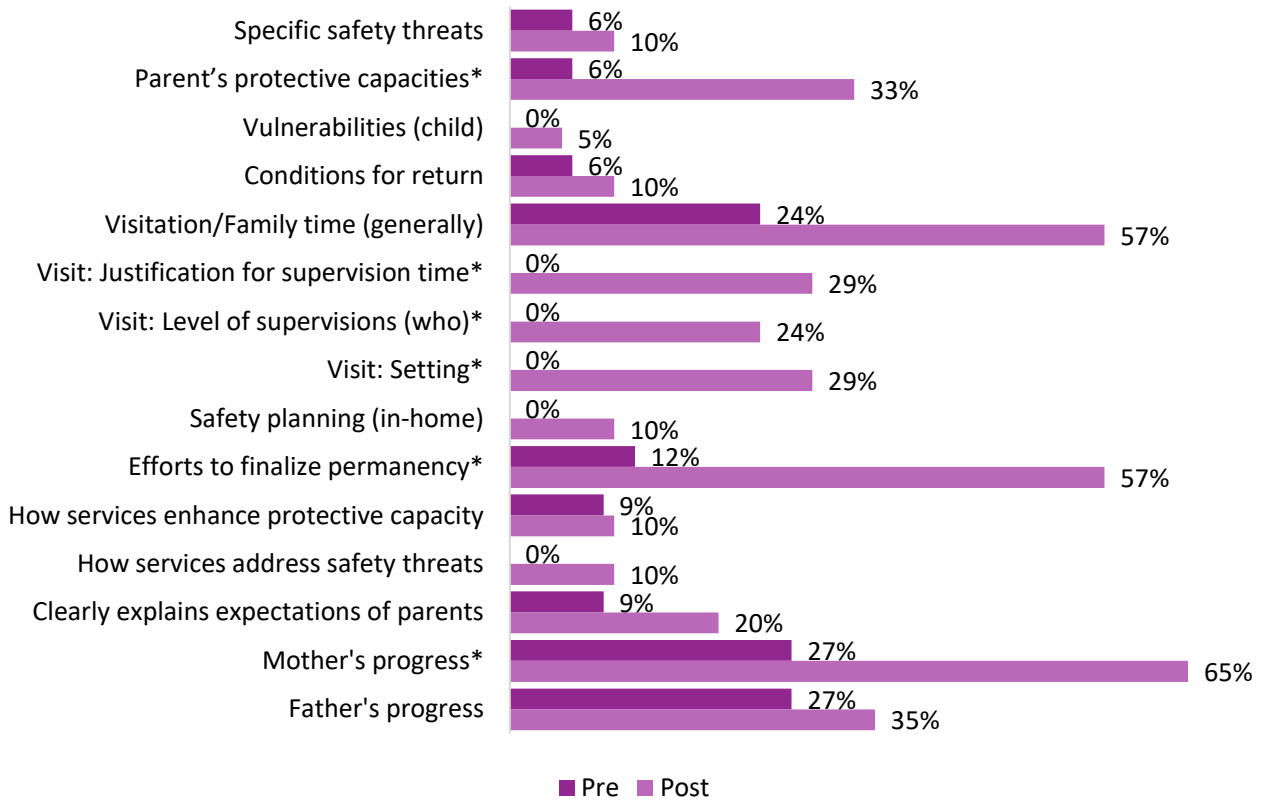


* indicates statistically significant difference ($p < .10$).

