Children’s Social Care Safety Plan Practice Guide 2020

Introduction

Safety Planning with children and families is often a critical and fundamental task in Social Work practice. Everyone has the right to be safe from harm. At times, the children, young people and families we support and work with will be faced with situations, behaviours and circumstances that increase the risk of harm.

The purpose of a safety plan is to provide an IMMEDIATE, short term plan of action for the family and professionals targeted at reducing immediate risk and introducing safety for children, young people and their families.

This guide is to support practitioners consider good practice in safety planning with children, young people and their families. The guide is set out into sections which consider how to prepare for safety planning and then how to design, implement, review and end a safety plan effectively.

Practitioners should refer to this guide when considering using safety planning as a tool with children and families/ The Newcastle Children’s Social Care safety plan Template (available on our TriX Procedures Manual) MUST be used by all practitioners.

Considerations for Practice – Before Using a Safety Plan

Practitioners should consider what the most appropriate tool is to manage the presenting risk. It might be that a Safety Plan is not what is needed, but a conversation, further direct work or a family meeting. Also, at times, a safety plan will not be appropriate as the risk is so great that immediate legal action is required to protect the child from harm. Management advice should always be sought if there is any doubt regarding the most appropriate tool.

The contents of what will go into a safety plan should be discussed and agreed with the persons being asked to be part of the plan. They should be given time to seek independent advice, e.g. from a solicitor, friend or family member. Family members should be aware that they can challenge and ask for amendments to the content without being viewed as uncooperative, for example if they feel an aspect of the suggested plan is unrealistic. This will likely increase the likelihood of ownership of and compliance with the plan.

In some situations, for example emergencies where it is necessary to record how newly identified needs and risks will be managed in the short term, it is accepted that prior discussion with the family network may not be possible. It is imperative in these circumstances, that parents or carers are provided with a copy of the plan and are clear and understand when the plan will be reviewed and that this will be a priority.

The person must have the [**capacity**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/glossary-cs/) to enter into and consent to the plan or agreement. Legal advice should be sought if there is any doubt about a person’s capacity.

If the practitioner has concerns that a person does not understand the plan or agreement, or does not recognise the risks, they should seek management advice before asking the person to sign.

The person must **freely consent** to entering into the agreement. Individuals should not be coerced into or feel under duress in signing an agreement or agreeing a 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 a dangerous illusion of compliance and is unlikely to be adhered to. If a person cannot agree a safety plan, and the content cannot be negotiated, they should not be persuaded to sign the document. However, if the individual has been unwilling or unable to enter into this agreement with the local authority the rationale MUST be recorded as a management oversight of this decision.

Practitioners **MUST** use the Newcastle CSC Safety Plan Template which clearly sets out the voluntary nature of the agreement to families.

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**”. The safety plan should provide an IMMEDIATE, short term plan of action for the family and professionals. The plan should be targeted at reducing immediate risk and introducing safety for children, young people and their families.
* A safety plan should always consider and, where possible, state the role of the wider family and friends.
* Safety plans should be aligned, used in conjunction with and wherever possible and practicable incorporated into the child’s plan.
* Safety Plans should clearly set out accountability for all parties involved and who is responsible for specific elements, actions and tasks within the plan. Parents/carers/young people /family members should be clear about who to speak to or how to complain, if they feel that the local authority or other parties are not adhering to the plan.
* A Safety Plan may involve a number of individuals. All parties involved with the agreement, and all persons with parental responsibility, should be asked to contribute to, and sign the Safety Plan. If the Safety Plan is not shared with a parent or person with parental responsibility (for example if they cannot be located, or if sharing the agreement would place the child at further risk), the rationale for this should be clearly recorded on the Safety Plan and on the child’s file with management oversight.
* 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 what the concern is, what is being agreed within the Safety Plan and how this will be effectively supported, monitored and reviewed.
* If a child or parent is unable to follow an agreed safety plan, the practitioner 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.
* The safety plan must be provided to all parties named as part of the document or agreements made. The Safety Plan must also be uploaded onto the child’s file as soon as possible but no longer than **within 2 working days** and a copy provided to the IRO.
* The safety plan should be shared with all agencies involved with the family. This ensures that all agencies have an understanding of the concerns for the family and what is in place to support the introduction or sustaining of safety for the child. The date and details of when and how the agreement has been shared should be recorded on the child’s file.

Reviewing a Safety Plan

* In order to ensure accountability, compliance and effectiveness in safeguarding the child, **safety plans should be regularly reviewed**.
* The starting point for any review should always be with the family members involved but must also encompass a multi-agency view. Safety plans should be formally reviewed, and the date of these reviews clearly recorded. This maybe within the next Care Team or Core Group, within Supervision and during Statutory visits to the child and their family.
* During Child in Need reviews, Child Protection conferences, Family Group conferences and Child in Care reviews the Safety Plan should be considered. **Actions and tasks detailed in the safety plan should be reviewed and incorporated into the child’s plan wherever it is appropriate and practicable to do so.** Any amendments or changes should be noted within the meeting minutes. This supports us as a service ensure that, wherever possible, children, young people and their families are not being required to work from multiple plans or documents when engaging with us. It also ensures key actions, tasks and agreements which promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people are at the heart of their plan.
* Where the child is not subject to a plan but an 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, amendments to the Safety Plan may be necessary to clarify expectations.
* All reviews of the safety plan should be documented on the child’s file, considering progress and effectiveness. Any failures of the safety plan and action taken as a result should be recorded.

Multi-agency involvement and accountability

* Most Safety Plans will be an agreement between the local authority and the family, however the agreement should be shared with all members of the multi-agency group, to ensure all professionals are aware of the arrangements in place and how these are being supported. Making sure that multi-agency partners are aware of the contents of a Safety Plan, means they can support the individual or family to follow the plan and share any concerns they may have if it is ineffective.
* All professionals involved with a family are responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of a safety plan and reviewing the plan within multi-agency forums.
* There will be some occasions where it is appropriate to include actions relating to other agencies in a Safety Plan e.g. engagement with other professionals, attendance at particular services or contact with certain agencies and professionals. It is IMPERATIVE that practitioners and agencies are provided with a copy of the Safety Plan and are consulted about their involvement and responsibilities.

Ending a Safety Plan

* Safety Plans put in place by our service often end when the case is closed as there is no longer an effective monitoring and review process for the plan. In some circumstances, there may be behaviours or arrangements of parents or other involved parties that continue when there is no longer social work involvement with the family. In these circumstances, a closure letter should be given to parents, setting out these expectations. This should be shared with multi-agency partners and uploaded to the child’s file. It should be made clear on the closure record, how these expectations will be monitored by step down/universal services.
* When a case is stepped down, it is the responsibility of both the social worker and Early Help Service to ensure that any expectations or agreements contained in a child or family’s Safety Plan are appropriately incorporated into the Early Help Plan. This should be achieved as part of the Step-Down Meeting. It is the social worker’s responsibility to arrange and attend the Step-Down Meeting and provide all practitioners with a copy of the assessment and Safety Plan that has been in place.
* Safety plans may continue to be used by families beyond case closure, as they may represent a continuing way of life for a family, wider family, friends or an individual. If a safety plan does continue beyond case closure, universal services working with the family such as school or the GP Practice must be made aware of this. The family’s understanding of the case closing and the implications of this in relation to any review or monitoring of a Safety Plan should be fully explored, supported and recorded on the child’s file.