Keeping Children Front and Centre

A Signs of Safety Approach to Child Protection and Family Support

Film Workbook
First Edition, 2017
Acknowledgement of Country and Peoples

The Department of Communities acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as traditional custodians of this land. It pays respect to their Elders past, present and future. It recognises the long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on this land and acknowledges that the past is not just the past. The past, the present and the future are as they always are, part of each other-bound together.
Message from Jackie Tang, Assistant Director General CPFS, 2017

The Child Protection and Family Support Division of the Department of Communities in Western Australia (Communities) is a leading organisation in the implementation of the Signs of Safety child protection practice at a national and international level. In this State we have strived to strengthen and deepen our practice with vulnerable children and families who deserve our best thinking, our genuine compassion and unwaivering commitment to walk alongside them and to assist them to improve their lives.

We aspire to work with respect, courage and emotional intelligence with those in our communities who have experienced significant trauma and disadvantage. Signs of Safety is a way to keep children at the centre of our conversations as we seek to better understand danger and safety through the eyes of children.

This film is not intended to be the whole story on Signs of Safety, as we know it is being practised around the world in many different ways. However we do hope that it will contribute to genuine efforts as a Department to make our work more transparent and instil greater confidence in the community about the efforts we are making to build safer communities for children.

Jackie Tang
Assistant Director General
Child Protection and Family Support

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Purpose of Film and Workbook

This workbook, written to accompany the film *Keeping Children Front and Centre*, is for staff and partner agencies to use as an online resource or for training purposes.

The film was produced and released by the former Department for Child Protection and Family Support in early 2017. It is a guide for workers to reflect on Signs of Safety practice.

The film introduces viewers to Signs of Safety child protection practice in action from the point of referral through to safety planning with two families. Communities staff will have the opportunity to learn how to utilise the signs of safety approach in every day practice, to actively engage families throughout various stages of child protection assessment. This workbook can be utilised within local learning and development networks, formal training programs, or individually to build worker’s knowledge and skills in how and when Signs of Safety and the accompanying tools can be used.

Communities is committed to the on-going learning of staff and external stakeholders in Signs of Safety. The film and this workbook provide partner agencies with an understanding of the Communities Child Protection Practice Framework, by demonstrating a day in the life of a Child Protection Worker. This workbook will provide activities for partner agencies to undertake to develop skills of how staff can prepare and engage a family involved in the child protection system.

About the Filmmaker and Cast

The film and workbook was developed by staff in the former Department for Child Protection and Family Support. The film features professional actors and over 30 Departmental and partner agency staff in a variety of employment roles enacting scenes encountered by staff on a daily basis. Accompanying the story is commentary by senior staff, highlighting key messages about issues and good practice.

Communities wishes to thank Mathew Knight from Mathew Knight Media for his skill and expertise in this project.

WARNING

This film contains scenes of family and domestic violence, alcohol abuse and child neglect. The film represents real life scenarios of child protection concerns which may disturb some viewers.

If you have been a victim of abuse or feel sensitive to material on child abuse you may need to exercise caution.

The film and study guide can be obtained from the Learning and Development Centre.

Signs of Safety Child Protection Framework

The Signs of Safety framework is Western Australia’s home grown, core framework for Child Protection. The framework can be traced back to the 1980’s when, as an employee of the Department in Halls Creek, Steve Edwards began thinking about ways to work in a less punitive and less adversarial way with Aboriginal people. Steve Edwards collaborated on this thinking with a colleague Andrew Turnell, then employed as a therapist doing Solution Focussed therapy with families. In 1994, this collaboration of research and practice between the two practitioners resulted in the development of the Signs of Safety Approach. In 2006, Andrew Turnell further refined the framework through his PhD research.

In 2008, under the leadership of the then Director General, Terry Murphy, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support implemented Signs of Safety as its core framework throughout Western Australia.

Signs of Safety is an internationally recognised framework that has been implemented in 200 agencies in 16 countries. It remains a constantly evolving Framework and in its essence the Framework aims to make Child Protection practice with families transparent, centred around the child’s experience, relationship based and specific. The Framework supports practitioners to inquire deeply into the context of children’s lives and walk alongside families as they assess risk and develop safety. It also creates a culture of inquiring into and honouring what works in practice, as a means of building on that success.

Research tells us the best outcomes for vulnerable children occur when strong working relationships exist between families and professionals. The Signs of Safety Child Protection Framework encourages workers to engage with families and professionals as they define the problem and generate specific solutions together.

Most recently Steve Edwards made the following comment about the ‘Keeping Children Front and Centre’ film;

“It felt like this film was 26 years plus in the making. Very humbling to see the workers using Signs of Safety expertly. We had to stop doing things to families and start doing this work with them. Especially Indigenous families who we took so much from. Congratulations to the film makers. Congratulations to the actors. Congratulations to the Department. Congratulations all”.
Signs of Safety Principles

The following Principles form the basis of the Signs of Safety Framework:

- **Working relationships** –
  Constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between professional themselves, are the heart and soul of effective practice in situations where children suffer abuse and neglect;

- **Thinking critically, fostering a stance of inquiry** –
  As soon as the professional decides they know the truth about a given situation this begins to fracture working relationships with other professionals and family members, all of whom very likely hold different positions. The single most important factor in minimising errors (in child protection practice) is to admit that you may be wrong;

- **Landing grand aspirations in everyday practice** –
  Finding and documenting practitioner and clients’ descriptions of what on-the-ground good practice with complex and challenging cases looks like is a key to learning.