Judicial Inquiry

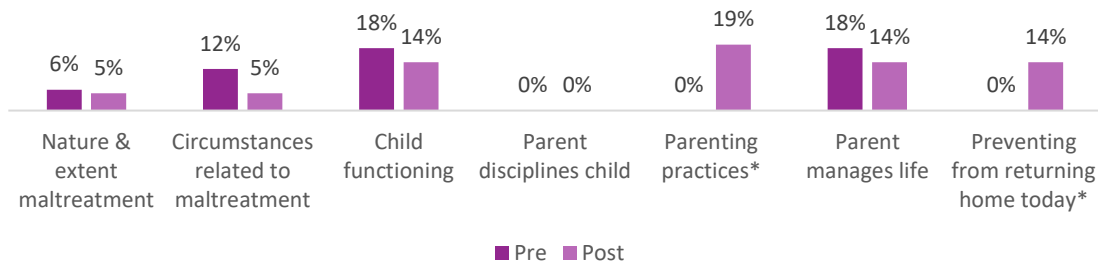
Judicial inquiry at Review hearings was measured as any time a judge asked a question from the bench. Judicial inquiry was coded as a yes/no item for each of the safety items. Figure 5 presents the percentage of hearings in both the pre and post samples that judges asked questions about a given safety topic. Compared to the pre-sample of Review hearings, judges asked significantly more questions in the post sample about: parent's protective capacities (up 27%); justification for supervision time (up 29%); level of supervision – who (up 24%); visitation setting (up 29%); efforts to finalize permanency (up 45%); and mother's progress (up 38%). All of the other safety items also saw increased judicial inquiry in the post-training sample, but differences from the pre-sample were not statistically significant.

Figure 5: Judicial Inquiry of Specific Topic at Review Hearings



Coders also explored the discussion of contextual safety information in the Review hearings. Figure 6 illustrates the percentage of Review hearings where contextual information was discussed in the pre and post-training samples. Significantly more discussion was observed in the post-sample of hearings for two contextual items: parenting practices (up 19%) and what is preventing the child from returning home before (up 14%). The other contextual items were discussed more in the pre-training sample of review hearings, although none of the differences between samples for these items were statistically significant. None of the Review hearings in either the pre or post sample discussed parental discipline of the child.

Figure 6: Discussion of Additional Safety Contextual Information at Review Hearings



* indicates statistically significant difference ($p < .10$).

Judges rarely made inquiry regarding contextual safety items. In the pre-sample, the judge only asked about how the parent manages his or her life at two hearings. The judge made no other contextual inquiries in the pre-sample. In the post sample the judge did make inquiry in one hearing about circumstances related to maltreatment, child functioning, and parenting practices. Also, in two hearings the judge inquired about what is preventing the child from returning home. None of the differences from pre to post-sample, however, were statistically significant.

Findings on the Record

Fifty-two percent of Review hearings pre and 53% post had verbal reasonable efforts findings on the record. The pre-sample was more likely to include detail in the findings* (67% compared to 30%); however, the post-sample was more likely to reference safety in the finding (15% compared to none of the pre-training findings).

Safety Analysis

Only 6% of Reviews had evidence of any safety analysis discussed in the hearing during the pre-training sample, and 10% had evidence of a safety analysis in the post-training sample. These differences were not significant.

Case File Review

The primary intent of the case file review was to identify what types of information the judge (and other stakeholders) receive prior to the hearings, specifically regarding safety analysis. It is important to note that case file reviews were limited to the information that was provided to the court and documented in the case management system. As a result, information such as case plans were not included in the documentation reviewed. Further, as cases in the post-training sample were selected that opened after the trainings (October -December of 2021), most of the cases were limited to the initial Shelter Care hearing, with a few reaching dispositions. As such, pre-post comparisons are only made for the Shelter Care hearing. All of the case files came from King County; 21 pre-training and 19 post-training.

