

Practice Guidance

The Harm Matrix

February 2025



Hull Social Work Academy
Grow and thrive together



Hull
City Council

1. Introduction and aims of the guidance

The Signs of Safety model is a relationship, strengths, safety and risks-based approach to Child Protection practice that places the child/young person and their family at the heart of the assessment and support.

The aim of this guidance is to encourage a focus on the skills associated with analysis, particularly in relation to harm. It seeks to equip social workers and lead professionals in feeling more confident and competent in assessing and identifying harm and the impact of this upon the child/young person. This is crucial for two reasons, firstly, given the number of child protection enquiries reached record levels in 2021-22, as referrals to children's social care surged in the wake of the removal of Covid restrictions (Department for Education, 2022). Secondly, since the best predictor of future harm, is the past harm the child/young person has suffered.

2. What is the purpose of the Harm Matrix?

The Harm Matrix is a useful tool which helps the child/ young person's worker to focus on and analyse the harm caused to a child/young person by a parent/carer or adult. It can also include risk-taking behaviour by the child/young person that is harmful to them. It should only include the harm that we can evidence has occurred to the child/young person and does not include speculation (what we think we know), complicating factors, safety or strengths.

3. Areas of the Matrix

When assessing harm, child abuse and neglect it is crucial to gather specific, detailed information about the harm, including the **behavioural detail, it's severity and the impact on the child/young person**. The Harm Matrix therefore separates the information into these three separate areas whilst focusing on the **first, worst and last event of harm**. These areas are defined and discussed in further detail below, within the prompt sheet (appendix 1). This also provides questions to consider for each box, to ensure that this is robustly completed.

4. When would you use the Harm Matrix?

The Harm Matrix can be used in the following circumstances.

- The matrix is designed to assist practitioners at any stage of involvement with a family to gather detailed information from professionals, family, young people and others associated with the family, to enable a broader understanding of the harm to the child/young person than simply the professional perspective.
- It does not have to be used in relation to every child, but specifically where there is harm caused to a child. The level of support could be Child in Need, Child Protection, Public Law Outline, for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. It must be updated prior to each discussion with a Group Manager, prior to discussion at the Legal Gateway Panel.

- As the allocated worker, you may feel stuck and need clarity on threshold, impact and next steps. For example, do you feel threshold is possibly met to escalate to an Initial Child Protection Conference or the Public Law Outline, but you feel you need to gather evidence to support this?
- It can help you to assess patterns of harm and to consider how the harm and its impact may have escalated or reduced, since the first incident.
- The tool is also helpful for key partners agencies helping to build a shared understanding of harm and to strengthen the quality of information sharing.
- It can also be used to support professionals when gathering information in order to make a referral to EHASH. Early help/Family help can also use this when considering support from to social care.

5. Where do I find the Harm Matrix form?

The harm matrix can be started through a link within the Child & Family assessment, **as per the below image**. It can also be completed as a stand-alone word document which can then be attached to Liquid Logic, a copy of this can be found within Appendix 3.

The screenshot shows a software interface. On the left is a sidebar menu with several items, each with a green checkmark icon. The item 'Worries and ...' is highlighted with a blue arrow. The main content area has a header 'Harm Matrix' with a sub-header 'Harm Analysis Matrix'. Below this is a link 'Start Harm Matrix (Assign to self)' with a red arrow pointing to it. Underneath are three sections: 'What are we worried about?' with two input fields labeled 'Harm' and 'Complicating Factors', and 'What is working well?' with one input field labeled 'Existing Strengths'.

6. The step-by-step approach

- 1) For workers using the Matrix for the first time, this can look like an overwhelming document, wondering, what information goes where? It is recommended to refer to the prompt sheet above, which will support with this. Start by identifying the main areas of harm. This might be the child/young person seeing their parents shouting and fighting, or the children not being taken to school by their parents and having poor school attendance. Then, add these as titles into each of the empty boxes on the Harm Matrix – this will help you to organise the information.
- 2) You should then begin to unpick the information you hold and record this within the Matrix. The prompt sheet definitions and prompts **in bold** in Appendix A will assist you in knowing which information to place where.
- 3) Through completing this, it will usually identify where your gaps in information are and who you need to ask questions to, in order to gather the missing information. This could include reading the child/young person's file in more detail, speaking with the child/young person, family, network and professionals. For instance, if you do not know what the impact of a particular

incident was, who can you ask to gather that information? Please see appendix A for example questions.

- 4) You can choose which box to complete first, however, if you are limited with time available to complete this initially, it is recommended to complete the impact section first.

