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Triaging Child Welfare Cases

In most jurisdictions, child welfare laws require that least intrusive measures be invoked when a mandated agency identifies a child at risk situation. This requirement is not only well intentioned but also is based on rather compelling social science empirical evidence. To comply with this legal imperative, for most child welfare professionals, is easy because by training, personal inclination, and values it is their first choice of response even without the law. On most occasions this works well. On some occasions it does not and children continue to be harmed. The goal of the workshop is to provide an empirically based methodology to distinguish between cases where least intrusive measures are warranted and when they are not. The workshop also introduces an intermediate consideration that serves as a warning to be vigilant about conditions that place a child at risk.

The triage methodology is based on a standardized methodology used to assess parenting capacity. It is a psychosocial perspective that contextualizes functioning in the parent's history and current circumstance. Particular attention is focussed on attachment, later life consequences to adverse environmental conditions in the parent's early years, social support network, and what reasonably can be expected from a parent in a timely manner. Case studies are used extensively to illustrate the decision making process.