

Signs of Safety how to guide: Modelling for managers and leaders



Using the Three Columns

The three columns are instantly recognisable as part of Signs of Safety and therefore using this to structure information in discussions and meetings will help to model Signs of Safety practice. The 'three columns' has the following structure:

What are we worried about?	What's working well?	What needs to happen?
What the issues or concerns are	The strengths – think about what can we learn from these or how can we build on this	The actions we need to take to address the issues

Scaling Question: A judgement on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is what you want to achieve, and 0 is where none of that has been achieved.

These questions can be used to understand how everyone assesses the situation, and also as a basis for exploring what they think would make the situation a bit better (small achievable steps) or what would need to happen to get to a 10.

When scaling, ask **why** the person has scaled at that number and what they feel they would need for it to go up one or two points. Any number higher than 0 shows that something about the situation is working.

As well as being used as a way of assessing the situation and planning with families, the three columns tool can also be used:

- To organise your thinking
- In management and strategic meetings
- In operational strategies and organisational plans
- In supervision
- In case consultations

Leading by Questioning

Signs of Safety is about a solution-focused and coaching approach - 'more asking and less telling'. There are different types of questions you can use:

- **Relationship questions** – "what would ... say?" – helps people to see the situation from other perspectives.
- **Detail questions** – "tell me more about ... ?" – helps to avoid responding to headlines and gets more detail.
- **Scaling questions** – "on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is ... ?" – helps to understand where the person is and what would affect their judgement on the situation - better or worse
- **Future questions** – "what would ... look like?" – helps the other person have a vision of the preferred future – can be used to refocus the person from the issues to the goal.
- **Exception questions** – tell me about a time when ... didn't happen? – helps the other person process what has helped in the past and opens up potential solutions.

Modelling Signs of Safety Principles

Signs of Safety Principle	Putting it into Leadership and Management
<p>Working relationships are fundamental</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value people – always look for and recognise strengths to offer balance • Communication is key - be open and honest about what is needed and why. Be clear about what is expected and what is achievable • Use plain and simple language – avoid professional jargon. Einstein said if you can't explain it to a child, you probably don't understand it yourself • Focus on observable behaviour and not the person, the behaviour is what we are looking to affect. Work with what you see rather than what you interpret (you may have it wrong). • Specify what the person should do instead of what should stop happening.
<p>Critical inquiry</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead rather than instruct – 'more asking and less telling'. Use a coaching approach and ask questions to encourage reflection, allowing people to arrive at the solution for themselves • Recognise that we can be wrong - we can only make decisions based on the best information available to us. Admit when you are wrong or when things haven't worked. • Encourage others to ask questions and be open-minded about families – family knowledge is vital • Learn from best practice – celebrate and share good practice and successes – ask questions to fully understand what works
<p>Based in everyday practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact on children and young people is the number one priority • Do with and not to - involve practitioners and families in developing and evaluating services • Learn from what works on the ground • Most learning comes from practising - encourage practitioners to try the practice and share their experiences • Signs of Safety practice is new to us and we won't get it perfect every time – it's important to have a go and share our experiences so we can learn together

Please share your practice examples with SignsofSafety@northumberland.gov.uk