7. Additional points to consider

- In terms of the worst incident, yourself, the child/young person and the family may have differing opinions. You are able to include a number of worst incidents in this section, should there be differences in opinion. Just title each incident with 'Mum's worst incident' and 'child/young person's worst incident'.
- The Harm Matrix should be a working document and can be added to as you gather information about the family, it does therefore not need completing in one session. However, please ensure that you finalise this document once this is completed. This is to ensure that you do not overwrite information within the document and that any progress and changes with the Harm Matrix can be evidenced on the child's file.
- If you are completing the Harm Matrix in relation to an unborn child, it may be difficult to evidence the impact upon them. However, completing a Harm Matrix for an Unborn Baby can still provide a significant amount of information regarding any harmful behaviours and the severity of this. Any information regarding potential harm which we cannot evidence, would be included within the danger statement.
- If the harmful behaviours that are currently occurring (such as Dad's violent behaviour towards Mum and the children – hitting, kicking and shouting) started to occur before the child was conceived, we will be unable to record within the 'impact' section, therefore this will remain blank or state 'this occurred before the child/young person was conceived'. However, it is important that we still consider this harmful behaviour, as we know that the best predictor of future harm, is the past harm that has occurred.
- The Harm Matrix can also be completed within group supervision, please click [here](#) for the supporting document.

Appendix A – Prompt Sheet and Best Questions Example

	Duration	First incident	Worst Incident	Last Incident
<p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <p><i>Definition - The dangerous or harm causing adult behaviour or the child/young persons risk taking behaviour that is harmful to them.</i></p>	<p>What is the worrying behaviour and how long has it been happening for?</p> <p>How many times has that behaviour happened over the whole timespan?</p> <p>*You may see repetition from this box, across the others as you complete the Matrix. This is because the duration section covers the behaviour from the start to current time and the additional boxes consider some of those elements (first, worst and last) in more detail.</p>	<p>When and what was the first the worrying/harmful behaviour occurred?</p>	<p>When and what was the worst event of worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>When and what is the most recent event of worrying behaviour?</p>
<p>Best questions to consider for 'Behaviour'</p>	<p>Over what timespan have worries been present about Mum and Dad fighting?</p> <p>How many incidents of fighting, shouting and parents hurting each other have been recorded by the</p>	<p>When did the fighting and shouting in Mum and Dad's relationship start?</p> <p>When would mum say the difficulties in her relationship with dad first</p>	<p>If we were to ask Evie (child) what the scariest time she had at home was in terms of mum and dad shouting/fighting/hurting each other, what would she say? And what happened?</p>	<p>What was happening the last time Mum and Dad's behaviour around the children worried Grandma and Grandad/the children/mum?</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>Police? What happened during these incidents?</p> <p>What behaviours would Uncle/Grandad/Grandma/the children say they have seen between Mum and Dad that have worried them?</p> <p>Over what timespan has the children's Uncle been worried about Mum and Dad fighting?</p> <p>Have mum or dad been a perpetrator of fighting and shouting in any other relationship?</p> <p>How many times was Dad removed from the home by the Police following him being violent?</p>	<p>start? What would dad say?</p> <p>When would Uncle say that he first started to become worried about mum and dad fighting?</p> <p>What was the first incident of mum and dad fighting that the children can remember or were witness to?</p>	<p>What would the Judge/ IRO say was their biggest worries about Mum and Dad fighting?</p> <p>Dad/Mum what was happening for you the worst time that Mum was physically hurt by dad?</p> <p>What did Dad do to you, mum that made this the worst incident?</p>	
<p>Severity <i>Definition - Describes how bad the harmful behaviour is</i></p>	<p>Over the whole time the behaviour has been happening, how bad has this been?</p>	<p>How bad was the first event of worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>How bad was the worst event of worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>How bad was the most recent event of worrying behaviour?</p>
<p>Best questions to consider for 'severity'</p>	<p>Over the whole period of time that the fighting and shouting has been</p>	<p>How serious was the first incident between Mum and Dad? Was it so</p>	<p>If you were to ask Mum/Dad/Jimmy/Jordan/Evie how serious the worst incident</p>	<p>On a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 was that the family</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>happening, how bad has this got? What made it so bad? What would Mum/the children say about this?</p> <p>How bad has it got for the children to have to come into foster care? What would the Judge/social worker/IRO say?</p>	<p>serious that other professionals needed to become involved?</p> <p>How serious would Uncle/Mum/Dad/Children say it was and why? What made it serious? Did any other adults need to get involved to help?</p>	<p>was, what would they say? What would they say happened to make it that serious?</p> <p>What would the children say that made this the worst time of shouting/arguments?</p> <p>What happened on the worst time which made it so bad that Mum/Police/Family/Neighbours would describe it as the worst incident?</p>	<p>dealt with problems in a calm way so it did not lead to anyone getting hurt or upset and 0 is that the violence was so serious that medical attention needed to be gained as someone was hurt and. Where would you Mum/Dad/the children scale the last incident?</p>
<p>Impact Definition - Describes the impact of the behaviours upon the child/young person</p>	<p>Over the whole time the behaviour has been happening, what has been the overall impact on the child/young person?</p>	<p>What was the impact on the child/young person of the first incident of worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>What was the impact on the child/young person of the worst incident of worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>What was the impact on the children of the most recent incident of worrying behaviour?</p>
<p>Best questions to consider for 'impact'</p>	<p>What would Jimmy, Evie and Jordan say that their experiences of living with mum and dad fighting for the majority of their lives made them feel?</p>	<p>What would Jimmy, Evie and Jordan's class teacher share has been the biggest impact of them seeing their parents fight and shout</p>	<p>How would Mum/Evie/Jordan or Jimmy say was the worst incident of mum and dad fighting made them feel?</p>	<p>How did Evie say she felt after she was assaulted by her dad outside her house? What was her biggest</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>How harmful has witnessing fighting and shouting been for the children?</p> <p>What has the impact of mum being physically hurt and shouted at been on her parenting of the children during their lives? What has this meant for the children?</p> <p>If I was to ask Grandma, what would she say that she would see in the children's behaviour that would tell her that things have been worrying for the children at home?</p> <p>Has the children's exposure to fighting and shouting made them experience difficulties with regulating their own emotions or having their own friendships/relationships?</p> <p>What has been the impact of the children coming into foster care?</p>	<p>at each other, on their education?</p> <p>How would Jimmy, Evie and Jordan say the first incident of their parents fighting made them feel? If they are able to remember this?</p>	<p>When mum was assaulted by dad and she needed hospital treatment due to injuries to her legs, how did this make mum feel? Did this impact on her ability to look after the children? Who looked after them when she was in hospital?</p>	<p>worry following this happening?</p> <p>Of the people who know the children the best, how would they say that they have been impacted by the most recent incident of Mum and Dad fighting?</p> <p>What would the children say are their biggest worries now following the last incident?</p> <p>How did Evie's class teacher say she presented when she shared with that she had been assaulted by her dad outside of her home?</p>
--	---	---	--	---