Shelter Care Documentation

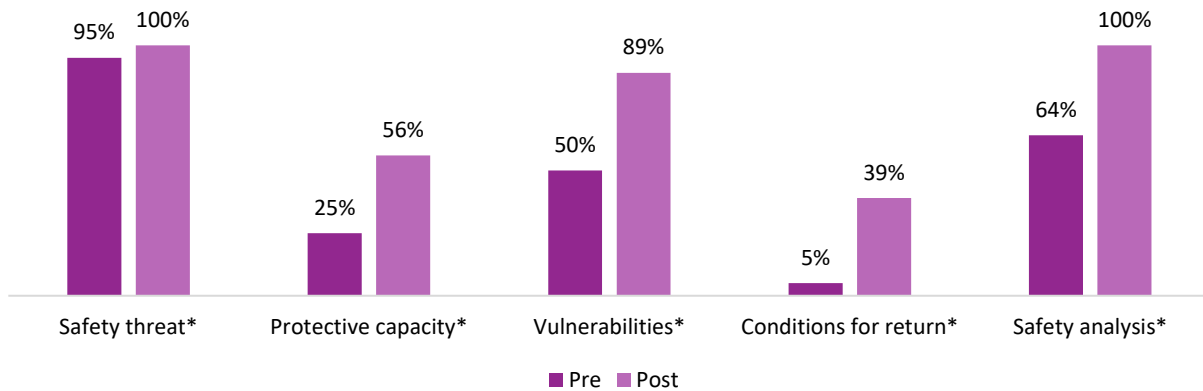
The case file review first explored the type of information provided in documentation that came into the court *prior* to the Shelter Care hearing. This typically only included a dependency petition. Coders reviewed this information to determine the extent of safety decision-making related information that was provided to the court. Coders looked for basic safety information related to safety threats, protective capacities, vulnerabilities of the child, and conditions for return.

Coders reviewed the American Bar Association's publication *Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys* (Safety Guide) for background on these constructs and the types of information that would fit into each category. Case documents that the court would have received prior to each hearing were then coded to see what information they contained. In addition, coders explored whether the document included a safety analysis. According to the Safety Guide, "whether a child is safe depends upon a *threat of danger*, the child's *vulnerability*, and a family's *protective capacity*." In determining whether there was a safety analysis, the coders explored whether the information provided included information about threats in relation to vulnerabilities and protective capacities. It was soon discovered that documents rarely discussed protective capacity, so credit was given to the site if they discussed safety threats in relation to child vulnerabilities. In 60% of all of the documents reviewed prior to the Shelter Care hearing, there was some evidence of a safety analysis.

As noted in Figure 7, nearly all of the documents (pre and post) submitted prior to the Shelter Care hearing addressed safety threats, although there was a statistically significant increase in the number of post-sample documents addressing safety threats (95% of pre and 100% of post). Significantly more documents submitted prior to the Shelter Care hearing in the post-sample cases referenced protective capacity (up 31%); vulnerabilities (up 39%); and conditions

for return (up 34%). Significantly more documents in the post-sample of cases also included a safety analysis (up 36%).

Figure 7: Percentage of Shelter Care Documents That Included Specific Safety Information (pre N=21; post N=19)

