

Signs of Safety Guide for Partners

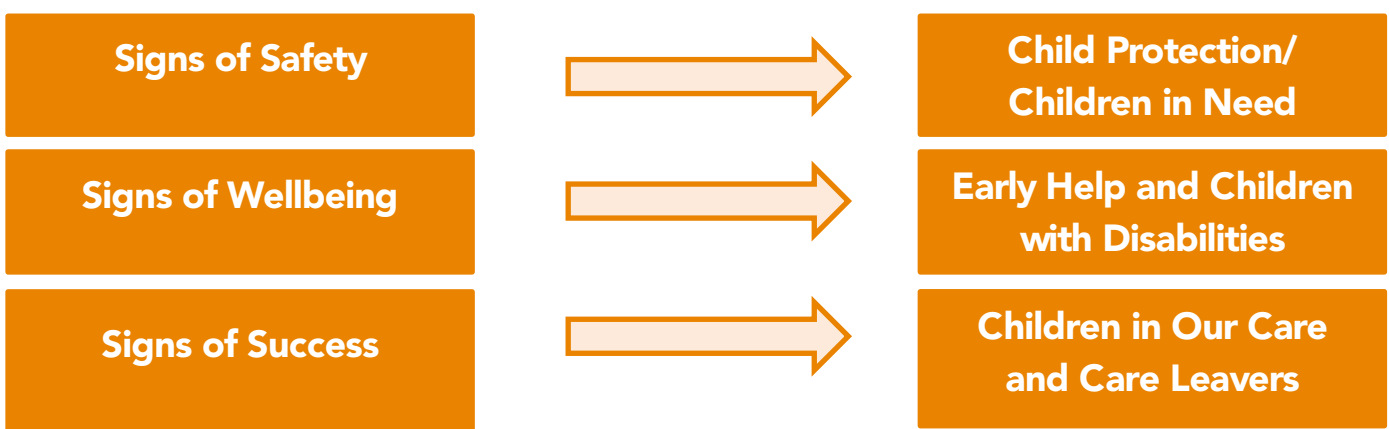


About Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety is a model of social work practice, it has been in use internationally for over 25 years and is the chosen practice framework for Redcar & Cleveland.

Signs of Safety started as an approach to child protection cases but can also be applied to early help and children in our care, where this is the case the language changes.

Within Redcar & Cleveland we use the following approaches for each area of practice.



What are the Benefits?

- The Signs of Safety approach is about working in partnership with families, so they are central to the social work/early help assessment and planning process.
- Families are asked to identify a support network of important people, like extended family and friends, to help create safety for their child(ren). Professionals aren't around most of the time, so having a network means that people are around to help keep the children safe if the worries happen again. It also means support will remain in place for the family after professional involvement has ended.
- Signs of Safety is strengths based and solution focused to identify what is already working well to support the family and to keep the child safe when worries have occurred. We then build on what is working well to create a safety plan for the child.
- Signs of Safety uses solution focused questions to elicit information from those involved, in order to answer the following questions and evidence this in the assessment.
 - **What are we worried about?** - who is worried and why, what has happened to make them worried and what is likely to happen in the future if things don't change?

- **What's working well?** – What strengths exist in the family and who has done what to keep the children safe when the worries have been present?
 - **What needs to happen?** - What the goals are for the family and what needs to happen next.
- The Signs of Safety model provides a consistent way of working, enabling professionals from all disciplines to take a joined up approach, so that everyone uses the same language, agrees on the worries and works towards shared goals.

Multi Agency Working and Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety is about children, families, their support networks and a range of professionals working together to meet the needs of the child in the best way possible.