Harm Analysis Matrix – Completed Version

	Duration	First incident	Worst Incident	Last Incident
<p>Behaviour</p> <p><i>The dangerous or harm causing adult behaviour or the child/young person's risk taking behaviour that is harmful to them.</i></p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children Glenda reports that Harry has hit, kicked, punched her, pushed her down the stairs, screamed and shouted at her over a 14-year period and that this has happened so many times that she cannot state a number. The Police have 15 recorded incidents on their system which include physical violence. The Local Authority have been made aware from Glenda and the children of an additional 4 incidents. The last incident was on the 10th December 2021 when Harry turned up at Chris' address and was shouting and swearing at Uncle Chris.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum After Glenda was pushed down the stairs by Harry in January 2021, she started to drink vodka every few days to manage her pain. She started to struggle to manage keeping the home clean and tidy and to do her washing, which meant the children were wearing dirty and smelly uniform.</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children Glenda states that the first incident was when she was pregnant with Jordan 14 years ago. They were arguing over Harry alcohol use, he shouted and swore at Glenda and became so angry that he tried to push her down a full flight of stairs, he said he wanted her to miscarry Jordan. Glenda managed to grab the handrail to prevent herself from falling all the way down the stairs but was still injured.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum After the assault on Glenda by Harry in</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children <i>Mum/Social Care's worst</i> In January 2021, Glenda was pushed down a full flight of stairs at home by Harry when he was under the influence of alcohol. He was shouting and swearing at Glenda calling her a 'fucking useless mother'. The children saw this happening and were in the room at the time.</p> <p><i>Evie's worst</i> In November 2022, Evie told her class teacher that outside of her home, her Dad had grabbed her by the throat and pinned her up against a car outside. She also shared that her Dad had been living in the home for the entire time and that they had been told by their parents to lie about this.</p> <p><i>Jordan's worst</i> In October 2019 Jordan came to school with bruising to his</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children Please see Evie's worst incident for the last incident.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum Please see the worst incident for the last incident.</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>The children's school attendance fell as Glenda was not getting them up for school as she was staying in bed. Evie and Jordan were not telling their Mum where they were going when they were leaving the house and she did not know if they were safe or what they were doing.</p>	<p>January 2021, Glenda started to struggle to keep on top of the washing in the home. Jimmy, Jordan and Evie did not have clean clothes as Glenda kept forgetting to put the washing on. Glenda was previously putting a wash on every two days but when this first started, she was putting one on every week or so.</p>	<p>face and he told his friend that his dad had thrown an ash tray at him when they were arguing.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum Glenda's alcohol use increased to daily around June 2021 after her pain continued. She felt her pain was never going to go away and she started to lose hope that she would get better. She stopped cleaning the home, this became very dirty and there was a strong smell of rats and urine in the property. Glenda struggled to keep on top of the washing as this was building up and this was also piled high over the home.</p>	
<p>Severity <i>Describes how bad the harmful adult behaviour is</i></p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children The incidents have ranged from being so serious that the Police have been called by neighbours who were fearful for the safety of Glenda and the children and that Harry was arrested by Police with bail conditions put into place so he could not return home to the address, however Glenda and</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children This incident was so serious that Harry tried to push Glenda down the stairs so that she would have a miscarriage. Harry was making threats to</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children <i>Mum/Social Care's worst</i> Mum had to be hospitalised overnight significant bruising to her body and legs which could be seen for around a month following the incident. She was in extreme pain and started to</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children Please see Evie's worst incident for the last incident.