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Safety Planning Practice Guide (V11)

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Safety Planning Practice Guide

Safety planning is a restorative way of working with children and families, where we are clear about risks and how we can work together to reduce the risk of harm to a child. Safety planning involves working collaboratively with the child, parents, carers, the family support network, and partner agencies to create a plan that ensures children do not experience harm while work with the family is underway and after our involvement ends.

A safety plan is not a document that we ask parents to sign but rather something that we partner to create with parents/carers, extended family, professionals and children (as appropriate). We know that families are more likely to sign up to the plan if they are given the opportunity to develop and own it from the start as part of our collaborative working with them.

Safety plans must be reviewed regularly to ensure it responds to changes in the level of risk and is able to provide meaningful safety for the child.

What is safety?

Safety can be defined as being free from harm, danger, risk or injury. Safety is unique for each child (not a one size fits all) and has a physical, emotional and psychological component. For children, safety involves means having responsive adult/s in their life who understand the identified risk/s and what the child needs in order to avoid them experiencing harm. This does not always involve the child's parent; it could be someone else who understands what needs to happen and when if the risk presents itself.

What is a safety plan?

A safety plan details the actions to be taken to ensure the immediate safety of the child. It details how a presenting danger will be managed and who are the people who will help. A safety plan is not meant to replace a child's Child in Need, Child Protection or Child in Care plan but is meant to work in conjunction with these plans.

A safety plan helps everyone understand their responsibilities within it. Developing and agreeing the plan requires openness and transparency, meaning that everyone (including the child as appropriate) understands what is happening and what the plan is meant to achieve.

Depending on their age and ability, the child must be included in identifying what they feel will make them feel safe. This includes choosing who from their network, they feel can help them stay safe.

We know however where children experience extrafamilial harm (exploitation/missing etc) there will be times when their views about a safe person cannot take priority for reasons they may not always accept nor understand as they may not see the risks in the same way that professionals or their family members do. In these instances, we must explain our decision to the young person so that they don't believe their views are being intentionally disregarded.

Parents and carers will be expected to offer their own perspective as experts in their own lives about what they believe can promote safety for their family.

There are instances where careful consideration needs to be given to the impact of the wider family; for example, where allegations of forced marriage, concerns relating to family honour or domestic abuse (including coercive control) exist. In these instances, there needs to be a thorough understanding of the wider family dynamics before decisions are made to include family in safety plans.

Safety plans are recorded in the case summary of the child's electronic record in red so that anyone picking up the record, a new or duty worker for example, can understand potential the risk, and the actions agreed in response. This could include who the child is and isn't allowed to spend time with, what the child will do (if age-appropriate) or whether any time with family needs to be supervised etc.

When should a child have a safety plan?

- Safety planning should be included for every child/young person we are working with, children in need, child protection, children in care and care leavers.
- When there has been a strategy discussion, and a section 47 enquiry is taking place and where an ICPC has been proposed.
- When a Child and Family assessment is underway.
- Where pre-proceedings are ongoing, or where care proceedings are initiated, and the child remains living at home.
- In situations of parental conflict and there are specific court issued plans around family time.
- Where risk is escalating or there has been a significant incident, for example where a child or young person goes missing from home or care, self-harms, a domestic abuse incident, increasing substance misuse, a mental health crisis, allegations of harmful sexual behaviour, when a baby is born and returning home following a pre-birth assessment etc (this list is not exhaustive).

Principles for good Safety planning:

- Safety plans are created collaboratively with the child and their family.
- Safety plans consider both strengths and risk factors.
- Safety plans identify who is in the family network and professional network.
- Safety planning considers the impact of the identified risk upon each individual child. The risk of harm to a child with additional needs must not be minimised.

- Safety plans are SMART, use language that is clear and not blaming.

- Safety plans are regularly reviewed and updated as the safety and risk factors change or evolve.
- The child, parents/carers, extended family and professionals all receive a copy of the safety plan.
- Safety plans do not make victims of abuse (children and adult victims) responsible for the delivery of the plan. They can however make a person demonstrating concerning behaviour accountable for their actions via their involvement in the safety plan. For example, a parent may agree to leave the home and attempt to calm themselves as opposed to escalating an argument.

For children at risk of harm outside of the home (contextualised harm) the safety plan would be developed at a multi-agency risk management meeting where up to date intelligence can inform the plan. These meetings should aim to include the child and parents/carers.

When should a Safety Plan be reviewed?

The Safety Plan must be reviewed during visits to see the child/family as part of our ongoing assessment to see how it is making a difference. They must also be reviewed at Child in Need, Child Protection and Child in Care multi-agency meetings or when the risk factors are assessed to have changed i.e. significantly reduced or escalating. If a safety plan is put in place for a child out of hours, it needs to be reviewed the next working day by the day team to ensure its ongoing effectiveness and suitability.

When should a Safety Plan end?

When we are confident that the identified risks have reduced, there are appropriate safeguards in place, and we are assured that the child will be safe, and their needs met by universal services.

Examples of a good safety plan: (*insert*)