



Government of Western Australia
Department for Child Protection

2012 Signs of Safety
Evaluation Report
Department for Child Protection

Report Analysed and Prepared by:
Information, Research and Evaluation
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Background

Signs of Safety is a practice framework designed to create a shared focus and understanding among all stakeholders in child protection cases, both professional and family. Central to this is the use of specific practice tools and processes where professionals and family members can engage with each other in collaboration to address situations of child abuse and maltreatment.

The Department adopted Signs of Safety in 2008 as the basis of a consistent, evidence-based child protection practice across its services, with a five year project plan. It forms part of the Department for Child Protection's reform agenda, based on the *Review of the Department for Community Development* by Prudence Ford in 2007.

2012 marks the fourth year of implementation.

Staff awareness of the Signs of Safety framework was first measured by survey in 2010.

Purpose

The purpose of the 2012 survey was to gain information about usage of the Signs of Safety child protection practice framework following its implementation and to begin to test the extent of practitioner knowledge and depth of practice by child protection workers and related staff across the organisation.

Method

The survey (see Appendix 1) was developed by the Director Case Practice and the Senior Practice Development Officer working on the Signs of Safety project in consultation with the Director Information, Research and Evaluation. The Signs of Safety Steering Committee provided further input and endorsed the survey.

The survey consisted of 28 questions, 9 of which required open-ended responses. The survey was made available online via Survey Monkey and in hard copy form. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Staff were invited to participate in the survey via an article via the Departments' *News of the Day* on 16 April 2012. The survey ran for two weeks from Monday 16 April to Monday 30 April 2012. A further reminder was included in *News of the Day* during the last few days of the survey period. An email reminder was also sent to staff by the Director General on 25 April 2012. Participation was also encouraged by offering a prize.

The Pearson Chi Square statistical test was used to compare categorical variables and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare scale variables by categories. Statistical significance is reported at the 95% confidence level.

Results and Discussion

Results of the survey indicate knowledge about the Signs of Safety practice framework is solid and is being applied in case practice. The results continue to build a positive picture of the increased use of the Signs of Safety child protection practice framework across the Department. The findings should also be realised in the context of a growing workforce, with a range of staff who are new to the Department, as well as those who have been employed for four years or more.

Both use of the practice framework and the range of tools employed to work with families has increased since the last survey in 2010. There is evidence that a high percentage of staff believe that Signs of Safety has increased or continues to increase their job satisfaction. Child Protection workers are using a wider range of tools across their work with families and the role of facilitation has begun to broaden across the workforce. However, there is also a need to continue to support staff in developing greater confidence and competence in facilitating Signs of Safety meetings.

There is a strong sense among child protection workers that the framework enables greater openness and transparency with families and agency partners alike. It is a measure of increasing worker confidence in the benefits of this practice framework, that they see feedback from families as a critical measure of successful engagement with families.

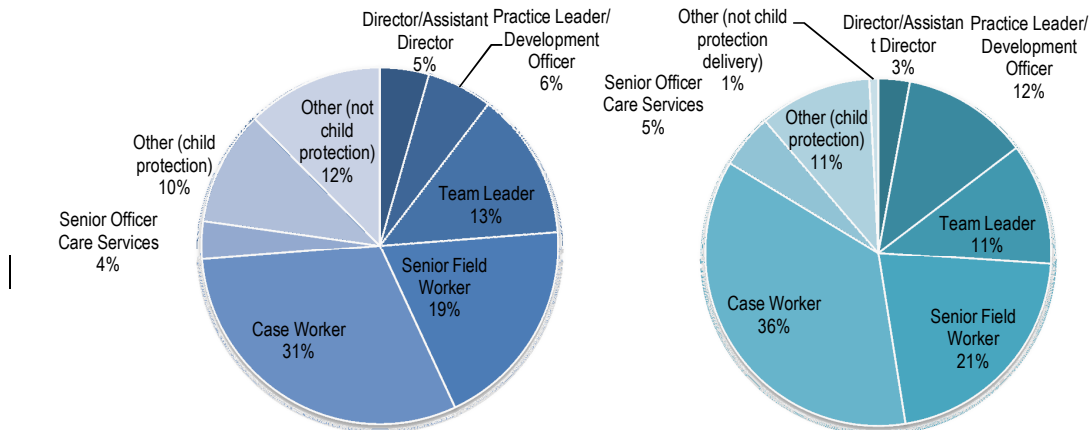
The survey results indicated a range of views about what 'Signs of Safety' meant to child protection workers. For the most part, respondents saw 'Signs of Safety' as a broad term and included those who used it to describe just one aspect of the model to those respondents who saw it as using the entire suite of tools. Therefore respondents' perceptions of what they think 'Signs of Safety' means and how they use the framework may have influenced how they responded to questions and may have confounded some results in the survey. As one respondent stated:

"We need to sharpen up our language: "doing a Signs of Safety" can mean anything involving 3 columns right through to a "pure" SoS assessment and planning forum."

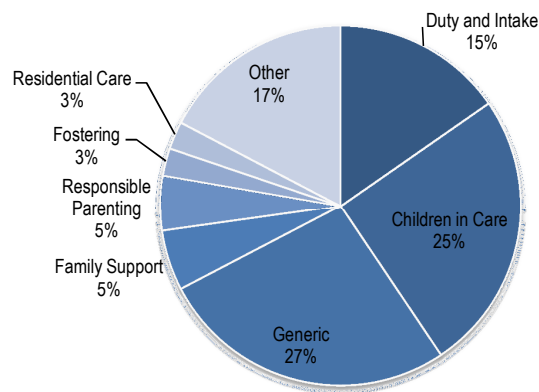
Respondent Demographics

A total of 202 responses to the survey were received. Responses were received from both individuals who work directly with cases and those in other roles such as district administration.

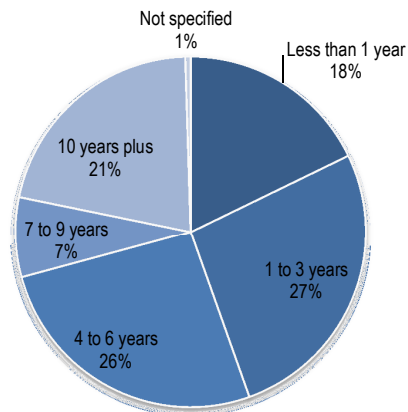
Respondents were distributed in similar roles as in the 2010 survey (see Figure 1). Sixty-three per cent of respondents were team leaders, senior field workers or case workers. This is comparable with the 2010 survey (65 per cent). A further 20 per cent of respondents worked in other service delivery roles. There were 25 respondents (12 per cent) who identified themselves as working in a non-child protection role such as administration, information technology or human resources. The survey delivery method (generic via *News of the Day* in 2012, versus targeted email only to child protection workers in 2010) was designed to test both the breadth and depth of knowledge across the organisation.

