

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 they will and won't do in the future to protect children from the identified worries - the unacceptable risk of significant harm. As a 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. Ensuring safety and having statutory responsibilities within a collaborative planning process means being clear about goals and about Child Safety's non-negotiables for planning. Prioritising safety means helping parents to create action steps to meet the stated goals (see the Collaborative Assessment and Planning Framework - Goal statements tip sheet for more information).

What are action steps and non-negotiables?

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

There will be times in our planning with families that it will be necessary to be very clear and direct about what Child Safety thinks has to be included in the plan to achieve the goal. This is where non-negotiables should be outlined to ensure clear understanding of Child Safety's planning requirements.

Non-negotiables are actions that Child Safety believes must be taken by the parents and/or the safety and support network to achieve the goals and to satisfy Child Safety that the child is being cared for properly and is safe.

Non-negotiables are about what Child Safety thinks must be included in the plan to ensure the child's safety, belonging and wellbeing needs are met. To work effectively with the family and their network to develop agreed action steps in the case planning process, it is vital that non-negotiables are clear, transparent, and overt. The non-negotiables are not necessarily contentious - they might be agreed upon by some, or all, of the people involved in the child's network. Whether they are agreed or not, they must be clear, targeted at preventing a specific harm or outcome, and able to be monitored.

When to write action steps and non-negotiables

As a statutory agency, Child Safety is required to assess and make decisions about whether children are safe, and has a responsibility to act to ensure their safety as necessary. In doing so, the aim is to work in a collaborative manner that values partnership and participation.

Ideally the family and their safety and support network must have as much freedom as possible to develop strategies and actions steps that are workable within their own particular context and circumstances to achieve the goals. However, there will be times when Child Safety will have some non-negotiables about what must be included in the plan (the case plan, immediate safety plan, long term safety plan, etc.) to ensure the child is safe. The non-negotiables provide these parameters for planning and for developing action steps and make the 'musts' clear so that families know what is essential in the plan.

Tip: Non-negotiable statements must be kept to the very minimum required 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.

In particular, Child Safety may want to consider non-negotiables when there is the presence of immediate harm indicators in the SDM safety assessment. These immediate harm indicators point to the presence of significant danger and, if they cannot be controlled for, will need to result in the child being removed to a place of safety. When an immediate harm indicator is identified, Child Safety needs to be clear about what non-negotiables are required to create a rigorous immediate safety plan.

Tip: For children and young people in long-term care, non-negotiables may also respond to worries related to high-risk behaviour, self-harming, or care arrangement issues.

How to write a non-negotiable

Non-negotiables are written using clear, plain language to describe what Child Safety **must** see included in the plan. 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. Child Safety staff may, at times, be required to list the actions to be undertaken by Child Safety staff. Action steps detail what has to be done and what this will achieve or change, by whom, how frequently, and the date to be completed or reviewed. Action steps are not a list of services that should be attended. Action steps respond to the bottom lines and non-negotiables and are steps to achieve the goals.

*Tip: The mnemonic **S.A.F.E.T.Y** can be used to assist in creating meaningful goal statements:*

- *Specific and measurable*
- *Achievable*
- *Family owned*
- *Endorsed by Child Safety*
- *Time frame is clear*
- *Young people have been involved and contributed to developing the goals.*

Examples of non-negotiables and action steps

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 create a plan that ensures that Sam is not alone with the girls so that the girls are protected

from future touching and Sam is protected from allegations of touching and everyone feels safe at home in the future.

Non-negotiables could include:

- Zoe will not be alone with Sam and there will always be a safe adult there when Zoe is around Sam.
- At the moment, everyone has agreed that Mum, Grandma, Grandpa and Auntie Tina can be the safe adults.

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 the neighbour'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.

2. If your goal is:

Zoe will have the support she needs to recover from what has happened with Sam.

Non-negotiables could include:

- Zoe will always be able to access her CSO, guidance officer or counsellor if she is feeling sad or worried about anything.

Action steps could include:

- CSO will visit Zoe every two weeks and take Zoe to the park or the shops so Zoe can talk to her about school, her friends, and home.
- Mum, Zoe and CSO will meet with the school guidance officer so that she understands what happened and can support Zoe and be part of Zoe's plan.
- Mum and Aunt will take turns driving Zoe to (Counselling Agency) so Zoe can learn some new ways to cope with and talk about her feelings.

3. If your goal is:

Mum will work with Child Safety and a network of people to develop a plan that will show everyone that:

- The children are always cared for by a sober adult who can make safe decisions.
- The children 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-negotiables could 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 to the hotel and play pokies she will take the children to Dad's house to be looked after for the night. Dad will take the children to school the next day or keep them at his house until Mum comes and picks them up that afternoon.
- If Dad is busy, Mum will ask her friend Betty to come over and look after the children. Betty 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.

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-negotiables could include:

- Noah will be given the opportunity to explore and understand his cultural heritage.

Action steps could include:

- CSSO 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.

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