

# *Signs of Safety*<sup>®</sup>

## An Overview for Alberta



### What is *Signs of Safety*?

*Signs of Safety* is an approach to Child Intervention that:

- was developed by Child Intervention staff to enhance child safety,
- uses professional social work concepts such as strengths-based and solution-focused methods and integrates them with the family's expertise and cultural knowledge,
- encourages a balanced and rigorous exploration of danger or harm as well as indicators of safety, and
- focuses on risk assessment and safety planning.

### Where is *Signs of Safety* being used?

- Over the past 21 years, *Signs of Safety* has been implemented in over 200 jurisdictions in 13 countries (including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Netherlands, Denmark, England, United States, and Canada).
- Jurisdictions that have implemented *Signs of Safety* have seen a reduction in the number of children coming into care and lower rates of children coming back into care after being returned home or the family requiring services again.
- Alberta is implementing *Signs of Safety* throughout the province. Training and coaching are being provided to front line staff in collaboration with the creators of the *Signs of Safety* approach. Different areas of the province are at different stages of implementation.

### Three core principles of the *Signs of Safety* approach:

1. Establishing constructive working relationships and partnerships between professionals and family members, and among professionals.
2. Engaging in critical thinking and maintaining a position of inquiry to ensure you are open to options and solutions that are best suited to the specific need of the child and family.
3. Staying grounded in the everyday work of child protection workers.

## Four Domains for Inquiry:

1. What are we worried about? (to identify past harm, future danger, and complicating factors)
2. What is working well? (to understand existing strength and safety)
3. What needs to happen? (to ensure future safety)
4. Where are we on a scale of zero to 10? (to understand scope, where 10 means there is enough safety to close the case and zero means it is certain the child will be abused)

## Collaborative safety planning in *Signs of Safety*

- Creates a proactive, structured and monitored process that provides a genuine opportunity for parents to demonstrate they can care for their children in a way that alleviates concerns about the child's safety and well-being.
- Develops a safety plan with a specific set of rules and arrangements that describe how the family will go about everyday life and show that the children will be safe.
- Ensures safety plans are most effective by creating them collaboratively, including all of the people who have an important role in the child's life. This includes family, friends, neighbours, and professionals who are involved in the family.
- Ensures the use of simple language throughout the *Signs of Safety* approach to provide everyone with a clear understanding of the concerns and safety needs.

## Techniques used in *Signs of Safety*

- **Mapping** – refers to the critical thinking process for building a joint understanding of the situation causing harm and what needs to happen to build child safety. This is a conversation with a family about the safety of children, which is recorded on the planning document.
- **Words and Pictures, Safety House, Wizards and Fairies, and Three Houses** – are specific tools used to help children understand the intervention concerns and involve them in creating their safety plan. Safety plans are about the children. By setting up living arrangements and clearly articulating safety plans, everyone, including the child, knows what needs to happen to create a safe environment.

## For further information:

- <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/17242.html>