Figure 1: Respondent role – 2012 survey (left) versus 2010 survey (right)

The majority of respondents (67 per cent) worked in direct case management roles such as duty and intake, children in care or generic teams (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Respondent team

The majority of respondents worked in the metropolitan area however a greater proportion of respondents worked in country locations (44 per cent) compared with the previous survey (36 per cent). Length of service was relatively evenly distributed across the five categories. There was a greater proportion of staff whose tenure was four years or more (54 per cent) than in the 2010 survey (41 per cent).

Figure 3: Length of service

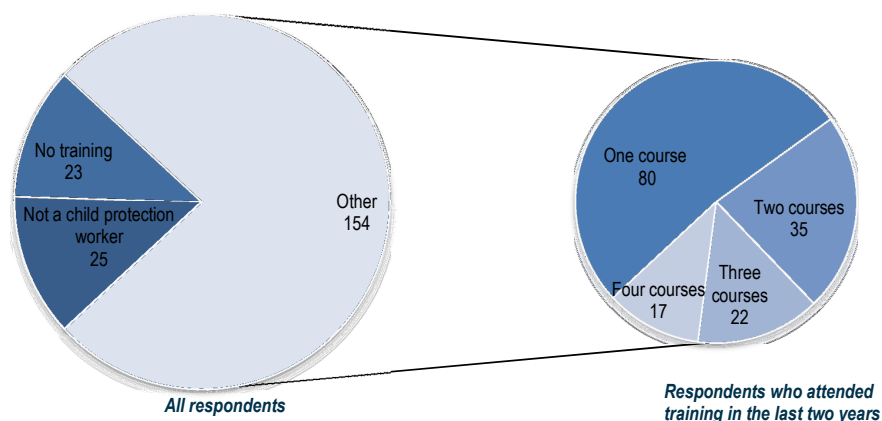
Training

Participants were asked what Signs of Safety training they had attended in the last two years.

Uptake of Signs of Safety training in the last two years appears to be strong. The majority of respondents had attended at least one type of training in the two years prior to the survey.

The results are shown in Figure 4 below. Twenty-five respondents were not working in a child protection role. Of the remaining 177 respondents, 13 per cent had not attended any training in the last two years, 87 per cent had attended at least one type of training, and 41 per cent had attended more than one type of training.

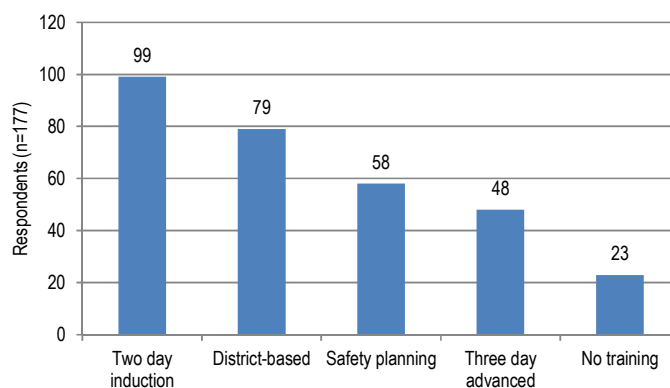
Figure 4: Number of Signs of Safety training types attended in the last two years



There was no significant difference in the number of training types attended by location; however there was a statistically significant difference¹ in the amount of training attended by length of service. As would be expected, respondents who had worked for the Department longer had attended more training types. There was also a relationship between the amount of training and the team where respondents worked². Respondents in duty and intake, family support, assessment and intervention and generic teams had accessed more types of training than other teams such as psychology services and children in care.

The most common type of training attended was the two day induction course (99 or 56 per cent of respondents), followed by district-based learning (79 or 45 per cent of respondents). Fifty-eight respondents (33 per cent) had attended safety planning training while 48 (27 per cent) had attended the three-day advanced course (which was not offered in 2010).

Figure 5: Training types attended in the last two years



¹ ANOVA p=0.000 at 95% confidence level.

² ANOVA p=0.000 at 95% confidence level.

Signs of Safety Usage

Twenty-five respondents were not working in a child protection role. Only responses from staff working in child protection roles (n=177) have been included in the analysis of results for the remainder of the report.

Participants were asked whether they had used Signs of Safety in last three months prior to the survey. Eighty-six per cent (152) had used the tool in the last three months. Signs of Safety was most commonly used for safety and planning, followed by care planning and child-centred family support.

Table 1: Aspects of work where Signs of Safety was used in the last three months

| Aspect of work | Number | Per cent |
|------------------------------|--------|----------|
| Safety and planning | 120 | 68 |
| Care planning | 51 | 29 |
| Child-centred family support | 47 | 27 |
| Case Reviews | 45 | 25 |
| Pre-birth meetings | 45 | 25 |
| Reunification | 44 | 25 |
| Supervision | 44 | 25 |
| Carer Assessments | 24 | 24 |
| Abuse in care | 22 | 22 |
| Carer reviews | 20 | 20 |
| Other | 19 | 19 |
| Quarterly reviews | 18 | 18 |
| Pre hearings conferences | 15 | 15 |

Seventeen per cent of respondents who had used Signs of Safety in the three months prior to the survey had used it in a single aspect of work. Eleven per cent had used it in two areas, 19 per cent in three areas, 13 per cent in four areas and 20 per cent in five or more. This varies considerably to the results from the last survey – more respondents are using three or more tools – as shown in Table 2 (the results of the previous survey are shown in brackets). However, one fifth of the respondents had not used the tool in the last three months, compared with eight per cent in the 2010 survey.

Table 2: Signs of Safety Tools used in the last three months

| Number of ways used | Number | Per cent |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------|
| One | 23 | 17 |
| Two | 27 | 11 |
| Three | 15 | 19 |
| Four | 12 | 13 |
| Five or more | 15 | 20 |
| Not used in the last three months | 8 | 20 |

The main tool used was mapping cases within a team, followed by safety planning, mapping cases with family, the assessment and planning form, developing safety goals and harm and danger statements.

