

Signs of Safety: potential benefits and constraints

16 October 2023

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Evaluation Teams

ROUND 1

King's College London

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Plus a team of Research Associates

Round 2

King's College London

Mary Baginsky, Ben Hickman, Jess Harris, Jill Manthorpe

What works for Children's Social Care

Michael Sanders, Aoife O'Higgins, Eva Schoenwald and Vicky Clayton



Context

151 local authorities in England

Recruitment and retention of social workers

Child protection: over reliance on newly qualified and early career social workers – and locums

Signs of Safety was not new; MTM Signs of Safety aligned with whole system change

MTM = Eileen Munro, Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy

In 2018 around 66% of local authorities used SofS in some form - 33% as their exclusive practice framework and another 33% using elements

Signs of Safety and the Innovation Programme

Three key principles:

- Establish constructive working relationships
- Encourage critical thinking and maintain appreciative inquiry
- Stay grounded in day-to-day work: from early help-to child protection
- **English Innovation Project**

Signs of Safety Assessment

Mapping

What we are worried about

What is working well

What needs to happen

Complicating factors

Scaling

Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Form

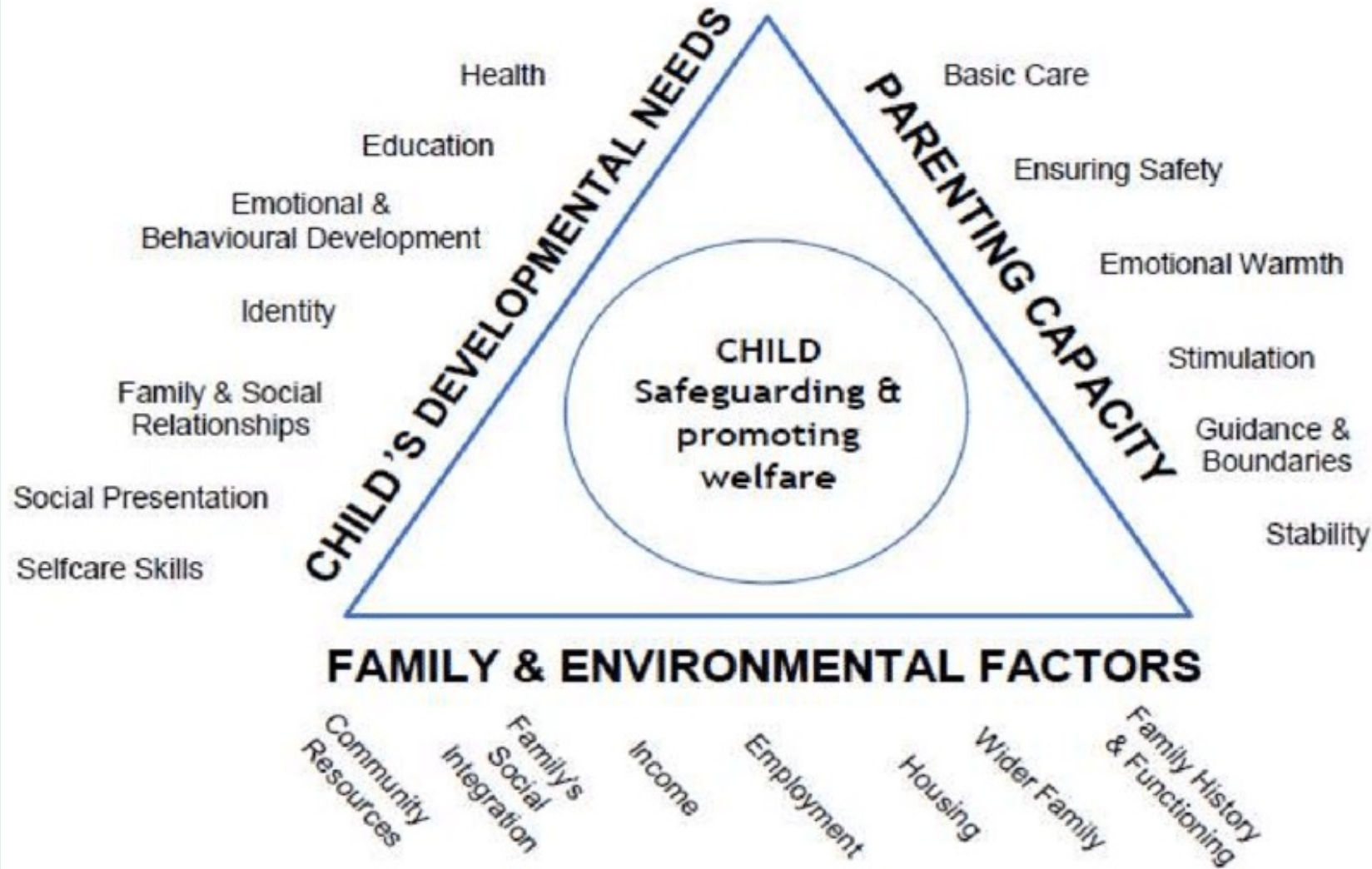
What are we Worried About?	Whats Working Well?	What Needs to Happen?
<p>Past Harm to Children Action/Behaviour – who, what, where, when; Severity; Incidence & Impact</p> <p>Danger Statements: Future Danger for Children Worries for the future if nothing changes.</p> <p>Complicating Factors Factors which make the situation more difficult to resolve.</p>	<p>Existing Strengths</p> <p>Existing Safety/Protection The Strengths demonstrated as protection over time.</p> <p>Must directly relate to danger.</p>	<p>SafetyGoals: Future Safety/Protection What must the caregivers be doing in their care of the child that addresses the future danger?</p> <p>Family Goals: What does the family want generally and in relation to safety?</p> <p>Next Steps What are the next steps to be taken to move towards achieving the goal?</p>

Safety Scale On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? (If different judgements place different people's number on the continuum).



