**Family Network Meetings Guidance**

Remember – Family Networks are not always about offering care for children – it is about identifying what safety looks like, who in the network will support safety to continue so that children and family can safely remain together, where possible.

This guidance is for those working with the child and their family. They provide prompts and details the process for supporting the development of the Family Network Meetings, using the Signs of Safety (SOS) Mapping Assessment Tool and Safety Planning.

**Preparation**

1. **(Social) Worker to facilitate the family identifying their support network using conversations with the family and use of tools to help to do this.**

The first step of safety planning and the development of the Family Network Meeting is to identify the network. Sometimes, families will tell us they have no one. There are a number of tools we can use to help the family identify their support network. The professional network should work with the family on this, and whilst there is no set number for a safe network, the specifics of the family situation will guide you to know what a safe number might be. Be clear that without a network, safety cannot be created or maintained.

1. **Organise a family meeting to bring the network together.**

Bringing the network together for the first time can be challenging. Although this can be time consuming the benefits of holding a Family Network Meeting will enable you to ensure everyone involved is committed to co-creating and supporting a Safety Plan.

It is suggested that this is coordinated early in the process of supporting families.

The **initial** Family Network Meeting will likely take up to 90 minutes to complete. We need to work with families to ensure they fully understand the need for their commitment and ongoing role in the planning process.

**The Meeting**

1. **Use the SOS Mapping Assessment Tool to be clear about our worries and goals, and begin to think about plans to involve the network to create/support safety. Draft Danger/Worry Statements and Safety/Success Goals.**

Together, with the family and network, go through the SOS Mapping Assessment tool – you may have already completed this as part of your assessments, so make sure you do not duplicate the process. Just make sure you talk about the main worries and critical issues. Ask as many questions as possible and explore the things that we would see if things were going well, as well as the times we would be worried, as this will help us and the network to identify risks to maintaining safety. Think of lots of relationships questions, as this will help with understanding different perspectives, and therefore help to clearly define the safety steps needed.

The involvement of the network allows you to be clear with everyone what the main worries are, and give opportunity for the network to share their main worries too.

If you already have draft danger statements and safety goals, use these. If not, work together to pull these together using main worries.

1. **Discuss who can do what to help (e.g. phone calls, visits, monitoring, contact, supervision, transport, respite), whatever this may be.**

Once you have identified draft goals, think about who will help to meet and achieve them. As the professional, you will work on the same goals within the formal processes (i.e. child protection, child in need, Early Help Assessments and care planning) so do not think about courses or actions that organisations might help with. We are looking for roles the network can play. This will help to form your draft Safety Plan. This needs to be a dynamic and creative conversation so that the network can come up with their own ideas. This is not us asking them to do things. Instead this is the network offering the best ideas to ensure they can show how the children will be safe and looked after no matter how difficult the situation may get in the future. Use the Family Safety Plan tool to record this.

Ask the family and network to begin to practice things they think will help, as well as monitor this by noting when things have worked (text each other, use a diary or journal etc.) so when we come to review the plan, changes can be made to the plan to reflect what actually works best.

Contingencies – What is the Backup Plan?

Ask the family what contingencies they have (e.g. what if grandma is on holiday, who will check in? What if the neighbour can’t get back from work, who will pick up the children if mum can’t get out of bed one day?). Be realistic about what contingencies the network can think of, your role is to pose the questions and facilitate their plan.

Review Family Network Meeting

This should take place within 4 weeks of the initial Family Network Meeting. The purpose of the Review Family Network Meeting is to check out the network’s commitment to the plan and understanding of the seriousness of the worries held*.*

**The drafting and “doing”**

1. **Work on drafting the plan with the network and practice what has been agreed in the plan.**

Outside of the Family Network Meeting, the draft Safety Plan needs to be pulled together. This needs to clearly state who is going to do what when harm/main worries happen, based on what was agreed in the meeting.

First agree the “adult” version of the plan. This will be detailed and will consider contingencies for the family and the network. Make sure this is shared with the family and talk through what they have been practising so far (during visits and calls).

The plan needs to be shared with the network.

**The reviewing and the “doing”**

1. **Review the family network meeting. Firm up the plan.**

The building of the Safety Plan is progressive and should involve regular meetings to review. This is about support to the family and network, as well as monitoring and reflections. There needs to be evidence of what work is happening and how this is keeping children safe.

Hold your first review Family Network Meeting. As the Safety Plan shows you the network and family are working, you will gradually hand over the facilitation to one of a member network who has demonstrated they have a good understanding of the risk and are going to monitor and support the progression of the Safety Plan.

Go through the Safety Plan and review what you are all worried about and what is working well since you last met. Much consideration must be given by you and the network to how the draft Safety Plan has shown it is working and if it needs tweaking. Make sure the network consider what can be done differently to help make it firmer. **Remember – you are the facilitator, this plan belongs to the network.**

You need to ensure that the following points are addressed as part of the review:

* What can the network tell you they have done or will do if they come across problems?
* How has this been managed so far?
* How do you know this is working?

The network must feedback on how they are monitoring and reviewing the Safety Plan and provide evidence. The family network must be able to evidence through their diaries, journals, texts or call logs. Make sure this is robust evidence.

1. **Agree the Safety Plan that the Family Network will follow.**

Agree the draft plan, but continue to test it. Create opportunities to test, such as network supervising contacts, overnight stays back at the family, opportunities for the network to “step in”. While it is important that we make sure risk of harm is absolutely minimised, it is important that we are not risk adverse. Without testing the plan, we will not build the confidence in the plan working when we are not around.

When the plan has been agreed, we need to transfer the key messages into a Words and Pictures Safety Plan that will be shared by the network and lead worker with the children. This is so they know what will happen when they might feel worried about something.

Remember, a full Words and Pictures Explanation should have been co-created with the parent(s) and shared with the network and children to make sure the children understand why professionals are involved. This should be done before a Words and Pictures Safety Plan is shared with them.

1. **Review Family Network Meeting.**

Continue to hold Review Family Network Meetings until you are satisfied that the formal review can be transferred to a network member and for the formal withdrawal of support. It is better to have individuals from a naturally occurring network supporting the family to keep the children safe and dealing with the worries without resulting to contacting professionals to resolve issues. If the plan is tested over time, and monitored well, professionals can be confident that the plan works and professionals can withdraw.

Review Family Network Meetings can be part of your regular visiting pattern (if organised effectively) or in addition to. These can be part of your statutory review meetings, or in addition to. Make sure you coordinate these so you are making best use of your time and that of the family. **Remember, this is part of the overall closure/safety building trajectory and roadmap for success in our day to day good practice.**

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