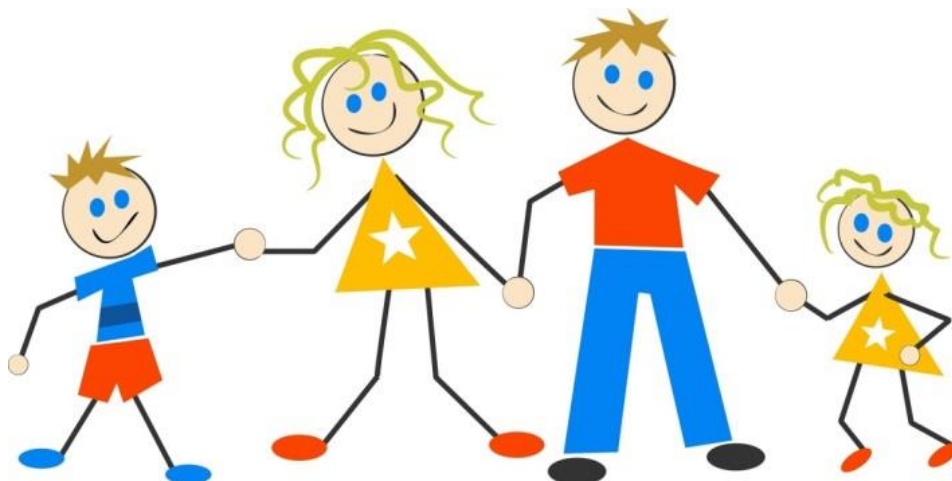
Creating strong relationships is central to the Signs of Safety approach; this applies to the relationship between professionals and the family and among all the professionals that are working with the family. To achieve this, Signs of Safety provides a collective multi-agency approach so that all agencies involved can contribute to the assessment and plan whilst providing consistency for the family in the way that they engage with different agencies.

When professionals such as teachers, doctors, the police, health workers, housing officers and voluntary sector workers are asked for information that contributes to an assessment or plan, the lead worker from the council will encourage them to answer the following three questions:

- What are you worried about?
- What is working well?
- What needs to happen?

They will likely follow this up with further questions to unpick the detail, particularly in relation to any worries.

The lead worker will then incorporate this information into their analysis within the assessment or plan. In most cases a multi-agency meeting will be convened to discuss what will happen next.



Using Clear Language

One of the most important aspects of the Signs of Safety approach is the use of clear, everyday language, all communications with families and everything written in their assessment and plan will use clear language that the family understands.

This means stripping out professional terms, acronyms and terminology so that the family and everyone involved are clear about what we are worried about, why we are worried and what needs to happen.

For example, our social workers will no longer use terms like 'neglect' without explaining the specific behaviours they have seen and the impact on the child.

- ✗ There is evidence that Johnny is being neglected.
- ✓ The social worker is concerned that Johnny is not getting the day to day care that he needs from Mum and Dad, that they are not giving him the food and drink that he needs, like the time his teacher saw him taking food from the bin and Johnny told her it was because he hadn't had breakfast or tea. This is making Johnny poorly sometimes and if it continues is likely to affect his growth and development.

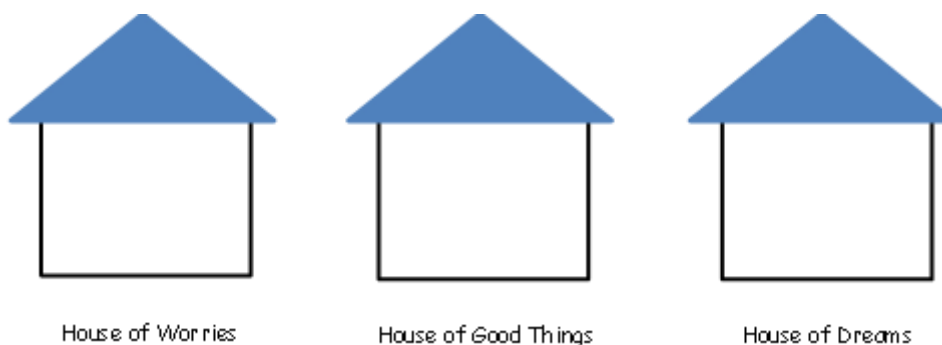
Professional language can create a barrier between practitioners and the family. By explaining exactly what we are worried about in clear language, we can be sure that families understand the problems so they can work with us to find solutions.

For advice on using clear language to explain your worries when making a referral to Children's Services please see our [Guide for Professionals – Making a Referral](#)

Direct Work Tools for Children and Young People

Signs of Safety advocates the use of direct work tools to capture the voice of the child so that this becomes integral to their assessment. Social workers and early help practitioners will use a range of tools to help children and young people explain 'what they are worried about', 'what's working well' and 'what they want to happen'. The My Three Houses approach is one example of this, it encourages children to draw and write in each house to explain worries, good things and dreams.

You can find guidance and templates for using My Three Houses [here](#).



