

Guide to Signs of Safety in Northumberland

November 2020

Sometimes families may need support from professionals to meet the needs of their child(ren). Children and young people might be at risk of harm and need a plan of support to keep them safe, or parents and carers might be struggling to cope with their child's challenging behaviour, or they might have difficulties of their own which are making it hard for them to meet their child's needs.

In Northumberland, we're working in a new way called Signs of Safety. Signs of Safety means Children's Social Care will work with families and other professionals so that together we can help children feel safe and cared for.

This guide will help you to understand what this means for children, families and their networks.

What is Signs of Safety?

Signs of Safety is about families, their networks (extended family members and friends) and professionals (health visitors, social workers, early help workers, teachers, doctors, police etc.) all working together to meet children and young people's needs in the best way possible.

It puts children, young people and their parents or carers at the heart of the work.



What difference will Signs of Safety make to the way professionals work with children, young people and families?

We use Signs of Safety to make sure that the views of children, young people and families are fully heard.

We want to identify the strengths of the family and include these in the assessments, plans, next steps and goals needed to keep children and young people safe and to promote their wellbeing.

Professionals working with families will be trying to make sure this happens by asking questions such as:

- **“What do you think is going well?”**
- **“What are you worried about?”**
- **“What needs to change to make things better?”**

Signs of Safety is a way of making sure that everyone involved in a child's life has the same understanding of what people are worried about, what is happening and what needs to be different.

Signs of Safety aims to get everyone who cares about the child, or who helps and supports parents and carers, like family, friends or professionals, to think about ways they can help children feel safe, healthy and settled.

Talking to children and young people

Talking to children is at the heart of Signs of Safety. It is important that children, as well as adults, have an opportunity to talk. We may use tools called the **3 Houses** or the **Safety House** to talk to children about the things that they are worried about, what makes them happy, and what they would like to see happen in their family and community to keep them safe, healthy and settled.



The Assessment Process

The Signs of Safety assessment process is called **Mapping**.

During an assessment four key questions will be asked of parents and carers, the child, wider family members and anyone else who helps care for the child.

What are we worried about for the child?

What has happened to make us worried and what is the impact on the child, including things that may be happening in the family's life that make problem(s) harder to deal with.

What is working well for the family?

Things that are already happening to keep the child safe and protected from harm or abuse and meet their needs.

What needs to happen to make sure the child is safe and well in the future?

What family and professionals need to see to be satisfied the child is safe. These are turned into goals and a plan.

How safe is the child on a scale from 0 to 10?

Families, their network and the professionals involved will be asked to scale the issue(s) that has caused people to be worried (0 meaning the child is being harmed, 10 meaning the child is safe) and they will be asked to give a reason why they scored in the way they did.

The Outcome of the Mapping

If the outcome of the assessment finds there are serious worries about the child, these are written down and called **Danger or Worry Statements**. The steps taken to deal with the danger or worries are written down and called **Safety or Wellbeing Goals**. These are the goals that need to be reached to make sure that the child is safe and well at all times.

Words and Pictures are used to communicate with the child in a way they will understand about what has happened and what will keep them safe.

A **Safety Network** is the people in the family's life that are important to them and to the children like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends.

All safety goals need to identify a safety network. This network of family and friends work with the family to provide ongoing support after the case is closed to Children's Social Care.

A Safety Plan includes all the things that will happen every day and will show everyone - professionals, the safety network and the child - how to be safe and well in the future even if danger or worries are present.

The safety plan is written together with the family, the case worker and the safety network. The plan will have what is called a **Trajectory**. A trajectory includes the danger statement, the safety goal and a number of steps with a timeline.



How do we know what needs to happen and if anything is changing?

A copy of any mapping completed will be shared with parents or carers and the relevant professionals. This will include information from people that know the child, young person or family well.

The mapping will explain the strengths, the worries and what needs to happen in a simple way, using danger statements and safety goals.

A safety plan of what needs to happen for people not to be worried or for Children's Social care not to be involved in a family's life will also be shared. The same plan will be used in meetings with family members and professionals to talk about the progress that is being made. These meetings will always look at:

- What's working well and how?
- What people are worried about and why?
- What needs to happen for people not to worry about the safety or wellbeing of the child or young person?
- How safe, well or settled is the child or young person now, on a scale from 0 to 10?

Everyone will meet regularly to see how the plan is going. The scaling of each issue will be discussed to understand everyone's point of view. This will continue until everyone is happy the safety goals have been reached and everyone agrees there is enough safety in place for the case to be closed to Children's Social Care.

Learn more about Signs of Safety

For more information about Signs of Safety, please visit www.signsofsafety.net
For family members, if you have any questions about Signs of Safety, please speak to the worker that is working with your family or you can contact Onecall on 01670 536 400.

For professionals, if you have any specific questions about Signs of Safety, please speak to the safeguarding lead in your organisation.

The aims of Signs of Safety

- To encourage each meeting with families as an opportunity for change.
- To focus on small successful changes that will keep the child safe.
- To support families with finding their own strengths within their networks that support the safety and wellbeing of their child.
- To encourage professionals to work with the family to resolve difficulties.
- To maintain a focus on the child's safety, wellbeing and success, at all times.
- To help us all to work in an open, honest and respectful way.
- To get feedback about our practice so we can always make improvements.