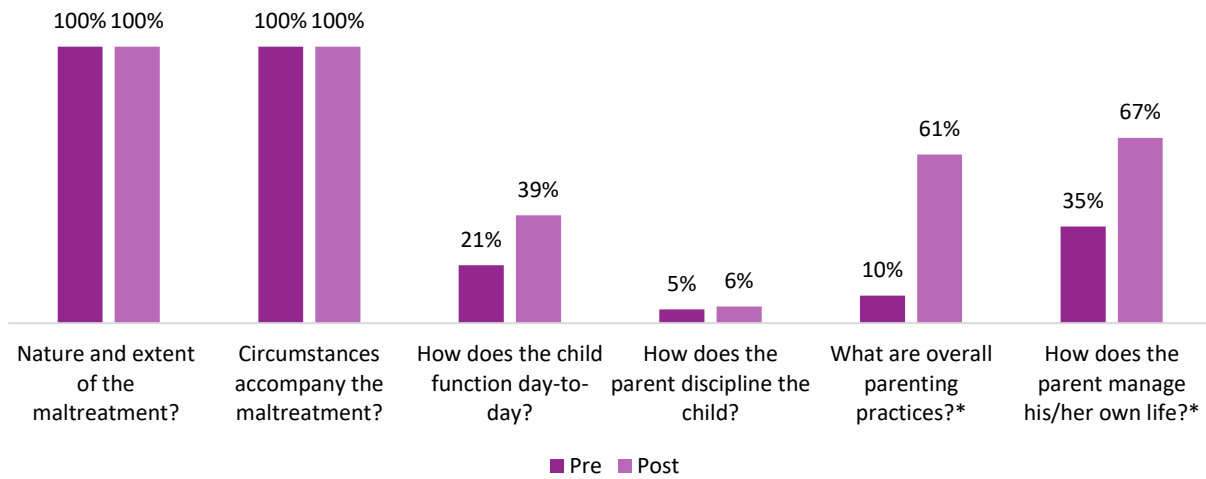


In addition, coders explored whether there was information in the case file about 6 key questions that judges are encouraged to ask to gain more contextual information about the safety of the child. These include:

1. What is the nature and extent of the maltreatment?
2. What are the circumstances that accompany the maltreatment?
3. How does the child function day-to-day?
4. How does the parent discipline the child?
5. What are overall parenting practices?
6. How does the parent manage his/her own life?

Figure 8 illustrates how often this information was provided in these documents. All of the documents in both the pre and post sample of cases included information about the nature and extent of maltreatment and the circumstances accompanying the maltreatment. There was a statistically significant increase in the post-sample of cases, however, in the number of documents with information about the parent’s overall parenting practices (up 51%) and how the parent manages his/her own life (up 32%). Increases in documentation about the child’s day to day functioning also increased post-sample (up 18%) but was not statistically significant.

Figure 8: Information on Safety Context in Documents Prior to Shelter Care (pre N=21; post N=19)



The review of documents also included whether there was a reason why supervision was required for any family time/visitation. Forty-two percent of the documents submitted prior to the Shelter Care hearing noted the reasons why supervised visits were being requested for the mother, compared to only 11% of documents in the pre-sample cases (this difference was statistically significant). For fathers, 25% of documents in the post-sample noted the reasons why supervised visits were being requested, and 13% of pre-sample cases (this difference was not statistically significant).

In addition, a reasonable efforts finding was found in the Shelter Care order in 90% of all cases reviewed (91% of pre and 95% of all post). The finding included detail in 36% of cases and for 49% there was a reference to detail in the report/documentation provided.

Per King County’s action plan, there was a plan for an updated safety assessment to be filed at every hearing. While we did not collect pre-data on this, 95% cases had a safety assessment filed prior to the Shelter Care hearing and 74% of Disposition hearings had one on file. It is important to note that these cases were still open and many had not yet reached disposition stage so the files may not have been updated completely at the time of our review.

Administrative Data

Administrative data were provided to determine how often cases have in-home safety plans in place and how often those cases result in the child being removed from the home. DCYF provided site level and state level data on the percentage of cases where a removal occurred within 6 months and the percentage of cases where removal occurred within 12 months of an

in-home safety plan (see Table 4). Because the data are in aggregate, statistical comparisons are not made. However, project sites did decrease over time in the percentage of removals from a safety plan.

Table 4. Percentage of Children With an In-home Safety Plan Removed within 6 and 12 Months				
Of Children with Safety Plan	PRE		POST	
	Removed within 6 months	Removed within 12 months	Removed within 6 months	Removed within 12 months
Project Sites	5%	7%	4%	4%
Statewide	4%	6%	4%	5%

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Safety Concepts. A primary purpose of the study was to explore safety decision-making after participation in multidisciplinary training. Four safety concepts were examined across court observation and case file review using a pre/post research design. These concepts were safety threats, protective capacities, vulnerabilities, and conditions for return. Key findings included:

