

## **'SIGNS OF SAFETY' POLICY AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

### **PART A**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks the Cabinet's support for the development of a practice framework to support direct work with children and families in Leicestershire. The framework is based on the 'Signs of Safety' model which is already well embedded in Children's Social Care Services. The intention is to spread this approach across all Children and Family departmental services and encourage understanding across relevant partner agency services. The report describes the high level implementation plan and summarises progress to date. The framework is attached to this report as Appendix A.

#### **Recommendations**

2. The Cabinet is recommended to:
  - (a) Approve the policy approach for work with children, young people and their families as set out in the policy and practice framework (Appendix A);
  - (b) Note the next steps for embedding the approach across the Children and Family Services Department;
  - (c) Note the progress made to date by the Children and Family Services Department to implement the Signs of Safety model;
  - (d) Support the extension of the model through the practice framework to other areas of direct work with families within the Children and Family Services Department (for example in Fostering and Adoption, Child Exploitation, and services for those with special educational needs and disabilities).

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The adoption of a clear policy and practice framework with an evidence based methodology for work with families across the continuum of need will help ensure continued high quality practice and good outcomes for children and young people.
4. The framework will underpin all direct work with children, young people and their families. It will help to ensure the care provided to families is coherent and consistent as their needs change and they move between different departmental

services.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

5. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been briefed on the practice framework and methodology, most recently in June 2016. Subject to the Cabinet's approval of the above recommendations the approach will continue to be extended across the Department during 2016/17.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

6. A number of documents underpin the practice framework, including in particular:-
  - The final report of the Munro review of child protection, 'A Child-Centred System' (2011) which set out sets out reform proposals to enable professionals to make the best judgements to help children, young people and families.
  - Government guidance 'Working Together' 2015 concerns inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, covering the legislative requirements and expectations on individual services, and provides clear framework for Local Safeguarding Children Boards to monitor the effectiveness of local services.
  - 'Signs of Safety - Comprehensive Briefing Paper' (Dr. Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy, 2014). This gives a detailed description of the approach including its history, the supporting evidence base, practice methodology, learning strategies, and implementation.
  - In 2013 the Cabinet approved the 'Choices for Children and Young People 2013: A Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People in Leicestershire's Care', which aimed to improve placement arrangements for young people in care and to secure 'permanence' by, where possible, moving away from residential placements towards a family-based care approach.

### **Resource Implications**

7. Leicestershire County Council was part of a partnership of ten local authorities which was awarded £4.7m from the Department of Education's Innovation Fund in 2014 to implement the Signs of Safety practice in each local authority, Leicestershire received £297,000. Grant remains available to meet programme costs up to the end of September 2016 and training support to March 2017 at which time the methodology will become business as usual.
8. Ongoing training will be provided by the Learning and Development Service as a priority within the Children and Family Services learning and development budget.
9. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedures**

10. None.

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**PART B**

**Background**

11. The Signs of Safety approach to child protection casework is widely recognised internationally as the leading approach to child protection casework. It has evolved and developed over the last 20 years and is used across a range of fields including education, early intervention provision, and also work with adults.
12. Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy, who developed the Signs of Safety approach and Professor Eileen Munro, have formed a partnership: Munro Turnell and Murphy Consulting (MTM).
13. In 2014 MTM and a partnership of ten local authorities, including Leicestershire, secured a Government Innovations Project grant of £4.7m to implement Signs of Safety practice in each local authority. Funding supported the re-design of organisational procedures, alignment of functions to better support the approach, as well as IT developments and research on the outcomes of the project. The MTM team has been working closely with the Department over the last two years, and Professor Munro met with members in September 2015 at an all-member briefing.

### **The Methodology**

14. The Signs of Safety methodology is a 'strength based' model. This means there is an equal commitment to identifying what is already working well in the family network and identifying strengths which could be built upon to secure increased safety, stability and success.
15. The quality of the workers' relationship with the child/family is seen as key and staff must spend focused and productive time with the family. Evidence indicates that families are more likely engage in change they have helped to develop and when they are recognised as the experts on their own lives. Working in this way means that ownership of change rests with the family and they are more likely to become confident and independent in their parenting.
16. The approach is characterised by an inclusive partnership approach. All plans and decisions affecting children and families are made with them and their support networks together. The family's networks of support are seen as the cornerstone for sustaining safety in the longer term for children, particularly as the Department reduces and withdraws support over time. Staff must help to build capacity in families to develop these networks even when children are living in challenging circumstances or where those networks are limited.
17. Children's safety remains paramount in the Signs of Safety model. The methodology offers a 'fit for purpose' practice model. It takes a stance of critical enquiry, meaning that staff must take a questioning approach to fully explore risks, dangers or worries. There are rigorous disciplines where by workers must distil these worries or risks into short, clear statements using plain language so they are fully understood by everyone involved.

