

SAFETY PLANNING TIPS

It's the relationship

Always remember, is what I am saying, doing or asking likely to make the family want to work with me or not?

Honour the family and their efforts.

- Start with this. This can be as simple as thanking a parent for speaking with us about their private life or when we've had a difficult relationship or disagreements with each other.
- Be curious about how the parents, carers and anyone in the network is managing right now and how people are pulling together to support each other. How have they changed their approach if they can't physically visit each other? How else are they helping out? Lots of people have come together in different ways during lockdown to support each other so this is an opportunity to really look out for this.

Listen to what the children are telling us and act on this

- Talk to the children about what they are worried about, how they want life to be better for them and what they think will help.
- Check out with the children who they would like to have involved in a conversation / meeting about making life better for them and what they want the rules to be for them to be safe at home.
- Share this with the parents and the network so that the child is front and centre of our plans.
- If children / young people have worries about us sharing how they feel and what they want with their parents, explore this with them – what do they worry will happen if we do share? How might things get better if we do share the worries? Who do they think would be the best person to talk to their parents about it? Think together with the child / young person about the words we can use to share their worries and views.

Hear and acknowledge what the parents / carers / network are saying, even if you disagree.

- Thank them for sharing their perspective then ask questions to tease out different perspectives – ask lots of relationship questions. What would the kids / your partner / your friend say if we asked them?
- Include scaling questions and where they would rate things for themselves. Ask where they think that *you* would rate things. Don't be too concerned if the family rate higher than you. Use this as an opportunity to get the family to think about what else would need to happen so that you don't need to be worried and can get off their back and out of their lives.
- Bring in some relationship questions – what would your best friend say that happens in your house that means that Children's Social Care don't need to be worried?
- Taking this approach helps families feel listened to and avoids blame, arguments or telling families what to do.

Use the parents / carers own language

- Reflect this back to them. What have they said that they are worried about, or when have they acknowledged some worries? We can use this as a lead in to questions, e.g. 'you've said before that it's really stressful when the kids are off school and that this can drive you mad.'

Can you tell me more about a time when you've felt mad or really stressed but you were able to do something different that meant you didn't lose it with the kids?

Stick to the facts

- If there is a dispute, e.g. about how an injury happened, it may not be clear how the injury happened but there will be evidence of an injury, e.g. a child with a cut to their head. We can talk about *what* we know happened (even if we have a fair idea who was responsible but can't say for sure *how* it happened).

Use hypotheticals

- Where there is a difference of opinion, e.g. about whether a partner is a sex offender or not, ask the parent what they would think if they were to read about this situation for another family in a newspaper. Would they have any worries? If the parent was a social worker working with that family, what do they think the social worker would be worried about? If they were a social worker in this situation, what would they need to see happen so they could be sure that the child was safe?
- Use 'same but different' examples to get family members to think about the same problem in a different family and explore their ideas for making things better for that family.
- If we make sense of 'denial' as an understandable response when families fear that being honest about their problems will lead to consequences, feelings of shame and being judged, then this approach can open up conversation and encourage thinking about solutions when families find their own problems too shameful to talk about.

Protect against further allegations

- When working with a difference of opinion / denial, e.g. where a dad has been accused of hitting his child and has denied this, work *with* this version of events rather than getting caught up in a dispute about who did what.
- We can ask the family to think about what would need to happen or what plans would need to be in place that would mean that dad couldn't be in a situation where he is accused of hitting his child again in future. We want to make sure that the child isn't hit again and we also want to make sure that dad isn't accused again, especially if he is saying that he hasn't hit his child.
- This approach can help us to get the accused on board even where there isn't an admission of responsibility.

Use Safety journals / Safety objects – test out the plan

- Support the family to take more ownership of safety by encouraging them to use a safety journal (this could be a note pad, notes on a phone, a diary etc) to record the times that they have found things hard or when things could have become unsafe for the kids. Get them to record what they (and others) have done to overcome the worry and make sure that the children are safe and review this at each Family Network Meeting / TAF / Core Group.
- Think creatively about how children could use a safety object to let others know if they need someone to check in on them, e.g. having a safety object in the window so that anyone in the network who walks past can see this, having a safe word as a text message etc

Keep in mind who else is in the room (lockdowns)

- This is especially important in families where domestic abuse is a concern and we are making video calls / phone calls. Who else might be in the room that we aren't aware of?
- Think about the use of safety object or a safe word that would mean that the conversation is being overheard or that the victim feels in danger.
- Think about using written notes over video if this is safer than talking, e.g. communicating to victims that they can dial 999 and then 55 if they need to alert the police that they are in danger but don't feel safe enough to talk.
- Work *with* the perpetrator, in order to reduce the likelihood of violent or controlling behaviour taking place. Keep in mind all the tips listed above when carrying out this work.