

Your Family Support Network

A guide for families who are working with a social worker

This guide is for families working with a social worker where there are worries about the safety or wellbeing of a child.

Our goal is always to work with you, and the people who are important to you, to address the worries and help you to create a plan that assures everybody your children will be safe and well cared for.

To do this we want to help you set up a 'family network'. This guide explains:

- What a family network is and what they do.
- Who can be involved in the family network
- What your social worker will do to help you identify the best people to be part of your network.



What is a Family Network?

A network is a group of people who have a connection with you, your children and family, they might be family members, friends, neighbours or members of your community.

Every family struggles sometimes; it might be following a difficult life event, when someone has been unwell or just because you can't be in three places at once. It is natural for people to step in and help out and it might be grandparents, friends, relatives or neighbours that do this.

A family network is about getting all these important people together, people that you and your child(ren) can go to for help and support, in an organised way. Your network will be there to support you and your child, and to work with you to address the worries that you have discussed with your social worker, so that everyone is involved in keeping your child(ren) safe and well.

The number of people in a family network will vary, this will depend on how many people we think need to be involved to keep your child(ren) safe.

What does a Family Network do?

- The network supports you, and your child(ren), at home - especially when life is difficult.
- Works with you and your social worker to help agree a plan to keep the child(ren) safe.
- Makes sure your child(ren) are safe, well and have the care they need. Particularly when the worries arise, each member of your network will have specific tasks to help keep the child(ren) safe (this will form part of the plan).
- Attend meetings – including meetings with your social worker and your own family and network meetings (without the social worker there), as well as more formal meetings with your social worker, where other professionals are also in attendance.
- When the network meets, you will talk about what everyone thinks the family and network are doing well in relation to the worries and how you have achieved this. The network will also discuss any worries they might have and what needs to happen to address them so that the child(ren) is safe and well cared for.
- We will sit down with you and your network to look at times when the problems are happening, and whether people in your network need to be around at those times, in order to support you and keep your child safe.

What do network members need to know?

- For the plan and network to be effective you will need to be able to have honest and open conversations.
- The network needs to understand the strengths of your family in terms of how people care for and support your child(ren) and what people have done in the past to keep them safe.

- The network should know about the worries that we have for the family and any worries that you may have too.
- The network needs to understand what the social worker needs to see happening to no longer be worried, as well as what your child(ren) wants to see, and what needs to happen to achieve this.

Who should be involved in the network?

- People who you and your child(ren) trust and feel comfortable speaking to. These might be different people - the people that your child trusts and feels comfortable speaking with might not be the people that are supporting you.
- Try and think about people who have stepped in to support you or your children when you have needed some help - people that you know you can rely on.
- People who you can contact if there is a problem and who can visit if necessary.
- The network should include some people that could look after your child(ren) if necessary.
- As well as people that can visit you regularly, you can also involve important people in your life that live far away, they can still be involved by regularly contacting you and your child(ren) by phone, video call or whatever works best for you as a family.
- Who in your family or network will be the boss of the plan (the lead network member)? This is someone that can check all the members of the network are doing what they said they would do, so that they know the plan is working and your child(ren) is safe and well cared for.
- There may be some people that we feel can't be part of the child's network because they pose too great a risk. We will discuss this with you.

Finding a network

Identifying people to be part of your network can be difficult, particularly if you don't have a big family or if you just aren't sure who to involve.

Your social worker will work with you to help you establish a network. They will ask you lots of questions to help you understand who the best people are to involve and who you do not want to involve. For example:

- Who are the people that have helped you during the best and worst moments of your life?
- Who is the first person you would phone if you had some wonderful news to share?
- Who is your child(ren) closest to?
- When things have been tough in the past, who have you confided in?
- Who would you ask to look after your children if you were unwell?

Working with your network to develop a plan

A key role of the network is to work with you, and your social worker, to agree and work to a plan that will keep your child(ren) safe.

This will involve making sure that everyone understands the kind of things that have triggered the worries happening in the past and the warning signs that suggest the worries are happening again.

