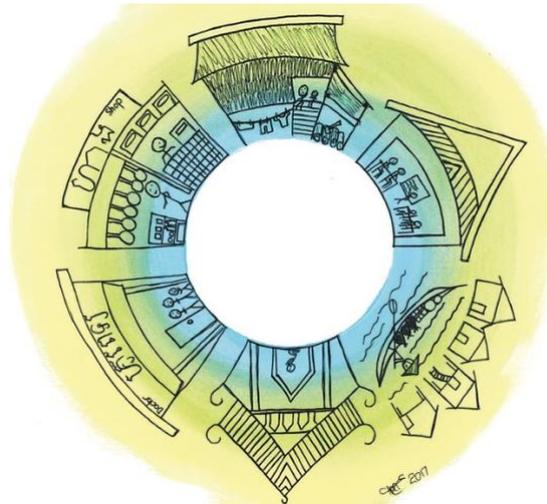


Involving Naturally Occurring Safety Networks in Child Protection casework

The wisdom of the oft quoted African saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child' is the foundation of childcare in traditional cultures and well recognised in developed countries. The aspiration that children's services should do everything possible to maintain a child's connections to their family and community is also enshrined in the child protection legislation of almost all countries with established children's services systems. A child who is connected to many people that care and are involved with them will almost always have a better life experience and be safer than an isolated child.



The Signs of Safety seeks always to involve everybody that has natural connections to the children to most effectively build lasting safety and healing, therefore the stated purpose of the Signs of Safety is:

To enable child protection agencies to deliver all their services with a rigorous focus on child safety and wellbeing and to set up their practice, policy, procedures and organisation so that the practitioners can do everything possible to put the parents, children and everyone naturally connected to the children at the centre of the assessment, decision-making, giving them every opportunity to come up with and apply their solutions before the professionals offer or impose theirs. Full involvement of family and network is always pursued, whether the child lives within or outside their family and kin, so that everything is done to sustain the child's lifelong connection with their family, culture and community of origin throughout children's services involvement.

The aspiration to involve every possible person who has natural connections to the child including kin, friends, neighbours and professionals such as teachers, family doctor, etc., is an obvious proposition since these are the people who have primary interest in, and responsibility for, the child. Every child deserves to be connected to their family and community of origin. However, for so many children in care, the professional system fractures or extinguishes their connections to their immediate family, kin and community of origin.

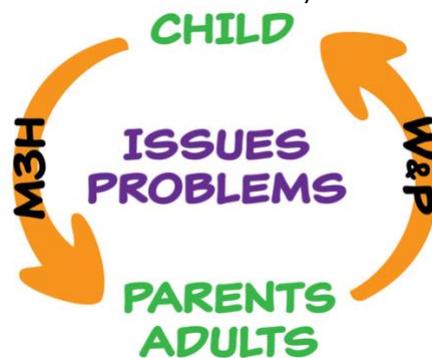
Though undeniably obvious, involving naturally connected people is a profound paradigm and culture shift for professional child protection agencies and is challenging in many ways. Child protection services have a propensity to focus on involving professionals with vulnerable families, often and in part because this is perceived to be more manageable and achievable than the involvement of naturally occurring networks.

Within the Signs of Safety, involving an informed naturally connected network around the children and their family of origin is key to minimising professional involvement and to creating an effective everyday safety plan because these are the people who have critical insider knowledge about daily life for the children and family.

Child psychiatrist Tilman Furniss succinctly stated that 'child abuse is a syndrome of secrecy'. To be effective in adopting responsibility for the child's continuing care and safety, it is essential therefore that all members of the safety network are fully informed of the concerns that have brought children's services into the family's life.

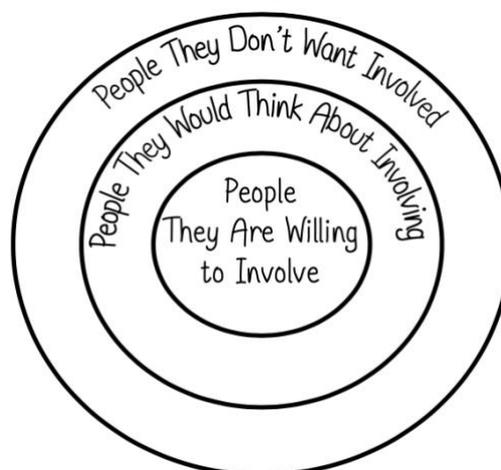
The Signs of Safety approach utilises a range of practical methods to openly discuss the problems and to break the secrecy and shame that typically surround situations of child abuse:

- Plain language risk assessment within the Signs of Safety mapping
- My Three Houses work with the child (the child's experience for the family and safety network)
- Words and Pictures explanation (the parent's explanation prepared with children's services about the child maltreatment issues for the child)



The Signs of Safety utilises a range of methods to find and build naturally occurring safety networks around the child and their immediate family including:

- Family Safety Circles tool
- Network Finding Matrix
- Genogram and Eco-mapping
- Various methods drawn from Family Finding (Koziolek, 2020).

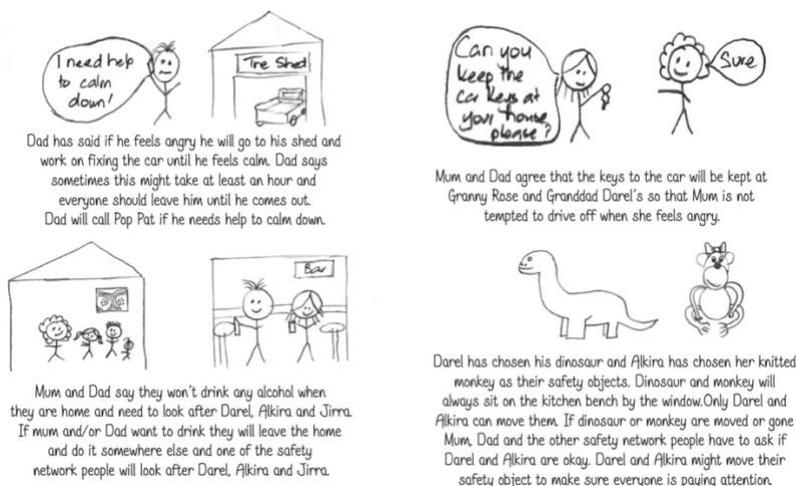


Family Safety Circles Tool

Within the Signs of Safety, involving an informed naturally connected network around the children and their family of origin is key to creating an effective everyday safety plan detailing who will do what to ensure the child is safe and well looked after even when there are problems and danger present.

The Signs of Safety utilises a range of methods and tools to create lasting, family-owned, detailed safety plans with the immediate and extended family and the naturally occurring safety network, including:

- Safety planning preparation worksheet
- Safety Journal
- Child's Safety Object
- Age appropriate Words and Pictures Safety Plan



Age-appropriate Words and Pictures Safety Plan

Further Reading:

Koziolek, D. (2020). Family finding tools. Available at:

<https://www.safetyplanning.org/index.php/en-us/2-knowing/135-family-finding-tools>

Turnell, A. (2013). *Safety planning workbook*. Elia International, Perth. Available at:

<https://knowledgebank.signsofsafety.net>

Turnell, A. and Essex, S. (2006). 'Creating an informed safety network around the family', Chapter Seven: pp 104-110, in *Working with 'denied' child abuse: the resolutions approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Turnell, A. and Essex, S. (2013). It takes a village: placing grandparents and extended family at the centre of safeguarding vulnerable children, in David Pitcher (ed.) *Inside kinship care: understanding family dynamics and providing effective support*, London: Jessica Kingsley.