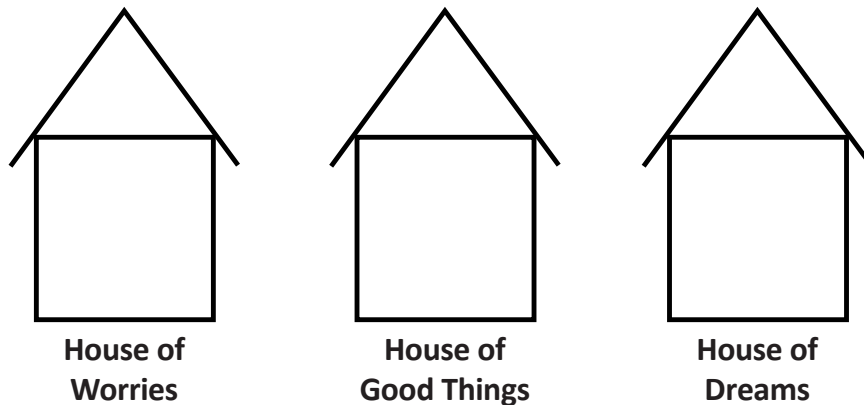


# Safety Planning Workbook

The worker then asks the children questions within these domains which they can draw pictorial or word based answers alongside which the worker usually adds any exact additional verbal description the children offer about their experience.

## 'Three Houses' Child Protection Risk Assessment Tool to use with Children and Young People



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The tool provides a focused shared physical activity to discuss the child's experience that avoids simply focusing on what's wrong which many children will naturally resist. To use the tool most effectively it is usually best to prepare a range of questions in advance and we encourage workers to focus particularly on questions for the house of good things and dreams rather than worries with lots emphasis on questions about extended family and friends such as:

- What are the best things about your life?
- What are the best times for you at home?
- Who are your favourite people you like being with?
- What are your favourite things to do with Mummy?
- What do you like most about seeing grandma (Daddy, Pop and Nan)?
- What are the best times you have with Mummy and grandma (Daddy, Pop and Nan)?

If you could have things just the way you would like them at home and all the problems were solved what would be happening?

- What would you all do?
- Who would visit?
- Who would help Mummy if there were problems?
- While we help Mummy get her problems sorted out who would you most like to live with?

In the case of Germaine and Kestie it would likely make best sense to interview them together. Most likely Germaine would provide the more detailed responses but involving Kestie often encourages an older child like Germaine to take the questions more seriously. The sorts of questions described above

tend to draw answers about favourite family times like reading at night, playing and having a meal together when Grandma comes over and family get-togethers and the like. While it is easy to dismiss such experiences this information is actually the gold that enables professionals to honour Sharon and the other adults in the extended family and to create a relationship where they will more likely bring forward their best efforts in resolving the problems. The children's answers in the house of good things will provide detail about what is going well in their lives and will inevitably also point to and usually deepen the exploration of the problems. For example, the children may draw a picture and describe the nice food and eating all they want when visiting Nan and Pop this points to and usually leads to talking about being hungry with their mother. This is a key reason we ask workers to pay more attention to questions for the houses of good things and dreams as these consistently lead to exploring the children's experience of what they are worried about quite naturally. Children's services practitioners experienced in using the Three Houses Tool report that exploring the house of dreams leads to the child both offering a vision of what they want it also regularly leads easily into discussing what the children are worried about.

At the beginning of a house of dreams exploration children will almost always talk about wanting particular toys or games and these sorts of answers should be recorded seriously, they are important to the child and when the three houses words and drawings are later hopefully shown to the parents and kin they recognise these answers as their child's thinking. A child like Germaine will then often say things like I want mummy to have enough money so we always have food, I don't want to be in the dark again (power cut off), I don't want mummy to have the parties at our home and I don't want her to have Brant and Shelly to come over, I want Mummy to always wake up and help me and Kestie in the morning, I want Mummy and Gran to get on better and Gran not to yell at Mummy, I want to see Daddy more.

While we don't have space to address many questions practitioners will have about this work these are addressed elsewhere (Turnell, 2011). The whole purpose of the Three Houses process is not to create a professional assessment of the child's world but rather to document the child's experience using the child's exact drawings and words to then bring these back to the adults the children belong to. Time and again we have seen that while parents and extended family might be wary of professional assessments and views when they see the child's own words and pictures describing their experience this creates a significant breakthrough where the adults put aside their own shame, blame and differences and will more readily work together for the children.

### **Using the Signs of Safety to bring forward the professionals concerns and goals**

The Signs of Safety assessment and planning process is a participatory process where everything written in the framework needs to be in straightforward understandable language. A central part of the assessment and planning requires the professionals to clearly identify the core issues they see need to be addressed (danger statements) and what it is they need to see to be satisfied the children will be safe in the future (safety goals). The earlier these can be created and negotiated with all family members in the life of the case, the more quickly a purposive direction can be created. The aim here is to distil the core concerns but also do this together with clear statements of what is needed to deal with the problems, thus making it more likely the family can engage with the seriousness of the problems. The safety goals are used to set clear expectations from the statutory agency placing their authority behind the requirement of involving extended family and friends for the agency to be willing to reunite Sharon and the children and close the case. In the case we are considering we would expect the danger statement (there can certainly be more than one but there is only one in this case) and safety goals to look something like: