# Group Supervision Process: My Three Houses™

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# Signs of Safety Group Supervision Process: My Three Houses™

## Talking With Children

It is essential to hear the voices of children involved in child protection or social services. My Three Houses is a tool that creates a process that allows the voice of a child to be expressed, heard and taken to the most important adults in the child's life. The development of the Three Houses concept came from work done in New Zealand in the early 2000s, initiated by Nicki Weld and Maggie Greening, with Andrew Turnell also actively involved.

The My Three Houses tool helps us to build plans, together with parents, focusing on what children need by listening to what they say. As the name indicates, the Three Houses interview looks at three houses: the House of Good Things, the House of Dreams, and the House of Worries. In this way the worker can talk to children about all the good things in their lives, what they hope for, and any worries they have. The process will help workers take a child through a process of writing and/or drawing about how they feel and what they think about what is happening for them in their life. Workers help the child to choose from a number of pre-drawn houses or to draw their own. Additionally, the child is able to use the name given to the houses or choose their own names.

It is important the worker listens to what the child says and doesn't lead them. Workers need to ensure they ask a series of open, non-leading questions about what the child would like to write and/or draw in each house. If the child cannot or does not want to write or draw, the worker can do this for them making sure to use the child's exact words. Sessions can take up to an hour, but are usually more like 30 minutes.

We want parents to know and see exactly what their children say in the children's own words and drawings. At the end of the Three Houses interview, it is important to ask the child who they think it is OK to see what they have written and drawn. This gives children a sense of control and confidence about what they have shared.

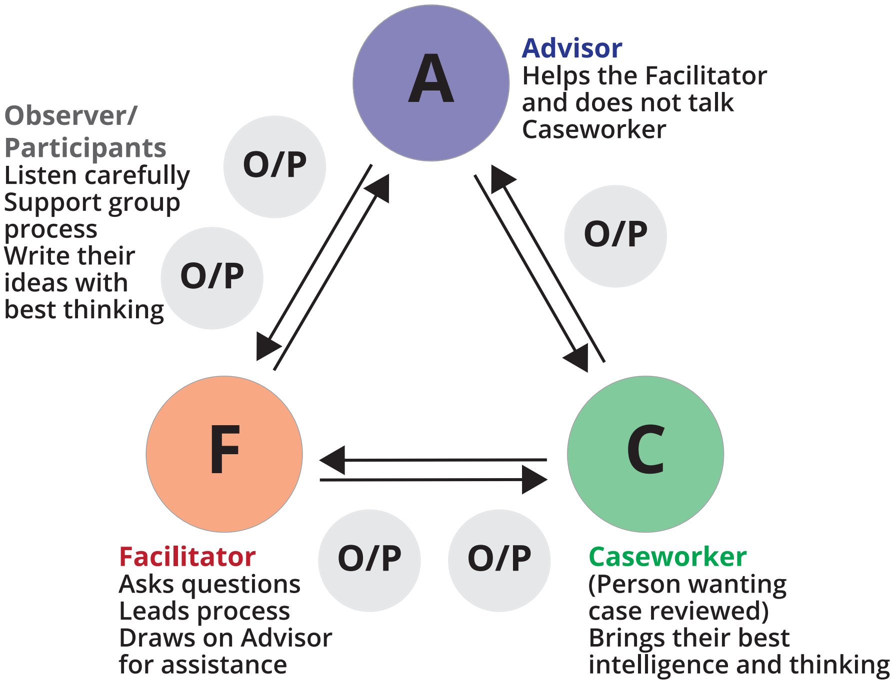
There are times when a child will say something that worries us about their safety or will say something they are worried about telling their parents. In either instance, it will be important to inform the parents as quickly as possible and talk to the child about how to do that. Occasionally, workers may believe that to talk to the parents about what their child has said will place the child at risk of harm. If this is the case, workers need to consult with their supervisor first.