Signs of Safety Disciplines

The Signs of Safety framework relies on the following disciplines to undertake child protection assessments:

- A clear and rigorous understanding of the distinction between, past harm, future danger and complicating factors;

- A clear and rigorous distinction made between strengths and protection. Strengths need to be demonstrated as protection in relation to the danger, and over time;

- Rendering all statements in straight-forward, rather than professionalised language, that can be readily understood by service recipients;

- As much as possible all statements focus on specific, observable behaviours;

- Skilful use of authority.

- An underlying assumption that the assessment is a work in progress rather than a definitive set piece.
Signs of Safety Process and Tools

The Signs of Safety assessment and planning process maps the harm, danger, complicating factors, strengths, existing and required safety, and a safety judgement in situations where children are vulnerable or have been maltreated. The questioning processes and inquiring stance that underpins Signs of Safety, is utilised to be the organising map for child protection intervention from case commencement to closure.

At its simplest, this framework 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.

Alongside this Signs of Safety assessment and planning process, several additional tools consistent with the framework have been created specifically for use with children and young people. These include:

- Three Houses Tool
- Words and Pictures Explanations
- Words and Pictures Safety Plans

These tools can involve children and young people throughout the life of a child protection case and will be demonstrated during the film.
Learning Outcomes

After viewing the film and completing the activities, Communities and partner agency staff will be able to:

- Identify and explain key aspects of WAs Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework;
- Explain how to engage with families using the Signs of Safety Framework;
- Understand the questioning approach which is a key aspect of meaningful engagement with families;
- Understand how to effectively and safely engage families where there is family and domestic violence;
- Understand the important considerations when working with Aboriginal families;
- Identify safety networks and what their role is within the Signs of Safety Framework;
- Understand the importance of keeping children’s voices at the centre of practice by using the tools within Signs of Safety Framework;
- Gain an understanding of the Getting Ready Signs of Safety Pre-Birth process.
Introduction to the Story

There are two families in the story...

**Sheree and Murray** reside in the country with their two children, Michael (age 7) and Hannah (age 5). Sheree and Murray have been together for 8 years. There have been some prior child protection concerns, but nothing that has warranted the children entering care, although the Police have been called out previously.

**Sarah and Shaun** reside in the city. Sarah is pregnant with Shaun’s child, and also has two other children, Sammy and Dawn, from another relationship. Sarah and Shaun have been having some problems. Shaun has been using ‘ice’ and drinking. When this happens he gets angry at Sarah and the kids. As Sarah is pregnant, she decides to have a break from Shaun and get out of the city for the weekend. She arrives at her cousin Sheree’s place where Sheree and Murray have been drinking and using drugs. Sarah does not use drugs but she does join in the drinking.

By Sunday night, the situation has escalated between Murray and Sheree. Murray can not find his wallet and he starts blaming Sheree. It is 10pm and the children are still awake. Murray starts shouting, hitting, and pushing Sheree.

Following this incident, Sarah’s mum is not happy about the relationship between Shaun and Sarah, or with Sarah staying with Sheree. Sarah’s mum has offered for Sarah and the kids to stay with her, but Shaun is not allowed to live there.
Chapter 1: “There’s a fight across the road”

The story opens with Murray (Dad) arriving home late in the evening drug and alcohol effected. Sheree (mum) is with their two children, Michael and Hannah. Sarah (Sheree’s cousin) and her two children, Sammy and Dawn, are also present in the house when Murray walks in.

Murray begins to yell at Sheree, blaming her for his lost wallet. When Sheree is unable to locate the wallet Murray proceeds to push and shove her. Murray smashes up the kitchen.

A passer-by hears the commotion from the house and rings the Police to report the fight. The Police arrive at the house to find Sheree and Sarah unresponsive in the lounge room. All four children are still present in the house. The Police call Child Protection and Family Support to report that the four young children are in the home unsupervised. The Police also find drug paraphernalia in the home.

Reflections from a Child Protection Worker:

In order to understand how we can be more culturally responsive within the Signs of Safety child protection practice framework, there is a part of the Signs of Safety three columns map we need to consider first.

It’s the ‘worries’ column…the harm, the danger and the complicating factors.

We know that people’s past hurt and pain and the things that have happened to them and their family: before the Department became involved are not just ‘complicating factors’.

If we did a “Signs of Safety mapping” on ourselves as child protection workers, we might form the belief that we are in the middle column as ‘Safety’ and ‘Strengths’ because we are child protection.

In actual fact, when we knock on a family’s door or have a family in a meeting and they start talking about Stolen Generations, what the family is doing is listing their ‘harm’ statements. The family is saying “in 1788 this happened… in 1905 this happened…. In 1936 …. In 1958 …”
The family has put you in their ‘harm’ section of the SofS map. When the family says “the stolen generation is happening all over again for us”, they are making their ‘danger’ statement, and they have put us in it. The family is worried that we are going to take their children away.

So - We think we are in the second column of the SofS map.

The family thinks we are in the first column of the SofS map.

If we don’t understand that we as child protection workers might think we are in the second column and that the family has put you in the first column, we are being culturally blind and we are, a ‘complicating factor’.

Peter Passalacqua

Discussion Questions

Impact on Children

- Do you think the family and domestic violence is impacting on the children?
- Can you identify the specific behaviours of the parents and the children that show what impact family and domestic violence is having?
- Fiona Fischer, District Director states: “Family and Domestic Violence is a significant issue in child protection.”
  - What is meant by this?