18. There is a set of processes which is clear for both staff and families. Engaging children is central, ensuring their voice is brought into the assessment and the plan. Parents are supported to explain events and plans to children using a technique known as ‘words and pictures’ to help children understand and make sense of what is happening in their lives. A summary of key tools is included in Appendix B.

### **Evidence of Effectiveness**

19. Internationally there is a growing body of evidence of the positive impact on the quality of practice that the adoption of the Signs of Safety methodology. A recent Ofsted paper, ‘The Quality of Assessment for Children in Need of Help’ (August 2015) commented that where a clear theoretical model was applied by local authorities the quality of assessments of vulnerable children and young people were improved. The England Innovations Project led by MTM is contributing to the national evidence base and reports from research undertaken in monitoring the project will emerge later in 2016.

20. In Leicestershire, staff have seen how the use of tools and techniques better captures the voice of children and contributes to casework plans. As part of the England Innovations Project regular learning events bring staff together from a wide range of teams to celebrate and share their success in working with families and achieving change.

21. The Signs of Safety approach is used in the way case conferences are conducted. In the autumn of 2015, over a three month period, all those who attended a conference responded to a survey and provided direct feedback on their experiences and observations. Both parents and professionals from partner agencies (including those from the NHS, the Police and Schools) contributed. These views are summarised in the table below:

Parents/carers’ responses:	Partner agencies’ responses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 82% felt prepared for conference</li> <li>• 86% were able to take a full and active role.</li> <li>• 89% understood what people were worried about.</li> <li>• 86% understood what needed to happen for the plan to end.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 93% understood the concerns.</li> <li>• 84% understood the strengths in the family.</li> <li>• 68% thought the family understood the changes that were needed.</li> <li>• 86% knew what they needed to do next.</li> <li>• 87% made an effective contribution to the outcome and plan.</li> </ul>

### **Implementation and Next Steps**

22. The Signs of Safety approach is already well embedded in Social Care in terms of Child Protection work and has been introduced to and adapted for the Department’s early intervention services. The intention now is to extend the approach to other areas of direct work with families, for example in Fostering and Adoption, Child Exploitation, and services for those with special educational needs and disabilities.

23. England Innovations Project funding ends in September 2016 and work within the Department is focused on sustaining progress so that the SoS approach is fully embedded. MTM is working with the ten local authorities to submit a second bid to the Government for additional funding to continue to develop aspects of practice. Should this be successful this would be extremely positive and allow a more rapid progression of plans. The Department will continue to build relationships with other Local Authorities, in particular, shire counties such as West Sussex and Lincolnshire, to secure challenge and support in managing common challenges in implementation.

24. The approach to implementation of the practice framework is focused across four areas:

- i) Learning
- ii) Leadership
- iii) Organisational alignment
- iv) Meaningful measures.

Progress to date is summarised below.

### **Learning**

25. The current training programme includes basic training for staff, advanced training for practice leaders and champions, and a two-year formal trajectory programme to develop practice leaders.

26. Practitioners and managers are trained in the approach working across Social Care and Early Help services in the Department. Close collaboration with learning and development colleagues is helping to ensure wider practitioner training is aligned and congruent. The refreshed Children and Family Services Workforce Strategy 2016/17 acknowledges the need to ensure that the Signs of Safety approach becomes embedded further and sustained across the Department.

### **Leadership**

27. There is a strong departmental commitment to the Signs of Safety approach from managers. They will continue to lead services and teams in ways that model the practice approach and will continue to embed the approach into practice through shared leadership, actively supporting learning and development activities focusing on key implementation and practice issues.

28. The Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Board (LSCB) has recently adopted Signs of Safety as a key priority for its work in 2016/17 and is actively supporting formal partner engagement to build a common language across agencies particularly in the field of child protection. The LSCB will continue to hold all agencies to account for the quality and effectiveness of their interventions with children and families.

