

# Signs of Safety

Child protection conferences  
Information for professionals

**In Stoke-on-Trent we are introducing a new approach to Child Protection Conferences.**

**This new approach is called Signs of Safety.**

**This information sheet will help you to understand what this means for you and the families you support.**



## 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 take a 'strengths and safety based approach' 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 practitioners and families throughout the child protection process.

### More information

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](http://www.signsofsafety.net)

## 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:

**What we are worried about ?** Past harm, future danger, complicating factors

**What is working well?** Strengths and safety which already exist

**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 or whiteboard paper, 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.

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 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.

## How plans are structured

What are we worried about?	What's working well?	What needs to happen?
What has happened to make us worried? What is the impact on the child, including things that may be happening in the family's life that make the problem/s harder to deal with?	Things that are already happening to meet the child's needs and keep the child safe and protected from harm and abuse?	What your family and professionals need to see to be satisfied your child is safe enough. These are turned into goals and a plan.

0 ←————→ 10

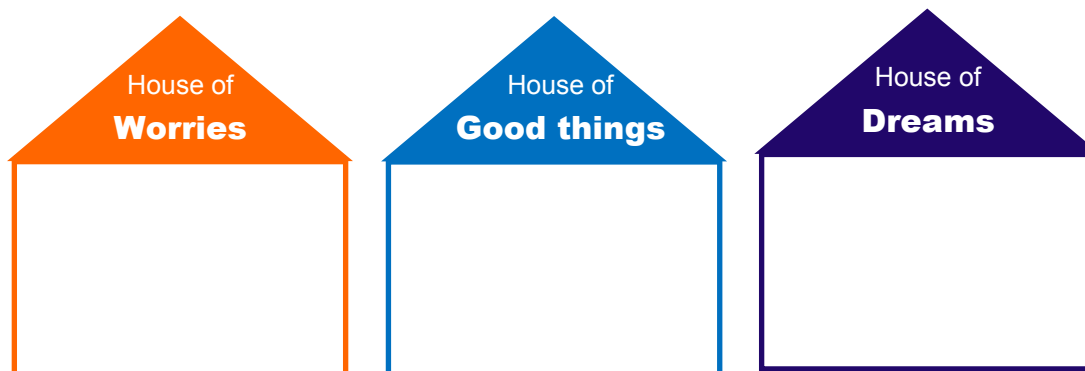
the child is not safe and will be immediately hurt and it is unsafe to live at home

the child is safe and the case can be stepped down/closed

## 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

Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding and Referral Team: 01782 235100

Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Board:

<http://www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/portal>