

Safety planning for kids in out-of-home care

FOR PROFESSIONALS

Increasing safety is vital when kids display problematic and harmful sexual behaviours (PHSB). Safety planning helps to reduce or prevent ongoing behaviours. To be effective, plans should increase safety both at home and in the community.



Safety planning

Safety plans are written documents that outline behavioural, parenting, skill building and supervisory strategies. They are designed to keep kids that display PHSB, and those around them, safe. Safety plans should also document strategies to build kids' protective factors. The most effective safety plans are developed with kids, their carers and their child support team. They are best when written in child friendly language that's easy to understand and follow. Safety plans should clearly tell kids and carers what to do, and what is expected, in certain contexts.

When are safety plans required?

Safety plans should be developed whenever kids display PHSB, minimising the potential for harm. By ensuring targeted strategies are in place, safety plans also lessen the likelihood that behaviours of concern will continue.

What should safety plans consider?

Safety plans should consider all contexts where PHSB may occur, including:

- sleeping arrangements
- privacy for bathrooms, bedrooms and personal care
- use of the internet
- after school activities
- visits and sleepovers with friends and family
- school or daycare
- before and after school care
- parks, pools, shops and entertainment venues (e.g. cinemas, playcentres).

What should safety plans include?

For kids in out-of-home care, safety plans should include:

- supervision – kids displaying PHSB usually require 24/7 adult supervision, both at home and in the community. The type and intensity of supervision depends on the PHSB displayed. Child support teams should work together to determine required levels of supervision, and who is best-placed to provide it in various contexts

- rules and boundaries – ‘safe family rules’ are written for the whole household and facilitate consistent responses. Effective rules and boundaries help kids know what’s expected of them. They also support adults to monitor and supervise effectively
- skill building opportunities – by increasing kids’ protective factors, these help reduce the recurrence of behaviours. It’s important to identify kids’ current strengths, as well as the areas they need support. Strategies and opportunities to develop strengths should be clearly specified
- increased support needs – behaviours may be more likely to occur at certain times or in particular contexts, requiring additional supports. Common triggers include boredom, routine changes, or experiencing big emotions.

Things to consider

Safety plans should be individual to the specific child/teen, their household and their community. When a safety plan is required, consider the following:

- who should be involved in developing the plan?
- where have the behaviours occurred and with who?
- what strategies will work for this child/teen and this household/community?
- what skills does this child/young person need to help reduce risk?
- are supporting adults able to implement the recommended strategies?
- what information do supporting adults require to implement the plan effectively?
- how can confidentiality be maintained?
- do the carers have their own support network?
- what will monitoring of the plan look like?
- how will you know if the plan is effective?
- how will the child support team communicate and update each other?

Implementing the plan

All adults supporting a child with PHSB should have access to their safety plan, and understand its expectations. Ensure supervising adults understand their role, and how to raise concerns if required. Maintain open communication around strategies, including their effectiveness, to keep everyone safe.