



State of South Carolina

Department of Social Services

Policies and Guidelines: Child Welfare Services

Subject	1646 Family Advocacy and Support Tool Assessments
Authority	Family First Prevention Services Act (P.L. 115-123)
Standards	Guiding Principles and Standards (GPS) Practice Model
Application	Child Welfare Services
Purpose	
To guide child welfare case managers and team leaders in the completion of comprehensive assessments in a strengths-based, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and family centered manner, using interpersonal skills that demonstrate genuineness, empathy, and respect for the family in accordance with the GPS Practice Model.	
Policy Statement	
Child welfare case managers and team leaders shall conduct comprehensive, fact-based assessments of the child and family as outlined in these policies and procedures. Case managers shall use the information obtained in comprehensive assessments to address immediate safety and risk concerns and develop individualized Family Permanency Plans (FPP).	
Policy Administration	
The Division of Child Welfare Services' Office of Safety is the owner of this policy. The Safety Director, or designee, shall review this policy annually from the date published in the Child Welfare Services Policy Manual, or as needed due to changes in law or practice.	
Policy Guidelines	
A. Family Advocacy and Support Tool Assessment Components	1. The Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST) is comprised of assessment components which are categorized as either a safety or risk indicator/item. 2. Case managers shall rate the safety indicators/items on the Initial FAST assessment. 3. Case managers should also rate the risk indicator/item during the Initial FAST assessment if relevant information is available; however, case managers must rate the risk indicator/item at least 15 days before the final assessment. 4. FAST assessments address the following domains: a. Family Assessment; b. Caregiver Assessment; and c. Child Assessment to include: i. Ages 0-5 years; and ii. Ages 6-21 years. 5. For a comprehensive list of all assessment components, please refer to the FAST Reference Guide.

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B. Gathering Information to Complete the Caregiver Assessment	1. Case managers shall consider assessing the following individuals when completing the Caregiver Assessment portion of the FAST: a. Biological parents whose parental rights have not been terminated; b. Noncustodial parents; and c. Any other adult who shares caregiving responsibilities. 2. Case managers shall request documentation from professional entities (e.g., law enforcement, medical organizations, educational institutions, and in-state agencies) pertaining to a caregiver or an alleged perpetrator when unable to assess a caregiver or an alleged perpetrator of child abuse or neglect. 3. Case managers may rely on evidence and information obtained from professional entities, as stated above, to complete and finalize the FAST, provided the evidence and information is documented in writing, and it is clear case managers received the information from that entity. 4. Case managers may rely on evidence and information received from out-of-state public child welfare agencies to complete and finalize the FAST, provided the evidence and information is documented in writing, and it is clear case managers received the information from that agency. The information received from out-of-state public child welfare agencies must address the following items: a. Specific questions, provided by DSS, related to the FAST indicator/item; and b. The specific caregiver domains: i. Strengths; ii. Needs; iii. Advocacy and Capacity; and iv. Caregiver. 5. Case managers cannot complete the FAST assessment if initial contact with the parent or caregiver has not been made OR case managers have no reliable evidence or information, documented in writing, from professional entities or public child welfare agencies.
C. Safety Services – Initial Contact	1. Case managers conduct Initial FAST assessments during initial contact and rate indicators/items utilizing Section A of this policy. FAST assessment indicators/items rated as a safety indicator/item result in one of two outcomes: a. Immediate Intervention Not Recommended 0 – No action needed 1 – Watchful waiting/prevention additional assessment b. Immediate Intervention Recommended 2 – Action/Intervention Required 3 – Immediate action/Intensive action required