Engaging with Families

- What ideas and strategies do you have to gain the families views about Communities’ involvement?
- If you are the professional, why doesn’t telling families what to do work?
- What would families see or hear you do that would let them know you respect their worldview?

Consideration of Aboriginal Cultural Responsiveness

- Today, children are removed from their parents due to safety concerns however the pain of removal echoes the pain of the stolen generation. What is important about remembering this when working with Aboriginal families?
- Lynley Pickett, Aboriginal Practice Leader, makes the following comment: “What we often hear is; your just taking our kids away, it’s the same as the stolen generation, the same thing happened years ago and you are still doing it today.”
  - Explain how child protection is different today than it was in the past.
How would you acknowledge past ‘stolen generation’ and current child protection practices while working with Aboriginal families?

Practice Questions

- As a child protection practitioner, stepping into volatile situations, how do you manage your anxiety?
- How does reflective supervision help workers identify and manage the emotional impact of child protection work: both with their own feelings and those of clients and colleagues?
- What services does Communities offer workers who feel stressed?
- How can you ask for support at work? Who do you need to support you?

Danger Statement:

Signs of Safety uses a danger statement to outline the direct risk to children in the future if the abuse or neglect continues.

The danger statement is a clear explanation, written in plain language to ensure families understand what Communities is worried might happen to children in the future if the type of child abuse or neglect continues or gets worse. The danger statement includes the probable adverse impacts that are likely to affect the children if the maltreatment continues. The danger statement describes the worrying behaviours which impact directly on the child.

Example of a Danger Statement:

Child Protection and Family Support is worried that when Daddy Murray chooses to yell, make threats, smashing things in the house and pushing Sheree, this will make Michael and Hannah feel very scared and fearful that they or their mum will be hurt by Daddy and other broken things in the house. When Daddy Murray chooses to be aggressive he makes everyone in the family feel really scared and this can feel worse when Murray is drinking. If this continues, Michael and Hannah will find it hard to learn because their brains may not grow healthy and strong and they may also find it hard to make friends.

Task:

Write a draft danger statement to explain what Communities is worried might happen to the children if Murray and Sheree continue to use drugs.
Chapter 2: “The stakes are very high”

(Starts at 2.48 – 4.25)

In this chapter of the film we see Bree (CPFS Child Protection Worker) and Racheal (Team Leader) having a meeting. At the District Office, Bree explains to Racheal that four children were brought into care during the night. When Police arrived at Murray and Sheree’s home they found methamphetamines on the kitchen table, they could not rouse Sheree or Sarah and Murray had left the house. Background searches carried out by Bree found that Sarah and two of the children, Samy and Dawn, reside in the city. The other two children, Michael and Hannah, normally reside in the country.

Racheal suggests that first of all Bree should complete the Signs of Safety Three Houses tool with the older children. She should then start on the Signs of Safety Words and Pictures explanation to help the parents understand what happened and why their children came into care.

Practice Questions

Preparation is critical in every contact child protection practitioners have with parents, children, families, carers and other professionals. Signs of Safety is a questioning approach and thinking of your best questions is always a good way to prepare.

- How did the Child Protection Worker prepare for the home visit?
- Who might you consult before undertaking the home visit and why?
- What do you need to consider when locating a placement for Aboriginal children?
- Develop some key questions you might ask the family on a home visit?
- Review your questions, how many are asking about the worries and how many are asking about what is working well in the family?
- How will you determine if Family and Domestic Violence is an issue for the family?
- What factors would you consider to ensure worker safety?
• What would you consider to ensure the mother’s safety when Family and Domestic Violence is present?

• Rehearse and role play how you would introduce yourself to Murray and Sheree. What do you think is important to discuss with them? Consider the following:
  o managing your own feelings
  o listening to the family’s story
  o being transparent
  o how will you know if the parents are drug affected
  o how will you keep the conversation focused on the child experience

**Discussion Question**

Describe the long term impact for Aboriginal children who are disconnected from their families?

How might you ensure Aboriginal children remain connected to family?

“When you don’t know what to do, do the most compassionate thing”

Kevin Campbell
Chapter 3: “Until you tackle trust”

(Starts at 4.26 – 6.39)

In this chapter of the film we see the Child Protection Worker, Bree, and the Team Leader, Racheal, arrive at the home of Murray and Sheree who are sitting outside. Bree and Racheal introduce themselves to the parents and explain that they are from Child Protection and are there to talk about what happened last night. Sheree becomes very emotional and pleads for Bree and Racheal to bring her children back, stating “Child Protection always do this to our mob.”

We then see Bree and one of the children seated in the District Office completing the Signs of Safety Three Houses exercise. Bree calmly and gently guides the child through drawing pictures in each of the Three Houses. When the child has finished Bree thanks the child and tells him that this has told her a lot about him and a lot about what has been happening.

Signs of Safety aims to make the voice of the child central to all Child Protection assessments and provides straightforward ways to do this with tools such as Words and Pictures and Three Houses.

In the film we see the Child Protection Worker seated with the child while he does the Three Houses exercise. His pictures provide the worker with important information about his current experience. It is important that Child Protection Workers ask age-appropriate questions when doing Three Houses with children and that the children’s views are considered in the child protection assessment.

