



The Safety House Guide



What is the Safety House?

The Safety House is a tool to help children describe what their home and family life needs to look like in order to for them to feel safe.

The information collected throughout the Safety House exercise can be used to inform the safety planning process, so that the child has a voice in this process and their wishes and feelings can help shape 'what needs to happen'.

The Safety House will help practitioners to:

- Gain an understanding of the people who are significant to the child and who might participate in enhancing safety.
- Understand the child's views about what needs to happen for them to feel safe.
- Help children who are feeling anxious about reunification to explain to the social worker what they are worried about and what they would need to see in the future to feel safe with their family.
- Record the child's views on safety, in a way that can be shared with the family and safety network, in order to inform the development of the overall safety plan.

Before you use the Safety House, the practitioner should have the following background information about the family and the child:

- A clear straightforward description of the child protection concerns.
- Understand the significant people in the child's life (to get to the safety planning part of the assessment a genogram or eco map should already have been completed).
- Understand who the child is living with and the contact arrangements that are in place.
- Understand any changes that have taken place since Children's Services became involved with the family.
- Have a clear commitment from all professionals involved that reunification or family preservation is being pursued.
- Be clear about the child's understanding of the issues that have led to Children's Services being involved, this should include the language that the child uses to explain what has happened.

The Safety House exercise should be undertaken with the consent of the family and children should be made aware that their parents are working with 'safety people' to create a new set of rules for their family to keep them happy and safe.

This creates a context where the child's Safety House can be brought to the parents so that their ideas will contribute to the safety plan. It will also help reinforce to the parents that, first and foremost, the required changes are to make things better for their child, rather than a series of actions to satisfy a social worker.

Elements of the Safety House

The Safety House is designed to capture a visual representation of everything the child wants to happen so that they will feel safe in the care of their family. Children can draw their own Safety House, or use the blank A3 template. If using the template, tracing over the outline in different colours is a good way to start as it will help the child to feel like the Safety House is their own.

1 Inside the Safety House

The Inner Circle– Ask the child to draw themselves first, this will help to reinforce that they are at the heart of the process. Following this, ask them to draw the people that they want to live with in the Safety House.

“Who else would live in the Safety House with you?”

Inside the four walls – This is where the child records the things that are happening in the Safety House, this might be day to day activities that they enjoy or what they want people to do to help them feel safe.

“What are the important things that _____ would do in your safety house to make sure you are safe?”

“Are there any important things or objects that need to be in the Safety House with you?”

2 The Roof

The roof is where the child writes the rules for their Safety House. The child decides on the rules, which describe how everyone should behave to ensure that everyone in the house will feel safe. Children might misunderstand this part of the Safety House, misinterpreting it as rules that children must follow to be good. This needs to be explained to the child so they understand the distinction.

“Something that you were worried about was_____. What rule do we need to have to make sure this doesn't happen when you live with Mum/Dad again.”

“If_____was here what would they say needs to be in the rules?”

3 Visiting the Safety House: The Outer Semi Circle

This is where the child writes or draws the people that they want to visit the Safety House to help keep them safe. Details of what each person should do to help the child be safe should be written next to their name or picture.

“Who would come to visit the safety house to make sure that you are safe?”

“If things weren't going so well, and some of the problems from the past were starting to happen, of all the people coming to visit, who would notice?”

“What do they need to do to make sure they notice?”

4 The Outer Circle

This is where the child writes or draws the people that they don't want to have in their safety house (either living there or visiting) – it is outside and separate from the Safety House. On the colour template this is the red circle.

“Is there anyone who you don't want to have living in your Safety House? Or anyone that you don't want to visit?”

5 The Safety Path

Is used to help the child rate how safe they are and is similar to a safety scale.

- The top of the path (closest to the house) represents the future where the child feels safe at home, all the way up to the door of the house where the child is able to go inside.
- The bottom of the path represents the past when they felt really worried and things were at their worst.

“If the beginning of the path is where everyone is very worried, like when you had to go and live with _____ and the end of the path, at the front door, is where all those worries have been sorted out and you will be completely safe living with Mum and Dad, where on the path do you think things are right now?”

6 Sharing the Safety House

It's important to speak to the child and establish who you can share the Safety House with and how they want this to be shared; they might want to be there when you show it to people or would rather you did this without them. It's a good idea to show the Safety House to the family first, before sharing it at a meeting where other people and professionals are present.

The Safety House

