

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between Harm and Danger?

Harm - What has happened to the child that worries us? This is actual evidence of harm to the child and doesn't have to be deemed significant harm

Danger - What are you worried may happen to the child in the future? Describe what the injury, damage or impairment the professionals believe is likely to happen to the child if nothing in the family situation changes. It can also be described as the professional's worst fear for the child if nothing changes.

What is a complicating Factor?

What factors/issues make life for the family harder, making building safety for the child more difficult? For example, poverty, addiction, mental illness, isolation, family dispute, cultural differences, professional discord.

Over time and with additional information, complicating factors can become 'dangers'.

How long should a 'Danger Statement' be and what should be in it?

A Danger Statement is as long or as short as it needs to be.

It can be 'broken up' into thematic Dangers or Harms, and each danger can be scaled individually, naming the individuals who are worried. For example, "John (social worker) is worried that.."

Each statement should start with something that is working well, or that you are impressed with, if possible. For example, "John (social worker) is pleased that.."

Always avoid using jargon and write in a way that the parents and child would understand.

What is the difference between a Strength and a Safety?

Existing safety - proven safety over time when the child was protected in relation to the danger.

Strengths - Strengths in the family and positive aspects of the situation. These could become safety if they prove to keep the child safe over time.

What is a safety goal?

What do you need to see to be satisfied that this child is safe enough that the child protection agency can close the case?

Using very clear language without jargon and so the family can understand.

What is a safety plan and how do I do it?

A safety plan is based upon the 'next steps' towards achieving the safety goal and is developed with the family and professionals working with them.

It needs to show what steps the family will take to keep the child safe.

The Social Worker needs to be clear about 'bottom lines' - be very clear about dangers that you cannot accept.

Next steps need to be small and achievable steps for the family. If the family are unable to come up with any or enough steps to keep the child safe, then you need to consider if the child is safe enough in their care.

It might take some time for the family to come up with next steps or a safety plan, and this needs to be in proportion to the Danger.

It's not a service plan. But, with the family, the professionals can suggest services which would help achieve the safety goal and safety plan.

I have to scale my worries. How do I know what number to scale them at?

Ask yourself and others the following question: 'On a scale of 0-10, where 0 means the situation for these children is so bad you need to remove them into care immediately, and 10 means that there is sufficient safety to close the case, where would you rate the situation right now?'

Remember, 10 does not mean a 'perfect' family, but signifies if statutory social work involvement is still needed.

You are not scaling the parents capacity to parent but how safe the child is. This is why the involvement of extended family or other networks as safety factors are so important

It's very important that when you scale, you qualify this with discussion and exploration in an evidenced based way about why you are scaling at the level you are. This should include the family and other agencies, as well as discussion with your peers and managers in a supervisory setting.

Can I close the case if the Scaling is less than 10?

If you are scaling at less than 10, then this means that you think there needs to be social work involvement to keep the child safe. If your plan is to close the case anyway, for example perhaps the family refuse social work involvement and it does not meet threshold for child protection procedures, then you need to make sure that the social work manager agrees to this decision and records the reasoning for this on the child's case file.

How do I scale children with disabilities, families with no recourse to public funds, or other circumstances where the case will not close but there are no identified child protection concerns?

If there are no other identified child protection concerns but a service is needed, one of the "dangers" is that the family would be unable to manage without statutory social work involvement. Scaling should take this into consideration and will not be more than 9.

Do I have to use the three houses?

Direct work with children is absolutely key in helping to understand the Harm and Danger to a child.

The three houses is one way that we know works well in understanding children's experiences. But you can adapt this model to suit the child you are working with, such as fairies and wizards, three islands etc. Ask your colleagues what has worked for them!

What is 'Words and Pictures?'

Words and Pictures is a way of working with children and their parents to help the child understand the safety plan.

It allows the child to understand what the problems were and what the danger was that meant that they needed a safety plan, and what will happen in the future to keep them safe.

The social worker must create the explanation with the parents and they need to be happy with it before the children are given the explanation.

It can be used with children who are looked after or who are still at home, as long as there is a safety plan in place.

See the signs of safety workbook for a full explanation of how to complete "words and pictures" work.