Source: own table

Assessment Framework



The Assessment Framework

Evaluation Phase 1: 2015-2017

- Children's Social Care Innovation Programme
- 10 local authorities – MTM Signs of Safety
- Realistic evaluation
- Longitudinal design
- Multiple types of data collection
 - Interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Case file analysis
 - Secondary data analysis
 - Value for money

Time 1

Interviews with key informants

Interviews and focus groups with 185 social workers

Survey 165 social workers

Interviews with 270 families

Analysis of 262 case records

Time 2

Interviews and self-profiling data from key informants

Time diaries completed by 121 social workers

Re-interviews with 184 families

Analysis of 30 performance indicators

Reanalysis of case records

Data collected at times 1 & 2 about two cohorts of families

(Some of)What we found

Some evidence

- An organisational commitment to SoS was becoming embedded
- Tools were being used
- Cases were being mapped
- There were indications that:
 - social workers involved families to a much greater extent than previously
 - there was greater degree of understanding between social workers and families
 - there was a more focused approach to goals and how they could be achieved
 - where families were involved in goal planning, they were more likely to report that their goals had been achieved [but the numbers were too small to draw firm conclusions]

No evidence that...

- progress was being made towards *consistently* building constructive working relationships between professionals and family members
- social workers were spending the necessary direct contact time with adults in families
- the service was intervening at the right time
- assessments were improving
- a culture was developing where it was permissible to admit mistakes
- social workers were being supported with administrative tasks
- local authority were recruiting high-quality staff or retaining them



INCONCLUSIVE ON EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluation Phase 2 2018-2020

- Overall fewer resources for Signs of Safety and the evaluation
- Still 10 local authorities but case studies only on 5
- A staff survey, an examination of assessments, **a contrast study**, an analysis of national outcomes data at an LA level and a difference-in-differences analysis (WWCSC)
- None of the different strands of analysis found significant and robust improvement across outcomes in relation to:
 - *staff wellbeing and retention
 - *likelihood of child protection conferences
 - *the removal of children from their homes.

Elements of the Contrast Study

- At request of Department for Education
- Experimental design
- Comparison of 2 authorities using SoS (Sites 1 and 4) and 2 not using (Sites 2 and 3) – a team in each site
- Assessment of team culture
- Observation of interactions of social workers with 60 families
- Responses of parents / carers and social workers measured by a series of instruments and interviews

Instruments used

- **Observations:**

Clinical Competence-Based Behavioral Checklist (CCBC) (Lu et al., 2011)

- **Team culture**

Organisational Social Context (OSC) (Glisson, 2007 and Glisson et al., 2006) – adapted for use in England – two points in time

- **Families and social workers:**

Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) (Horvath 1981, 1984, 1992)

- **Families**

Hampshire County Council Children's Services Family Feedback charts; Practice Elements of Signs of Safety Chart; Client Engagement in Child Protection Services (Yatchmenoff, 2005)

- **Social workers:**

Survey of social workers in SofS sites



Observations of Signs of Safety

SoS sites and contrast sites

Very low usage of safety plans with families

?? but their use was recorded??

No differences were noted between SoS and non-SoS sites on any of the items measured by the instruments

The overall level of SoS use had no significant impact on family scores

The more competent the social worker (CCBC) the more likely parents were to be positive about involvement with social care

Key differences were between individual social workers rather than the methods they used

Organisational Social Context

**'Proficiency', 'rigidity',
'resistance', 'engagement',
'functionality' and 'stress'.**

Remember a Site = Team

Overall, there were no *consistent* differences between the SoS (Sites 1 and 4) and non-SoS sites (Sites 2 and 3)

OSC data showed that Sites 1, 2 and 4 had very similar profiles at T1 and by T2 Sites 1 and 4 (both SoS) had not changed significantly while Site 2 had an improved profile

Site 3 had an 'average' score at T1, then deteriorated greatly at Time 2

Scores indicated that all 4 sites generally had lower than normal 'engagement' coupled with higher than average 'functionality' and 'stress'.

Organisational Social Context

**'Proficiency', 'rigidity',
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'functionality' and 'stress'.**

Remember a Site = Team

'Engagement' was lower in SoS pilot sites at Time 1. By Time 2 it had fallen in the contrast sites to a point where both contrast sites had lower 'engagement' scores than the pilot sites.

At T2 OSCs were completed when teams in both contrast sites were experiencing high staff turnover.

Stress levels were high across all 4 sites.

Reflections on the contrast study

Resources limited usefulness even as a trial of a method

Focus on a team does not reflect practice across a local authority

Heavy dependence on social workers' collaboration

Case selectivity

Time consuming

Same evaluator – linked with resources – consistency, but danger of inbuilt bias

Was it worth it ???

Probably not as an experiment

Messages for scaling up and embedding

And great insights from families and social workers

What needs to be in place?

- Experienced social workers
- Stable workforce
- Deeper understanding of theory and research and confidence to use
- Manageable caseloads
- Supervision that is reflective and supportive but challenging
- Peer support / group case discussions
- Clarity over Assessment Framework - Is it dying in reality, if not in policy?

And Signs of Safety?

Signs of Safety is not a substitute for them

It is a tool to support assessment and not a comprehensive assessment framework

It was often used inconsistently - in terms of families and its elements

Disclaimer

The project was funded by the Department for Education, but the views expressed are the author's own.

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