## **Organisational Alignment**

29. This refers to the alignment with practice of all policies, procedures and processes. Steady progress has been made over the last eighteen months in aligning key areas including; child protection conferences; Children in Care review meetings; audit focus processes, and the supervision of staff. Future work will ensure close alignment across all relevant departmental policies and processes. The current Departmental policy sets out the principle that:

*'All children have a right to experience family life, and wherever it is consistent with their health and welfare, this should be with their own families.'*

## **Meaningful Measures**

30. The Department continues to use data and key performance indicators to manage and monitor operational performance. It has made good progress in shaping the quality assurance and improvement framework (QAIF) to align more closely with the developing practice framework. This includes the key processes of quality assurance, case audit and practice fidelity. These are used to review across the four critical domains of:

- i) Understanding and using data,
- ii) Qualitative analysis of practice through audit and practice observation,
- iii) The voice of staff (staff wisdom), and
- iv) Capturing the voice of children and families.

31. In summary, the proposed framework is designed to be used:

- as part of the induction process for new or returning workers,
- as a workforce development tool,
- to shape policies and procedures, and
- as a key element of quality assurance systems and tools.

32. The ambition is to embed a departmental way of working. Care and practice with families must always be tailored and personalised, but the overarching framework will provide a consistent and secure foundation to guide the way staff work with children, young people and families.

## **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet on 13 December 2013 - 'Choices for Children and Young People 2013: A Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People in Leicestershire's Care' - <http://ow.ly/GSKC301VVNg>

Final Report of the Munro Review of Child Protection, 'A Child-Centred System' (2011) - <http://ow.ly/2Wlb301VVR9>

Department for Education 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (March 2015) <http://ow.ly/j1uQ301VVXq>

Signs of Safety - Comprehensive Briefing Paper' (Dr. Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy, 2014) - <http://ow.ly/w0hs301VW2D>

## **Appendices**

Appendix A - Policy and Practice Framework

Appendix B - Summary of key tools

## **Equality and Human Rights Implications**

33. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) for the introduction of the practice framework has been completed.

34. Teams within the Department work with children and young people from across the demographic profile of the County. Direct, face-to-face work with those children and their families is often as a result of concerns or potential risk. Many of these children and young people live in families which are marginalised, and more likely to experience discrimination or disadvantage in their lives. The introduction of this framework will help ensure that children and young people remain at the centre of practice, that their voice is prioritised and that the additional factors affecting and complicating their lives are addressed fully.

## **Partnership Working and Associated Issues**

35. The Department has worked closely with the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Board in developing its approach, as a result of which the Board now has an agreed priority to '*champion and support the extension of Signs of Safety (SoS) across the Partnership and secure assurance of the effectiveness of multi-agency processes/working and evidence of positive impact for service users*'.

36. Work with other local authorities will be a focus of work in the next period. Sub-regional colleagues will be actively supported in adopting the Signs of Safety approach and the Department is engaged with colleagues nationally in tackling shared challenges in implementing the model. MTM remains keen to continue supporting Local Authorities in their development.



# Children & Family Services A Policy & Framework for Practice with Children & Families

## Signs of Safety, Stability and Success

1. This paper describes a practice framework which will underpin our work to improve the lives of children and families living in Leicestershire. The framework will be relevant for all those practitioners who work directly with children, young people and their families and with their wider networks of support. The framework provides an evidence based methodology for work with families across the continuum of need. It will help ensure that all teams and services are working coherently and more consistently as families move between teams. It is intended to be used as part of the induction process for new or returning workers, in workforce development, in the shaping of policies and procedures and in our quality assurance systems. In short it is written to remind all workers and managers of our ambition and our collective responsibility to develop and strengthen our practice based on evidence of what works and what families tell us works for them.

### 2. Departmental Vision:

*Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families*

### 3. Mission:

*Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities*

4. To deliver our mission we believe that children and young people, their parents and their natural networks of support need to be at the centre of all aspects of our work.

## Family Work: The Departmental Philosophy

### 5. Working to keep families safely together where ever possible

Children must be protected from harm and neglect and children's safety remains our priority. For a small minority of children and young people, we know that it will not be safe for them to live with their families. Children and young people who are living away from their families need stability and permanence in their lives. Current departmental policy sets out our principles in this matter: 'All children have a right to experience family life, and wherever it is consistent with their health and welfare this should be with their own families (LCC Permanence Policy 2013 Revised 2016).