**Discussion Questions**

- Review the Three Houses drawings from the film below and consider why this information is valuable for child protection assessments of the family situation.
- How will the information gathered from this tool influence your assessment?
- For more information about My Three Houses App for iPad, download for free [here](#).
In this house, Michael has drawn a football and a tv. He tells Bree that he likes it when his dad kicks the footy with him but he can not remember the last time dad did that. He also likes it when he gets to watch tv. Michael could not think of anything else that was good in his house. This is common when children have been neglected.
Michael tells Bree that he often feels sad and hungry. In the top picture his tummy rumbles. He worries that mum and dad forget to feed him and Hannah. He does not like it when Hannah cries because she is hungry. He also says that mum sleeps a lot. There are lots of beer bottles in the house and sometimes they fall and smash on the floor.
In Michael's house of dreams there are football goal posts and a footy oval. He would like to play footy. There is also a Pokemon – he’s like to have a Pokemon game and he wishes his dad would play with him. In his house of dreams everyone in his family would be happy together and mum and dad are smiling. There would be lots of pizza and he would not be hungry.
Three Houses Tool

- Review the Three Houses Tool outlined below.
- Can you add any additional questions you might ask within each House to gather further information?
- Considering other abuse types, what other questions would you ask?

**House of Good Things**

- Explain what you like most about your mum?
- What are your favourite things to do with your dad?
- Tell me the most important thing your mum or dad does for you?
- What is the best thing about your life?
- Describe something special about who you are and where you come from?
- What makes you feel strong?
- Who makes you feel strong? What do they do that makes you feel that way?
- How often do you get to see them?
- Who is your best friend?
- What do you think your mum/dad/grandma/grandpa/teacher/siblings/friend/aunty/uncle like about you the most?
- What’s the best thing about being you?
- What makes you feel happy?
House of Worries

Tell me what you do not like about what is happening at home?

Describe what worries you the most?

If you could change one thing about something in your house, what would it be?

What would be different about your life if that change happened?

Who do you wish would not come to your house?

Explain what scares you the most?

What’s the most difficult part of the day for you? What is it about that part of the day that makes it so hard?

Who else is around when things are going bad?
House of Dreams

If a miracle happened and you could have one wish come true, what would that be?

On a scale of 0 – 10 where 10 is everything in my family is exactly as I like it and 0 is nothing at home is how I like it, what number would you give?

What would need to happen in order for you to scale up by one number?

Tell me what else would make things better in your home?

Explain what else needs to change in your life?

If you could spend the day with anyone in the whole wide world, who would that be?

What is it about them that you like so much? Is there anything they could do to make things better for you?

Is there something someone else could do to make things better at home?

Is there anything you think I could do about any worries you have? How would that help with the worries?
Chapter 4: “We have to partner”

(Starts at 6.40 – 11.12)

In this Scene of the film we see Bree preparing the Words and Pictures for the meeting with the family. Murray and Sheree arrive at the District Office and enter the meeting room where a number of professionals are present, including; the Case Worker, Team Leader and Aboriginal Practice Leader. The meeting is opened with an acknowledgement to country. Murray and Sheree are presented with Michael’s completed Signs of Safety Three Houses and the worker highlights that it is time that they all start working together for the children. A Signs of Safety mapping helps Child Protection Workers gather information from the family’s perspectives so that a balanced assessment can be made. It is explained to Murray and Sheree that right now the Department believe that their children are not safe in their care. The case worker spoke to Murray and Sheree about who they would like in their safety network.

During this chapter we also see Bree and the Aboriginal Practice Leader discussing the meeting with their District Director. Consultation and decision making with senior staff is critical in all child protection work. Child Protection Workers don’t make decisions on their own and consultation is always helpful to make sure important information is not being missed. The Aboriginal Practice Leader is critical in all consultations involving Aboriginal families. In this case, he suggests they look at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle for the children and try and find a placement that is either with family or with an Aboriginal person in their community if possible. Workers are always encouraged to follow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which is a legislative requirement in Western Australia.

Words and Pictures

There are different types of Words and Pictures. The short form version of the Words and Pictures is the one featured in the film and included below. It is important to note that workers can do a draft and then discuss with the family. In this case, the worker drew the pictures but every case is different and sometimes family members or children may wish to draw. It is important that there is agreement on the explanation between the parents and the child protection workers before the words and pictures is shared with the children. Issues of dispute can be captured in the words and pictures. Words and Pictures is a very helpful way for many families to understand why the department is involved and what needs to happen for the future safety of the children.
Words and Michael for Michael and Hannah so they know about the worries and why they aren’t living with mummy and daddy.

1. Since Michael and Hannah were really little, Mummy Sheree and Daddy Murray have always had problems with alcohol that led to Daddy getting really angry and yelling and mummy. This has made Michael and Hannah scared and sad.

2. On Sunday, CPS (the Department) got a call from the police. The police say they got a call about some yelling at mummy and daddy’s house and this is not the first time they have been called there. When the police got there, Daddy wasn’t there but mummy and aunt Sarah would not wake up. Police say there was lots of empty beer bottles and cans at the house and it looked like mummy and aunt Sarah had passed out. This left Michael (aged 6), Hannah (aged 4), Sammi (aged 3) and Dawn (aged 5) looking after themselves on a very cold night. Mummy and Aunt Sarah say they weren’t passed out they just fell asleep. The Department is worried because the children had no grown ups awake to look after them.
3. The police also said that all the children were awake, even though it was 10 o'clock at night. They said there was broken glass outside the house as well as inside the house that was overall very messy with dead cockroaches. Michael had a cut on his arm and all the children were hungry and needed a bath. Inside the house, police also found stuff that makes them think someone was taking drugs and it is not OK for this to happen with the children around. Michael, Hannah, Sammi and Dawn were all taken to the hospital to get checked and then they were taken to foster carers so they had somewhere safe and warm to sleep.