- Safety Discussion and Inquiry at Shelter Care Hearings:** Post-training there were more Shelter Care hearings with a discussion of all safety items, with the biggest increases found for the number of hearings that discussed efforts to prevent removal. Average level of discussion of safety items also increased over baseline Shelter Care hearings, with statistically significant increases in average discussion for specific safety threats, vulnerabilities, conditions for return, justification for supervision of family time, safety planning and efforts to prevent removal. Judges also made significantly more inquiries about agency efforts to prevent removal, vulnerabilities of the child, and visitation (generally) in Shelter Care hearings in the post-training sample.
- Safety Discussion and Inquiry at Review Hearings:** Post-training there were significantly more Review hearings that discussed parent’s protective capacities, justification for supervision time, visitation setting, and efforts to finalize permanency. Judges also asked significantly more questions in the post sample about: parent’s protective capacities, justification for supervision time, level of supervision (who), visitation setting, efforts to finalize permanency, and mother’s progress. All of the other safety items also saw increased judicial inquiry in the post-training Review hearing sample, but differences from the pre-sample were not statistically significant.

- **Judicial Findings:** Judges made significantly more verbal reasonable efforts findings in Shelter Care hearings post-training. However, findings were less likely to include detail. At Review hearings, judges' pre-training reasonable efforts findings were more likely to include detail but the post-training findings were more likely to reference safety.

Safety Analysis. Safety analysis was defined as exploring safety threats in relation to child vulnerabilities and parent protective capacities. Within the study it was explored both in terms of discussion in court observation and information presented within the case file review. Key findings included:

- There was some evidence of more safety analysis in hearing discussions in both Shelter Care and Review hearings post-training (e.g., that someone had considered the safety threats in relation to child's vulnerabilities), but while trending in the right direction the improvement over pre-training hearings was not statistically significant.
- There was a statistically significant increase in the number of documents submitted prior to the Shelter Care hearing that addressed safety threats in the post sample (after trainings). Significantly more documents in the post-sample of cases also included a safety analysis, with more documents including a reference to protective capacity, vulnerabilities, and conditions for return.

Contextual Safety Information. Contextual safety information was defined as information that could contribute to a better understanding of safety for the family. It included six questions (or topical areas) about nature and extent of maltreatment, circumstances leading up to the maltreatment, how child functions day to day, how parent disciplines the child, overall parenting practices, and how parents manage their own lives. Findings from the study indicate:

- In the Shelter Care hearings, there was slightly more discussion about contextual factors related to safety in the post-training sample, although there was less discussion of the nature and extent of maltreatment, circumstances related to maltreatment, and the child's functioning. Judges also rarely made any active inquiry related to these contextual items in either the pre or post sample of Shelter Care hearings.
- For Review hearings, significantly more discussion was observed in the post-sample of hearings for contextual information about parenting practices and what is preventing the child from returning home. Unlike the Shelter Care hearings, judges made more active inquiry post-training about contextual safety information in Review hearings, but none of the differences from pre to post-sample were statistically significant.

- Significantly more documents submitted prior to the Shelter Care hearing in the post-sample of cases included contextual safety information about the parent's overall parenting practices and how the parent manages his/her own life.

Visitation. Visitation was explored from a safety decision-making perspective. In particular, it was explored whether there was information regarding the justification for supervised visitation. That is, what is the safety threat that requires supervision. Findings included:

- There was a statistically significant increase in discussion of the reasons for supervision at both the Shelter Care and Review hearings post-training.
- A statistically significant increase in the documentation of justification for mothers' supervised visitation from pre to post-training cases was found. While not statistically significant, there was also an increase in documentation of justification for supervised visitation for fathers in the post-sample of cases.

Safety Plan. The study explored safety planning in two ways. Administrative data was used to determine how often in-home safety planning is effective and court observation data was used to explore how often there is discussion of safety planning. Findings included:

