



Information Leaflet
for Professionals

Under the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) DHSSPS (2012) Guidance, everyone who works with children has a responsibility to keep them safe. If you have a concern about a child, you need to report it.

Social workers engage with families when the welfare, protection or safety of a child is in doubt, or if there are concerns the child is being abused or neglected.

For further advice and guidance please refer to SBNI website: www.safeguardingni.org

The Trust has adopted the Signs of Safety assessment framework as its approach to practice.

Assessment of a Case

Following receipt of a referral, social workers will assess the concern and decide if it meets the threshold for intervention. A key decision is whether the child has been harmed and needs a child protection safety plan or whether there are welfare concerns and the child needs a child welfare safety plan.

There can be different outcomes to each assessment such as:

- 1 There is no risk to the child and the case will be closed.
- 2 There is a child in need identified and family support services will be offered. No further action may be needed from statutory services but support services from the community will be offered to the family.
- 3 There are ongoing child protection concerns or serious worries and a child protection safety plan will be needed.

What is Signs of Safety?

The Signs of Safety approach is a solution-focused, safety-oriented approach to child welfare.

It was created by Dr. Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards.

Since June 2018 Social Work Children's Services across Northern Ireland have adopted Signs of Safety as the practice approach to child care practice.

Signs of Safety is structured to allow practitioners to work collaboratively with families and children to conduct balanced risk assessments and produce action plans for increasing safety, and reducing risk and danger. This is achieved by focusing on the strengths, resources and the naturally occurring networks around children and families. Signs of Safety sharpens professional rigour.

This will be done by describing the harm and future danger to children using clear, plain language. Developing clear written danger statements with matching safety goals to ensure we, as professionals, can be very clear with parents about our immediate and long term worries and what changes are needed to ensure children are safe.

This rigorous assessment and analysis enables professionals and families to understand each other's perspectives and work together with greater clarity and focus.

Working with Children

Talking to children is at the heart of Signs of Safety. In Signs of Safety, tools for engaging children and to bring the child's voice into the assessment are used.

The Three Houses

The Three Houses method takes the three key assessment questions of Signs of Safety assessment and planning - what we are worried about; what's working well and what needs to happen - and locates them in three houses to make the issues more accessible for children.



**House of
Worries**



**House of
Good Things**



**House of
Dreams**

Words and Pictures Explanation

Words and Picture Explanations are an agreed story, prepared in partnership with the family, to enable the parents to explain to their children why they are working with social workers, what happened and what will be happening in the future.

Words and Pictures also allows parents and professionals to share the same clear narrative to explain to all professionals involved in the case, to the family and the network what has happened and what is going to keep the child/children safe.

Mapping is used as the Assessment Framework

| What are we worried about? | What is working well? | What needs to happen? |
|--|--|---|
| (past harm, future danger, complicating factors) | (existing strengths and existing safety) | (family and social workers agree safety goals and next steps for future safeguarding) |

Within these domains of enquiry are the risk assessment analysis categories. This involves defining harm and defining the danger. We identify existing safety and strengths and develop safety goals to address the danger statement. All expressed in succinct plain language.

A case trajectory is essentially a time-line which sets out step-by-step how professionals and a family will work together and on what task, to develop the safety planning process.

This time-line includes involving the children, developing a network of safe people to think through and define the key steps in the safety planning process.

The time-line makes it possible to assess the family's ability to provide safety for the child/children.

At the same time the social workers have the opportunity to talk through a plan for any challenges that present themselves and it also provides the family with the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities over time. The time-line includes a specific goal end date which provides greater motivation for families to reach the shared goals.

Some or all of the practice tools will be used depending on the seriousness of the worries and the outcomes of the case.

What can I expect as a professional?

- There will be greater use of questions by the social worker from the point of referral through to case closure. You may also be asked scaling questions which will require you to rate your professional opinion on the current safety for the child on a Safety Scale based on the danger identified
- Social workers will use more straightforward , simplified language with families. So you may be asked to simplify professional language you use
- There will be greater participation of parents and their network in child protection conferences, Looked After Children, case planning meetings
- There will be greater clarity and agreement from everyone about what we need to see to be able to close the case and know there is sufficient safety for the child/children
- Trusts will deliver ongoing awareness raising seminars for all partner agencies

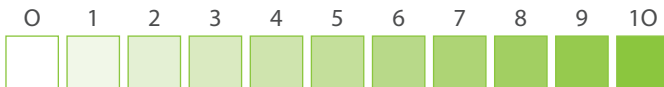
Signs of Safety Mapping Assessment and Planning Framework

Thinking about the child / young person and the family situation in this child protection case:

| What are we worried about? | What is working well? | What needs to happen? |
|--|---|--|
| HARM DANGER STATEMENTS COMPLICATING FACTORS | EXISTING STRENGTHS EXISTING SAFETY | SAFETY GOALS NEXT STEPS |

On a scale of 0 - 10, where 10 means the child / young person is safe enough and we can close the case and 0 means things are so bad for the child/young person we must remove them into care immediately, where do you rate this situation today?

Put different judgement numbers on scale for different people, e.g. different professionals, child/young person, parents etc.



Safety Network

A safety network consists of family and community members who are naturally connected to the family. These people commit to working with the Trust and the family.

The network is a critical element of safety planning in Signs of Safety. The network is central to safety planning, monitoring and providing ongoing safety and support to the child/children and family.

No Network = No Safety

Safety Plan

A safety plan describes in detail to everyone; (the professionals, the family's own supporting safety people and the child/children) what needs to happen and how the child/children will be safe in the future.


The safety plan is created and implemented by the family and their support network. The plan is monitored and reviewed with the family and their support network and refined over time.

Bottom Lines

The Trust will agree the bottom line so that the family and network are clear about the process and expectations.

Trajectory

A trajectory is a document that sets out how the case will progress towards increased safety providing a set of steps within an agreed time-line and eventual case closure.

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several vertical bars of varying heights and shades of green, creating a modern, abstract background.

Danger Statement

Danger statements articulate what the Trust assesses as future danger, what the social workers are worried will happen to the child if nothing in the family changes. The statement is grounded in past harm to the child. The statements are written in simple language that outlines the danger in clear behavioural detail.

Danger statements must convey the seriousness of the concerns in language that is easily understood by the family and provide clarity about why children and young peoples social work services are involved.

Safety Goals

Safety Goals are paired with the Danger Statement. The Safety Goal is what needs to happen to ensure the child/children will not be harmed in future.

Safety Scales

Safety Scales are used to determine and measure where the safety of the child/children sit between Danger Statements and Safety Goals.

Each paired Danger Statement and Safety Goal have a corresponding Safety Scale. This helps family members (if they wish) and professionals scale on the basis of the information at that time. This can be used to scale the child's position between danger and safety, maintaining a focus on increasing safety and well-being.

**This is what we're afraid will
happen to the children if
nothing gets better or changes.**



Harm

Things that mums and dads or people looking after children/young people do that could hurt or really scare children and young people.

Danger

This is what we're afraid will happen to the children/young people if nothing gets better or changes.

Complicating Factors

Things that happen in the family or around the child/young person that make it harder to make sure the child/young person is always safe and looked after.

Existing Strengths

Those things that mums and dads or others in the child's/young person's life are really good at and make the child/young person feel good at home.

Existing Safety

Things mums and dads or others already do that make the child/young person safe at home even when things get difficult or dangerous.

Safety Goals

The things we need to see happening to be sure the child/young person is always safe particularly when life gets hard.

Practice Tools

Central to this approach is the use of specific practice tools and processes where professionals and family members can engage with each other in partnership to address the worries about harm to children/young people.