4. In the morning, Bree spoke to the foster carers who were worried about Michael and Hannah. Michael told the carer that he loves his daddy, especially when they watch footy together but daddy drinks lots of beer and pushes mummy and hits mummy. Michael showed the carer how Daddy did this. He said it made him feel “big mad” inside, especially when mummy cries.

5. Because Bree and Jim from the Department are so worried about Michael and Hannah, they will go to Court and tell the Magistrate what has happened and ask that they stay with carers until the worries get sorted out. Mummy and Daddy can also tell Bree if there are other people in their family who can look after Michael and Hannah while they are sorting out all the problems.
6. Bree and Jim really want to work with mummy and daddy so they can sort out their problems. It’s important for Mummy and Daddy to get Michael to school everyday so he can learn and make friends. Daddy says he didn’t know his yelling and angry ways made everyone so frightened. Mummy and daddy need to find family and friends who can help them take care of Michael and Hannah so that Michael and Hannah can be happy, warm and safe.
Here is some more information about Words and Pictures....

Words and Pictures completed early in a case can help everyone; including the child, understand why Child Protection is involved in their life. It is especially helpful in families where English may not be their first language.

When you are preparing to do a Words and Pictures, be clear about your purpose. Consider the following;

- Child Protection Workers need to consult with the Aboriginal Practice Leader if the family is Aboriginal, as they are skilled in engaging with family and localised knowledge;
- Use the correct language to reflect the words of the children / parents / community;
- Check for appropriateness of drawings; Child Protection Workers need to check with the Aboriginal Practice Leader if there are any images that could be culturally inappropriate;
- Workers are the first audience for a Words and Pictures. Be clear about the facts, the worries and the strengths in a family as well as what needs to happen for the children to be safe;
- Write clear harm statements, danger statements and safety goals, when drafting a Words and Pictures;
- Convey the seriousness of the situation in age appropriate language in the words and pictures;
- Consider what questions the children might have, especially if they have been removed from their parents. A Words and Pictures is a great opportunity to answer children’s questions and help them understand what is happening. Often children can feel like decisions are being made about them and around them – they need to be included and have input into what is happening;
- A clear Words and Pictures is critical in developing a good safety plan.

Practice Questions

- What are some questions you would ask to help you develop a Words and Pictures?
- Think about a family you are currently working with. Draft a Words and Pictures for that case.
- Give the Words and Pictures a title.
- Who was worried?
- What were they worried about?
- What happened next?
• What is everyone doing about the worries?
• Draw the pictures. Stick figures can convey a lot of emotion. You do not need to be an artist. Personalise the drawings e.g. If mum has curly hair or if dad wears glasses, draw stick figures with these characteristics.

**Task:**
Get into pairs and read out your draft as if you were delivering the Words and Pictures to the parents and their network.

### Safety plans

**To be completed by Departmental Staff Only**

Signs of Safety uses a safety goal to help parents understand what the Department needs to see to be satisfied the children will be safe. The safety goal directly relates to the danger statement.

**Example of a Safety Goal:**
The Department know that Murray and Sheree love Michael and Hannah very much and want them back in their care. In order to know that Michael and Hannah are safe and that the case can be closed, the Department needs to see that Murray does not shout, push, hit, or hurt Sheree, and that both Sheree and Murray are able to feed, love, and give lots of attention to Michael and Hannah, so that they are able to grow up healthy, strong and safe.

**Task:**
Write a draft safety goal regarding what the Department needs to see happen in terms of specific behaviours, to be convinced the children will be safe. Remember this should be the danger statement in reverse, so the family is clear about the goals we are all working towards.

**Practice Questions**
The safety goal can be finalised with the family during the safety planning meeting, to include further information and the family’s own ideas and language.

1. How might you include any bottom lines in the plan so the family feel a greater sense of ownership of the plan?
2. How might you find out about times when the family kept the children safe? Why would this information be important?
3. How might you make the child’s experience central to the development of the safety plan?
4. What kind of specific behaviour do you need to see to feel confident the children will be safe? Over what time frame?
5. What will be the roles of safety group members?
6. How will we know the safety group people can actually provide safety?

7. Why is language important?

8. How will you review the safety plan regularly with the family? Why is this important?

9. Is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in the safety plan?

10. What kind of support will family require to keep children safe in an emergency if the safety plan is breached?

11. What are some of the challenges in safety planning where there is family and domestic violence? How might we overcome these?

12. Make a list of open questions you can ask to help build and sustain safety networks with a family. Here are a few to start you off...

   - What do you think your children might say if they saw you working with us and a group of safety people so that you could get them home?
   - Are there people you are connected with on Facebook/Instagram etc who live close by and could be part of your safety network?
   - Talking about the department’s worries in front of family and friends or other professionals can be overwhelming, what can workers do to make it easier for you to do this?

A few months later Murray and Sheree worked towards unsupervised contact with Michael and Hannah with the following Safety Plan

**Example of Draft Safety Plan**

**Date:** 13th February 2017

**Purpose:** For Murray and Sheree to have unsupervised contact with Michael and Hannah.

**Network Members:** Greg (Paternal Uncle), Mary (Maternal Aunt), Sandy and Dave (Maternal Grandparents), Barb (Sheree’s cousin), Norma (Maternal Aunt) and Jenny (Neighbour of Murray and Sheree).