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	2. Case managers shall consider the need for safety service(s) if a safety indicator/item is rated a 2 or 3. Refer to Investigations Work Aid 3.6: Safety Services and Planning. Note: Consider whether an evidence-based practice or in-home service is available for the family and would be sufficient to control the safety threat if a safety indicator/item is rated a 2 or 3.
D. Initial FAST Timeline Requirements During Investigation	1. Case managers shall conduct Initial FAST assessments during initial contact with the family. a. Case managers may utilize DSS Form 37670 as a field guide when making initial contact, as necessary, and shall enter the FAST assessment into CAPSS. 2. Case managers shall document Initial FAST assessments in CAPSS within 72 hours of making initial contact with the family. 3. Case managers shall provide written justification for each safety and risk indicator/item rated 1, 2, or 3. 4. Case managers shall provide written justification for each indicator/item in the Strength section that are rated 0, 1, 2, or 3. 5. Unless extenuating circumstances exist, within 10 days of the initiation of an investigation, team leaders shall review ratings and justifications for the Initial FAST during post-initial contact case consultations. Team leaders shall complete any review that becomes overdue within 12 days of the initiation of an investigation. Refer to Investigations Work Aid 3.2: Concerted Efforts to Locate Families in the event case managers have been unable to locate the child or family. After the consultation, team leaders complete the following activities, as applicable: a. Notify case managers of any changes that need to be made before approval. b. Provide the team leader's signature indicating approval of the Initial FAST.
E. Full and Final FAST Timeline Requirements During Investigation	1. Within 15 days after the initiation of an investigation, case managers shall complete and update the Full FAST assessment. Team leaders shall review and sign the Full FAST assessment after the case manager signs the assessment and no later than 20 days after the initiation of an investigation. 2. Case managers shall provide a written justification for each indicator/item rated a 1, 2, or 3. 3. Case managers shall provide a written justification for each Strength indicator/item rated 0, 1, 2, or 3. 4. Case managers shall provide a written justification for each Advocacy and Capacity domain indicator/item rated 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4.

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	5. Team leaders shall review ratings and justifications for the Full and Final FAST assessment and notify case managers of any changes that need to be made. 6. Team leaders shall approve the Final FAST assessment between Day 30 or 45 of a report being accepted for investigation, unless a 15-day extension is granted by case determination. a. The assessment will be considered overdue after Day 45. b. The team leader's final signature indicates approval. 7. Refer to Policy 1647: Family Permanency Plan, Section A, for guidance on how to connect families to services where the indicator/item are rated a 2 or 3.
F. Writing Rationale	1. Case managers shall provide written justification, in the Rationale Section, for each: a. Need indicator/item rated 1, 2, or 3; and b. Strength indicator/item rated 0, 1, 2, or 3. 2. Only the narrative section, rationale of actionable indicators/items, populates into the FPP. 3. The narrative consists of the following: a. A clear and concise justification of the need for an intervention or service; b. An explanation of the rating, behaviors, current intervention(s), and concerns contributing to the rating; c. Information on the occurrence and severity; d. Discussion of whether another indicator/item contributes to another concern causing the severity to increase more; and e. Any individual(s) who may negatively impact the occurrence and severity.
G. FAST During Family Preservation Services	1. Case managers may utilize DSS Form 37680: Full FAST Field Guide to assist in completing the comprehensive assessment, but it must be documented in CAPSS. 2. Case managers shall review and update the FAST within 14 days of opening Family Preservation service lines to engage children/families and inform the development of the FPP. 3. Family Preservation case managers or team leaders shall hold a CFTM within 25 days of opening Family Preservation service lines to create or finalize FPP's utilizing the FAST to inform services decisions. 4. Family preservation case managers shall reassess the family and update the FAST every 90 days from the opening of family preservation service lines, or when there are changes in safety or risk. Note: For example, if the family preservation service line opens on January 1, the initial reassessment is due by