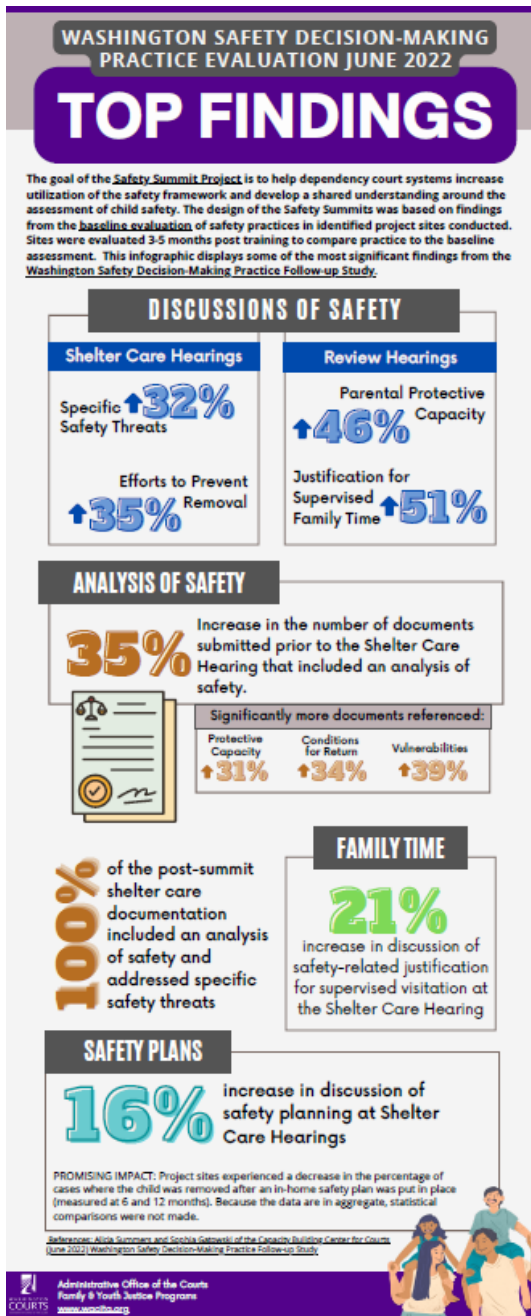
- Both the Shelter Care and Review hearings had an increase in discussion of safety planning from pre to post training. For Shelter Care hearings, the average level of discussion of safety planning also increased post-training and represents a statistically significant improvement in the degree to which safety planning was considered at the Shelter Care hearing compared to pre-training hearings.
- While judges rarely inquired about safety planning in the Shelter Care hearings observed in either the pre or post-training samples, more judges inquired about safety planning at Review hearings. There was also an increase from pre to post-training Review hearings in safety planning inquiries, but this difference was not statistically significant.
- A review of administrative data found a decrease over time in the percentage of removals from a safety plan for project sites. We could not determine if this was a statistically significant decrease, but the data moved in the right direction.

While sample sizes for this study were relatively small, especially considering three of the original seven sites are not included in the follow-up study, a number of statistically significant improvements in application of the safety decision-making framework were detected from pre to post-training. In summary, this evaluation found significant improvements from pre to post-training in courts' discussion of and inquiry about key safety concepts. Judges made more

verbal reasonable efforts findings on the record, and while the detail of those findings did not increase, more findings referenced safety. Significantly more documents in the post-sample of cases also included a safety analysis, with more documents submitted prior to Shelter Care including a reference to protective capacity, vulnerabilities, and conditions for return. We also found more discussion of and judicial inquiry about contextual factors related to safety in Review hearings post-training. Finally, there was a significant increase in information presented to the court and discussion in court regarding why supervision is needed in relation to a safety threat. While we cannot say that the Safety Summits *caused* this change in practice, there is a positive pre-post difference after the trainings.

These findings can be used to enhance Safety Summit discussions, particularly in areas where there was less change than expected. For example, discussion of what is preventing the child from returning home today and the conditions for return, are still pretty low. These discussion topics could be helpful in ensuring families fully understand the conditions for return so that they can successfully reunite with their children. Data should be reviewed with an eye toward successes and these opportunities to continue to improve safety discussions and decision-making.