**Danger Statement:** The Department is worried that when Daddy, Murray chooses to yell, make threats, smash things in the house and push Sheree, this will make Michael and Hannah feel very scared and fearful that they or their Mum will be hurt by Daddy and other broken things in the house. When Daddy, Murray chooses to be aggressive he makes everyone in the family feel really scared and this can feel worse when Murray is drinking. If this continues, Michael and Hannah will find it hard to learn because their brains may not grow healthy and strong and they may also find it hard to make friends.

**Safety Goal:** The Department know that Murray and Sheree love Michael and Hannah very much and want them back in their care. In order to know that Michael and Hannah are safe and that the case can be closed, the Department needs to see that Murray does not shout, push, hit or hurt Sheree and that both Sheree and Murray are able to feed, love, and give lots of attention to Michael and Hannah, so that they are able to grow up healthy, strong and safe.
Rules:

Drug Use:

1. Murray and Sheree will not be drug or alcohol affected when caring or having contact with Michael or Hannah. Sheree will show this by:
   - Welcoming her family in when they visit, taking their calls and being more open with her support network.

   Murray will show this by:
   - Being his normal funny, calmer, and attentive self when he is spending time with Michael and Hannah and having family time.

2. Murray and Sheree know they cannot just have one or two drinks so they will discuss with their elders where they can get help from to stop drinking. They will let CPFS and their network know what they have decided by the next monthly meeting.

Family and Domestic Violence:

1. Murray will not get angry, shout, yell, hurt anyone or throw things when caring or having contact with Michael or Hannah.

2. Murray will show Sheree he is supporting her as a mum by helping around the house and garden. He will also try and get the kids involved so they can do fun things together.

3. If Murray feels like he is getting angry, he will go for a walk and have a cigarette to calm down. He will give Greg a call if he’s still angry.

Family Contact

1. Murray and Sheree will have unsupervised contact with Michael and Hannah on Monday’s and Wednesday’s after school and on Saturday’s.

2. Murray, Sheree and Mary will discuss the most suitable times and length of contact that suits Michael and Hannah’s routine.

3. Murray will make an effort to kick the footy with Michael on visits.

4. Michael and Hannah will be able to call Mary or Crisis Care at any time during contact if they feel scared or unsafe.

5. Mary will check in with Sheree and Murray to make they are sober and well prior to contact occurring with the children. If Mary has any concerns about either Sheree or Murray’s presentation, contact will not occur for that day.

Roles of the Safety Network:

All members of the network know that Murray and Sheree can be good parents. They also want to see Michael and Hannah get home as soon as it is safe enough. In order for this to happen:

1. Greg and Dave will check in with Murray and Sheree once a week to see how they are going and encourage them to stay on track for Michael and Hannah.

2. Norma and Sandy will take turns each Saturday to come over and help Sheree cook dinner for Michael and Hannah as they know Sheree has a lot to deal with.
3. The support network will feed back any concerns regarding the safety plan, parenting by Sheree or Murray, drug use by Sheree or Murray, or any violent behaviour displayed by Murray towards Sheree or the children, and anything else pertaining to the safety and wellbeing of Michael and Hannah.

Red Flags:

1. If Jenny hears Murray yelling at Sheree like before, she will call the police.
2. If Sheree and Murray don’t let network members in the house or don’t take their calls, network members will call a review meeting with CPFS.

Bottom Lines:

If any of the above conditions are breached by Murray or Sheree, or any of the network members feel the safety plan isn’t working, CPFS with Murray, Sheree and the network members will come together immediately to review the plan.

Each month the safety plan will be reviewed with Murray, Sheree and the network members so that Michael and Hannah are able to return home as soon as possible.

Review Date: 17/7/17

I have understood and agree to the following plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
<th>Agreed at meeting on 13/2/17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheree:</td>
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<td>Mary:</td>
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<td>Jenny:</td>
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<td>Case Manager:</td>
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Chapter 5
Getting Ready: Signs of Safety Pre-birth Process—“A mother is most at risk when she’s pregnant”

(Starts at 11.13- 14.23)

This chapter of the film opens with Kate (CPFS Child Protection Worker) and Pete (CPFS Aboriginal Practice Leader), both Metropolitan Perth CPFS Workers, sitting in the car talking about the phone call received from the Country District Office to say that two nights ago Sarah and her two children, Sammy and Dawn, were discovered at a house where Sarah had drunk too much alcohol and had passed out leaving the children unsupervised. As a result Sammy and Dawn were brought into care but were returned to Sarah the following morning.

Kate tells Pete that she has been worried about Sarah and her children, Sammy and Dawn, for some time. Sarah is pregnant and because of her worries Kate tells Pete that she would like to discuss pre-birth planning with the family and this is why they are at the family home today. After introducing themselves to Sarah, Kate and Pete are led to the back garden where two other people are present. Once settled around the table Kate and Pete produce a cloth map as a way to visually explain to Sarah the process she is about to embark on with the Department. Pete explains, using the map, that by the first proper meeting Sarah will have enough support people around her to fill the room, including her friend Danielle and her hospital Social Worker.
**Research**

Research tells us that 1 in 2 Aboriginal women and children experience family and domestic violence (ABS, 2008), and that Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be hospitalised as a result of a family and domestic violence assault (AIHW, 2006).

