

Quick Guide to Signs of Safety

The five Children's Services Trusts in Northern Ireland are implementing Signs of Safety practice. Signs of Safety will become the overarching practice framework with other approaches including ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences), BBF (Building Better Futures) and UNOCINI.

SEHSCT will be supporting staff to support the implementation of SOS providing training, supervision and guidance on how to work with the families

Many of you will be familiar with using Signs of Safety, as a successful Making Children Safer Model used in Child Protection Conferences is based on the approach.

What is it?

[Signs of Safety is now widely recognised internationally and locally as the leading approach to child protection casework.](#)

It is an innovative, solution-focused, strengths-based approach to working with children, young people and families. It provides a clear framework for how to work with families; how to build relationships and work effectively with them to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

It includes:

- principles for practice which underpin the work
- ways of working – what to do, how and when
- a range of tools to support engagement with families, strong assessments and plans, and for capturing the voice of the child or young person , three houses
- ways to support learning, reflection and development, such as supervision, group supervision and audit of practice that is aligned with the approach.

Research has shown that the best outcomes for children and young people are achieved when there are [constructive working relationships](#) between all professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves. This has been shown to be the case, both nationally and internationally, at all levels of need and intervention.

In order to build effective relationships and work inclusively and respectfully with families, Signs of Safety focuses on both the family's strengths and the safety of the child or young person. This recognises that, despite the concerns and difficulties, all families have strengths, and by building on these strengths we can increase safety and wellbeing for children and young people.

Why are we adopting it?

The South Eastern HSCT is adopting Signs of Safety because we believe this will support us to deliver the very best outcomes for our children, young people and families. Best practice is child-focused, solution-orientated, and respectful and inclusive of families, and this is what we want to achieve through adopting Signs of Safety.

Where Signs of Safety has been adopted by other local authorities and Tulsa it has been welcomed by families. Families have reported that (often for the first time) they are clear about what services expect from them. Families particularly like that their views and strengths are acknowledged as well as their weaknesses understood.

What will it mean for my practice?

Using Signs of Safety will mean that:

- You will be asked about the impact on the child or young person.
- You will be asked to talk or write about families' strengths as well as the concerns – from contact at the front door onwards.
- Planning and meetings will work differently (e.g. Case Conferences and Core Groups) – these will have a similar format to Child Protection Conferences and will focus on the three columns – concerns, strengths and next steps.
- You will be asked to scale how worried you are about the impact of the current situation on the child/ young person on a scale of 0-10. This will happen at the front door and in meetings and is used to help everyone understand and discuss their level of concern and assessment of risk.
- You will be part of developing danger/worry statements and safety/wellbeing goals – which set out very clearly for the family what the concerns are and what we want to achieve.
- You will see a change in language away from professional language to clear and simple language which is easier for families to understand.
- Professionals will have a more coaching and questioning role – supporting families to develop their own solutions.
- You will have access to tools and ways of working that make it easier to involve children and young people and their families.

Want to know more?

For more information on why we are adopting Signs of Safety, what we want to achieve, and our plan for how we will do this please see our Signs of Safety Strategy. Also see the official Signs of Safety website for the latest developments on the approach and resources at www.SignsofSafety.net

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