</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>Harry have breached these conditions and allowed Harry to return. The worries were so serious that it was agreed for Child Protection planning in 2014 and 2021 and Jordan and Evie needed to come into foster care in 2021 following Evie's dad grabbing her by her throat and pinning her up against a car outside her home.</p> <p>The children have told me that Mum and Dad have repeatedly told them not to tell anyone about what was happening for them at home and that they have been threatened that if they do tell, they would be taken into care and would not be able to see their family again.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum The cleanliness in the home has been so dirty that there has been mould all over pots on the floor and half eaten food. These were piled high. This led to their being rats living in the kitchen. The children did not have clean bedding and their clothes were unwashed and covered in stains.</p> <p>Jimmy, Jordan and Evie have had poor school attendance over the last</p>	<p>kill Glenda and Unborn baby Jordan. Jimmy and Evie were upstairs when this was happening and they could hear what was happening. Glenda needed to be checked over by hospital staff as she had bruising to her stomach and arm.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum Jimmy, Jordan and Evie's had been wearing their school uniforms for around four days per time, their clothes were covered in stains and Jimmy and Jordan's smelt strongly of body odour. Jordan said that his friend called him a "smelly twat" at school and he was really upset about this and he didn't want to go to school as he</p>	<p>self soothe with alcohol, drinking straight vodka a few days per week.</p> <p><i>Evie's worst</i> This incident was so serious that Evie said she was petrified and thought she was going to die as she couldn't breathe and she had seen her dad strangle her mum before until she nearly stopped breathing.</p> <p><i>Jordan's worst</i> Jordan had bruising to his upper eye and a small graze to the side of his face. Mum saw this happen, she colluded with dad regarding this incident and said that Jordan had fallen. Dad told Jordan to lie about this and said that social workers would take him into care if he told the truth. As a result, Jordan refused to speak to any professionals about this.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum The cleanliness and conditions in the home became much worse, week by week. The</p>	<p>The care provided to the children by Mum Please see the worst incident for the last incident.</p>
--	---	---	--	---

OFFICIAL

	<p>three years (between 70-80%) however, between January 2021 and November 2021 this dropped to between 48-50%.</p> <p>Evie ran away from home 14 times between February 2021 and November 2021 and Jordan 15 where they would not tell anyone at the time where they were going. Only 4 of these episodes for Evie and 5 for Jordan were reported to the Police by their Glenda or School.</p>	<p>was embarrassed and he went missing that day on the 12th February 2021.</p>	<p>pots started to pile up across the floor in the kitchen and they became mouldy. The floors had not been hoovered for several weeks and were covered in thick dog hair and dirt.</p> <p>Rats were seen in the property by Glenda and Evie, and they were causing a very strong smell in the home which was getting into the children's clothing. The children's clothes were dirty and covered in stains, they smelt strongly of rat urine.</p>	
<p>Impact</p> <p><i>Describes the physical and emotional impact of the behaviours on the child</i></p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children</p> <p>Jimmy, Evie and Jordan have all had bruising to their face and body after they have been hit, kicked and strangled by their Dad. They have become very fearful of him, often being scared at home and struggling to sleep well throughout the night. They thought that their Mum was going to die at times and they were petrified that they were going to lose her.</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children</p> <p>Jordan and mum's heart rate were seen to increase when monitored by the midwives. The midwives were concerned that Jordan was distressed and that this lead to difficulties in Jordan growing in</p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children</p> <p><i>Mum/Social Care's worst</i></p> <p>The children were petrified that Mum would not be discharged from hospital and that their Dad would come back to look after them. They worried about how much pain Mum was in and that Dad could do the same thing to them too.</p> <p><i>Evie's worst</i></p>	<p>Violence from Harry to Glenda and the children</p> <p>Please see Evie's worst incident for the last incident.</p> <p>The care provided to</p>