Table 3: Areas of work where Signs of Safety Tools were used in the last three months

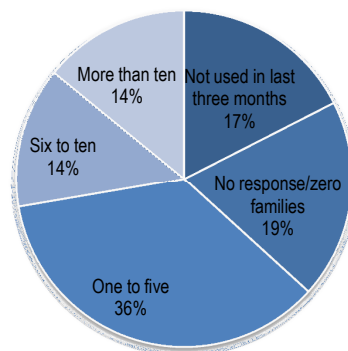
| Tools used | Number | Per cent |
|---|--------|----------|
| Mapped a case with your team | 104 | 59 |
| Developed a safety plan | 102 | 58 |
| Mapped a case with a family | 81 | 46 |
| Used the Signs of Safety assessment and planning form | 77 | 44 |
| Developed safety goals with a family | 73 | 41 |
| Developed harm and danger statements within your team | 72 | 41 |
| Developed harm and danger statements with a family | 54 | 31 |
| Used the Three Houses or equivalent with a child | 53 | 30 |
| Facilitated a pre-birth hearing | 19 | 11 |
| Participated in a pre-birth conference | 16 | 9 |
| Developed a words and pictures document | 14 | 8 |
| Facilitated a pre-birth conference | 7 | 4 |
| Participated in a pre-birth hearing | 2 | 1 |
| Training | 2 | 1 |
| Three columns | 2 | 1 |
| Staff meeting | 1 | 1 |

Table 4 shows the number of tools used by respondents. The most frequent number of tools used by respondents was five or more, which is an increase on the previous survey (figures in brackets in Table 4) where mainly three tools were used. However, it is important to note that the 2012 survey asked about a larger range of tools than in 2010 (pre-birth and pre-hearing meetings, safety goals, and harm and danger statements).

Table 4: Number of Signs of Safety Tools used in the last three months

| Tools used | Number | Per cent |
|--|--------|----------|
| One | 16 | 7 |
| Two | 22 | 15 |
| Three | 24 | 8 |
| Four | 15 | 7 |
| Five or more | 13 | 42 |
| No tools used in the last three months | 10 | 21 |

Respondents using Signs of Safety in the three months prior to the survey were also asked with how many families they had used it. One fifth had not used it with any families in the last three months. Thirty-six per cent had used it with up to five families, while 28 per cent had used it with six or more families. There was no statistical relationship between the number of families with whom it was used and the respondents' roles, teams or length of service.

Figure 6: Number of families with whom Signs of Safety had been used in the last three months

Although 65 per cent of respondents working in child protection roles had used Signs of Safety with at least one family in the three months prior to the survey, almost half of these had used Signs of Safety with five or fewer families. Given that, on average, child protection workers are expected to have a caseload of between 10 and 15 cases, this result could be considered lower than expected. However, it is also possible this question does not reflect the total number of instances of Signs of Safety usage in the last three months, as a number of different aspects of Signs of Safety, or a number of Signs of Safety meetings, may have been conducted with the same family during this period. Furthermore, staff may be using Signs of Safety tools for planning aspects of their work without families always being present.

Signs of Safety Knowledge and Skills

Respondents were asked to rate their level of knowledge and skill in various areas of signs of safety practice.

Table 5: Level of practitioner knowledge and skill in Signs of Safety practice

| Area of practice | Limited (1-2) | Adequate (3) | High (4-5) | Don't know | Not applicable/ no response |
|---|------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of respondents (n=177)</i> | | | | | |
| Using the questioning approach to obtain relevant information | 9 | 38 | 42 | 1 | 11 |
| Face-to-face work with children | 10 | 34 | 44 | 2 | 10 |
| Preparation for mapping meetings | 15 | 33 | 38 | 1 | 13 |
| Participation in mappings with families/agencies | 14 | 28 | 44 | 1 | 13 |
| Using authority skilfully to respectfully challenge information in meetings | 14 | 31 | 41 | 1 | 13 |
| Constructing harm and danger statements | 22 | 37 | 30 | 1 | 11 |
| Using scaling questions | 20 | 37 | 32 | 1 | 11 |
| Developing family goals and next steps | 13 | 36 | 37 | 2 | 13 |
| Speaking clearly about the department's bottom line | 13 | 27 | 46 | 1 | 13 |
| Writing/recording information in mappings | 11 | 33 | 40 | 1 | 13 |
| Analysing information from mapping meetings | 10 | 34 | 40 | 1 | 14 |
| Facilitating the establishment of safety networks | 12 | 38 | 35 | 1 | 12 |
| Debriefing after mapping meetings | 19 | 39 | 28 | 1 | 15 |
| Planning how the outcome of the safety mapping meeting will shape future work with the family | 17 | 32 | 35 | 1 | 15 |

Key: 1=very limited; 2=limited; 3=adequate; 4=high; 5=extensive

Staff indicated in most areas that their knowledge and skills were adequate or better. However, about one fifth of respondents stated that their knowledge and skills were limited in the areas of constructing harm and danger statements (22 per cent), using scaling questions (20 per cent), debriefing after mapping meetings (19 per cent) and planning how the outcome of the safety mapping meeting will shape future work (17 per cent). There was a statistically significant difference³ in responses based on length of service in the areas of debriefing and planning outcomes. There was also a statistically significant difference⁴ based on the number of training types attended, with respondents who had attended just one type of training having less knowledge in all four areas.

The highest skill-level reported was using the questioning approach where 80 per cent of respondents rated their skill as adequate or better, followed by face-to-face work with children.

³ Pearson Chi Square $p=0.043$ and 0.012 at a 95% confidence level.

⁴ ANOVA $p=0.000$ at 95% confidence level.

Signs of Safety Facilitation

Respondents were asked whether they facilitated Signs of Safety mapping in their current role.

Sixty-five respondents, or 37 per cent of those working in child protection roles, who indicated they currently facilitate mappings, were subsequently asked about their skill level when facilitating (Table 6) or participating (Table 7) in Signs of Safety mapping.

Table 6: Level of facilitator skill when facilitating a Signs of Safety Mapping

| Skill area | Not well developed (1-2) | Adequate (3) | Well developed (4-5) | Don't know | Not applicable/ no response |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Percentage of respondents (n=65) | | | | | |
| With Department staff only | 11 | 32 | 47 | 0 | 0 |
| With parents | 10 | 34 | 47 | 0 | 0 |
| With the family's safety network | 11 | 38 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| With other agencies | 16 | 32 | 50 | 0 | 2 |

Key: 1=not very well developed; 2=not well developed; 3=adequate; 4=well developed; 5=very well developed

Table 7: Level of facilitator skill when participating in a Signs of Safety Mapping

| Skill area | Not well developed (1-2) | Adequate (3) | Well developed (4-5) | Don't know | Not applicable/ no response |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Percentage of respondents (n=65) | | | | | |
| With Department staff only | 2 | 18 | 80 | 0 | 0 |
| With parents | 3 | 22 | 75 | 0 | 0 |
| With the family's safety network | 2 | 25 | 74 | 0 | 0 |
| With other agencies | 2 | 28 | 70 | 0 | 0 |

Key: 1=not very well developed; 2=not well developed; 3=adequate; 4=well developed; 5=very well developed

The majority of facilitators indicated an adequate or higher level of skill in all four areas when facilitating a mapping. Slightly more facilitators (16 per cent) indicated their skill when working with other agencies was less than adequate compared with other skill areas (10 to 11 per cent).

