

Adoption of *Signs Of Safety* as The Department for Child Protection's Child Protection Practice Framework

Policy Statement

The Department for Child Protection (the Department) is adopting and implementing *Signs of Safety* as the basis of the consistent, evidence-based child protection practice framework across all Departmental child protection services.

Purpose of The Policy

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure field staff adopt the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* when responding to child abuse and neglect.

Background

Signs of Safety was developed in Western Australia in 1990s by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards in collaboration with child protection practitioners. *Signs of Safety* has been adopted in a number of jurisdictions internationally.

The *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* is the child protection framework to determine:

- what supports are needed for families to care for their children
- whether there is sufficient safety for the child to stay within the family
- whether the situation is so dangerous that the child must be removed
- if the child is in the care system, whether there is enough safety for the child to return home.

Signs of Safety seeks to create a more constructive culture around child protection organisation and practice. Central to this approach is the use of specific practice tools and processes where professionals and family members can engage with each other in partnerships to address situations of child abuse and neglect.

Signs of Safety is implemented in conjunction with creating a culture of appreciative inquiry around frontline practice. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a process of asking questions and focusing on successful behaviours and practice. Its aim is to enhance practice depth amongst practitioners to deliver safer outcomes for vulnerable children. AI will be undertaken by all staff under the leadership of Practice Leaders in the Districts.

Comprehensive Risk Assessment

The purpose of using the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* is to generate child protection practice that is organised first and foremost around child safety.

Signs of Safety utilises a comprehensive approach to risk that:

- is simultaneously forensic in exploring harm and danger while at the same time eliciting and inquiring into strengths and safety
- clearly articulates professional knowledge while also equally eliciting and drawing upon family knowledge and wisdom
- is designed to undertake the risk assessment process with the full involvement of all stakeholders including children, families and professionals.



The *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Protocol* (and the questioning processes and inquiring stance that underpins it) are designed to be the organising map for child protection intervention from case commencement to closure. Refer to Attachment 1 and Field Worker Guidelines (FWG).

At its simplest this Protocol can be understood as containing four domains for inquiry:

- 1) What are we worried about? (Past harm, future danger and complicating factors)
- 2) What's working well? (Existing strengths and safety)
- 3) What needs to happen? (Future safety)
- 4) Where are we on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means there is enough safety for child protection authorities to close the case and 0 means it is certain that the child will be (re) abused (Judgment).

Specific tools for engaging children and their families (see FWG) will be developed to:

- actively involve children, families and professionals in child protection assessments
- enhance children's and families' understanding why professionals are intervening in their lives and
- facilitate safety planning.

Disciplines for Using *Signs of Safety*

- 1) A clear and rigorous understanding of the distinction between, past harm, future danger and complicating factors.
- 2) A clear and rigorous distinction made between strengths and protection, based on the working definition that 'safety is regarded as strengths demonstrated as protection (in relation to the danger) over time'.
- 3) All statements are in straight-forward rather than professionalised language that can be readily understood by service recipients.
- 4) As much as possible all statements focus on specific, observable behaviours and avoid meaning laden, judgment-loaded terms.
- 5) Skilful use of authority to engage the family to participate in mapping or assessing the concerns.
- 6) An underlying assumption that the assessment is a work in progress rather than a definitive set piece.

Transitioning from the Child Safety Assessment Framework to *Signs of Safety*

There will be a transition from the *Child Safety Assessment Framework (CSAF)* to the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* as the Department's child protection practice framework. This will be completed by mid-2009.

Legislative Mandate and Principles

Signs of Safety is consistent with the principles under *Children and Community Services Act 2004 (the Act)*.

The Act is the legislative basis that underpins the Department's mandate to safeguard or promote the wellbeing of children, individuals, families and communities, and to provide for the protection and care of children in circumstances where their parents have not provided, or are unlikely or unable to provide, that protection and care.

The Department complies with the principle that the best interests of the child are paramount (s7 of *the Act*). The Department's child protection practices are guided by other sections in *the Act*, including:

- s8 – factors to consider in determining the best interests of a child
- s9 – guiding principles
- s10 – principle of child participation
- s11 to 14 - principles relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle and the principle of self-determination and community participation
- s22 – cooperation and assistance between the Department, other government departments and service providers
- s23 – exchange of information and s129 – protection from liability for giving information to the Department
- s80 and s81 – guidelines for placement of children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- s240 – confidentiality of notifier's identity.

The Department's thresholds for initiating an assessment and an investigation are established within *the Act*, which enables the Department to:

- receive reports of concerns for a child's wellbeing (s31)
- make inquiries (s31) to determine whether the Department has a role and if so, what actions to be taken to safeguard or promote the child's wellbeing (s32)
- undertake a child protection investigation to determine if the child is in need of protection [s32 (1)(d)]. The threshold for a child who is in need of protection is set out in s28(2).

The Act allows child abuse and neglect to be addressed through:

- the provision of voluntary social services [s21(1)(a)] or take any other actions necessary to safeguard or promote the wellbeing of a child or group of children [s21(1)(b)]
- the provision of child-centred family support [s32(1)(a)(b)(c)(f)] if the Department's assessment indicates that the wellbeing of a child needs to be safeguarded or promoted. This includes: provide or arrange for the provision of social services to the child and family; facilitation of a meeting with the family and relevant stakeholders to develop a plan to meet the needs of the child; and a negotiated placement agreement if the child is not in need of protection.
- taking Intervention Action that results in a child being taken into the care of the Department if the parents have not protected or are unlikely or unable to protect the child from harm [s32(1)(e) and s32(2)].

Related Policies and Documents

- *Background Paper on the Adoption of Signs of Safety as the Department for Child Protection's Child Protection Practice Framework (2008)*
- *Field Worker Guidelines on Signs of Safety (in press)*
- *Policy and Field Worker Guidelines on Neglect (2008)*
- *Policy and Field Worker Guidelines on Child Sexual Abuse (in press)*

Implementation

The implementation process is outlined in the Reform Project 5a Scoping Paper (http://sharepoint/DCP/DCP_Projects/ford_reform/).

Guidelines

The *Signs of Safety* Assessment and Planning tools are in the Field Worker Guidelines (in press).

Effective Date

1 July 2008

Review Date

1 July 2011

Owner

Executive Director, Policy and Learning Directorate.

Attachment 1: Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Protocol