6. The Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) highlighted the importance of building resilience and reducing risk for families. We know that for the vast majority of children, growing up in their family networks and being close to their own communities is far better for them than living with strangers. In Leicestershire we want to work with families in ways that ensure more and more children can live within their own support networks and communities.

## **7. Proportionate and tailored responses**

Children need to receive the right help, at the right time. This means providing the lowest level of intervention necessary to meet need, working with families to help them resolve their issues and support them to get back on track as quickly as possible. Workers need to be 'risk savvy' and robustly monitor the changes that families and their networks put in place. We believe that almost all families are the experts on their own lives and most want the best for their children. However we will continue to check and challenge families so that children are safe, can achieve success and have stability in their lives.

## **8. Constructive working relationships are key to achieving lasting change**

The department will work with the child's wider family and their supportive networks and connections to help families do their best for their children and achieve the changes that will work for them in the longer term. The strengths, skills and knowledge of families and their networks will help build solutions and support the family's capacity to change and keep children safe.

9. We know from both national research and our own practice experience that the children living in families who are isolated with few or poor social networks are at higher risk of poor outcomes, of neglect, abuse, and poor mental health. Helping parents identify and seek support at the earliest point from within their neighbourhood or naturally occurring networks can help strengthen families and support parents when they are struggling or feel overwhelmed. Working in this way helps to build solutions owned by families, providing greater safety for children and young people.

## **10. Development of a practice framework**

The practice framework described here expresses the departmental commitment to high quality practice in our work with families. In developing the framework the goals are to;

- Identify and adopt a clear methodology for working with families across the continuum of services across the department.
- Identify and adopt a tested approach which equips practitioners to more effectively work with risk in families so that children are safe and protected both immediately and in the longer term.
- Harness the families' strengths as well as identifying concerns, risks or worries and developing shared goals and clear plans to create change.
- Be explicit and consistent in the way we make decisions – we must be able to show our analysis and evidence our rationale for all decisions taken including how we have taken into account the family's views.
- Ensure that practice is compassionate and based on working with families to help them change – not doing to families. The plan for achieving change is the family's plan. They describe the steps they will take to improve their situation.

- Enable practitioners to engage successfully with all families – even when there is denial of harm, or families are wary or fearful of professionals.

## **11. The Practice Framework**

The practice framework is made up of 3 elements. These are set out below;

### **(a) Principles for excellence in practice**

- The quality of the workers' relationship with the child/family is essential in a process of change.
- Children and families are more likely engage in a plan they helped to develop. Plans and decisions affecting children and families should be made in a meeting that includes the family support network as well as the professional network.
- Separating children from their families is often traumatic for children. Their distress can be lessened when they can safely stay close to their own communities and maintain their relationships with schools, friends and other natural connections.
- Assessments should focus on underlying needs, (as opposed to symptoms), as this promotes more effective intervention and lasting change.
- Success in school is a reliable predictor of child well-being. Planning for the safety, stability and success for children should be fully integrated with school support plans so that children can continue to make progress in their education.
- Services should be provided as close to the place where the child and family live and find most accessible.
- The role of line managers and supervisors is critical in ensuring plans are robust and effective in positively changing children's lives.

### **(b) The practice methodology: Signs of Safety, Stability and Success**

- The Signs of Safety methodology is a 'strength based' model characterised by an inclusive partnership approach – work is undertaken collaboratively with families and their naturally occurring networks of support. Ownership of change rests with the family – who are seen as the experts on their own lives. Their networks of support are a cornerstone for effective change – workers help to build capacity in families to secure safety, stability and sustained success for children living in challenging circumstances.
- The methodology offers a 'fit for purpose' practice model which takes a stance of critical enquiry. This means workers must take a questioning approach to fully explore risks dangers or worries, distilling these into succinct and clear statements using plain language so they are fully understood by everyone involved.

There is equal commitment to identifying what is already working well in the network and identifying strengths which could be built upon to secure increased safety, stability and success.

There is a set of processes which are clear for both workers and families. Engaging children is central, ensuring their voice is brought into the assessment and the plan. Parents are supported to explain events and plans to children using a technique known as 'words and pictures' to help children understand and make sense of what is happening in their lives.

