



Signs of Safety: A Guide for Professionals

In Worcestershire we are introducing a new approach to our work with children and families; this approach is called Signs of Safety; this information leaflet will help you to understand what this means for partner agencies.

What is Signs of Safety?

The Signs of Safety approach, seeks to strengthen risk assessments and maximise family participation and where possible they actively contribute to solutions to keeping their child safe.

Using the Signs of Safety approach professionals supporting families work together to:

1. Look at what's going well in the child's life - the strengths.
2. Understand who is worried and why - the worries and concerns.
3. Identify what needs to be done to build on the strengths, reduce the concerns and keep the child safe - the outcomes.

Signs of Safety expands on the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and signs of safety that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child's and family's situation. The approach is designed to help professionals and families throughout the child protection process.

When used in Child Protection Pathway the following approach is taken. What is different about this style of child protection conference?

The Signs of Safety approach uses assessment and planning tools to 'map' the information shared. This information is organised into:

1. **What we are worried about?** Past harm, future danger, complicating factors
2. **What is working well?** Strengths and safety which already exist
3. **What needs to happen?** Child protection safety goals and next steps for future safety

Agencies no longer read out their report; instead you are asked to provide key information concisely, focussing on the above points and to consider what your information tells us about the dangers to the child but also what is working well and the family's strengths.

It is important that information is presented in everyday language, without using jargon and you should distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. The source of the information should also be made clear.

What you need to do before the Conference

It is important that families do not hear new information at the conference and it is the responsibility of all agencies that have relevant information to make this available to the conference in a written report. The report should be provided to and discussed with parents, and children where appropriate, at least 24 hours in advance of an initial conference and 3 working days before a review conference. These timescales are to give families sufficient time to prepare for such important meetings about their family life.

Information is recorded on a whiteboard or whiteboard paper, the Chairperson asks questions of professionals and family moving between worries and strengths etc. to develop the presented information.

When the information has been 'mapped' the Chair will ask the social worker for their Danger Statement, this answers the question 'what are you worried will happen to the child/ren if nothing changes?'. This can be amended if necessary if new information is presented to the conference.

The conference then agrees 'what would you need to see to end the plan/close the case?' This is the Safety Goal and enables the family to clearly understand what they need to change.

Actions to help the family achieve these changes are identified and recorded during the conference as Next Steps - this becomes the plan.

Decision making

The conference is required to determine risk and the likelihood of significant harm for the child in question. The Chair will explain the threshold for a Child Protection Plan and will ask each agency for their view about whether the outline plan developed in the conference constitutes a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan.

To help with this decision the Chair will ask you a question to scale from 0 to 10 to measure how concerned you are and why. It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Chair to decide the category of risk that is most representative of the concerns.

More information on this can be found at www.signsofsafety.net