One third of respondents were facilitating Signs of Safety mappings. These facilitators stated they felt less skilled when they were facilitating meetings than when they were participants only, particularly when other agencies were involved. This finding indicates that building confidence and competence in facilitation should form part of future training and development opportunities for child protection staff.

Signs of Safety Confidence

Respondents were asked to rate their confidence level using various Signs of Safety tools.

Table 8: Confidence level using Signs of Safety tools

| Skill area | Not confident (1-2) | Adequate (3) | Confident (4-5) | Don't know | Not applicable/ no response |
|--|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Percentage of respondents (n=177) | | | | | |
| Using the Three Houses | 13 | 24 | 49 | 1 | 14 |
| Developing a Words and Pictures document | 37 | 24 | 22 | 2 | 14 |
| Undertaking safety planning | 9 | 20 | 58 | 1 | 12 |
| Conducting an appreciative inquiry | 34 | 21 | 31 | 2 | 12 |

Key: 1=not very confident; 2=not confident; 3=adequate; 4=somewhat confident; 5=very confident

The majority of respondents rated their confidence level using the Three Houses and undertaking safety planning as adequate or better (73 cent and 78 per cent respectively). One third of respondents were less confident in developing a Words and Pictures document and conducting an appreciative inquiry. Responses did not differ based on region, number of families or number of training types. Of note is that more than ten per cent of respondents did not select a confidence level at all.

Respondents were asked to rate their skill level in a range of Signs of Safety disciplines.

Table 9: Skill level using Signs of Safety disciplines

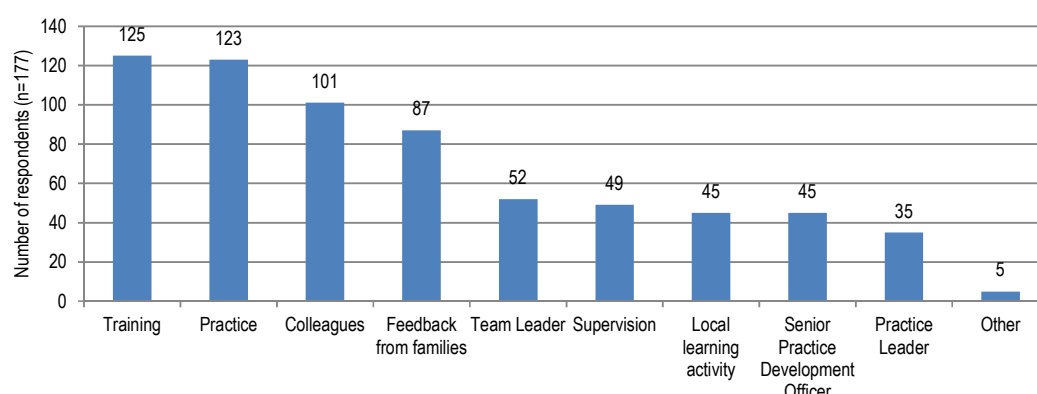
| Skill area | Not well developed (1-2) | Adequate (3) | Well developed (4-5) | Don't know | Not applicable/ no response |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of respondents (n=177)</i> | | | | | |
| Understanding the distinction between past harm, future danger, complicating factors | 8 | 27 | 53 | 1 | 12 |
| Recognising assessment is always a work in progress | 4 | 18 | 68 | 1 | 11 |
| Being prepared to identify and name past harm and current danger statements | 6 | 25 | 56 | 1 | 12 |
| Understanding the distinction between strengths and protection when safety planning with a family | 7 | 24 | 55 | 1 | 13 |
| Making statements that are in straight-forward and non-professional language that can be understood by families | 5 | 22 | 62 | 1 | 11 |
| Making statements that focus on specific, observable behaviours | 7 | 24 | 59 | 1 | 11 |
| Using your authority skilfully | 7 | 23 | 57 | 1 | 13 |

Key: 1=not very well developed; 2=not well developed; 3=adequate; 4=well developed; 5=very well developed

The majority of respondents indicated their skill level was adequate or higher in all of the disciplines questioned. Of note is that more than ten per cent of respondents did not select a skill level at all.

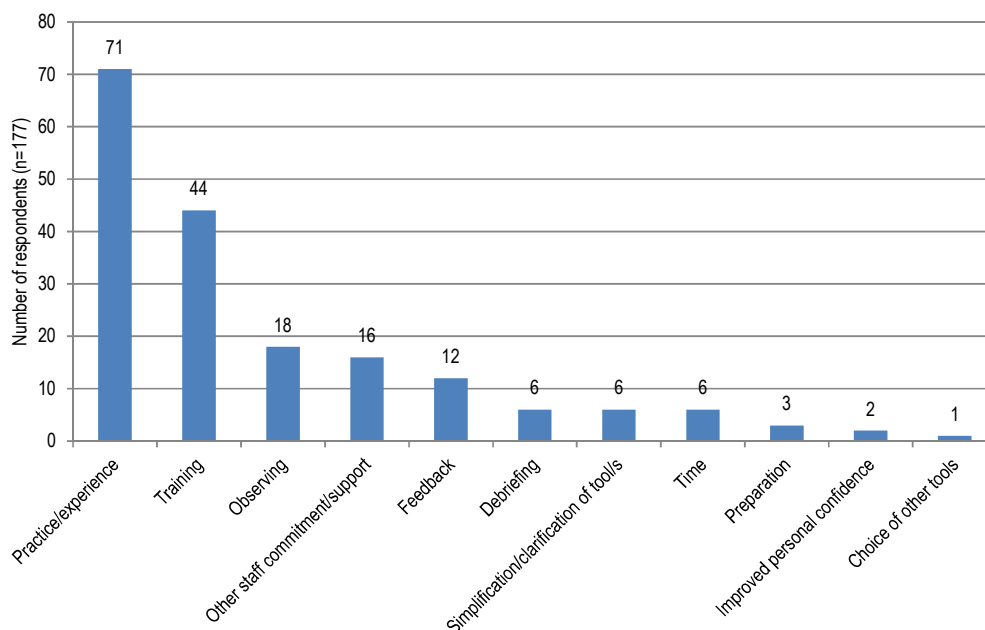
Respondents were asked what currently helped them feel more confident using Signs of Safety. More than one option could be selected for this question. Training, practice and feedback from colleagues and families were most frequently nominated as factors which increased confidence using Signs of Safety.

