

Signs of Safety Outline.

Why SOS

Social work has been going through a period of self-assessment recently, due to the findings of the Social Work Task Force, the Munro Review, the Family Justice Review, The Children and Families Act 2014, numerous high profile Serious Case Reviews, and the new Ofsted inspection framework, all of which have recommended that as a profession social work has to improve and demonstrate real impact on outcomes for children.

We know that Social Workers have been caught up with the demands of the integrated children system and rigid processes and procedures, and that this has led to less time working directly with children and their families. Social Workers want to spend more time with children and families to achieve real change for children rather than sat at computers and co-ordinating the work of others.

As all Local Authorities have been looking at how they can reduce bureaucracy and increase time with children and families, many different methodologies have been reviewed, tried and tested.

It's an explicit risk assessment tool

Signs Of Safety (SOS) is a methodology that underpins social work practice, to:

- highlight the risk – **danger** – to the child,
- look at what's working well for the family – **strengths**
- **what needs to happen** to reduce the danger
- **what the situation will look like once the work has been achieved** – **safety goal**
- The **plan** is what we are all going to do (including the family) in order for the children to **live safely**

It puts the family at the centre – as the expert - and supports the family to draw on their own resources

The **Danger statement** explicitly highlights the risk, so that we cannot be over optimistic and fail to say what it is exactly that concerns us – it's at the centre of why we are worried and working with the family.

Signs Of Safety is not replacing Working Together, the assessment framework, or any other process – it is a 'tool' to enable workers to communicate with children and families more effectively.

Why did CYPS decide to implement this before securing partnership agreement?

In Bristol we know from our quality assurance work and performance information that **what we are doing now is not good enough**. Whilst we know that many social workers are working very effectively with families and supporting improved outcomes for children, there are some families where we have not managed to support the achievement of lasting change. Like we ask our parents to be 'good enough', as professionals, we need to ask ourselves the same question.

We know that Social Work practice has to improve in order to reduce the number of children being the subject of court proceedings, coming into care, and being made the subject of Child Protection plans, all of which should be only used when opportunities to influence change in families have been exhausted.

What does this mean for BSCB agencies?

You will see from the new Single Assessment Form that SOS has to some extent already been integrated into the format – we are asking practitioners:

- **What are you worried about?** – this means what have you seen, heard, smelt etc – not a hypothesis
- **What is working well?** – what is good in this family – this does not mean that risks are eliminated, but may mean they are reduced by safety factors
- **What needs to happen?** – not the services that will be provided – but what will the child’s life look like after things have changed.

Child Protection Conferences will run differently using the SOS methodology.

At Child Protection Conferences the family is given time to be the ‘expert’, as they know their family resources and need time to talk about them. Parents will be encouraged to look at what’s working well and what they can do more of. This may have a time implication in that the Conferences may take more time – I would predict this to be the case particularly in the early stages as CP Conference chairs get used to implementing the model.

Professionals will be asked to be explicit about their concerns, using language and concepts that the family will understand - this sounds simple, but we know that this may require a culture shift. Professionals will not be able to tell the social worker outside of the meeting what they are worried about – it has to be in the meeting, with the family, with practitioners being open about the dangers that concern them. –You may think that this already happens, but the experience of other areas who have adopted the methodology is that this can challenge the way professionals have always behaved in CP Conferences.

How will your agencies understand the method and tool?

We are going to give briefings in line with other training already being organised – to reduce duplication we are working with our colleagues across the council to link up the delivery of learning and development – for example, when practitioners go on training for the SAF, we will include key information about SOS.

When practitioners attend BSCB training CP stage 1, we will introduce SOS

SOS does not stand alone from any other tools that workers use – it’s a way of looking at cases and talking about them – breaking down the issues. For many, it’s not new – it’s what they are already doing. We believe that practitioners without any training in the methodology will be able to play their part in a CP Conference using SOS. However, we suggest that in order to use the methodology well, agencies need to consider how best to brief staff on what will be expected of them.

Some areas have implemented the methodology in a more in depth way in partner agencies. For example, Health Visiting CP Supervisors using the ‘mapping’ tool in their supervision, in order to decide whether to provide enhanced services, or whether to make child protection referrals.

Where are we now?

All BCC Children’s Social Workers and Family Support Workers will be trained in using SOS by July 2014. They are using the tools as soon as they have got them; using them with children, families, and in supervision and case discussions.

SOS Steering group – The first meeting took place on 24 January 2014 and it was decided that we needed several Sub groups due to the amount of professionals we are working with in Bristol. Sub groups for training and IT has been established and met on the 18 March 2014

The future

The vision is that SOS will be embedded into practice so that any person requiring a service will be asked the same questions – **what are you worried about – what is working well – what needs to happen**, regardless of which part of the system they are engaged. Any professional considering the safeguarding needs of a family – up, down across the system – will use the same language and tools so they understand what they are saying to each other

and can reach agreement about what concerns them, but more importantly, they will be working in a way that is understandable to families.

Kate Markley
Principal Social Worker
Children and Family Support
People Directorate
Childrens Workforce Development
Bristol City Council