

# Signs of Safety Newsletter

Welcome to our 'third' Signs of Safety Newsletter. Gosh, time certainly flies! We recognise all of the great work being done by you, to implement and use Northumberland's chosen practice model.

To build upon this great start, there are numerous training opportunities to tap into, around areas where you would like additional support or just a chance to clarify and hone your current approach to applying SoS.

Don't forget 'practice makes perfect' so keep giving it a go!

We're also keen to hear peer acknowledgment too so if you feel a colleague has a particular strength in a certain area of all things SoS it would be great to hear.

However please ask for their permission before sharing it with us via [signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:signsofsafety@northumberland.gov.uk)

## Message from Su Kaur, Principal Social Worker



## WHAT IS WORKING WELL

It has been another busy month with people "having a go" and more developments taking place in our implementation plan.

### System testing

Thank you again to everybody that helped us to test the system earlier this month, including the daily support from the Systems Team! We had testers from First Contact, Early Help Locality Teams, Safeguarding Teams, IROs, the Safeguarding Unit, DCT, Leaving Care, the Leadership Team, and the Performance Team.


Overall, there were some minor glitches identified with the workflow, which has now been shared with Liquidlogic to resolve. We will have a final period of testing between December-January 2021, which we hope some of you will be part of again.

## Guide for families, their networks, and professionals

Our new SoS guide is now available on the NCC website, as well as on [Tri.x](#). It can be downloaded for your information but also to share with families, their networks, and professionals to help them understand the changes in our practice and what this means.

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## NEXT STEPS

### New assessment pilot

We have started a new pilot using the SoS children and family's assessment form. The pilot will be starting in the ASYE academy and will be expand to a selection of worker in the North and West Safeguarding Locality Teams as well as First Contact. The aim is to give practitioners the opportunity to record their work with families in the new format, before we go live with the new form in LCS in April 2021. Alice Tierney, ASYE academy Social Worker, said:

“The form is streamlined and the language in it is clear and simple. Using SoS, helped me to stay focused on the reason we were involved and preparing some best questions, to explore this further. Sharing the danger statement and safety goal involved the family and enabled them to understand what we were worried about. I thought focusing on the family's strengths and involving the network was more natural. It is now easier to record your work in the document.”

### Training

We continue to offer a range of training through Learning Together. The demand for courses is high. If you are not able to book onto a course, please use the waiting lists, if a space becomes available, we will offer the space to those on the waiting list.

How you can help:

- Check the [training matrix](#) before you book any SoS training; some programmes and workshops are not suitable for all roles. Some workshops require that you have completed other programmes first, so that you are prepared with the correct knowledge and so you get the maximum learning from the material being delivered.

- If you are no longer able to attend the session or all the sessions in that series, please cancel the training through Learning Together and rebook. Spaces are limited and your space could be used by someone else who needs to do the course.

- Be available for the full session -you will not get the maximum learning from the course if you take calls, arrive late or leave part way through the session, and it can disrupt others.



### System demonstrations

We are hoping to develop system demonstrations as an opportunity for users to see aspects of the system that will be changing from April 2021. These will be led by the Systems Teams and will be tailored to the different aspects of work, for example Early Help, Triage/MASH, Child in Need, Child Protection, Looked After Children and Leaving Care.

Alongside the demonstrations we want to encourage as many users to access the test system, in a planned way, as an opportunity to input your work, so you can see and practice how the system will record your work in the new forms, from April 2021.

Even if the forms in the system that you use are not changing to a SoS format, you will still be encouraged to record your work using SoS, so the demonstrations will still be useful.

**Remember we want a system that records practice, not practice that is dictated by forms or a system.**


- Log on and be ready for the session 10 minutes beforehand, so that the session can start on time.
- Complete the post course evaluation form - this helps to develop the sessions and ensure we're offering the correct support, and opportunities to learn and reflect.

For services that are required to complete the e-learning module, it is a great way to understand the basic principles of Signs of Safety, even if you are not working directly with families.

We are currently looking at the schedule for 2021 and the dates will be available shortly. If you have queries about SoS training, please email [socialcaretraining@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:socialcaretraining@nhct.nhs.uk)

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## Practice Guidance

Paperwork that has been updated this month to reflect SoS, includes:

- Template for legal gateway panel

The document can be found on [Tri.x](#).

## We need your help

We are setting up a several working groups to progress tasks and would like to include people from across the service.

### • Practice framework

We are developing a practice framework handbook, which will set out the expectations of each service. It will be used by practitioners and managers as a working document in their day-to-day practice.

This handbook is being developed now, in line with the support that is offered by our Practice Leads, and each service will be asked to contribute, by drafting their practice expectations and bottom lines.

### • Guide and support to the new forms in the system

Linked to the practice handbook, we want to develop short guides to help users navigate from the “old” forms to the “new” that we will be using. This will include screenshots, guidance on where information will go and what will be expected in each section of the new forms.

### • Resource Bank

Along with the resources on the SoS Knowledge Bank, we would like to build a bank of visual material, that includes mock meetings, discussions etc. to support further learning across the service. We need some volunteers who would like to help prepare the material for the sketches as well as being involved in the making of the clips.

If you would be interested in helping with any of these tasks, email [Catherine MacDonald](#).