OFFICIAL

	<p>Jimmy has started to see fighting as a good way of dealing with problems and arguments as he has seen so much of this at home with him more regularly fighting with his peers at school.</p> <p>Jordan, Jimmy and Evie have been told that they cannot share information with professionals about what is happening at home, this has put significant emotional pressure onto them and they have often been seen to be withdrawn and sad. Also struggling to make and sustain friends.</p> <p>Jimmy, Evie and Jordan have missed periods of their education as they have been worried about their mum and her safety at home with their dad, that they have missed lots of learning and do not know what is expected of children of their age.</p> <p>Evie and Jimmy have been so frightened at home that their Dad would return and hurt them and their Mum that they have gone missing. On one occasion, Jimmy stayed out overnight outside of a children's home where he was approached by a male</p>	<p>the womb. Mum was also very distressed and appeared stated that she did not want to go home to Dad but felt that she had to. Jimmy and Evie were screaming in the home when this was happening as they could hear lots of shouting and screaming. Jimmy and Evie were described by Glenda as not eating or sleeping for a few weeks after the incident and being very teary.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum</p> <p>Jordan was really embarrassed when his mate called him a 'smelly twat' at school and he didn't want to be there, as a result he started going missing from school.</p>	<p>Evie thought both herself and her mum were going to be killed by her dad. Evie had nightmares for months after this incident and struggled to sleep. She didn't want to go to school or to be at home and she started to go missing.</p> <p><i>Jordan's worst</i></p> <p>Jordan became scared of social workers as he had been told that if he told anyone about his dad throwing the ash tray that he would be taken into care and wouldn't be able to see his family again. Jordan was very jumpy in school when approached by teachers during lessons. He couldn't focus on his lessons and wanted to leave school when he arrived.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum</p> <p>Glenda wasn't getting the children up for school or reporting them missing/looking for them when she didn't know where they were. This meant that Evie and Jordan were spending their nights in the</p>	<p>the children by Mum</p> <p>Please see worst incident.</p>
--	---	--	---	---

OFFICIAL

	<p>who asked Jordan to sell drugs for him.</p> <p>The care provided to the children by Mum</p> <p>Jimmy, Jordan and Evie have all begun to struggle academically at school over the last few years due to their lack of attendance. Jimmy is working two years below his expected age with both Evie and Jordan being three years behind academically in all areas of their development.</p> <p>Evie in particular was upset about seeing her Mum drunk as this reminded her of her Dad being drunk and she worried her Mum could become violent.</p> <p>Jordan was approached by a male who tried to get him to sell drugs one evening when he did not return home.</p> <p>The children were embarrassed of their home and did not want their friends to visit. They were not wearing clean clothes and smelt unclean, they were bullied by their peers for smelling of body odour and wearing dirty clothes and they stopped taking care of their appearance.</p>	<p>He was missing key parts of his maths revision in class and really started to struggle with this and he got a grade F when he sat his maths mocks which he was really disappointed with.</p> <p>Jimmy and Evie's teachers shared that they were lacking confidence in class and were struggling to focus on their lessons. They did not want to spend time with their friends at lunch time and Evie was found hiding in the toilets as she was embarrassed.</p>	<p>community until the early hours of the morning unsupervised. They started to miss between a day to two days of school a week and were struggling with their learning.</p> <p>The children were very living in a home which was very dirty and smelly and where there was rats. Rats carry and spread infectious disease. They transport both viral and bacterial ailments through direct contact or contamination of water, food, or dust and this could have made the children very ill. Evie was petrified of the rats and for a period of time refused to go downstairs as she was petrified of them. The children no longer wanted their friends to visit as they were ashamed of the house, their clothes were so smelly that they were embarrassed and continued to be called names at school.</p>	
--	--	---	---	--

Blank Harm Analysis Matrix

	Duration	First incident	Worst Incident	Last Incident
Behaviour <i>The dangerous or harm causing adult behaviour or the child/young person's risk-taking behaviour that is harmful to them.</i>				
Severity <i>Describes how bad the harmful adult behaviour is</i>				
Impact <i>Describes the physical and emotional impact of the behaviours on the child/young person.</i>				

OFFICIAL