Figure 7: Factors that increase confidence using Signs of Safety



Given that staff displayed varying degrees of confidence, respondents were asked what would help them to feel even more confident using Signs of Safety. Eleven main themes emerged and these, together with the percentage of respondents who made mention of each theme, are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Factors that would help staff feel more confident using Signs of Safety



A significant number of respondents stated that additional training (125 respondents), practice (123 respondents), feedback from families (87 respondents) and guidance from other workers (101 respondents) would increase their confidence levels. These themes were also borne out by open responses, along with minor themes such as being able to observe other more experienced staff using the tool and support and encouragement from other staff. Feedback from other colleagues and families, together with access to debriefing after meetings with colleagues or supervisors also featured:

“More Signs of Safety practice leader group workshops and practice discussions; and more external consultations with people like Andrew Turnell and other practice leaders outside the district; have a separate senior practice development officer for district to help us grow our practice depth.”

“Being able to observe other facilitators conducting all areas of Signs of Safety to learn individual ways, whether better or worse, to enable consolidation of learning.”

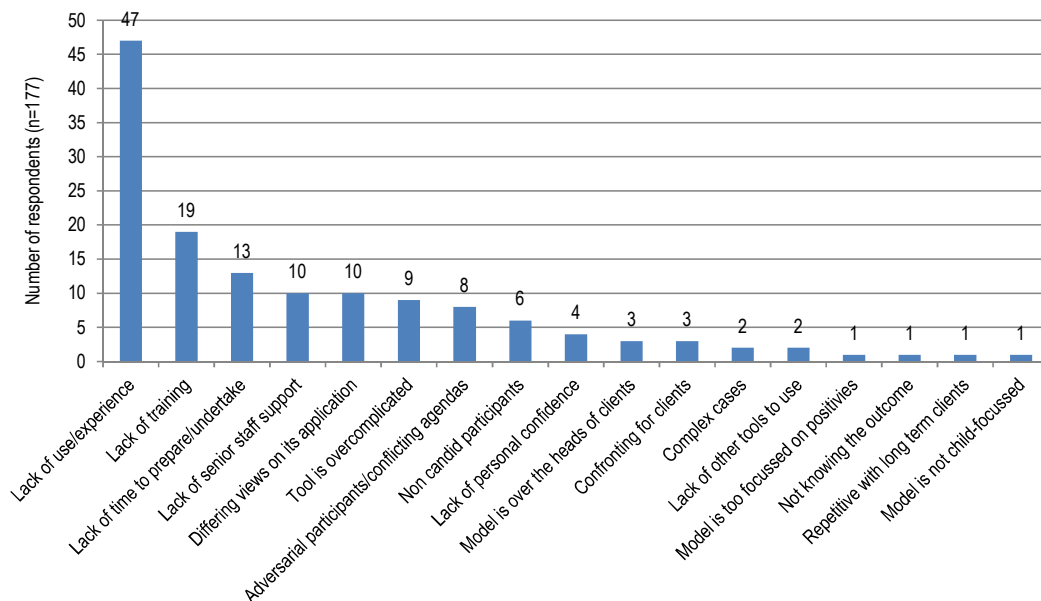
“Having practice experts step us through the best practice from start to finish with an actual case; building learning examples that are real to us...not international examples.”

“Feedback from colleagues most important, feedback from families and services.”

A few respondents thought the Signs of Safety could be simplified or customised depending on where it was being used.

Impact on practitioner confidence

Respondents were asked what made them feel less confident using Signs of Safety. A breakdown of themes arising from responses is shown in Figure 9. Training and practice/experience again emerged as significant themes.

Figure 9: Things that make you feel less confident using Signs of Safety

A lack of guidance from other colleagues, lack of time to prepare for and undertake Signs of Safety meetings and differing views on its application were also identified as factors reducing confidence.

“When time is so restricted that I am not able to prepare for mapping or work with families.”

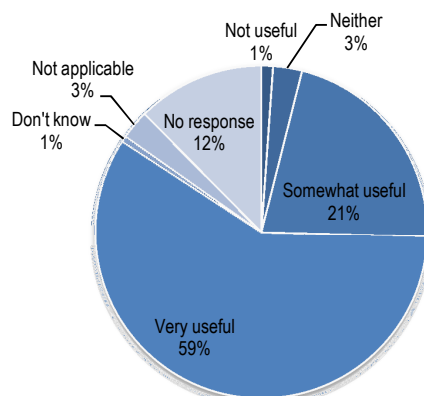
“I have found it confusing at times when colleagues have different perspectives on when and how to use Signs of Safety processes.”

“Difference in perceived understandings of the use of the Signs of Safety and what methods are used and in what manner they are used.”

Signs of Safety Usefulness

Respondents were asked how useful the Signs of Safety framework was overall in their assessment and decision-making regarding the safety and wellbeing of children.

The majority (80 per cent) indicated the framework was useful or very useful.

Figure 10: Usefulness of the Signs of Safety framework

Respondents were asked to expand on their answer to the usefulness question. Themes arising from these comments are shown below in Table 10. Only respondents who stated the framework was useful chose to elaborate on their answer.

Table 10: Usefulness of the Signs of Safety framework - comments

| Usefulness comments | Number of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|
| Positive Comments | |
| Positive for families/inclusive | 9 |
| Makes parties accountable | 4 |
| Useful generally | 18 |
| Transparent/clear decision making | 16 |
| Helps to articulate information to make decision/action plan | 18 |
| Strengths-based | 2 |
| Common/simple language | 2 |
| Children get a say | 1 |
| Collaboration with colleagues | 1 |
| Negative Comments | |
| Only as good as facilitator | 1 |
| Too strengths focussed | 2 |
| Other tools/analytical skills/experience also needed | 7 |
| Need more practice/training | 11 |
| Takes too long | 1 |
| Personal comments and feelings without evidence, once documented become fact | 1 |
| Differing views on application | 1 |
| Needs to be customised for use with children in care | 1 |

The framework supported workers in articulating information. Respondents thought it facilitated the decision-making process, and made it more transparent to families.

"I find the framework extremely useful in giving me a clearer picture of the family functioning and the safety available for a child within the family environment."