- The methodology provides a range of effective analytical tools to support assessment and planning, decision making and the engagement of children and families. Practice disciplines support workers to be specific and precise about their concerns. They involve workers and managers using plain language, focusing on specific observable behaviours as well as the skilful use of authority.

### **(c) Practice depth**

- This methodology is not a stand-alone approach. The application and integration of professional knowledge is essential in the delivery of high quality practice. The knowledge and expertise gained through professional training, development and practice wisdom that are relevant to the complexity of each family's situation must be woven into the application of the methodology. For example:
  - In situations of neglect or cumulative harm the long term impact of chronic behaviours such as low warmth/high criticism parenting is considered
  - In domestic violence the psycho-social effects of witnessing domestic violence and abuse for children is demonstrated
  - Careful consideration of the impact of relevant complicating factors such as trauma, mental illness, developmental delay, fear of professionals
  - Clear evidence that the cultural context is considered so that the family members/people from that culture would say their culture has been respected
  - An understanding of the significant role that good attachment and healthy child development plays in early brain development of babies and children

## **12. Implementation**

The Signs of Safety approach is already well embedded in Social Care in terms of Child Protection work and has been introduced to and adapted for our early intervention services. However our ambition is to extend the approach to other areas of our direct work with families for example in the Children Centre programme, Fostering and Adoption, Child Exploitation, and those working with special educational needs and disabilities.

The approach to implementation of the practice framework is focused across four areas:



#### **a) Learning**

This has included basic training for staff; advanced training for practice leaders / champions; a two year formal trajectory for practice leaders' development which includes a programme of workshops; and specific workplace based learning to grow confidence in the application of the methodology to develop critical thinking and analysis skills. Within the department practitioners and managers are trained in the approach working across Social Care and Early Help services. Close collaboration with learning & development colleagues is helping to ensure wider practitioner training is aligned and congruent. The refreshed CFS Workforce Strategy 2016/17 acknowledges the need to ensure that SOS becomes embedded further and sustained across the department.

#### **b) Leadership**

We have a strong departmental commitment to this framework. Our managers are standing together to transform our practice with families. They will continue to lead services and teams in ways that model the practice approach. They continue to embed the approach into practice through shared leadership, actively supporting learning and development activities focusing on key implementation and practice issues.

In addition, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Board has recently adopted 'Signs of Safety' as a key priority and is actively supporting formal partner engagement to build a common language across agencies particularly in the field of child protection. The LSCB will continue to hold agencies to account for the quality and effectiveness of their interventions with children and families.

### **c) Organisational Alignment**

This refers to the alignment with practice of all policies, procedures and forms. Whilst we have made steady progress in this area over the last eighteen months achieving the alignment of key areas including; child protection conferences; Children in Care review meetings; audit, and the supervision of staff. However there is much more to do and this work will continue and will over time extend to all departmental policies and processes to ensure close alignment where ever appropriate.

### **d) Meaningful Measures**

The department continues to use data and key performance indicators to manage and monitor operational performance. In addition, we have made good progress in shaping our departmental quality assurance and improvement framework (QAIF) to more closely align with our practice framework including quality assurance, case audit and practice fidelity. The four critical domains are, understanding and using data, a qualitative analysis of practice through audit and practice observation, the voice of staff (staff wisdom) and the voice of children and families themselves.

## **13. Summary**

The Children & Family Services department is adopting a practice framework to underpin its direct work with children and their families. We believe this will support the effective delivery of high quality services. The successful application of this framework in day to day practice will strengthen the capacity of parents and families to give the best care they can for their children and deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

## **References**

**Signs of Safety - Comprehensive Briefing Paper.** Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (3rd edition, 2014)

The comprehensive briefing paper provides a more detailed description of the approach and framework including its history, the supporting evidence base, the practice methodology, learning strategies and implementation.

**'Signs of Something' - Adaptations of Signs of Safety across the Continuum of Service (Resolutions Consultancy, 2015)**

This brief resource paper charts the key aspects of the Signs of Safety approach that are applied unchanged and those that are adapted across service areas and the continuum of service, with examples to illustrate.

