

## How to use Outcomes Stars™ with Signs of Safety®

Top tips for services working with families and children on how the tools and approaches can work together

### 1 About this document

Triangle are the social enterprise behind the Outcomes Stars, and we have produced this guide to kick start a conversation around the Star and the principles of the Signs of Safety approach. We welcome input and discussion from organisations or other parties with an interest in these areas to help us to understand and improve our guidance, and showcase best practice examples – contact details for Triangle can be found at the end of the document.

### 2 What is Signs of Safety®?

Signs of Safety is an innovative, strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection casework. The model of its approach was created in Western Australia by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards, and it is now used in North America, Europe and Australasia.

Signs of Safety expands the investigation of risk in child protection work to encompass strengths and ‘Signs of Safety’ that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child’s and family’s situation. It provides a format for undertaking comprehensive risk assessment — assessing both danger and the existing strengths, safety and goals of the family/extended family that can contribute to better planning and achievement of safety for the child or young person.

At its simplest, the Signs of Safety framework can be understood as containing four domains for inquiry:

1. What are we worried about? Such as past harm, future danger and complicating factors
2. What’s working well? Such as existing strengths (information relating to strengths and resources within the situation or family/extended family that may be developed to achieve safety). Safety factors are strengths demonstrated as protection (in relation to the danger) over time
3. What needs to happen? So that the children are safe in the care of the parents
4. Where are we on a scale of 0 – 10? Where 10 means there is enough safety to close the case and 0 means it is certain the child will be harmed.

### 3 How do the principles of Signs of Safety compare with the Outcomes Star?

#### Similarities:

- Both are collaborative tools – done with and not to a parent/family
- In both, the relationship with the client is critical to using the tools meaningfully
- Both are strengths based – eliciting and building on the assets of the family, rather than starting from what is absent or the parent is not achieving
- Both are forward looking
- Both use a spirit of enquiry – asking open ended questions, and remaining open-minded, including the worker being prepared to admit they may have it ‘wrong’
- Both tools use plain language that clients can understand

#### Differences:

- Despite its focus on safety, SOS is ultimately a comprehensive risk assessment framework. The Family Star is not a risk tool - it doesn't measure the severity of the parent's problem(s) or the amount of risk to the children. Instead, the Journey of Change tracks the parent's progress in how they are engaging with the different aspects of parenting. So change could be made internally by the parent (e.g. they may have changed their attitude now be recognising the problem, and so gone from stuck to accepting help), without their children (or workers) yet seeing or feeling any visible or external signs of change seen in their children
- The Family Star is used in a wide range of family support work and not exclusively in child protection work (and in fact tends to be used more in Early Help/preventative work rather than in the statutory end of the spectrum of family work). The SOS is a tool used in child protection work
- The Family Star is not an open scale, rather the behaviour and attitudes expected at each of the points on each scale are clearly defined. The SOS is however an open scale of 0 – 10 (where 10 means there is enough safety to close the case and 0 means it is certain the child will be harmed)
- Star Action Planning uses a broad coaching approach, where the client is encouraged to identify goals and next steps necessary to achieve change in areas they want to work on, which may be broader than the areas of concern/risk.
- Whereas in the SOS, action planning is specifically safety planning in relation to:
  - A) agency goals - what does the agency need to see the parents doing in their care of the children and over what time period to be confident there is enough safety to close the case;
  - B).family goals - what does the family think they need to be doing in the care of their children for them to be safe or for Child Protection Services to be willing to close the case.

#### 4 How services could use Signs of Safety and the Outcomes Star together

Both tools are founded in the values of strengths and collaboration. However the tools do different things - Signs of Safety is a risk / safety focused framework, whereas the Star is focused on supporting change and measuring distance travelled towards holistic outcomes.

This means that one doesn't replace the other, and the Star can work well within a Signs of Safety approach. The four domains of inquiry (outlined in 2 above) fit very well with the best practice for the Star, and how practitioners and parents/children can interpret together the results of a completed Star - broadly what in the Star is working well; what's not working so well; and what are priority areas for action planning.

In addition, the Journey of Change stages could be seen as important internal factors, necessary for parents to build sustainable behaviour change and for children to be safe and well looked after. In 'Accepting help' the parent is recognising the problem, in 'Trying' they are now believing they need to make changes and are having a go at doing things differently, and in 'Finding what works' the parent is consolidating their learning and finding what approaches work best for the family.

Completing the Star with a parent can therefore help both the parent and practitioner to use the Signs of Safety domains of inquiry. The open 0-10 scaling in Signs of Safety is different to the Scales in the Star. However, having completed the Star, a practitioner and parent would have a lot of knowledge on which to base their 'score' on this scale, and a practitioner could use the Journey of Change reading from the safety-related outcome areas to inform this.

## 5 More information

You can find more information about Signs of Safety on their website - [www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net). For any questions about any aspect of the Outcomes Star, please visit our website [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk) or contact us on [info@triangleconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@triangleconsulting.co.uk) or +44 (0)207 272 8765.