



Signs of Safety information for partner agencies

Signs of Safety is a way of working with Children, Young People and Families. It is a practice model which was developed in Australia in the 1990s and has since been used in 13 different countries around the world. It is used by about a third of local Councils in England

Three of the key principles of the model are:

- No professional jargon. We should speak and write in a way that is plain and easy to understand. If a family reads an assessment written by one of our practitioners they should be able to clearly understand what we are worried about, why we are worried and what we want to do about it.
- Making sure the child or young person's voice is heard. We will work closely with them to understand what they are worried about, what they think is going well and what they want to change. We will record their thoughts in their own words and not translate it in to professional-speak. We will do this regularly and work it in to our assessments and plans
- Involving the family and the wider network. We want to work with the family to understand what they think is going well and to work with them to find solutions to problems. We want to develop plans together with the family to achieve change. We want to involve the other people who support the family such as friends, neighbours and extended family to help make plans that they can sustain and work on even after we are no longer in their lives.

Our implementation

As part of Hull's improvement programme we have committed to using the model across the whole of Children's Social Care and Early Help. Our official start date for the model was 21st June 2021. Full implementation can take 2 to 5 years, so we expect it to take a long time before the change is fully embedded. Most of our case-holding staff and managers have received basic training. Our knowledge of the model and its techniques will continue to grow over the next few years as our practice leaders continue their development and train our staff. This implementation will be a learning experience for all of our staff and partners. It is a big change with lots to learn and it will take time to get to a place where everyone understands the model well.

Our implementation goals:

- We will know we are at our best when we see practitioners, external partners, communities, families, parents, and children working together to ensure as many children as possible are living safely at home or with their families. For this to happen, Hull City Council will:
- Lead a consistent practice approach to reflection, learning, risk assessment, decision-making, and safety planning across all teams.





- Work transparently together with external partners, from a common understanding and shared vision for children.
- Grow the confidence, competence, and pride in the work practitioners do WITH children, families and their networks.
- Empower children, parents and families to have the confidence, competence, and pride in sharing their voices and working together to ensure that children are safe and well cared for, especially when things are the most worrisome.

Our implementation will focus on four key strands:

Learning – training our staff to the level where they are confident using the model and passing their skills on to others.

Leadership – clear and visible participation and engagement with the practice by our leaders

Organisational alignment – a commitment from the whole organisation to the practice. Alignment of policies, forms, methods and plans to the practice. Good collaborative arrangements with partners.

Meaningful measures – a quality assurance framework designed to demonstrate whether the practice is being used widely, being used well and having positive impact on the lives of children, young people and families

Signs of Safety Organisational Implementation





The changes you will see

When you speak to our staff or attend meetings such as Child Protection Conferences or Team around the Family meetings you will see the language we use and the way we ask questions will change. We will ask some Signs of Safety questions when you make a new referral to us. We may change the reports we ask you to submit to conferences and reviews. Please see the 'about the model' section below for details of some key terms we will use and questions we will ask.

We know that not everyone will understand the model well. The person chairing the meeting or contacting you about a family will be able to explain what they need and answer any questions you have.

On June 21st 2021 we changed much of our paperwork to fit the Signs of Safety framework. This includes social care and early help assessments, plans, conference reports and review reports. We are part way through the gradual process of rewriting the plans of all of the children and young people open to our services. This will take time and in many cases the plan will not be updated to the new format until the next time it is reviewed.

Our Early Help Assessment will adopt the Signs of Safety model and Outcome Stars remain a valuable tool to inform the assessment.

About the model

Safety, success and wellbeing.

Signs of Safety was originally developed for child protection where children were in danger of being harmed, but this does not apply to all the children we work with. We will change our language according to the needs of the person but the basics of the approach remain the same.

For child protection, we use **Signs of Safety**. We will talk about **dangers** and **safety goals**

For early help and some child in need cases, we will not have any concerns about their safety but need to work to ensure their wellbeing. We use **Signs of Wellbeing**. We will talk about **worries** and **wellbeing goals**.

