



Practice Guidance for the use of Safety Plans October 2022

Safety Planning

Safety planning is a complex, dynamic and collaborative process that focuses on building enough safety to reduce the risk of harm to the child. The safety planning process involves working collaboratively with the child, parents, carers, the family or support network and partner agencies to develop and implement a detailed safety plan that leaves everyone confident that the child will be safe. The safety planning process also involves monitoring and reviewing the safety plan over time so that everyone is satisfied that the safety plan is working and will continue to work to provide ongoing safety for the child.

Because of the complexity and dynamic nature of the safety planning process, there is no specific formula that you can follow. Every family has different qualities, strengths and challenges, so every safety plan will be different and unique to each family. The template can be found [here](#) and practice exemplar [here](#).

Safety plans should not be a routine part of Child in Need, Child Protection, or Looked After Child planning. They should be used in specific circumstances for a specific purpose and should not simply replicate some, or all, of the contents of a child's plan, as this can be confusing for everyone involved. They are intended to provide clarity about the way that the local authority and the parents, carers, family members and professionals will work together. They can be used at any stage of the child's journey but should be considered during strategy discussions.

The safety plan is **not** a legal document but can be provided in supporting evidence if a care application is made to the court.

Principles of Safety Planning

➤ Working in Partnership

Social Care has the power to intervene in the lives of families and in the parent-child relationship. While this statutory power needs to be exercised if a parent is unable or fails to protect their child from significant harm, there is a responsibility to ensure that this power is exercised in ways that are respectful and preserve the dignity and wellbeing of family members. Safety planning processes are designed to foster inclusiveness and collaborative decision-making, so that the strength, capacity and wellbeing of parents and

families is enhanced rather than undermined by Social Care involvement. There should be a commitment to ensuring that any planning *about* the family is done *with* the family.

➤ **It takes a village to raise a child**

An essential principle in safety planning is the inclusion and strengthening of the family's safety and support network. The role of the safety and support network made up of family members, friends, other professionals or people who regularly see the child, is to uphold the safety of the child and to support the parents in making the necessary changes to build and maintain future safety for the child. The support network needs to be fully aware of the concerns, be willing to participate in the development of the safety plan and be willing to support the family in ensuring the child's ongoing safety and maintaining the safety plan over the long term.

➤ **Safety planning involves facilitating change**

The safety planning process is a change process, which invites family members, safety and support network members and child protection professionals to identify the risks for the children and to work out realistic and meaningful solutions to address these risks. Safety planning is all about helping people to make the shifts that are required to change: understanding the need for change, considering a different future and acknowledging that real change requires changes in their own thoughts, attitudes and behaviours.

➤ **The Child's Views**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (specifically Article 12) establishes children's rights to be heard and to participate in planning and decision-making about issues that affect them. Children need to be offered opportunities for meaningful participation in developing the safety plan, where it is appropriate to do so, as this will affect greatest change.

➤ **Safety Planning is a journey**

The long-term safety plan may require the family to change their daily lives in ways that are very different to their previous living arrangements. These changes cannot be put in place all at once. An effective safety plan requires time to be developed, refined and demonstrated. Regular reviews with families and professionals are required and the safety plan updated accordingly.

➤ **Ensure immediate safety for the children at each stage of the process**

At each stage of the safety planning process, you need to make sure there is immediate safety for the children. Arrangements need to be put into place to make sure that the children are safe in the short and medium term (for example: tonight, this weekend, for the next few weeks, for the next few months) while everyone is working together to develop a safety plan that will ensure the long-term safety of the children. Depending on the concerns, these immediate or short-term safety plans might involve things such as: a

safe adult moving into the family home and taking responsibility for the care of the children; the adult we are worried about moving out of the house and not having unsupervised contact with the children; the children being monitored each day by professionals/safe adults. In some instances, the only way of ensuring immediate safety may be to place the children in the care of other safe adults (foster carers or relatives).

➤ **Promoting sustained change**

The safety plan is designed to provide parents and families with the best possible opportunity to demonstrate that they are able to make and sustain the necessary changes to keep their child safe. Safety planning is not about trusting that parents, family members and safety network members will do what they say they will do. Trust can lead to over optimism and lack of curiosity and to the children being left in risky situations. At all stages of the safety planning process, safety needs to be demonstrated. This means that whilst acknowledging the statements that people make about what they will do in the future, these statements only translate into safety once actions or behaviours have been demonstrated over sufficient time to enable everyone to be confident that these actions will be continued. The monitoring process including regularly visiting and checking that people are doing what they say they will do, is critical as this clearly communicates to the family and the safety network that the changes in behaviour have to be demonstrated, as well as providing a mechanism to build confidence that the safety plan is actually working.