**Quality Matters in Children's Services:** Messages from Research 2009 Mike Stein.

**Recent Ofsted reports:** Bristol 2014; Lincolnshire 2014; Norfolk 2015; Brent 2015; Wokingham 2015; West Sussex 2015

**1. Practice Tools**

**Assessment and planning** tools are used for “mapping” the worries, strengths and required safety, all in plain language. The map encompasses the key domains for enquiry, using the “**three columns**” and a scaling question:

- What are we worried about? (in child protection, the past harm, future danger, complicating factors)
- What is working well? (in child protection, the existing strengths and existing safety)
- What needs to happen? (in child protection, the family and child protection authority safety goals and next steps for future safety)
- The **scaling question** to make judgments, in child protection, about how safe the child is, from the perspective of the child protection authorities, the family, their networks and other professionals, to bring the case to judgment, develop understanding between the parties and to drive change.

Within these domains of enquiry are the risk assessment analysis categories that involve defining the harm, defining the danger, identifying existing safety and developing safety goals to address the danger statements, all in succinct plain language.

The Signs of Safety map, in its original form for child protection work is shown below. The four domains of enquiry and the different categories of analysis categories are labelled:

When we think about the situation facing this family:		
What are we Worried About?	What's Working Well?	What Needs to Happen?
<p><b>(Past) Harm (Future) <u>DANGER</u> <u>STATEMENTS</u> Complicating factors</b></p>	<p><b>Existing strengths Existing safety</b></p>	<p><b><u>SAFETY</u> <u>GOALS</u>  Next steps (for future safety)</b></p>
<p>On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? (If different judgements place different people's number on the continuum).</p>		
<p><b>0</b> ←————→ <b>10</b></p>		

Signs of Safety assessment and planning are adaptable across service areas and the continuum of services, from early help through youth at risk to looked after children services. Workers in these areas of service are adjusting the language to fit with their area of work – essentially around signs of success and stability. This means that the methodology can be applied across a range of settings.

There are a number of tools for **engaging children**, and bring the child’s voice into the assessment. The **three houses** for example (the house of good things, the

house of worries, and the house of dreams) is a child's version of the three columns to capture their experience, in their own words.

**Words and pictures explanations** are used to support parents to explain what has happened in a child's life and why and if applicable, set out the safety plan.

## **2. Principles**

### ***Working relationships are fundamental, with families and other professionals***

We know from research that the best outcomes for vulnerable children are achieved when constructive relationships exist with both the family and across the professional network.

### ***Critical inquiry – always being prepared to admit you may have it wrong***

In relation to child protection practice, Eileen Munro (1997, 1998) states 'the single most important factor in minimizing errors is to admit that you may be wrong'.

Practitioners need to take a questioning approach and remain open minded. Practice is characterised by more asking and less telling.

### ***Landing grand aspirations in everyday practice***

Families, young people and children together with front line practitioners are the arbiters of whether practice works. This means creating a reflective environment where we are learning from what works; where we are working with families not doing to. This will help to ensure that practice delivers the changes families need and avoids a 'command and control' approach or 'conveyor belt' practice.

## **3. Disciplines**

The disciplines of the methodology help to guide workers' behaviour in the application of the approach:

- There is a clear and rigorous understanding of the distinction between past harm, future danger and complicating factors (such as mental health issues, and drug and alcohol abuse).
- There is a clear and rigorous distinction between family strengths and actual behaviours identified that demonstrate a capacity to protect the children.
- Plain language is used routinely so that everything can be readily understood by everyone in the family network.
- All statements focus on specific observable behaviours. Statements avoid vague general terms and must not imply a judgement.
- Skilful use of authority means recognising that the exercise of statutory authority involves a level of coercion. Families can still be given choices about the ways they can engage with practitioners to find the best fit for each family.
- Assessment is always a work in progress rather than an end in and of itself.



#### **4. Processes**

The core processes of *Signs of Safety* practice involve the following elements:

- Mapping the assessment and plan, doing so with the family and their network of support. Other professionals who share a concern for the children or young person also contribute. There is equal commitment to identifying what is working well and identifying the strengths of the network and elements of existing safety.
- Narrowing the information into short and clear statements of past harm and future danger (what will happen if nothing changes).
- Using scaling to make a judgment about how safe the children are from different perspectives.
- Developing safety goals that directly address the danger statements.
- Building a safety plan with detailed actions to achieve the safety goals, drawing on the family's network. The family's success in using the plan is monitored initially by the professional network but over time this role is passed to the family's safety network. The safety plan is a journey not a product.
- Engaging the children to ensure their voice is included in the assessment.
- Working with parents to help them explain to children what is happening and why.