

# Signs of Safety Newsletter

Hello, and welcome to the second Signs of Safety (SoS) newsletter. We intend to use the newsletter to keep you in touch with any news and developments which relate to the implementation of Signs of Safety.

## WHAT IS WORKING WELL

There has been lots of positive progress and evidence that people are having a go at using the Signs of Safety, which is fantastic!

### Group Supervisions

Practice Champions have been using group supervisions within their teams.

We hope this is something that you have found useful to support you in mapping complex or uncertain issues or where you have found yourself “stuck”.

Remember group supervision isn't just for social workers or early help workers, everyone can use it!

If you need support in your team with setting up group supervisions or developing sessions further, the Practice Leads can help!



### Welcome to our SoS Trainers

We now have a group of trainers within the service, who all share the commitment to deliver training to staff and to partner agencies.

Over time they will be delivering aspects of the SoS training programme that we offer.

If you are interested in this role then please contact [Tracey Horseman](#), who is the training and development lead, for a discussion.

## Agenda items

SoS will now be a standard agenda item at meetings. We would like to provide a regular opportunity to talk about our implementation and the steps needed to make it a success.

Within your Team Meetings there will be an opportunity to hear updates, talk about and plan what you can do to use SoS in your work with families, hear about and identify any training needs, share good practice examples and resources as well as understanding and using the support available specifically from your Practice Champions.

## Knowledge Bank

The SoS knowledge bank has a wealth of information and resources available - [check it out](#).

We have subscribed to a small number of SoS Knowledge Bank licenses as a pilot. For those that hold a license, we are keen to hear your feedback as this may be something we extend to the whole service.

There are also ongoing resources and the opportunity to interact with and learn from colleagues from around the world in the SoS community, via Facebook:

For practitioners and Team Managers: **Signs of Safety-Children's Services Support Group**  
For Senior Managers: **Signs of Safety Child Protection Leadership Support Forum**

## Support from Emma Hopper

We continue to use the support of Emma, our Signs of Safety Consultant.

This month she has completed a session with First Contact looking at preparation for cases that progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC).

Next month, Emma will be delivering a session on the Harm Matrix to our Practice Champions.

Emma has also facilitated a session with our Leadership Team to look at our Meaningful Measures.

These are the measures we believe are important and tell us qualitative information about our practice. Reviewing these measures will help us to remain focused on delivering the best service we can provide to children, young people and families, and ensure the measures have a purpose and meaning.

## Testing

This month we will be starting our system testing. The new system contains several new forms which all reflect the SoS model.

A group of volunteers will be testing the forms to identify any glitches. Thank you to all of you who are supporting us in this and for taking the time to provide us with valuable feedback about how the system works. This will help us to make sure the forms will flow as we expect them to, before we go live.

## New practice guidance

Guidance is available to you to support you with the transition to the new SoS forms.

There are two guidance documents available:

- Case note summary
- Care Team/Core group meeting template

These can be found on Tri.x, in the [document library](#).

## NEXT STEPS

### SoS guide for families and professionals

We are currently developing a guide to SoS for families and their networks, and professionals.

This will be available on the NCC website as a PDF, which can be downloaded and shared.

We hope that this will be useful to support everybody in understanding how SoS can be used, so that together we can help children feel safe and cared for. The guide is out for final comments now and will be launched very soon.



### Partnership involvement

We have met with our partner agencies and shared our SoS progress so far.

Partners have been asked to consider steps they need to take between now and April 2021, to prepare for their role and involvement in cases open to Early Help or Children's Social Care.

The most noticeable changes will include SoS language; questions at the point of referral, during assessments and within meetings; new forms and reports being in SoS format, and how meetings will be chaired.

Partners are encouraged to access the multi-agency training that is available on Learning Together to support with the transition, but if you do have any specific queries, please contact [Catherine MacDonald](#).

## Referral form

We want to make sure that SoS is being used from the point anybody makes contact requesting support, so we are reviewing and developing our multi-agency referral form (MARF). There will be a single referral form that is used for both Early Help service requests and referrals to Children's Social Care, which will model SoS to capture worries and strengths.

## Support

We have created a generic mailbox for all your SoS enquiries. If you have any questions or queries about training, a request for case support etc. please direct them to [signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk) which is live now!

We are also creating informal support mechanisms, we will have chat groups on Teams for practitioners, managers and the leadership team. These will be a great way to access the knowledge, skills and experience of your peers.

## Training

To support your learning and help you understand how the SoS model will work in your role there are a range of training sessions available on Learning Together.

Every role across Children's Services is different, and for this reason we have aligned the different roles to the most appropriate course in a matrix to help ensure you access the most appropriate training for you. Please check the [matrix](#) prior to booking any training, and ensure you are available for the sessions you book.

We are trying to better understand the demand for SoS training. Everyone within the service should have completed some form of SoS training, depending on your role, within the last 2 years. We have circulated a document to managers to populate and your support to complete this as swiftly as possible would be appreciated.

"I have attended strategy meetings in the past that have used SoS but 2 of the noticeable differences during this meeting was that each professional was asked to write their own danger statements (previous meetings have done a collective statement) and when we scored we were asked what we felt needed to happen/change in order for that score to go up. Personally I think this was a real positive change in the way danger statements and scoring were looked at, it really made me think about what it was that I was worried about (which is not always the same as other professionals) and that these concerns were taken on board."