There may be times when you will choose to share what the child has said despite their worries about doing this. In such instances, ensure you always discuss with the child what will be said to whom, how, and when, while providing the child with as much choice as possible.

This group supervision process is designed to support workers to prepare for a My Three Houses session with a child, drawing on the best thinking of the group.

## Group Supervision Process

This Signs of Safety group supervision process is designed for groups of 4 to 10 people. It revolves around the caseworker who brings forward the case. (Sometimes, of course, there is a number of people bringing forward the case). The facilitator leads the group process, assisted by an advisor. Other group members are involved as observers/participants. The roles of each are described in the following diagram:




The entire group, but in particular the facilitator and advisor, must focus on the process and not get caught up or over-organized about the content and detail of the case. This process is all about growing the capacity for the team to create together a fast process for working through, and getting direction in, a case. As with every meeting in child protection, effective meetings are always led skilfully.

## Group Process

### 1. Introductions (2–3 minutes)

If the group is new to the group supervision method, the facilitator should introduce the process, including a quick description of each person's role:

- The facilitator is the ONLY person who talks directly to the caseworker.
- The advisor acts to assist the facilitator to lead the process.
- The observers/participants have the opportunity to learn by staying out of the content of cases and focusing on analysis and judgement processes, thereby assisting the worker to gain a better overview of the case and the direction he/she wants to take.

The facilitator has the professionals, the caseworker, and anyone directly involved in the case say who they are, what their role in the case is, and how long they have been involved in the case. The facilitator will probably need to prevent the professionals involved in the case from going into case content at this point.

### 2. Genogram (3 minutes)

The facilitator draws the family genogram to include the basic information of age along with the names of the immediate family parents, partners, children, extended family members, and relevant friends. This should include clarifying where children are living, if not with one or both parents. Again, to keep the process focused, this is not the time to describe case information.

### 3. Background Information (3–5 minutes)

The facilitator gives the worker 3–5 minutes to give an overview of the case, usually by asking, 'What makes this an open child protection case now?' or 'What has happened that has led you to want to talk with the child using the My Three Houses tool?' Allow the worker to talk without interrupting. The facilitator and observers should make notes of worker's exact words and begin to analyse the information. While listening, the facilitator can make notes at the side of the whiteboard and should not be trying to 'map' the case by locating information into particular columns. The more experienced workers become in using the process, the more succinct they will be at providing the critical information that is needed to move through the process.

### 3. Focus of My Three Houses (3 minutes)

This is THE MOST important part of the preparatory steps because it provides clear focus for the facilitator and group making efficient use of time.

Ask: 'What do you need most from this session to help you use the My Three Houses tool and process with this child?' The facilitator should dig in a little to get a clear, specific goal. If the worker says, 'I want to know what to do next; this is too general,' the facilitator should ask what specifically they feel they need help with in order to figure out what to focus on next.

If the worker says, 'I want to interview the child to see how they're going', the facilitator can point out that is a case goal for outside of this session. The facilitator then asks something like, 'OK, so you want to find out how the child is going. What do you need from this consultation to help you prepare for that conversation?'

### 4. Preparing to Use 'My Three Houses': Large Group Exercise

Thinking through the logistics – who, what, where, when and how.

4.1 In situations where the worker is needing help with several aspects of talking with the child, it might be helpful for the facilitator to ask the group to brainstorm the things that need to be thought through in preparation for using My Three Houses with the child; e.g. venue, consent, names of the houses, and write these up on a whiteboard/flipchart.

4.2 The facilitator then asks everyone to think through the best questions they can come up with that will assist the worker to start thinking through how he/she will prepare for the session; e.g. 'Where could you go through My Three Houses with the child that would be the most comfortable place for him/her?'

4.3 Depending on the size of the group, participants could share their questions in groups of 2–3 before sharing responses with the larger group. Copies of all suggested questions are given to the worker to take away. The facilitator shares the suggestions he/she has created.