You and everyone in your network will know about things that you, and others, have done in the past to support your child(ren) and keep them safe. Discussing these things will help everyone to understand what has worked well previously so that things like this can be built on to create an effective safety plan.

The social worker will help everyone think about who can do what to support you and keep your child(ren) safe, so that everyone can work together to address the worries. We want to know your best ideas and thoughts about how to achieve this.

What goes in a plan?

The plan is likely to be a combination of:

- Things that need to happen regularly, like members of the network visiting to check on you and your child(ren) and provide support.
- Specific things that people need to do to keep your child(ren) safe if there are any signs that the worries are starting to happen again.
- Rules that everyone needs to stick to that will keep your child(ren) safe.

The plan will explain who will do what and when they need to do this

Depending on your family's circumstances, it might be your social worker that works with you to develop the plan or this might be done through a Family Group Conference, with one of our Family Group Conference Co-ordinators. If your family would benefit from a Family Group Conference your social worker will speak to you about this.

The plan for each family will be different, it will need to be tailored to the specific worries for your family (the danger statement) in order to achieve the agreed safety goal. You and your network will know what works well for your family and are best placed to develop solutions.

Safety Objects

It might help to include a safety object as part of the plan. Children do better if they have a sense of control of their situation. Because children sometimes struggle to find the right words to use when they don't feel safe, the safety object gives an easy way to communicate to their family or network that something is worrying them.

You could ask your child to pick an object that's important to them and to figure out a place where they want to keep this object when they are feeling safe and things are going well. If your child gets scared or worried, all they need to do is move their safety object. When you, your network or professionals notice the safety object is moved, that's a signal to talk to your child and listen to what has been happening to make them worry. Then you can work out what needs to

happen to make them feel safe and confident enough to put the Safety Object back in its place where it signals that all is well. Getting to that point may require a network meeting to make improvements to your plan.

Below are some examples of the type of things that family network members have done to help keep a child safe as part of a plan.

Dad Adam can sometimes get very depressed, which really worries his daughter Evie. Sometimes he is so depressed that he can't get out of bed and take Evie to school.

Evie, and everyone in the network, knows that Dad tends to get really quiet when he is starting to feel depressed, he spends more time alone and often stops doing things like tidying the kitchen and washing up.

Evie knows that when Dad does any of these things she needs to call Grandma Maggie straight away who will come round and check Dad Adam is okay. If she can't get hold of Grandma Maggie she will call Auntie Terry or Dad's best friend Paul.

Jenna has a learning disability and the social worker is worried that she doesn't always understand and respond to the needs of her baby, George.

To make sure that Jenna gets the support that she needs, so she can care for George well, the family network have agreed a weekly calendar so that people will pop in to see Jenna and George three times a day.

Hannah, Jenna's Mum, keeps the calendar up to date and everyone has to let Hannah know if they can't visit, so she can make different arrangements. Everyone who visits tells Hannah if they have any worries, so that Hannah can speak to Jenna about this and contact the social worker if she is really concerned.

Emily has chosen a purple unicorn as her 'safety object.' The unicorn lives on the table opposite the front door where everyone can see it when they enter the house. Unicorn always faces the front door and the only person that can move it is Emily.

If unicorn is ever in a different position, or facing a different direction, it means Emily is worried about something. If this happens Mum and people in the family network will ask Emily if she is okay. Emily might move unicorn sometimes, even if she isn't worried, just to check that everyone is paying attention.

Examples of a plan - what to think about and what questions to ask

Your social worker will work together with you and your network to help put a plan in place that works for you and your child(ren).

Below is the format of the plan we will use, with an explanation of what to include in each column. The questions and example on the following pages will help you understand this further.

