

Signs of Safety Newsletter

Enfield
Safeguarding
Children Board
...because safeguarding children
is everybody's business



3rd Edition – July 2017

Welcome and Update

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This is our third Signs of Safety (SofS) newsletter, first of 2017 and the first written by me! There has been so much activity locally in Enfield since the last newsletter in October 2016 that only a brief flavour of the work can be given here. In addition to all our local activity SofS continues to grow and develop nationally and internationally with very recent large scale evaluations of the model.

We will be publishing a newsletter with SofS updates quarterly so we can give more frequent and regular updates of all this activity.

A Personal View

On a personal note, I was recruited to this post in November 2016, but due to critical health problems of my wife I was not able to begin the role fully until the beginning of February 2017, and even then on a part-time basis. I share this as I have had personal experience of the power of the SofS model as a robust problem solving model. The tool with the basic four domains (What are we worried about?, What is working well?, What needs to happen? And a judgement scale) can be applied to any human problem and helped me and my family when we were in crisis and continues to do so in my work and personal life. I also learned the importance of developing an informed network of safety people around my family to support us through the crisis. A key element of the model is helping create an informed (those who know of the worries) network of naturally connected people (i.e. not professionals) around a child and family. A key element of SofS is understood by the African proverb *'It takes a village to raise a child'*.

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A Quick Recap

We began our SofS implementation journey in the autumn of 2015, and since then a tremendous amount of progress has been made towards fully embedding the model within children's services and among partner agencies in Enfield. We have formed good links with other London Boroughs and Local Authorities across the country to become part of a community of agencies sharing learning and experiences. It is clear that organisational and practice change is not a simple and straightforward process. Change is challenging and we are seeking to engage positively with the challenges and bring people with us. A progress report and implementation plan was written in June 2017 to help guide this work by Grant Landon, Service Manager for Practice and Partnerships.

What's working well?

A pilot Ofsted inspection took place in April 2017 the inspectors provided very positive feedback in relation to how SofS is being understood and implemented in Enfield. An internal audit of the use of SofS by Social workers in March 2017 similarly showed that understanding and use of the model is consistently increasing and improving.

There is however, a great deal of work still to be done. The vision remains of whole organisational change.

We need your views!!

If you haven't completed the [Signs of staff survey](#) yet, do it today...just click the link

We continue to train practitioners in using the framework. There have been a variety of strands of this training – from one hour bite sized coaching sessions, half day briefings, and whole day training. We have also held more 2 day introductory training and 5 day advanced training facilitated by our externally licenced Signs of Safety trainer and consultant Agi Gault.

We have continued our learning and development journey by training up 25 Enfield Signs of Safety Practice Leads to lead learning across all our Children's Services Departments. The Practice Leads are being trained in Appreciative Inquiry a method aligned with the SofS framework. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a change management approach that focuses on identifying what is working well, analysing why it is working well and then doing more of it.

Templates for recording have been amended across the department, for example the Team Around the Family meeting, the Early Help Form, Change and Challenge forms, Parenting Support Service, supervision and case summaries to name but a few. Along with an operational group and steering group for the SofS implementation we have formed a working group looking to re-organise our recording system to aid workers in their use of SofS.

A key element of Signs of Safety is positive engagement with families to ensure they fully understand the concerns expressed by professionals which can then help facilitate genuine change. As such it is a very visual model with the concerns, strengths and actions being displayed visually in Child Protection Conferences and other settings so that they can be developed and understood by everybody present. London Borough of Enfield has invested in three Microsoft Surface hubs to facilitate this visual element. Those attending conferences recently will have seen this kit in action.

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

It's clear a child who has connections to a number of people who care for them, is more likely to have a better life experience than an isolated child. One of the fundamental aspects of SofS is the involvement of people who are naturally connected to the family, to help keep children safe. As professionals, we can find it difficult to take a step back from offering our opinion on how this should be done. SofS encourages us to allow the family every opportunity to come up with their own ideas, their own plan. After all, they're the experts on their family. If we want to create longer term improvements, helping to find those friends and extended family networks, their 'village', has to be an important part of the work we do.



Cooking up a Safety Plan using the Signs of Safety model

Ingredients:

Child(ren) we have concerns about

Parents/carers & family

All professionals involved with the family

Respect & honour

Plain, simple language

Danger statements

Safety goals

A bottom line

Friends and family support - the 'safety network'

Patience and cooperation

Method:

1. Begin by gathering together the child(ren), their parents/carers and the professionals and add in a good healthy dollop of respect.
2. Take time to identify and honour the family for everything that is positive in their everyday care of the child(ren).
3. Calmly share the concerns using language the family will understand, making sure that you include everything that has actually been observed.
4. Start forming safety goals - don't be tempted to make them complicated, plain and simple works best.
5. And now define the bottom line, what the authorities need to see happening to show the child is being kept safe.
6. Fold in as much of the safety network as possible and allow them to suggest how those goals can be achieved. This will help to construct a much stronger and more achievable action plan suitable for their family.
7. As the plan develops, check that it covers all the concerns and clearly states who will do what, when and how. Once everyone has agreed, the family can put their plan into action.
8. Careful monitoring will be needed by the safety network and professionals. If things don't go to plan, regather the mixture and help the family & friends mould a new plan. Don't worry if this needs to happen, things can evolve in unexpected ways.
9. When there are no further concerns about the children's wellbeing demonstrated over time, together you've cooked up a successful plan.

What Needs to Happen?

1. Continue with the message and vision that the SofS model is one in which we can improve our delivery of service and thereby improve the outcomes for all children in Enfield.
2. The IT and recording processes need to be aligned to further support the use of the model in our recording
3. Develop further the understanding and application of SofS across the different social care teams and with our multi-agency partners (health, education, police, probation, the voluntary sector), through use of training, coaching and group supervision.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of SofS using family.
5. Continue with our training of new staff within and outside of social care to support their understanding and application of the model moving towards a whole system reorganisation.
6. Continue to challenge ourselves and our colleagues to embrace the core principles of the model looking to move from a position of paternalism (telling people what to do) to a position of partnership with children and families.
7. To become self-sufficient in our rolling out of the 2 day SofS training through the training of the practice lead team.

We want to hear from you. If you have any ideas, questions or comments or if you would like

to request a Signs of Safety briefing for your service or agency please email: local.safeguarding.children.board@enfield.gov.uk

We are also keen to hear and share your experiences of using Signs of Safety in your workplace.

For more information, resources and tools visit the [ESCB Signs of Safety webpage](#) and Signs of Safety's own website <http://www.signsofsafety.net/>
For details of the recent large scale evaluations of the model funded through the Department for Education visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/signs-of-safety-practice-in-childrens-services-an-evaluation>

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Thematic-Report-2017-Social-Work.pdf>

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