## FEEDBACK

**Sarah Wittringham (Education Welfare Officer) on her experience of a Strategy Meeting with a new format.**

## System preparation and preview

Whilst the outcomes in the new forms in the EHM and LCS will stay the same, the forms will look and feel a little different at first. You should be able to recognise the elements of the SoS model, for example danger statements, safety goals, scaling, timelines and trajectories. We are developing a glossary, to support you to navigate the transition to the new forms and to understand the features of SoS more easily. This will be ready ahead of our go live date. If this is something you would like to be part of please get in touch.

After the initial period of testing we are keen to arrange for as many of you who will be working with the new forms (First Contact, DCT, Locality Safeguarding and Early Help Teams and Leaving Care) to access the test system. You will be able to see the new forms and have an opportunity to record some of your work.

We will be scheduling system demonstrations, so everybody will have had an opportunity to see the new forms in the system before the go live date.

Whilst only some teams will be using new forms, the expectation is that the whole service will be recording their practice in a SoS way.

**Our aim is that our practice with families will be recorded in a system, rather than a system dictating practice.**

## How is the service changing in response to Signs of Safety?

We are starting to see some impact on practice, as a result of the changes we are making and people trying to use the model, which is excellent.

## Update from Practice Leads

Mel and Paul continue to work alongside the Safeguarding and Early Help locality teams, before they rotate into new teams next month.

They are supporting with the setup and review of group supervisions and supporting practitioners to apply the model to their practice with families. There is a real enthusiasm within teams to “have a go” applying SoS, and an openness to using a questioning approach.

The North and West safeguarding duty workers are now trying to use SoS wherever they can with new referrals. The feedback from this has been positive, with workers seeing a change to their practice and the way that they work with families.

Paul has supported workers in the West on a case moving between the Safeguarding and Early Help teams, getting the practice elements of SoS in place, keeping things clear and not repetitive for the family.

Mel has done some work with the North Early Help team, working through a case, chairing a meeting with a family and supporting the worker to develop danger statements, safety goals and scaling to help the case move forwards.

Paul has set up group supervisions for Early Help in Central and South-East and both Mel and Paul continue to work directly with workers where they need support with best questions, use of mappings in meetings and working on effective danger statements and safety goals.

**If you have a case where you feel stuck or would like to try a new approach, then please get in touch!**

“The reflective group sessions have focused on danger statements, safety goals, safety circle, family network, best questions and bottom lines. The sessions are proving to be invaluable for all involved, including me. Regardless of what level of SoS training you have had, having such a clear focus on the worries, the impact and what this means for the child [is important to] strip the often vague and professional language down so the families and professionals understand exactly what the worries are and we can all work towards the safety goals. The sessions provide a safe and comfortable space for everyone to just give it a go and learn together and from each other.”

## FEEDBACK

**Patrick Boyle (CSM North Safeguarding) on his experience of joining a group supervision session in the North.**

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We are here to help you through this process.

Ask us - We can support you if you have any questions or queries.

**PAUL THOMPSON AND MEL ATKINS**


[signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk)



**PRACTICE LEADS**

**Adults and Children's Services**

 **Northumberland**  
County Council

**Our people.** The heart of Northumberland 

**Our vision:** One council that works for everyone **Our values:** Residents first, Excellence and quality, Respect, Keeping our communities safe and well

## This months focus

### Practice focus: Use your Practice Champions for support to have a go at SoS in your work

There is a practice champion in each team. They will be role modelling SoS, ensuring the use of language is clear and simple, and always identifying the worries, strengths and next steps. Practice champions are a point of contact within your team, for advice and guidance. Areas of support they can provide may include case discussions, facilitating group supervision, supporting with mapping, facilitating family network meetings, sharing good case examples and celebrating good practice. They will support and encourage post training reflection and with the transfer of learning into practice.

Find out who your Practice Champion is if you don't know, they are there to help!

### Feedback

Throughout this newsletter you will have read feedback from colleagues across our service area.

We want to hear from you on how you have used SoS and what impact this has had for families to inspire us all.

Please send your examples and feedback to the Signs of Safety mailbox.

### Frequently asked questions

This section is your opportunity to ask a question about anything relating to SoS, and we will make it a feature of future newsletters. Please send your questions to the Signs of Safety mailbox.

If you have any feedback or would like to share an update in future newsletters, please contact [Catherine MacDonald](#).

## Top tips

1. Give Signs of Safety a try, doing is the best way to learn! Check out the [Knowledge Bank](#), find out who your Practice Champion is and use them or Mel and Paul if you are stuck!
2. Focus on networks, try to get as many people as possible around the table from the network to help the family think through the worries to form plans for their every day living arrangements.
3. Remember your EARS...Elicit, Amplify, Reflect, Start Over. Signs of Safety is a questioning approach, if you want to make a statement STOP and ask another question!
4. Check out this [article](#) on 'How to develop care plan'. It mirrors the principles of SoS and will support good practice in the build up to transitioning to the new SoS forms when we go live.

"The mapping and the safety plan helped detail our worries and helped identify what needed to happen. Because the mapping also focused on strengths, all professionals could see a more rounded picture. Being part of the mapping and safety plan, parents were also empowered to make changes straight away. They know I'm straight with them, I don't just focus on worries but when I do, they know I'm serious."

"The Front Door said my SoS information was 'great and nicely set out'. I really felt it helped the Front Door workers to readily grasp the worries and to help them assess the level of ongoing support appropriate for this family. The referral process felt collaborative and that we were all using a shared language."

"After the event, the family texted to say, 'thank you we needed that kick up the backside!!'"

### FEEDBACK

**Lesley Lovell and Vicki Collins (West Early Help Locality) on their step-up referral to the Front Door when concerns were escalating. They reflected on this using an Appreciative Inquiry.**