Research also identifies that family and domestic violence often begins or intensifies during pregnancy, with family and domestic violence being linked to poor birth outcomes such as, increased rates of miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, foetal injury and foetal death (Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework, Second edition, pg. 74.) There are a number of factors that have been identified as being linked to a higher likelihood of experiencing family and domestic violence during pregnancy; however, it is important to remember that gender inequality is acknowledged as the predominant underlying factor of all forms of violence against women.

Pregnancy is often a time of increased autonomy and self-awareness for women, as she mentally prepares for motherhood which may be interpreted by a perpetrator of violence as the woman gaining more independence from her partner (Bacchus et al., 2006, p. 595). As control is a significant aspect of family and domestic violence, perpetrators may find pregnancy threatening and therefore seek to regain this control over their partner. Furthermore, a mother's focus on her newborn and getting ready for parenting during pregnancy and motherhood, may also lead to an increase in violence, due to the perpetrators perception of her limited ability to perform the expected traditional homemaker roles (Jasinski, 2004).

**Getting Ready for Pre-birth Planning Meetings**

Pregnancy is a critical time for effective interventions, as it is the time when women come into contact with various health care professionals. Furthermore, pregnancy in some instances may be motivation for women to leave a violent relationship. In child protection practice, it is important that workers prepare families as best they can to engage in the pre-birth planning process. Workers may use maps, drawings or a table cloth (as depicted in the film) as a visual tool to help families understand the pre-birth planning process. Focussing on the map can reduce the need for eye contact on sensitive issues and show the timeline in which a safety plan for the baby needs to happen and how. Working this way can help build constructive working relationships as early as possible in a pregnancy.

**Practice Questions**

Consider the following questions regarding how we work with families when there is family and domestic violence and when mum is pregnant:

- Why is it important that we understand what the violence actually looks like in the family?
- How do we involve both mum and dad safely if we are worried about violence?
• Why are we helping parents to get ready for ‘pre-birth planning’?
• How do we talk with families in a culturally respectful way at such a sensitive time?
• What was the value in using the visual map with the family in the film?
• What is important about engaging dad early in the pre-birth planning process?
• What are the risks if dad does not engage?
• What is important to consider in term of mum’s safety and how do we respectfully acknowledge her ability to be part of a safety plan?
• What practical support can we offer to assist mum and dad to get to meetings on time, on the right day, organise child-care, and get to appointments?
• What is important to consider when we try to engage with dad in the process? How might we hold him accountable for violent behaviour, but also respect his role as a father and show genuine curiosity about what he holds precious as a father?
• What do we want to achieve in these meetings with families?
• What do you need to consider when determining who to invite to a pre-birth meeting?
• What would you need to consider when engaging with an Aboriginal family?
Chapter 6: “Who in the network can help?”

(Starts at 14.24 – 21.34)

In this chapter of the film we see the first pre-birth meeting taking place.

Also in this part of the film we see the conversation between Sarah and her partner Shaun. Often parents know there are worries even before Communities becomes involved. Fear of past welfare practices continue to impact on families so it’s important that workers do what they say they will do and are transparent in their practice. Being able to partner with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation can also help build positive relationships and networks.

Safety Networks

Signs of Safety seeks to get the people naturally connected to the child and other people identified by the family, around the table to hear Communities’ worries and plan for safety at the earliest possible time. The safety network communicates with the parents and each other to support the parents to meet the safety goals and keep the children safe.

When building safety networks it is important to consider the following:

- Aboriginal Practice Leaders can help workers identify and engage the network;
- Consider the purpose of the network i.e. support to family so they do not feel isolated, care for the child for periods, be available by phone etc.;
- Asking scaling questions can help track the progress of the safety plan and the safety network- if the danger is not reducing then amendments may be needed to the safety network;
- Social histories can also help identify people from the past who might be helpful;
In cases of family and domestic violence, you need to consider separate networks for the perpetrator and their victim(s);

- It is important to ensure that fathers are equally considered and involved;

- Aboriginal Practice Leaders can be beneficial in engaging and identifying supports for Aboriginal Dads;

- It is important to regularly review the network to make sure the ‘right’ people continue their support and commitment. People need to be clear about their role on the safety network;

- It is important that safety network people also have a relationship with each other. If possible, someone on the safety network can take a lead role so that the safety plan can be sustained after the Department closes the case.

- It is important to ask children or young people (where possible) who they may want as part of the safety network.

Practice Questions:

1. What are some of the challenges we face in getting parents to work with us?

2. How long will we need to see the safety plan being followed?

3. What questions or tools could you ask a young person to help them identify safety network members?

4. How might you support a family or safety network to achieve the safety goal?

5. What role could partner agency play to identify safety network members?

Appreciative Inquiry Activity

The Signs of Safety Framework operates at its best in a culture of learning and practice based on reflection. Appreciative Inquiry is a tool for embedding this practice based reflection throughout the organisation right from individual supervision through to team meetings and within upper management leadership forums.

Appreciative Inquiry digs into a worker’s practice to uncover the depth of their practice using the following questioning style (EARS);

1. **Elicit** (First Question, and the questions to elicit detail)
   - Tell me about a situation in which you were proud of your practice, or where things could have gone badly but instead went well?

2. **Amplify** (who, what when – relational questions to get to the specific detail of what the worker actually did)
   - What were all the things you did well or you were pleased with? What did you do? How did you start? What did you say? How did you figure out how to do this? What was the other person doing that made you realise things were working well?
3. Reflection (summary of learning in practice and close conversation)

- When you think about that situation and what you did what is the biggest learning for you? If the child/mum/father/grandparents/Elder was here, what would they say they appreciated the most about how you worked with them? What was the most important learning you got from this case?

