

# PRACTICE GUIDE

## Collaborative assessment and planning framework

### Action steps and non-negotiables

Increasing safety for children involves working with parents to develop clear and workable plans about what changes to behaviour are needed to protect children from the identified unacceptable risks of significant harm. As the statutory child protection agency, Child Safety has a legislative responsibility to act in a child's best interests and must prioritise their need for safety.

Child Safety must be clear about what actions are *non-negotiable* to achieve the goals for safety of the child, at the planning phase.

#### What are action steps and non-negotiables

Action steps detail exactly what Child Safety, the parents and their safety and support network, carers and others will do, by when, to achieve the stated goals for ensuring the child's safety, belonging and wellbeing. Action steps give everyone involved clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

At times it may be necessary to be very clear and direct about what Child Safety requires in the plan to achieve the goals. Use explicit non-negotiable actions that must be taken by the parents or members of the safety and support network to achieve the goals and ensure the child's safety, belonging and wellbeing needs. These actions are to be written clearly, with their intention overt. This transparency will aid effective engagement and collaboration processes with the family members.

Whilst the non-negotiables are not necessarily contentious, there will be times where not everyone involved agrees. Regardless of individual's opinions or positions on the situation for the child, the non-negotiable actions must be clear and targeted at preventing a specific harm or outcome, and able to be monitored.

#### Tip:

Keep non-negotiable actions to a minimum to ensure the child's safety.

#### Action steps, non-negotiable statements and Structured Decision Making

The SDM safety assessment is used by Child Safety to guide the assessment of whether a child is in significant and imminent danger. Items selected in the safety assessment are reflected in the worry statements and addressed in goal statements.

Child Safety must use non-negotiable actions to mitigate immediate harm indicators identified as these point to the presence of significant danger. These actions will form a rigorous immediate safety plan. If the immediate harm cannot be mitigated with a non-negotiable action, this will result in the child being removed to a place of safety.

#### Tip

For children and young people in long-term care, non-negotiable actions may be established to respond to worries related to high-risk behaviour, self-harm, or care arrangement issues.

## How to write a non-negotiable action

Non-negotiable actions are written using clear, plain language to describe what Child Safety must see included in the plan. These non-negotiables will change over time as situations and circumstances change and as children, young people, parents, carers, and networks develop new strengths and skills.

## How to write action steps

The most meaningful action steps are written by children, young people, families, carers, and support networks. Most action steps will reflect the tasks and actions that are specific to them.

Action steps detail what is to be done and what this will achieve or change, by whom, how frequently, and the date it will be reviewed for completion.

### Attention

Action steps are not a list of services that should be attended. Rather, they may incorporate the use of a service to effect a change in behaviour.

## Examples of non-negotiables and action steps

### Example 1

#### If your goal is:

Child Safety, Sam (step-dad), Mum and Zoe (young person) and a safety and support network will work together to ensure that Sam is never left alone or solely responsible for Zoe so that there is no opportunity for Sam to cause harm to Zoe due to the level of supervision by other responsible adults.

#### Non-negotiable actions may include:

Zoe will not be alone with Sam as there will always be another responsible adult present.

At this time, everyone has agreed the following people are responsible to supervise Sam: Mum, Grandma, Grandpa, Auntie Tina, and neighbour Fran.

#### Action steps could include:

Mum, Sam, Grandma, Grandpa, Auntie Tina, Zoe and CSO are going to meet together on Friday after school to start to create a safety plan for Zoe, which will include things like house rules about privacy, sleeping arrangements, and who is allowed in the bathroom when Zoe is having a bath, a shower, or when she is doing her hair.

Mum and Sam are going to talk to some of their friends to see who else could be part of the safety and support network.

Mum will do the grocery shopping during the day when Zoe is at school. If Mum needs to go out and can't take Zoe with her, she will arrange for Zoe to stay at Fran's house or she will ring one of the safety people to come over and stay with Zoe and Sam.

When Mum goes to work on Monday and Tuesday nights, she will take Zoe to Grandma's house so she can stay there overnight. Mum and Sam will pick up Zoe in the morning and take her to school or home.

## Example 2

### If your goal is:

Zoe will have the support she needs to recover from the sexual abuse caused by Sam.

### Non-negotiable action may include:

Zoe will have regular appointments booked with her counsellor at Pine Creeks Community Health Centre.

Zoe will have the phone number for her CSO Debb programmed into her phone and set to favourites for ease of contact.

Zoe will know she can see the school's guidance officer Helen and spend time in the 'Green room' at school, if she is feeling sad, worried, or overwhelmed when she's at school.

### Action steps could include:

CSO Debbs will visit Zoe every two weeks and take Zoe to the park or the shops so Zoe can talk to her about her experiences, feelings, and problems.

Mum, Zoe and CSO Debbs will meet with the Helen, school guidance officer so that she understands what happened and can support Zoe and be part of Zoe's plan and support Zoe during school hours to use the supports available.

Mum and Aunt will take turns driving Zoe to Pine Creeks Community Health Centre so Zoe can learn ways to cope with what has happened and manage her feelings in a safe way.

## Example 3

### If your goal is:

Mum will work with Child Safety and the safety and support network to follow this plan and demonstrate:

- her children Anh and Thao are always cared for by a sober adult who can make safe decisions.
- Anh and Thao are always fed, supervised and looked after in a way that keeps them safe and is right for their age.

Child Safety will need to see the plan working for 12 months to be confident that they can close the case, and the plan will keep working.

### Non-negotiable action may include:

The children can't be looked after by Mum when Mum is drinking. There needs to be another sober and safe adult with the children.

### Action steps could include:

When Mum wants to go out to relax and have drinks, she will take the children to Dad's (Pete) house to be looked after for the night. Pete will manage the care of Anh and Thao the next day or until Mum can come back and collect them when she is sober.

If Pete is busy, Mum will ask her friend Shilpa to come over and look after the children. Shilpa will stay the night to make sure the children have dinner and breakfast (and lunch if a school day).

Mum said she wants to work with Donna at AMEND to learn new skills to manage her feelings of anger and depression instead of drinking alcohol to cope.

#### Example 4

**If your goal is:**

Noah (young person) will work with Child Safety, Bronte (Mum), Mary and Rob (carers) and the School Guidance Officer to develop a plan about what needs to happen and what everyone needs to do to support Noah to make sure that Noah knows who his people are and where he comes from.

**Non-negotiable action may include:**

Noah will be given opportunities to explore and understand his cultural heritage.

**Action steps could include:**

CSSO Sharon will meet with Mum next week to ask more questions about Dad and his family and try to find other family members who may be able to provide more information about Dad and his family.

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#### Version history

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