



South Gloucestershire

Child Protection Conferences

Information for professionals



Introduction

From May 2016 South Gloucestershire Council will be introducing a new approach to Child Protection Conferences. This new approach is called Signs of Safety.

The Signs of Safety approach originates from Western Australia and is designed to increase family involvement and understanding of the concerns and risks that professionals have for their children. More information on this can be found at www.signsofsafety.net

What is Signs of Safety?

The Signs of Safety approach focuses on 'How can the (social) worker build partnerships with parents and children in situations of suspected or substantiated child abuse and still deal rigorously with the child protection/safeguarding issues?'

Practitioners supporting families work together to look at the strengths (what's going well in the child's life), the worries and concerns identified (who is worried and why) and focus on what needs to be done (outcomes) to build on the strengths, reduce the concerns and keep the child safe. This is known as a strengths and safety based approach.

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 practitioners and families throughout the child protection process, whatever the setting (statutory, hospital, residential or treatment).

What is different about this style of child

protection conference?

The SoS 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. 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. Information is recorded on a whiteboard, the Chairperson asks questions of professionals and family moving between worries, 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 and 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 action plan.

Scaling questions are used to assess how safe we think the child is where 0 indicates significant concern for the child's safety and alternative care arrangements need to be considered and 10 indicates the plan can be ended /case closed. There may be more than one scaling question dependent upon concerns identified in the danger statement.

When we think about the situation facing this family:

What are we worried about?

HARM
DANGER
STATEMENTS
Complicating factors

What's working well?

Existing strengths
Existing safety

What needs to happen?

SAFETY GOALS
Next steps

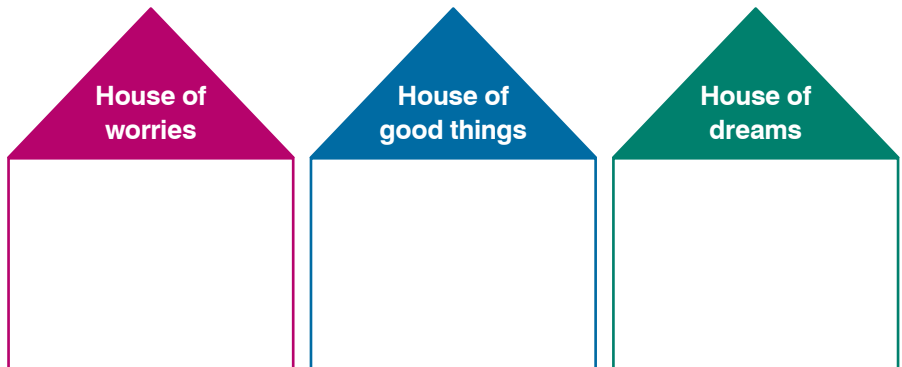
On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children they can't live at home where do we rate the situation? (If different judgements place different people's number on the continuum).

0

10

The Child's Voice

The Signs of Safety approach brings a strong emphasis in creating opportunities for children to be involved in the process and so act as a catalyst for change within the family. The 'three houses' tool is a child version of the 'three columns' tool and allows the child to express their worries, what makes them happy and the dreams they have for the future.



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.

Useful contacts

- South Gloucestershire Access and Response Team (ART)
01454 866000
- South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board <http://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children/>

If you would like this information
in a different format or language,
please contact **01454 868009**

www.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding