



# **DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Practice Guidance - The use of Written Agreements, Safety Plans & Contracts of Expectations

Children's Social Care, People Group

Date

January 2022

Version

Version 1

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

Policy Name	Practice Guidance: The use of Safety Plans
Document Title	Practice Guidance - The use of Written Agreements, Safety Plans and Contracts of Expectations
Applies to	All staff directly employed by Darlington Borough Council's Children's Social Care
Document Replaces	N/A New Practice Guidance
Reason for change	New Practice Guidance Required
Original Approval by	SLT
Approval Date	April 2024
Distribution List	CSC All Staff
Council Website / Intranet	TriX
Status	Live
Issue Date	April 2024
Review Date	April 2027
Version	V1
Lead Officer	Head of Service – Care Planning
Author	Head of Service – Care Planning

**UNCONTROLLED IF PRINTED**

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## Practice Guidance on the use of Safety Plans

### Practice Guidance Introduction

Safety Planning with children and families is often a critical and fundamental task in Social Work practice. 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 to 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 and our Safety Plan Template (Appendix 1) MUST be used by all practitioners.

### Scope

The provisions of this guidance will apply to all staff directly employed by Darlington Borough Council's Children's Social Care staff.

### Background and Context

When safety plans are used in isolation and without oversight, they do not on their own offer protection to children. The protection of children comes from a well-considered assessment of parent's ability to meet their children's needs. 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.

Within Darlington we will not use any form of standalone safety plans unless specifically directed within Court proceedings; where they are time limited and overseen by the Court or during the beginning stages of a Child & Family Assessment where there are acute risks where we need to develop a plan with the family to safeguard a child during the assessment period. The plan will have a clear start date, review date and end date (where it will be incorporated within existing statutory plans)

Safety planning is part of everyday social work with children and families. We have a variety of plans we put in place to keep children safe. Any elements of a safety plan should form part of the child's wider plan, i.e. child in need, child protection or looked after children's plan. This will

ensure all plans are regularly reviewed through multi-agency meetings and ensure families are not working to several separate plans concurrently.

When a Family Group Conference (FGC) has been held, a family plan is identified and initially reviewed by the FGC Team. This is a family led plan in response to the difficulties the family have experienced, and once established should be reflected in the child's overall plan.

All plans in place for children must be developed with parents and the child if they are old enough to understand. They must be co-produced and therefore will be handwritten with the family and uploaded to wisdom. They must be shared with partner agencies.

When we close a child to Children's Services a robust assessment of the parents' ability to meet the child's needs will have been completed and identified that there aren't sufficient concerns to remain involved. Therefore, there should be no need for a standalone safety plan. If you are worried about closing or stepping down a family without a safety plan, discuss this with your Team Manager as it may be premature to end our involvement.

It is essential that within our Child & Family Assessment we are clear about the concerns we have and what needs to happen to keep the children safe. This may include how we have assessed parents' ability to make safe choices, how they mitigate risk and what plans they have in place to keep a child safe. For example, we may have become involved due to concerns relating to domestic abuse and mother has reported now separating, with no evidence to the contrary. Therefore, the assessment would reflect that we are closing to Children's Services due to this but if the relationship was to resume it would lead to further intervention.

We must ensure the outcome of the Child & Family Assessment is shared with family and partner agencies in an outcome meeting.

### 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 Children's Services 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.

**Safety Plan**

What are we worried about?	What impact does this worry have on the child?	What needs to happen to keep the child safe?	Safety Goal
<b>Bottom line (what will happen if the plan isn't followed)</b>			
<b>Date plan implemented:</b> <b>Date plan is to be reviewed:</b> <b>Date plan is ceased (should be replaced with a statutory plan):</b>			

Signed (family)

Signed (social worker)