My Three Houses - © Nicki Weld and Maggie Greening

The Signs of Safety Terms

There are a number of terms that are fundamental to the Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning framework which will be referred to when you meet with social workers and early help practitioners.

Danger Statements – Summarise the social worker or early help practitioner’s analysis, based on the information they have collected from the family and all the involved agencies, to explain who is worried, what they are worried about and the impact this could have on the child.

Danger statements are developed based on the information that has been collected regarding ‘past harm’, ‘future danger’ and ‘complicating factors’ and set out why Children’s Services are working with the family in clear, everyday language. There can be up to four danger statements on a case. **For early help and children in our care we use the term ‘worry statement.’**

Louise from Children’s Services is worried because Johnny hasn’t always got the care he needs on a day to day basis, like when he has regularly missed meals and this has left him hungry, thirsty and feeling unwell and when he has gone to school dirty because Mum (Hannah) and Dad (Lee) haven’t helped him to have a bath or shower. Louise can see that Hannah and Lee love Johnny very much but she is worried that if things don’t change, Johnny will get sick because he isn’t getting the food and drink that he needs and he won’t be taken to see the doctor. Louise is also worried that Johnny won’t make friends at school, if he goes to school dirty and could be bullied which will make him very unhappy.

Safety Goals - There is a safety goal for every danger statement. This explains to the family, their safety network and all the professionals involved, what Children’s Services will need to see happening to be sure that the worries in the danger statement have been addressed and to know that it’s safe to close the case or step it down to early help. **For early help cases we use the term ‘wellbeing goals’ and for children in our care we talk about ‘success goals.’**

Louise from Children’s Services wants Hannah, Lee and Johnny to be together, because she can see how hard Hannah and Lee are working to be the best parents they can be. For this to happen Louise needs to see Hannah, Lee, and some key support people, working together to develop a plan. The plan will make sure that Johnny is always fed, clean and goes to the doctor when he is sick. Louise needs to see that this plan is working for three months in order to be happy that Johnny will be safe.

Safety Scale Questions – Are used to capture how people feel at any one time and create further conversations about what needs to happen for things to get better, from everyone’s perspective. There is a safety scale question to match each danger statement and safety goal. Safety scale questions are on a scale from 0 – 10 for example:

On a scale of 0 – 10, where 10 means that you are confident that the child is safe enough to close the case and 0 means that you are certain that the child will be harmed, or harmed again – where would you rate the situation right now?

At meetings, the family, their network, the social worker/early help worker and professionals will be asked to rate the situation on the safety scale, they don't need to agree on a score, but everyone will need to give a reason for their rating and explain what needs to happen for their rating to increase.

If the safety plan is making a difference the family will start to see people's scores increasing overtime, this builds hope and shows them that they are making progress.

For early help cases there will be a 'wellbeing scale question' and for children in our care a 'success scale question.'

Signs of Safety in Multi Agency Meetings

The format of our Child Protection Conferences, Children in Our Care Review Meetings, Child in Need Meetings, Strategy Meetings and Team Around the Family Meetings are aligned to the Signs of Safety way of working.

When you attend a meeting, or when you provide information about a family, you will be asked:

- What are you worried about?
- What is working well?
- What needs to happen?

The 'danger statement' or 'worry statement', formulated by the social worker or early help worker and based on the information they have collected from everyone involved, will be central to this meeting - as will the development of the 'safety plan' and 'safety goal.'¹

To help the social worker or early help worker understand the extent of everyone's concerns and the steps that need to be taken to make things better; you will be asked a 'Safety Scale Question.' This question will be developed based on the individual circumstances of the case. You will need to give a number from 0 – 10 to indicate your level of concern, explain why you have come to this conclusion and what you need to see happening to rate higher.

If your rating is different from everyone else in the room that's okay. The purpose of scaling isn't for everyone to agree, it's to start conversations and for people to give a judgement regarding the safety of the child from their own/their agency's perspective. The social worker or early help worker will ask follow up questions to understand why your score is low or high, this isn't to challenge you, it's to understand your reasons for this and to make sure that they haven't missed any important information such as evidence of harm or things the family have done to keep the child safe.

¹ For Children in Our Care, we will use the words Success Plan and Goal, for Early Help we will use the words Wellbeing Plan and Wellbeing Goal.