Consideration when implementing a safety plan

- The person must have the capacity to enter into and consent to the safety plan. Legal advice should be sought if there is any doubt about a person's capacity.
- If the social worker has concerns that a person does not understand the plan, or does not recognise the risks, they should seek management advice before asking the person to sign.
- The person must freely consent to the safety plan. Individuals should not be coerced into, or feel under duress, in agreeing a safety plan, particularly if this involves consequences that may be perceived as threats (for example that legal advice will be sought). An agreement signed under such circumstances gives an unhelpful illusion of compliance and is unlikely to be adhered to. If a person does not agree to the safety plan, and the content cannot be negotiated, they should not be persuaded to sign the document. However, in these circumstances, the rationale must be recorded as a management oversight of this decision, and consideration to seeking legal advice if this leaves the child at risk of significant harm.

Good Practice When Using a Safety Plan

- Consider the specific purpose of the safety plan. It should be clear in highlighting *“this is the issue; this is what needs to be done”*.

- A safety plan should always consider and, where possible, state the role of the wider family and friends.
- Safety plans should be aligned with and used in conjunction with the child's plan. The use of a safety plan should assist in the monitoring of outcomes for the child via the child's plan.
- A safety plan is a personalised document to support the individual in how to manage presenting issues. It may be necessary to complete a number of safety plans with adults and children in the house on an individual basis.
- The language used in the safety plan should be simple, and jargon should be avoided. This ensures that all family members and agencies are clear as to the expectation of all parties, and consequences of breaching the plan.
- If a child or parent is unable to follow an agreed safety plan, there is an expectation that the relevant worker should review the plan with them to understand the reasons for this. It may then be possible to consider additional support that can be provided, or different strategies to achieve the goal. It will also inform the evidence base of the parent's capacity to meet the needs of the child safely.
- A statement outlining the consequences of breaching the safety plan should be discussed and understood and be recorded clearly on the document.
- The safety plan (signed by all parties and a team manager), should be stored on the child's file.
- A signed copy of the safety plan needs to be provided to the family.
- The safety plan should be shared with all agencies involved with the family. This ensures that all agencies have an understanding of the expectations, and the likely consequences of these expectations not being adhered to. The date and details of when and how the agreement has been shared should be recorded on the child's file.
- Safety plans should be time limited and reviewed to support evidence-based practice. Regularly reviewing a safety plan is important to measure its effectiveness and determine whether changes need to be made. The safety plan allows an ongoing approach to managing presenting issues.

Reviewing a Safety Plan

To ensure accountability, compliance and effectiveness in safeguarding the child, safety plans and working agreements should be regularly reviewed. The review should always be with the family members and partner agencies and opportunities to review the safety plan include:

- During Child in Need reviews, Child Protection conferences and CLA reviews. It should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting that the plan or agreement has been reviewed, and any amendments noted.
- During any other formal family meeting, such as a Family Group Conference.
- When a Child and Family assessment or Parenting assessment has been completed - it may be appropriate to amend or end the safety plan, once further information has been gathered and once all agencies that are involved with the family have been consulted.
- Following significant events - where amendments to the safety plan may be necessary to clarify expectations.
- Prior to case closure and subject to consultation with all partner agencies involved with the family.

Compliance or non-compliance with the safety plan should be discussed:

- With the parent/carer during home visits.
- With the child/young person in an age and development appropriate way.
- During multi-agency meetings.
- During supervision.

All reviews of the safety plan should be documented on the child's file, considering progress, effectiveness and compliance. Failures of the safety plan and breaches of the agreement, and action taken as a result should be recorded.

Ending the Safety Plan

When everyone (parents, children, professionals and safety network) is confident the safety plan is working, and there is no further need for the plan, then the monitoring of the safety plan can be ended or handed over to the family and professional support network with clear information about what the support network will do if there are future worries or if the network is not able to continue working with the family.

If a safety plan does continue beyond case closure, universal services should be made aware of this.