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	<i>January 15. The next reassessment would then be due April 1 and every 90 days thereafter until the family preservation service line is close.</i> 5. Team leaders shall review and approve or reject the updated FAST within 72 hours of completion by the case manager as indicated by their signature. 6. If a team leader rejects the FAST and provides reasons for the case manager to revise the FAST, upon the resubmission from the case manager, team leaders shall review the FAST again within 72 hours of receiving the revised FAST, as indicated by their signature.
H. Service Intensity Levels During Family Preservation Services	1. Based on the ratings in each section, the assessment will result in one of the following service intensity levels: a. No Service Intensity – services not recommended. Case managers continue to complete the required tasks for case closure. b. Low Service Intensity – case managers proceed to case tasks or closure contingent on team leader approval and no new safety or risk concerns. c. Moderate Service Intensity – case manager initiates referrals for appropriate services that have been identified for any family member's needs. d. High Service Intensity – case managers initiate referrals for appropriate services that have been identified for any family member's urgent needs immediately upon consulting with the team leader, but no later than 48 hours after the consultation. Urgent needs are those rated 3. 2. Case managers shall discuss, with the family, the justifications for any safety and risk indicator/item rated 2 or 3 and strength indicator/item rated 0 and 1 on the FAST prior to or during a CFTM to develop or update the FPP. 3. Case managers develop goals in Section II of the FPP that address any safety and risk indicator/item rated a 2 or 3 in collaboration with the Child and Family Team (CFT). The goals, and the associated services and/or activities for the goal, will also encompass any strength indicator/item rated 0 and 1 on the FAST. 4. Refer to the Service Intensity Chart for additional guidance.
I. Determining Recommended Services to be Provided to Children and Families	1. Completed FAST assessments recommend service types including: a. Assessment and Testing; b. Psychotherapy Services; c. Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA); and d. Parenting Services. 2. Case managers shall utilize DSS Resource 37678 and consult with team leaders, children (when age and developmentally

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	appropriate), and family members to determine specific services based upon the recommended service type. 3. Referrals shall not be limited to the specific services that accompany the service recommendation types. a. Case managers shall make service referrals immediately after consulting with the team leader, but no later than 48 hours after the consultation. b. Case managers may need to explore other service referral options based upon availability and extenuating circumstances of the case by consulting with team leaders for guidance. 4. Case managers and team leaders shall consult with the Well-Being Team and any other appropriate individuals to discuss and determine the next steps if additional consultation, support, or services are needed.
J. Determining Level of Care if Child Enters Foster Care via Investigation or Family Preservation	1. Case managers shall utilize the Behavioral/Mental Health Needs, School, and Risk Behaviors Modules to determine appropriate levels of care for children who enter foster care when Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessments are not available. 2. Refer to Policy 1650: Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment, Section F(1), for guidance regarding the initial level of care determination for a child.
K. Team Leader Responsibilities	1. Team leaders review and approve FAST assessments, as indicated by their signature. 2. Direct team leaders of case managers, who are unavailable or not certified to complete the FAST, shall complete the assessment. 3. Team leaders shall collaborate when a family is involved in multiple program services to determine who will complete the Initial and Final FAST assessment. 4. Team leaders verify adherence to timelines for reviewing the FAST.
L. FAST Training and Certification	1. All Child Welfare case managers and team leaders responsible for completing the FAST must be trained and certified. 2. Case managers must score a 70% or above on the training vignette to be certified to complete the FAST. 3. Team leaders must score 70% or above on the training vignette to be certified to complete and/or approve the FAST. 4. Case managers, team leaders, team coordinators, and any other role responsible for completing or approving FAST assessments must be re-certified annually.

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Forms and Related Documents	DSS Form 37670: Initial FAST Field Guide DSS Resource 37678: FAST Service Types and Determination DSS Form 37680: Full FAST Field Guide FAST Reference Guide Service Intensity Chart
Related Management Reports	N/A

Glossary
Comprehensive Assessment: the practice of informing decision-making by identifying, considering, and weighing factors that impact children and their families Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST): the initial intervention assessment tool designed to be utilized with families who are involved in a child welfare services investigation and families who are identified as needing family preservation services Family Permanency Plan (FPP): the sole plan for a family that is developed collaboratively to describe the reasons for DSS involvement, the actions, and services required to change behaviors and reduce safety concerns and risks, and promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and family Safety Service: actions, activities, tasks, or imposed situations, grouped according to behavior management, crisis management, social connection, and resource support, that may be informal or formal provided by nonprofessionals for the purpose of managing or controlling impending danger threats and must be immediately available, always accessible, and sufficient to control impending danger Safety Threat: immediate, harmful, family conditions that are actively occurring and will likely result in severe harm to the child