Plan Template with Definitions

Key issues arising from danger statement	Existing safety/ what's working well	Stressors and Triggers	Indicators danger is emerging or present (red flags)	Who will do what when problems arise?
<p>Here we want to explain to everyone about what has been happening to make us worried. We want clear descriptions about;</p> <p>The adult behaviours that have been harmful or damaging to the child</p> <p>How bad have these behaviours have been.</p> <p>How this has harmed the child so far.</p> <p>How we think this will harm the child in the future if nothing changes.</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u> Here we want to record who has been helping to try and get these worries sorted out</p> <p><u>Safety</u> Here we want to find out who has done what to keep the child safe when the key issues arising from the danger statement have been happening.</p>	<p>Here we want to know who or what has stressed the adult or triggered the harmful or dangerous behaviours in the past.</p>	<p>Here we want to try and find out what has the child / family / network noticed in the past that has given them an indication that the problems have been happening.</p>	<p>This is where we want you to think about what has worked in the past to keep the child safe so that we have some ideas of what you could do in the future if the worries happened again.</p> <p>There also may have been times when there were problems, and the family / network tried to step in to help and keep the child safe but this didn't work. This is where we want to help you reflect and think about what you have learned and to think about what you would do differently in the future.</p> <p>This is how we create the safety plan</p>

Example questions to help develop a plan

Here are some questions to help family networks think about what to include in the plan. Some of these questions are general and others are tailored to a scenario where a Mum has depression. Your social worker will help you and your network come up with some questions that are specific to your circumstances.

Key issues arising from danger statement	Existing safety/ what's working well	Stressors and Triggers	Indicators danger is emerging or present (red flags)	Who will do what when problems arise?
<p>In what ways have you seen parents not provide good care to their children?</p> <p>In what ways have they failed to keep an eye on their children?</p> <p>How often has this happened?</p> <p>How bad did things get when this happened?</p> <p>How did this impact on the child?</p>	<p>Strengths Who has been helping to try and get this worry sorted out?</p> <p>How has this helped?</p> <p>What would the child say?</p> <p>Safety Who has stepped in to help keep the child safe when parents haven't been caring well for their children?</p> <p>How did this help protect the child?</p> <p>What have they said?</p>	<p>There are times when you have struggled to prioritise the needs of the children. Has there been anything making this harder for you to do?</p> <p>Mum, you have said that you struggle with your depression. What things make your depression worse or harder to manage?</p> <p>What kind of things have made you feel the most stressed / worried / anxious?</p> <p>What kind of things get you down?</p>	<p>What have you seen / heard / smelled that has told you things weren't going well in the past, even when parents were telling you that everything was fine?</p> <p>What were the first warning signs you noticed that told you they were not coping, even if they didn't say anything to you?</p> <p>What did you notice about the children that showed you something wasn't right at home, even if they weren't saying anything to anyone?</p>	<p>What have you done in the past that has helped? Could this be something you would be willing to do in the future? Who else could help if you weren't able to do this?</p> <p>Who has helped you? How did that help? Is this something you would do again? If not, what else would you do? What help would you need?</p>

Example of a plan

Below is an example of a plan, for a family where there are worries about the children being neglected because of Mum's depression. It explains what people in the network will do to keep the children safe when the problems (worries) arise.

Key issues arising from danger statement	Existing safety/ what's working well	Stressors and Triggers	Indicators danger is emerging or present (red flags)	Who will do what when problems arise?
Parent's lack of supervision and care of the children	When Mum takes her prescribed medication she is able to function well, stay alert and care appropriately for the children.	<p>There are periods of time when Mum is prone to be depressed and not coping e.g.</p> <p>1) Anniversary of when she lost her first child (July)</p> <p>2) Times when partner is away working and she is left alone with the children.</p> <p>3) When she forgets to take her medication</p>	<p>Mum not allowing people into the property.</p> <p>When Mum doesn't answer phone calls or texts.</p> <p>When she doesn't collect her prescription.</p> <p>When the curtains are still closed mid-morning.</p>	<p>If Aunty Susan sees any of the red flags she will use her spare key and go into the house to check the children are okay.</p> <p>If Aunty Susan is unwell, she will phone Uncle Bob up to use his spare key and he will go round.</p> <p>If anyone thinks Mum isn't coping they will either stay with her and make sure the children are okay or they are happy to have Mum and the children stay with them until she gets better.</p>

Family Network Support Calendar

Some families will need people from their family network visiting regularly to help and support them, this calendar can help you plan who visits and when.

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							