4. Start Again (choose a new question to elicit another area of detail) - return to 1.

**Task**

In groups of three each person is assigned roles of facilitator/advisor/interviewee

- Facilitator to start the Appreciative Inquiry with the question…”Tell me about a time you successfully facilitated a good safety plan with a strong safety network?”
- Advisor to prompt with questions to assist Facilitator if required and time interview at 7 minutes
- Interviewee to be interviewed regarding a time they successfully facilitated a good safety plan with a strong safety network.
- Interview each other for seven minutes each. Provide feedback and swap if time allows this.

“Safety is temporary, healing happens in the group”

Kevin Campbell
Chapter 7: “Sharing that decision”

(Starts at 21.35 – 23.04)

In the film, Kate and Pete are told by the Team Leader that the District Director has approved that there is enough safety for baby to go home with the safety plan in place. Kate is very happy to share that decision with Sarah and Shaun.

Discussion Questions:

- How important do you think it is that children and families feel you genuinely care about what is happening for them?
- How do you show your authentic self to the families you work with, while also having professional boundaries?
- Reflect on a time when you had to work hard to engage with someone who was anxious, angry or distressed, or unwilling to work with you. What is it that others would have seen you do to engage the family?
- In the film the Child Protection Worker Kate scaled safety within the family at a 7 and said she felt there was room for growth. What does this number mean? How will Kate and the family know if it gets higher or lower?
Practice Questions:

- Based on the information in the film scale the family’s situation yourself, using your own professional judgement. What number are you currently? Why?
- What information is missing that would help you scale more effectively? What would need to happen for your scale to get higher?
- Have a go at developing some scaling questions that you might ask Sarah and Shaun, or their safety network (0 = no safety and 10 = safety).

0 __________________________________________________________________________ 10

Difficult decisions
At times despite intense, ongoing efforts to safety plan with family, this cannot be established.

If a Child Protection Worker scales a family at 3 or below, and the District Director makes the decision that a baby is not safe to go home with parents, this news can be difficult to deliver and should always be done after careful planning.

Child Protection Workers are involved in complex and difficult decisions on a daily basis.

Consider the following:

- What have you learnt about sharing difficult news with families in a compassionate way?
- How might an Aboriginal Practice Leader, Team Leader or partner agency be able to assist Child Protection Workers to prepare to deliver difficult news to parents?
- How might you be able to help the family hold some hope for the future in the face of such news?
- What do you need to grow in your practice so that you are able to balance being firm but also kind and compassionate?
Chapter 8: “Your steps and contributions”

(Starts at 23.05 – end)

In this final chapter of the film we see Sheree on the phone to one of her children checking that they are all okay, Murray is in the background and wants Sheree to tell them that he loves them. Sheree and Murray are thrilled when they find out that they are going to be able to see their children tomorrow.

The final scenes are between Sarah and Shaun with their children.

In both case scenarios, Signs of Safety practice is used even though the outcomes were different.

Program Logic

Communities has developed the WA Signs of Safety Program Logic which is outlined on the last page of this workbook. This provides a shared understanding within Communities about what we are hoping to achieve through Signs of Safety and also the key activities we will use to get there.

Discussion Questions:

Review the Program Logic and consider the following:

- What’s the next step you hope to make in your practice so that you keep offering families the opportunity to engage using the Signs of Safety framework?
- What has been the most important learning for you, from the Keeping Children Front and Centre Film?
- How might your agency and Communities staff work together to ensure the ongoing learning of Signs of Safety when working with families and children?
Western Australia’s Signs of Safety Program Logic

**Inputs**
- Leadership to drive practice improvement
- Recruitment and development of staff with appropriate knowledge, skills and cultural competence
- Adequate policies, procedures and professional capacity to support participation of children, their families and other key stakeholders in decision-making
- Facilitation skills to grow practice depth
- Worker competencies and applied understanding of legislation, nature and dynamics of family and domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, child development, intergenerational trauma, grief and loss from past child protection involvement

**Signs of Safety Principles and Disciplines**
- Children and families have the foundational knowledge about the caring strengths and risks that exist in their own families and communities
- Critical incident collaborative inquiry
- Practice audit and feedback
- Practice example
- Formal learning
- Shared responsibility
- Signs of Safety Gatherings
- Rapid Response
- Memorandum of understanding with Alberta
- Pre-birth processes and pre-hearing conferences

**Activities**
- Supervision
- Participation in ongoing learning
- Questioning approach
- Scaling questions
- Words and pictures explanation

**Outcomes**
- Overarching outcome – increased safety for the child
- Parents, children, families, carers, professionals and other significant community stakeholders are actively engaged and understand the Department’s role and responsibilities and why the Department is involved
- The framework and tools are applied within the context of using a culturally responsive and trauma informed approach across case practice
- Decisions made are safety focused
- Safety plans are developed collaboratively with child (age appropriate), adult victim of family and domestic violence, other family members and stakeholders as part of case management (planning, implementation, monitoring and review)
- The right of children, particularly Aboriginal children, to remain connected to family

**Foundation Principles, Policies and Legislation**
- Children and Community Services Act 2004
- Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation, Connection)
- People Development Framework
References


Learning Together, Growing Together

Keeping Children Front and Centre
A Signs of Safety Approach