TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Information for Professionals about Social Work

signs of safety®

Tusla has adopted a new approach to child protection called the Signs of Safety. This guide explains the Signs of Safety and what is expected of you, as a professional who works with children.

How does this affect me?

Under **Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**, everyone who works with children has a responsibility to keep them safe. Some professionals, known as mandated reporters, have more responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015.

If you have a concern about a child, you may need to report to Tusla - Child and Family Agency.

Our Social Workers engage with families when the welfare, protection or safety of a child is in doubt or if there are concerns that a child is being abused or neglected.

To find out about more about your responsibilities under Children First, please visit tusla.ie.

If you want to make a report, please see 'A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns' at www.tusla.ie/children-first.

What will Tusla do if I contact them with a concern about a child?

When Tusla receives a report, our first consideration is always the immediate safety of the child. Tusla checks all reports and information on the day they are received. If neccessary, we will take emergency action to protect the child.

In some cases, we may not need to intervene and the issue can be dealt with through other types of services.

However, if we feel the child needs to be assessed, we will assign them to a social worker to begin the assessment process using the Signs of Safety approach.

Social workers work collaboratively with families and children to conduct risk assessments and produce safety plans to increase a child's safety and wellbeing.

They focus on on the strengths, resources and the existing networks around the child and their family. The aim is to produce a 'danger statement' written in plain English which outlines:

- our immediate and long term worries about the child and
- a corressponding 'Safety Goal' which outlines the specific changes that need to be made to ensure the child is safe.

The Assessment Framework

The assessment framework along with its associated tools assist everyone (the child and their family, social workers, professionals working with the child and their family, etc.) to jointly discuss and record the concerns, worries and strengths that exist within the family that has led us to be concerned about their child.

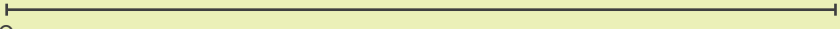
The framework lets us gather information from various perspectives and analyse this information through three domains and seven categories as outlined below:

Thinking about the child/young person and the family situation in this child protection case:

What we are worried about?	What is working well?	What needs to happen?
Harm	Existing Strengths	Safety Goals
Danger Statement	Existing Safety	Next Steps
Complicating Factors		

On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means the child is safe enough and zero means things are really bad for the young person and they must be removed from the situation immediately, where do you rate this situation today?

Put different judgment numbers on scale for different people, e.g. different professionals, child, parents, etc.



Harm: Past hurt, injury or abuse to the child (likely) caused by adults. Also includes risk-taking behaviour by the child that indicates harm and/or is harmful to them.

Danger Statement: The harm or hurt that is believed likely to happen to the child if nothing in the family's situation changes.

Complicating Factors: Actions and behaviours in and around the family, the child and by professionals that make the situation more difficult to deal with.

Existing Strengths: People, plans and actions that contribute to a child's wellbeing.

Existing Safety: Actions taken by parents, caring adults and children to make sure the child is safe when danger is present.

Safety Goals: The behaviours and actions that Tusla needs to see to be satisfied the child will be safe enough to close the case.

Next Steps: The immediate next actions that will be taken to build future safety and keep the child safe as possible.

Practice Tools

Central to the Signs of Safety approach is the use of specific practice tools that let professionals and family members work together to address the worries about harm to the child. Some of the practice tools are described on the next page.

Safety Scales

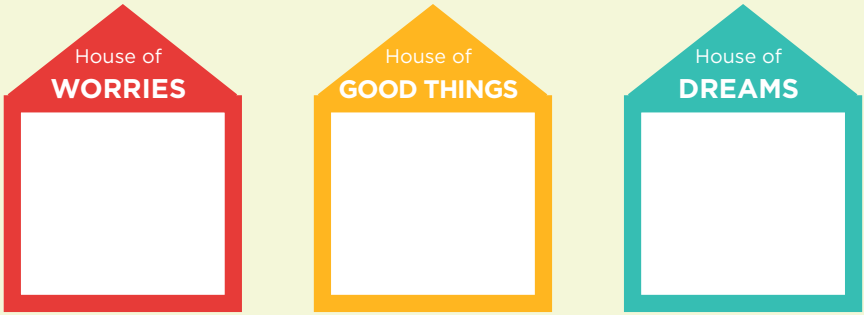
Scaling questions help us measure the extent of the worries and concerns for the safety of the child at a point in time. There is an example of a safety scale questions on page 3.

Working with Children

Talking to children is at the heart of Signs of Safety. We use specific tools such as My Three Houses (see page 5) to engage with children to bring the child's voice into the assessment.

My Three Houses

My Three Houses takes the three key assessment questions – what are we worried about, what's working well and what needs to happen – and places them in three houses to make the issues more accessible for the child.



Words and Pictures Explanation

Words and Pictures is an agreed story, prepared in partnership with the family, to enable the parents to explain to their child why they are working with Tusla, what happened and what will change in the future.

Words and Pictures is also a way of explaining the situation to other professionals and the wider safety network.

Developing a Safety Network

A safety network is a group people, who are connected to the child and the family. It consists of family and community members who commit to working with Tusla and the family to create a plan that shows everyone how the worries about the child will be managed.

The network is a critical element of the safety planning process in Signs of Safety. Every safety goal developed with a family must identifying a safety network.

"No Network = No Safety"

The people in the network take part in the safety planning and monitoring process and commit to providing ongoing safety and support to the child and family after the child protection case is closed.

Developing and Monitoring a Safety Plan

A safety plan is a specific set of rules and arrangements that describes the family's everyday life and shows everyone - the professionals, the family's own supporting safety network and the child - how the child will be kept safe in the future, even if the danger is present.

The safety plan is created with the family and the safety network. It is monitored, reflected on by everyone involved and refined over time.

Building a Trajectory

A trajectory is a document that sets out how the case will progress until eventually a decision is made to either:

- close the case; or
- meet the child's safety needs outside the family home.

The document gives families a clear timeline for what needs to happen to show Tusla that the child is safe. It sets out step-by-step how the professionals and the family will work together and on what tasks to develop the safety plan.

This timeline includes:

- involving the child,
- developing a safety network,
- keeping the network is informed, and
- holding regular safety planning and safety monitoring meetings.

Having the timeline makes it possible to assess the family's ability to provide safety for the children. It also includes a specific case closure date which provides clear goals, motivating the family to reach them.

Some or all of the practice tools will be used depending on the seriousness of the worries about the child.

What can I expect as a professional?

- The Signs of Safety is based on a questioning approach so the social worker will ask more questions from the point of referral through to case closure. For instance, you may be asked to rate the current safety of the child on a safety scale based on the danger identified.
- Social workers will use clearer, simpler language with families.
- Parents and their safety network will take a greater part in meetings s such as Child Protection conferences.
- There will be greater clarity and agreement from everyone about what Tusla needs to see to close the case and know that the child will be safe.
- Tusla will hold detailed briefing sessions at a local level about the Signs of Safety approach.

If you would like more information, please contact your local social work department.

Social Worker's Name & Tel No:

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Team Leader's Name & Tel No:

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Tusla welcomes all comments, compliments and complaints from service users, carers, visitors and the community about the services Tusla provides.

You can contact the Tusla Feedback and Complaints department at:

tellus@tusla.ie / 01 7718500
(Call 9am to 5pm Monday - Friday)

Text 086 014 2775