TOP FINDINGS INFOGRAPHIC

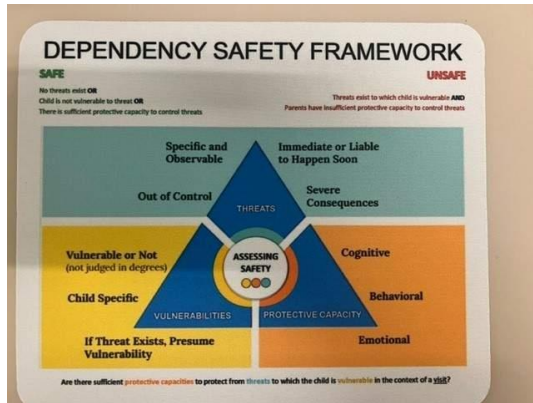


[Download PDF](#)

INNOVATIONS IN SAFETY SHOWCASE

SAFETY FRAMEWORK MOUSEPAD

King County



One of the goals of the Court was to have the safety triangle on display for judicial officers during hearings, whether being conducted virtually or in-person. Using the “blue triangle” imagery created for Safety Summit, the FJCIP Coordinator put together a graphic that was printed onto mousepads. Pictured here, these mousepads are on-the-bench in the four dependency courtrooms in King County so that both sitting and pro tem judicial officers have a constant reminder of the safety framework.

[Learn More](#)

Similar imagery was used by the Office of Public Defense Parent Representation Program to make “giveaway” stickers to participants at an annual conference.

CASE INFORMATION WALK-AWAY FORM

Mason County

Mason County created a "walk-away order" with important case information for parents. This simple document provides a mechanism for the judicial officer to clearly articulate important information and expectations directly to parents in a way they can understand.

[Learn More](#)

QUESTIONS FROM THE BENCH

Kitsap County

The Kitsap County team worked to develop four main questions to be asked by the judicial officer at dependency court hearings. Physical and electronic versions were distributed widely

1. What does this parent need to do to improve their finding of compliance and progress for the next review period?
2. What does this parent need to do to increase visits and decrease visitation restrictions on Family Time?
3. What is the threat or danger to the child(ren) that requires supervised/monitored visitations during Family Time?
4. What needs to occur for the child(ren) to return home?

to dependency court system partners. These questions are designed to help increase conversations in the courtroom with parents present that can support the reunification process for families.

[Learn More](#)

HEARING TIMING STUDY

Grays Harbor County

The Grays Harbor County Superior Court partnered with FYJP to conduct a hearing timing study to assess the average amount of time spent on dependency court hearings for the purpose of assessing the need for increased judicial capacity and increased efficiency in case calendaring. Over the course of a month, FYJP timed 72 hearings in Grays Harbor County and was able to provide the court with a breakdown of the average time allocated to dependency court hearings by hearing type.

SAFETY SNAPSHOTS

Family & Youth Justice Programs



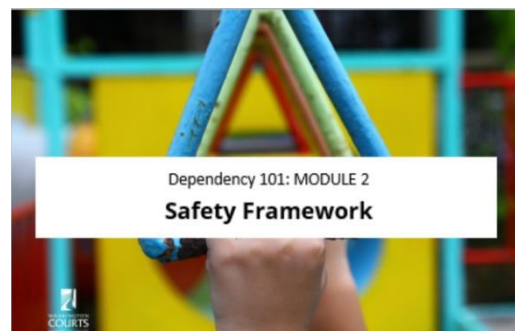
Follow along with Safe-T as he guides you through mini lessons designed to help you use the safety framework in your dependency practice. This **mini-learning series** contains short learning, practice, and knowledge check lessons on the effective application of the safety framework. This learning series is for all professionals who work within the dependency court system. Lessons are just minutes in length and easy to navigate. This series is being continuously developed so check back frequently to see new content.

[LEARN MORE](#)

SAFETY FRAMEWORK ONLINE MODULE

Family & Youth Justice Programs

Part of the *Dependency 101 for Judicial Officers Course*, the newly released online Safety Framework training module provides a virtual introduction to the safety framework. The module covers the basics of the safety framework and its application in child dependency cases, including scenario practice activities and final knowledge check. While originally designed for judicial officers, this module is available and helpful to anyone wanting to learn more about the safety framework and how to use it in child welfare cases.



[LEARN MORE](#)