



PRACTICE GUIDE

Collaborative assessment and planning framework

Worry statements

What are worry statements?

The *Child Protection Act 1999*, section 10, refers to an 'unacceptable risk of harm, which is **significant harm which has not yet occurred but is likely in the future, given risk factors identified in the present**.

A child is assessed as 'in need of protection' if the level of risk is identified as likely (probable), not just possible (may occur); the probable harm will have a significant detrimental effect on the child if it does occur; and there is not a parent able and willing to protect the child from this future significant harm.

Worry statements document unacceptable risk of significant harm to a child. Worry statements describe actions or inactions that may happen in the future to significantly harm the child if nothing changes.

When to write a worry statement

Worry statements can be developed to focus our assessment and planning at different points on the child protection continuum.

When responding to a notification, worry statements can be used to identify what Child Safety is worried might happen to the child **in the future**, based on our assessment of past and current harm.

Where an assessment identifies that a child is in need of protection, a worry statement is developed to assist everyone to understand what Child Safety is concerned might happen to harm the child in the future if nothing changes.

Tip

Where harm has occurred, a harm statement will be written, and a worry statement will be developed for each harm statement. Where only risk of harm is identified, develop only a worry statement for each complicating factor present which gives rise to the future risk of harm.

When ongoing intervention is commenced for a child in need of protection, the **worry statements** articulate the probable future harm, and the reason Child Safety is remaining involved. If further harm is identified while the case is open, or Child Safety become aware of other significant complicating factors that give rise to the future risk of harm, update the worry statements accordingly.

Tip

Progress made by parents in relation to addressing the documented worries is captured in the strengths and protection sections of the Collaborative Assessment and Planning Framework Tool.

Worry statements and Structured Decision Making

Child Safety uses the SDM safety assessment to guide the decision making of whether the child is in significant and imminent danger.

When an immediate harm indicator is selected in the safety assessment, and the particular harm has already occurred, this should be reflected in a harm statement and will have a corresponding worry statement. If the immediate harm indicator selected refers to a **risk of harm** that may occur in the immediate future - for example, 'The physical living conditions are hazardous AND pose an immediate threat'- this should be recorded as a complicating factor and a worry statement is then developed to respond to this complicating factor.

How to write a worry statement

Each harm statement (physical, emotional, psychological) and complicating factor that is related to a significant risk of harm should have a corresponding worry statement. A worry statement uses clear, behaviourally focused descriptions of parental action or inaction and the future danger this poses to a child. Worry statements help everyone (especially the child and their family) to understand what Child Safety is worried might happen to the child in the future if nothing changes and why Child Safety is involved.

A worry statement is future-focused and identifies:

- who is worried?
- what are they worried the parents might do or not do (stated in clear, easy to understand behavioural terms) and in what context or circumstances?
- what the possible future impact of this parent behaviour might be on the child.

A worry statement is written in plain language (avoid jargon and ambiguous terms) to be easily understood by the family. Anyone participating in developing the case plan can have worry statements including the child, parents, members of the safety and support network, and Child Safety.

While worry statements may initially be developed by Child Safety, they may be jointly constructed with the family over time to draw on the parent or child's language and phrasing or to include alternative views.

Agreement about past harm is not necessary to achieve agreement in relation to worries for the future.

For example, the harm statement:

- 'Child Safety is aware that on three occasions over the last year, Simon (Dad) has gone to the casino and lost a lot of money, drunk a lot of alcohol and then touched Selina (his daughter) on the vagina and put his finger in her vagina. Selina reports this made her feel scared, sad, bad, unsafe, and confused. Simon and Sharon (Mum) say that dad has never touched Selina.'

Could have a **worry statement** as outlined below:

- Child Safety and Selina are worried that if Simon (Dad) is alone with Selina (daughter), that he will touch Selina on the vagina, put his finger in her vagina, or behave in sexual ways and that Selina will feel sad, bad, unsafe, and confused. Simon and Sharon say that Dad has never touched Selina, but they are also worried that Simon will be accused of touching Selina again in the future.

Worry statement examples

Example of a worry statement for alleged significant harm identified at intake:

Child Safety is worried Amy (mother), and Jason (father) will spend money on drugs and inject speed every day. Causing them to be unable to feed, look after, supervise or care for Shanaya (7 years), Jake (5 years) and Poppy (18months) properly. The children may get hurt while wandering the streets, get sick from not having enough to eat, and feel scared, worried and alone.

Example of a worry statement following an assessment where it was identified a child suffered harm:

Child Safety is worried Maria (mother) will pinch Aran (age 5) and Asnee (age 4), hit them around the head with her hand and whip them with a cane when they are naughty, and that Aran and Asnee might be badly hurt in the future by these actions.

Child Safety is also worried that if Maria disciplines the boys by physically hurting them, Aran and Asnee will get more and more scared of her and won't want to live with her.

Example of a worry statement following an assessment where there is unacceptable risk of future harm (without actual harm occurring yet) and the child (or unborn child) does not have a parent able and willing to protect them:

The parental behaviours (actions or inactions) deemed likely to cause future harm are documented as complicating factors.

- Sarah (mother) has been stopped by police twice for drink driving. On the most recent occasion Sarah's blood alcohol level was very high at 0.23 and her family describe her as an alcoholic. On both occasions of drink driving, Sarah had both Maddie (2 years) and Braydon (7 months) in the car with her.

Two corresponding worry statements are then constructed:

- Child Safety are worried Sarah will drink alcohol and drive with Maddie and Braydon in the car and she will have an accident where both she and the children could be seriously injured or die.
- Child Safety are worried if the Maddie and Braydon are alone with Mum when she drinks alcohol, she will become so drunk she interact with them and won't be able to notice and attend to their needs (including being fed, water, sleep).

Tip:

As **no actual harm has been experienced by the child or unborn child** no harm statement has been documented, only a worry statement.

Example of a worry statement for ongoing intervention (Long-term guardianship to the chief executive):

Child Safety, Police, Mary and Rob (carers) and Bronte (Mum) are all worried that if Noah smokes weed, misses school and shoplifts he will not finish Year 12 and might end up with criminal convictions and then won't be able to get the job that he wants.

Tip:

By avoiding words like 'continue' and 'again' in worry statements, we avoid a dispute about whether something happened. This doesn't weaken the worry statement, rather, it remains focused on what we're worried will happen in the future.

Further reading

Practice guide: [Collaborative assessment and planning framework](#)

Version history

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