"It's a clear way for parents to know exactly what our/their worries are (even if the family does not fully agree with the worries) therefore there is a flow to the decisions and they can see that process working."

However, some did note that Signs of Safety did not replace other tools and analytical skills and other knowledge or experience was also needed. Some respondents stated the importance of other core bodies of knowledge. These included child development, parental risk factors in child protection and working with high risk families where domestic violence was present as important additional elements to be used alongside Signs of Safety in developing safety plans.

"Signs of Safety is one useful tool in a range of tools and experience we use to come to these decisions."

"The framework is helpful to set the scene to engage people' workers' capacity to analyse the information and develop the relationship with family is the complexity of the work."

What is working well for practitioners?

Respondents were asked to describe what works well for them in their application of Signs of Safety.

Five main themes emerged from these comments:

- the tool provides clarity and transparency - it provides a structured method of exploring and documenting a case and arriving at decisions which can be understood by all parties involved (51 respondents)
- it promotes family involvement and engagement (24 respondents)
- it enables collaboration with colleagues and other agencies (17 respondents)
- they like the questioning approach and language (12 respondents)
- it is understood by clients (11 respondents).

Other comments related to specific components of the tool which were working well, such as the three houses, mapping and safety planning.

"Information is sorted and easy to understand. It gives me a way to organise the information that I receive. It gives the families/reporters an opportunity to understand what it is exactly that they or others are worried about without getting caught up in other issues such as conflict. It gives the family a chance to hear what the Department is worried about. As a worker, I am able to be open and transparent with the family about my concerns."

"Engages families and gives them a voice."

What were practitioners worried about?

Respondents were also asked to describe what they were worried about in their application of Signs of Safety. The main concern was a lack of training and experience (25 respondents).

Other minor themes emerged:

- respondents wanted other risk assessment tools to be acknowledged, staff should not be limited to one Signs of Safety requires other skills such as good analysis and depth of knowledge (10 respondents)
- Signs of Safety could be seen as just a tick box or a token consultation (9 respondents)
- successful application required high quality facilitation (9 respondents)
- concern was expressed in some cases as to whether the parents or safety network can really be trusted (7 respondents).

There was recognition that the tools alone were not sufficient:

"That a good mapping requires good analysis – the three columns do not speak for themselves, they are the starting point for a thorough and rigorous analysis, you have to try to make sense of them, to hypothesise and draw conclusions from what they are pointing to. They don't analyse for you."

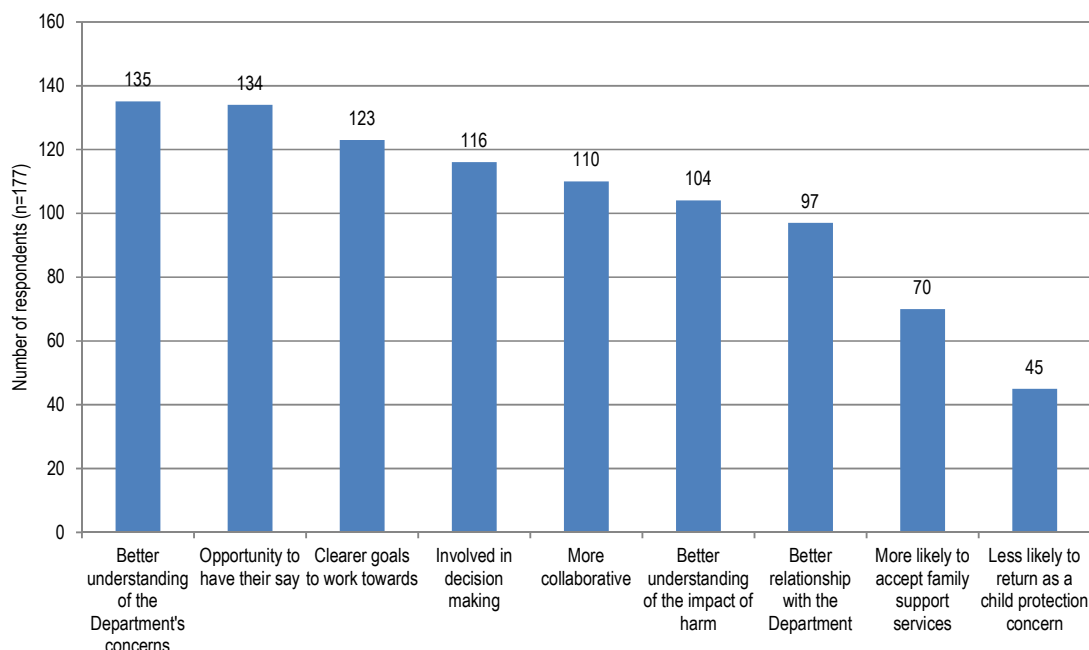
Concern was also expressed by some respondents that the Signs of Safety approach and the corresponding tools should not be thought of as an end in themselves. One worker summed up the anxiety expressed by this group:

"That all other risk assessment models are not valued and overlooked. That workers' understandings of using the tool extends only to the extent of their individual experiences and knowledge of what constitutes harm, what other factors are relevant despite often not being the presenting issues, how to develop an analysis and rationale for decisions and judgements and other assessments."

Signs of Safety Outcomes for Clients

Respondents were asked to indicate what outcomes Signs of Safety had achieved for their clients. Respondents could choose more than one category.

Figure 11: Outcomes for clients



Understanding, clarity and collaboration were the outcomes most identified by respondents for clients. The least common outcomes were increased likelihood of accepting family support services and less likelihood of returning as a child protection concern. This is important to note as it suggests that Signs of Safety may be a better way of working with families in that it is collaborative and transparent, but the Signs of Safety process itself may not actually increase the ability of families to effect change both in terms of their likelihood to seek additional help and their parenting behaviour.

Respondents were asked what they thought families would say about their participation in Signs of Safety. Three main themes were identified from responses:

- families get to have their say/are heard (52 respondents)
- families understand the Department's concerns better (31 respondents)
- it is collaborative and they are involved in decision-making (26 respondents).

"Now I understand what the Department is worried about and I am really pleased to be heard and to be able to have my say."

A small number of respondents noted that it could be confronting or intimidating for clients, meetings are sometimes long and the process can be experienced as repetitive.

What do you think other agencies would say about Signs of Safety?

Respondents were also asked what they thought agencies would say about their participation in Signs of Safety:

- generally positive (34 respondents)
- collaborative (28 respondents)
- helps agencies to better understand Department's concerns (12 respondents)
- puts everyone on the same page (9 respondents).