4.4 If not already identified as something to think about by the worker, the facilitator focuses the group on thinking about what alternative names for each house might be useful. Ideally the worker will allow the child to decide what to call each house. However, if the child isn't sure, the worker can offer a few suggestions from the list that his/her colleagues have created.

4.5 Depending on the size of the group, participants could share their alternative names for the houses in groups of 2–3 before sharing responses with the larger group. Copies of all suggestions are given to the worker to take away. The facilitator shares the suggestions he/she has created.

4.6 The facilitator asks everyone to think through the best questions they can think of to elicit information from the child for each house. The facilitator asks everyone to individually write down on a piece of paper (that can be handed to the worker) their best questions for each house. Questions should be written out fully in the form they would actually be asked.

4.7 Depending on the size of the group, participants could share their questions in groups of 2–3 before sharing responses with the larger group. Copies of all suggested questions are given to the worker to take away. The facilitator shares the questions he/she has created.

## 5. Preparing to Use 'My Three Houses': Individual Exercise

If relevant (i.e. participants have children they are wanting to use the My Three Houses tool with) and time permits, the above process can be repeated with participants working on their own cases individually or in pairs.

## 6. Review and Next Steps

6.1. The facilitator now reviews the process so far by asking the worker: 'What has been most useful for you about the process so far?' Then the facilitator asks: 'On a scale of 0 to 10 – where 10 means I've got what I need from the consult already and 0 means I'm no better off or any clearer than when we started – where are you?' If the group has stayed on track, the worker should be rating relatively high at this stage. The facilitator then asks the worker if this is this enough for now. If the answer is yes, end the work here.

If no, ask, 'What else do you need to focus on?' and spend some time on that, usually by listening to the issue and getting questions created for that issue.

A low rating from the worker probably indicates the group process has gone off track significantly from what the worker wanted, or that the worker actually now wants something else or perhaps is feeling swamped and anxious about the case. Whatever the problem, the facilitator will need to back up and help the worker identify where the sticking point is and agree on a process to deal with that.

## 7. Review Process for Group

The advisor leads a review with the whole group about what was useful, what they learned, and any issues they have. (The review should not be about the content of the case).

## How Often Do We Use This Group Process in the Agency or Team?

When presenting and teaching this group mapping process, these questions are often asked: 'How often should we do this in our agency? Do we do this in every case?'

This group process is designed to:

- build a shared, structured, collective team and agency culture, and process for thinking through cases using the Signs of Safety approach;
- enable child protection professionals to explore each other's cases, bringing their best thinking, including alternative perspectives, and to do this without getting caught in one or two people dominating or the group telling the practitioner whose case it is or what they must do;
- develop a shared practice of bringing a questioning approach to casework, rather than trying to arrive at answers.

This group process cannot be undertaken in every case discussion. However, the process can be replicated in individual supervision and when practitioners are thinking through cases for themselves.

Building and sustaining this sort of questioning culture for thinking through cases as a team usually requires this process being undertaken at least once every two to four weeks.

The process presented here offers quite a tight structure, because helping professionals often tend to default to individual supervision, so group supervision is not a normal part of most agencies' practice. Where group supervision is normal, the group conversations can often be very free form and unstructured with little sense of shared purpose. If the majority of quality supervision is individual, this creates a very privatised practice culture within the agency, places excessive pressure on the team leaders or supervisors to be the fount of all wisdom for all practitioners, and limits the capacity to draw on the knowledge and experience of peers. Many supervisors and practitioners shy away from group supervision or, if they have to participate, they do so in a constrained way because of previous bad experiences. It is strongly suggested that supervisors and teams follow the process offered here closely, particularly as they build the habit of group supervision in their teams. This process is safe, well tested, refined, and avoids group dynamics where one or two people dominate.

The advisor role is central to the success of the group process. The advisor should be very active, checking in regularly with the facilitator about their sense of direction and effectiveness of what they are doing. Likewise, the facilitator should quickly draw on the advisor if they are feeling stuck or unsure.