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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**

## HOW IS THE SERVICE CHANGING IN RESPONSE TO SIGNS OF SAFETY?

### Update from Practice Leads

Mel and Paul have now rotated and have just started to support DCT, the IRO service and NAS. Each service will develop a timeline, which will outline the focus areas for their 8-week support trajectory. Mel and Paul are still available to answer questions and queries and remain enthusiastic to support you to embed SoS in your work with families.


**If you have a case where you feel stuck or would like to try something different, then please get in touch.**

“Developing statements, goals and scaling questions: some workers have used these with families and found it really powerful!”

**FEEDBACK**

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## Feedback from the Practice Champions

The practice champions have recently reflected on what has been happening in their teams, over the last 3 months, specifically what has been working well.

Some of the comments about using SoS are very encouraging:

“Being able to see how the different elements fit together.”

“Group supervisions have developed confidence for workers and managers to complete scaling questions and best questions.”

“We are feeling more confident as a team.”

Keep up the good work, we can see the difference “having a go” is making!

The Practice Champions, along with the Practice Leads, are there to support you, sharing their knowledge and experience, so you can use SoS in your work with children and families.

## Feedback from others

An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) said **“I'm taking time to think through best questions and scaling questions, before my meetings. As meetings are all virtual now, being more prepared with the best questions has helped me to build up a relationship with families quicker. This has really helped to involve families in discussions to move things forward, rather than constantly repeating information that is in reports, in the meeting.”**

Katie Mills, Social Worker in First Contact, spoke about her experience of facilitating a family network meeting **“It was helpful for the family to have an opportunity to think about what they could work towards and how this could look for them and their child. I felt it was a good example of how we can facilitate conversations, where previously there has been a tendency for Social Workers to “take charge”. The family’s feedback has been positive; they found having the plan they created written out helpful and felt it is helpful to have a set period to “test out” the safety plan and see if it helps or if it needs to change.”** A great example of having a go.

A Deputy Team Manager has found the support from the Practice Leads beneficial, when they have observed and supported with setting up group supervision sessions. Although they were nervous, they feel that their confidence is now growing to facilitate the sessions independently.


A Social Work Support Assistant found using the harm matrix tool helpful to understand what life was like for a young person and the detail of the harm they had experienced. They found using the tool effective in managing their own emotions in response to the information they heard - a powerful reminder of how the tool can help us to be clearer on what the risks are, what is expected of everyone, resulting in better decision making for families.

Group supervisions are being used, Neil Newcombe, North Safeguarding Deputy Manager said, **“bringing a case to group supervision was like turning up for a test where everyone else gave you all the answers!”** Give it a try!

Thank you to everyone that has shared their experiences and feedback this month. Please send your examples and feedback to the [Signs of Safety](#) mailbox.

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## This month's focus

### Using the Harm Matrix

The harm matrix is a tool introduced to clarify harm, which helps to assess harm and danger. Understanding harm and worries involves analysing the **behaviour** that was harmful or damaging, how often the behaviour has happened (**the timespan**), how bad the behaviour is (**the severity**) remembering the first worst and last incident, and how the harmful or worrying behaviour has affected the child (**the impact**). Some examples of using the harm matrix can include:

- Within new referral: to identify the level of harm or worry to make timely responses.
- Within any new assessment: to identify how worried we are, to develop a worry or danger statement and what level of safety plan is needed and whether a case can be closed.
- Within long term cases: to identify why the case is open, how long the concern has been active and how worried we are about the child, to create a safety goal and timeline to close the case.
- When considering reunification plans: looking at past harm and the reason why the child was accommodated, to identify safety goals for the plan.
- When making decisions about contact arrangements: to identify what "unsafe" or "inappropriate" family members means, and how to plan for safe contact, if it's possible.

Although you might not use the matrix yourself, understanding how to interpret the information, will be the responsibility of everyone across the whole service.

Emma Hopper will be delivering a session to the Practice Champions on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

There will be a new workshop available from 2021 called Analysing Harm, which will look at the tool and how it can be used in your work with families.

**If you have any questions about the Harm Matrix, speak to your Practice Champion.**

The Front Door received feedback from a parent, following an assessment. Although the parent didn't want to discuss the information directly with the Social Worker, they found it more useful to write down their responses after they received the mapping information. Doing things differently, gave the worker "a lot of insight to the situation and resulted in a case closure rather than an escalation because there were gaps in information". The parent found the SoS questions and information layout helpful and said that they felt listened to.

### FEEDBACK

#### Top tips

1. **When you want to make a statement, STOP, and ask another question instead.** A question not asked, is a door unopened.
2. **Move away from description, and ask yourself so what?** So, what does that mean? So, what does it mean to the family or the child?
3. Check out [this article](#) on "simple steps for getting started with SoS tools". Remember, there are lots of resources, webinars, articles and case examples on the SoS Knowledge Bank, which you don't need a license to access.
4. **Try to identify the complicating factor; what makes the problem harder to deal with and then focus on the harm?** What is the observable behaviour that is causing harm to the child? For example, if a parent is using drugs, that is the complicating factor, BUT what is it about using drugs that makes it harder to care for the child or puts the child in danger?
5. **Be firm but incredibly kind.** Difficult conversations are not easy, but they are necessary. How can you really expect a parent or carer to make changes if you cannot tell them exactly what needs to change or what needs to be different? Honesty is the key to building effective working relationships with our families.

If you have any feedback or would like to share an update email [Catherine MacDonald](mailto:Catherine MacDonald).