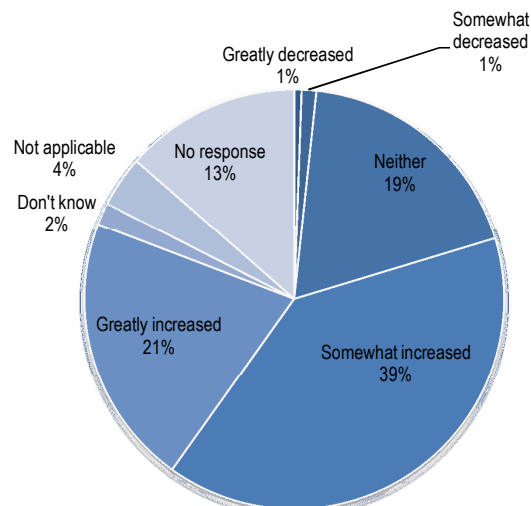
"Hopefully that it makes sense and demystifies the department's decisions, improves transparency and builds working relationships between agencies because we are all on the same page."

It was also suggested that Signs of Safety meetings gave them an opportunity to advocate for their client.

Signs of Safety and job satisfaction

As in the 2010 survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether Signs of Safety had impacted on their job satisfaction.

Figure 12: Job satisfaction



Sixty per cent of respondents indicated their job satisfaction had increased due to working with the Signs of Safety approach - this compares to 64% in the 2010 survey sample. Nineteen per cent were neutral, compared with 25% in 2010, and two per cent said their job satisfaction had declined. Almost one fifth made no selection.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their response to the question about job satisfaction.

Respondents who indicated their job satisfaction had increased made comments including:

- it has improved the Department's relationship with families/families' perceptions of the Department (15 respondents)
- it is a good tool/model (seven respondents)
- it is more inclusive of children (six respondents)
- it provides transparency (five respondents).

"The job is about keeping children protected and safe and also about supporting families to keep their children safe. We are finally working together on this and being able to develop

positive relationships. This has come about through the Signs of Safety framework which demands honesty and commitment from all in looking at a solution that will work. The children benefit from this."

Respondents who indicated their job satisfaction had not been impacted, or had decreased, made comments such as

- my job satisfaction is not connected to Signs of Safety (*four respondents*)
- it is just another tool (*two respondents*)
- I am not using it much (*two respondents*).

"Assessment tools can be quite similar and whilst slight differences may assist in assessing it does not necessarily adjust job satisfaction."

"Use the right tool when you need it so that it's effective. Signs of Safety is a great tool. However obligation to use it to finish an interaction delegates that tool to another form that needs to be completed."

Other Comments

Respondents were invited to make any further comments about Signs of Safety in general. Nineteen respondents made generally positive comments about the tool; six respondents said it was not being widely/routinely used and six said it took too long to use the tool comprehensively with families.

While comments were positive overall, some respondents suggested areas where they would like to see improvements:

"I do not yet believe that it is widely understood and that other staff are not always involved."

"Signs of Safety is a good process when workers do not cut corners to hasten the process. The process must retain its integrity if it is to be of value."

"Signs of Safety is not routinely completed for cases referred to intake and assessment. Generally a SWA is considered the required work and so no additional mapping or family support options are pursued due to work load considerations. In my experience families involved in intake and assessment are rarely invited to participate in meetings due to time constraints. While highly complex cases or long term involvement may result in a Signs of Safety meeting, it is not true to state that Signs of Safety is being implemented routinely."

"The process needs to be completed quickly within an hour. To do justice to the process it requires more than an hour or more than one meeting. Without having the background knowledge and experience working with previous frameworks and being able to apply this, Signs of Safety tends to limit new staff's ability to really understand the dimensions of risk to children."

"Overall it has been a positive improvement in the way we approach our work. However, it is not a magic bullet or universal panacea to every problem a child protection worker may encounter and we need to recognise and acknowledge that if we want to prevent cynicism and "SoS fatigue" from creeping in."

"The Signs of Safety approach seems to work very well. It has many strong points, but I find that not everyone in the Department uses it the same."

"I think Signs of Safety is great compared to the old style of safety planning. It is less punitive...the emphasis should be on quality and sufficient time spent to gain the most benefit from this style of work, not a quick meeting, hastily devised Safety Plan and then case closure."

Response to Survey Findings

Not surprisingly, child protection workers saw a clear link between access to support, feedback from colleagues and families and targeted training and improving their practice depth. This section identifies areas where the Department may want to consider ways in which it can support new and established child protection workers in continuing to improve their practice depth.

Increasing practice depth for specific professional groups.

Whilst take up of training was generally good across the organisation, survey results indicate that targeted training for children in care teams and psychology services would increase practice depth for those working with children in the CEO's care. There is the potential added benefit of strengthening assessment in the area of reunification.

There is evidence that Signs of Safety is being used in carer assessments and carer reviews, but this is an area which could merit further attention. Benefits would include improvements in the safety provided to children in relative care and the early identification of support needed by those carers.

Child protection work with families

Child protection workers identified areas where they wish to see increased focus in training. Workers made a clear link between improved confidence in these areas and benefits for the families they were working with:

- constructing Harm and Danger Statements;
- using scaling questions;
- debriefing after mapping meetings; and
- planning how the outcome of a mapping meeting will shape future work with the family.

Facilitation, working with families and other agencies

37% of respondents working in child protection roles stated that they currently facilitate mappings. The focus of the current Signs of Safety Review and Implementation Plan makes clear that:

"All child protection practitioners (will) undertake case mappings, with families and their networks, in line with their capacity to do so reflecting their skills and experience."

The survey results indicated:

- the number of staff facilitating meetings is growing, but not at the rate expected;
- they identified a need for ongoing support and access to training and peer review;
- the majority of those who have been facilitating mappings for some time indicated an adequate or higher level of skills in all four areas (facilitating with departmental staff only, with parents, with the family's network and with other agencies); and
- 16% of facilitators identified that their skills when working with other agencies present at mappings were less than adequate when compared with the other three skill areas set out above.

The findings of this survey indicate that building confidence and competence in facilitation should form a major part of future training and development opportunities for child protection staff

Appendix: Survey



2012 Signs of Safety Evaluation Questionnaire Department for Child Protection

We are seeking your feedback on Signs of Safety, the Department's child protection practice framework. The purpose of this survey is to:

- determine what is working well in the application of Signs of Safety;
- identify concerns when using the framework;
- work out what needs to happen to ensure Departmental staff are confident using the framework;
- assess risk; and
- promote the safety and wellbeing of children.

To be included in the draw to win a Dymocks book voucher, you can choose to include your name at the end of the survey. However, please be assured that your individual responses will remain confidential.