For long term looked-after children and care-leavers we will often have no concerns about their safety but need to work to make sure they can thrive and be successful as they approach independence. We use **Signs of Success**. We will talk about **worries** and **success goals**.

Mapping and Scaling.

As we work with families, we will regularly do a mapping exercise where we will ask the child and family, ask ourselves and ask our partners "What are we worried about?", "What is working well?" and "What needs to happen?"

What are we worried about?

This will be broken down in to three categories: harm, danger and complicating factors.

- Harm (wellbeing concerns in Signs of Wellbeing, and worrying behaviours in Signs of Success) describes the past. It looks at things which have already happened in the child's life





which have harmed them or made them unsafe, affected their wellbeing or prevented them achieving their goals.

- Danger (critical worries in Signs of Wellbeing and Signs of Success) describes the future. It looks at what we fear might happen in the future to harm a child or make them unsafe, affect their wellbeing or prevent them achieving their goals.
- Complicating factors describe any additional difficulties which make it harder to deal with these worries.

What is working well?

In relation to our worries, we will look at the things in the child's life which could or do help.

- Existing strengths looks at what positives we can identify. It looks at what is going well, and in the context of the worries, what could be drawn on to help such as what support friends or family might be willing to give.
- Existing safety (existing wellbeing or existing success in Signs of Wellbeing/Success) looks at proven examples of what has already happened to improve safety, wellbeing or success in relation to the worries.

What needs to happen?

- Safety goals (wellbeing goals/success goals) broadly describe what we, the child or the family want to see to ensure the safety, wellbeing or success of the child is not compromised. Goals are set to be realistic rather than some unachievable vision of perfection.
- Next steps describe the first things that practitioners, the child, family or support network need to do.

Scaling

We will look at how worried we are overall through scaling questions. We develop specific scaling questions for each child or family and make them relevant to their individual situations. We use a 0 to 10 scale where 0 means we are as worried as it is possible to be and 10 means we are satisfied that the child, family or support network have everything they need to manage the worries on their own and they do not need support from social care or early help.

We will scale regularly throughout our involvement with the family to get a view how near or far we are from our goals. We will do this at key points such as initial referral, during assessment, when a strategy discussion takes place and when reviewing a plan. We will ask partners to scale separately at certain points. This is an important tool to find out how worried each partner is about the situation and a starting point to look at why there is a difference in opinion and what one partner may have seen to make them more or less worried than another.

Danger statements and safety goals

Having done our mapping exercise we will produce a danger statement and a safety goal. In Signs of Wellbeing this would be a worry statement and wellbeing goal and in Signs of Success it would be a worry statement and a success goal. The danger statement will summarise the information recorded under 'what are we worried about' and 'what is working well' to produce a simple statement





explaining what people are worried about and why social care or early help need to be involved. The safety goal will summarise what would need to happen before people can stop worrying.

Direct work and the child or young person's voice

Finding out how the child or young person feels is a very important part of the model. The child or young person's voice will help to inform assessments and plans. Even from a very young age, children have a voice of sorts. How a baby reacts to certain situations or people will tell a person a lot about how they feel even before they can speak.

When working with children and young people, we will commonly use the My Three Houses approach. The worker and child will draw the house of worries, the house of good things and the house of dreams. The child will then use words or drawings to fill the houses with things from their life. From this we will find out in the child's own words what they are worried about, what's working well and what needs to happen. For families, hearing their child say in their own words what they're scared of or how they'd like things to be is a very powerful experience.

Find out more

To learn more about the model and how it will affect you:

- Sign up to one of our free online partner briefing sessions. Mail SignsOfSafety@hullcc.gov.uk
- Access the Signs of Safety knowledge bank at <https://knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net/>
Please note only limited resources are available free of charge to the public or to organisations without a subscription. If you are a Hull City Council employee please mail SignsOfSafety@hullcc.gov.uk to enquire about a subscription.
- Speak to the services you are working with, for example if you are attending a Child Protection Conference please contact the conference chair
- Mail SignsOfSafety@hullcc.gov.uk