Board Members

Dear Colleague

Re Implementation of the Signs of Safety Approach to Child Protection Practice in Northern Ireland

All staff and volunteers who work with children, young people and families have a responsibility to safeguard and protect children and young people. Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland August 2017 is the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people. The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Regional Core Child Protection Policies and Procedures are set within this policy and outline how agencies and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Since June 2018 the five Health and Social Care Trusts Children’s Services supported by the Department of Health, and the Health and Social Care Board, have commenced implementation of the Signs of Safety approach to Child Protection practice in Northern Ireland.

What is Signs of Safety?

‘Signs of Safety’ is an approach used by social workers when working with children and their families within the Child Protection system.
The approach requires the social worker to work alongside families and multi-agency partners to identify risks and concerns as well as identifying the strengths within the family and where appropriate within the wider family circle to protect children.

Social workers and Chairs of Child Protection Case Conferences have been receiving training in how to implement the Signs of Safety approach with children and their families during 2018/2019.

The purpose and function of the Child Protection Case Conference is to bring multi-disciplinary/multi-agency professional/staff and families together to discuss the risks to the child/young person, to make a decision about whether or not to place the child/young person on the Child Protection Register and agree a plan to keep the child/young person safe. This will not change with the implementation of the Signs of Safety approach.

The Signs of Safety approach enhances and supports the Child Protection Case Conference. The focus of the Child Protection Case Conference is to be clear about the concerns based on past history and current risks/harm as well as identifying strengths within the family.

The Signs of Safety approach provides additional tools for social workers to engage with families. Some language used at Child Protection Case Conferences under the Signs of Safety approach will change. Those attending Child Protection Case Conferences will be asked to use language that everyone can understand, to identify – for example - “what they are worried about”, “what is going well” and “what needs to happen to keep the child/young person safe”.

A collaborative visual record will be created during the Child Protection Case Conference.

Child Protection Case Conferences from January 2020 onwards using the Signs of Safety approach, shall begin to use some of the aforementioned language and approach.

Awareness raising sessions on Signs of Safety for multi-agency partners will be taking place over the next 12 months. The SBNI Core Regional Policy and Procedures relating to Child Protection Case Conferences are currently being reviewed in the context of the implementation of the Signs of Safety approach. Any
future proposed changes to these procedures will undergo the appropriate consultation process with all SBNI partners prior to implementation.

Further information regarding Signs of Safety is available at the following link

www.signsofsafety.net

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marie Roulston
Director of Social Care and Children’s Services,
Health and Social Care Board