The survey is to be completed before 27th of April and forwarded to Information, Research and Evaluation

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

1 What is your current role? (you may select more than one option)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Officer Care Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant District Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Court appointed Pre-Hearing Conference Convenor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitator of Pre-Hearing Birth Meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Practice Leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Field Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Practice Development Officer | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Practice Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caseworker | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify below) |

2 What is your current team? (please select only one option)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duty and Intake (front end) | <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children in Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Adoptions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Generic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Centred Family Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify below) |

3 Where do you work for the majority of the time? (please select only one option)

- ☐ Metropolitan
☐ Country
☐ Remote

4 How long have you worked at the Department for Children Protection? (please select only one option)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 to 9 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 years or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 to 6 years | |

5 What Signs of Safety training have you attended in the last two years? (you may select more than one option)

- ☐ 2 day induction course
☐ 3 day advanced course (Practice Leadership training)
☐ Safety planning
☐ District based learning
☐ Have not done any training at all

6 Have in the last 3 months used the tools of Signs of Safety?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (go to question 22)

7 In the last 3 months, in which aspects of your work have you used the tools of Signs of Safety?

(you may select more than one option)

- ☐ Safety and Planning
☐ Child Centred Family Support
☐ Abuse in Care
☐ Repatriation
☐ Care Planning
☐ Quarterly Reviews
☐ Case Reviews
☐ Carer Reviews
☐ Carer Assessments
☐ Supervision
☐ Pre-birth Conferences
☐ Pre-birth Hearings
☐ Other (please specify below)

8 In the last 3 months which of the following Signs of Safety Tools have you used?

(you may select more than one option)

- ☐ Mapped a case within your team
☐ Mapped a case with a family
☐ Used the Signs of Safety assessment and planning form
☐ Developed home and danger statements with your team
☐ Developed home and danger statements with a family
☐ Developed safety goals with a family
☐ Used the Three Houses or equivalent with a child
☐ Developed a words and picture document
☐ Developed a safety plan
☐ Facilitated a pre-birth hearing
☐ Participated in a pre-birth meeting
☐ Facilitated a pre-hearing conference
☐ Participated in a pre-hearing conference
☐ Other (please specify below)

9 In the last 3 months, how many families have you used Signs of Safety with?

(Please provide a number in the space provided below)

10 Please rate your knowledge and skills level against the following areas of practice:

| | Very Limited | Limited | Adequate | High | Extensive | Don't Know | Not Applicable |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a Using the questioning approach to obtain relevant information | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b Face-to-face work with children | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c Preparation for mapping meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d Participating in mappings with families/agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

e Using authority skilfully to respectfully challenge information in meetings

f Constructing harm and danger statements

g Using scaling questions

h Developing family goals and next steps

i Specifying clearly about the department's 'bottom line'

j Writing/recording information in mappings

k Analysing information from mapping meetings

l Facilitating the establishment of safety networks

m Debriefing after mapping meetings

n Planning how the outcome of the safety mapping meeting will shape future work with the family

11 Do you facilitate Signs of Safety mapping in your current role?

☐ Yes

☐ No (go to question 14)

12 Please rate what you consider your skill level is when facilitating a Signs of Safety mapping within the following areas:

Not very well developed Not well developed Adequate Well developed Very well developed Don't know Not applicable

a With DCP staff only

b With parents

c With the family's safety network

d With other agencies

13 Please rate what you consider your skill level is when participating in Signs of Safety mapping within the following areas: (ie. talking about assessing what you are worried about, what's working well, what needs to happen.)

Not very well developed Not well developed Adequate Well developed Very well developed Don't know Not applicable

a With DCP staff only

b With parents

c With the family's safety network

d With other agencies

14 Please rate your confidence levels using the following Signs of Safety tools:

| | Not very confident | Not confident | Adequate | Somewhat confident | Very confident | Don't know | Not applicable |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a Using the Three Houses (or equivalent) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b Developing a Words and Pictures document | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c Undertaking Safety planning | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d Conducting an appreciative inquiry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15 Please rate what you consider your skill level is in working with the Signs of Safety disciplines.

| | Not very well developed | Not well developed | Adequate | Well developed | Very well developed | Don't know | Not applicable |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a Understanding the distinction between past harm, future danger and complicating factors | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b Recognising assessment is always a work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c Being prepared to identify and name past harm and current danger statements | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d Understanding the distinction between strengths and protection when safety planning with a family | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e Making statements that are in straight-forward and not professional language that can be understood by families | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f Making statements that focus on specific, observable behaviours | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g Using your authority skilfully | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16 What helps you feel confident using Signs of Safety? (you may select more than one option)

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice Leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colleagues | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Practice Development Officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from families | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local learning activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify below) |

17 What would help you to feel more confident?

18 What makes you feel less confident?

19 Please rate how useful the Signs of Safety framework is overall in your assessment and decision-making regarding the safety and wellbeing of children.

| | Not very useful | Not useful | Neither | Somewhat useful | Very useful | Don't know | Not applicable |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Usefulness of the Signs of Safety Framework | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

20 Please provide additional comments in support of your answer from question 20.

21 What works well for you in your application of Signs of Safety?

22 What are you most worried about in your application of Signs of Safety?

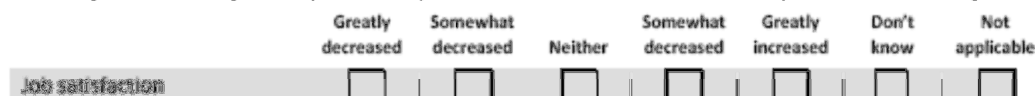
23 What outcomes do you think Signs of Safety has had for clients? (you may select more than one option)

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Better relationship with the Department |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Better understanding of the impact of harm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Better understanding of the Department's concerns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Opportunity to have their say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | More collaborative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Involved in decision making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Clearer goals to work towards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | More likely to accept family support services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Less likely to return as a child protection concern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify below) |

24 What do you think families would say about their participation in Signs of Safety?

25 What do you think other professionals and partner agencies would say about their participation in Signs of Safety?

26 Thinking about working with Signs of Safety overall, has this approach led to your job satisfaction being:



27 Please provide additional comments in support of your answer from question 26.

28 Please provide any further comments or observations on using Signs of Safety.

If you wish to be included in the draw for the Dymocks book voucher, please provide your name and telephone number below: *(please note: your name and telephone details will not be included in your identifying details and will be removed from the survey form)*

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Thank you for completing the survey.

Your information and time is greatly appreciated.

Your information and details will be kept strictly confidential.