

# S.A.F.E.R. kids

framework

A guided approach to  
risk assessment in  
child protection





The Department of Health and Human Services respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners throughout Victoria and their ancestors and elders past and present.

**The S.A.F.E.R. kids framework supports cultural safety and self-determination for Aboriginal communities.**

Cultural identity and connectedness is critical to the development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children do better when they remain connected to their culture, community and country.

This requires relationship-based practice, critical reflection, and cultural competence and child protection services delivered in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities throughout Victoria.



**S** seek information

**A** analyse

**F** formulate

**E** enact and empower

**R** review and reassess

The S.A.F.E.R. kids framework is a guided approach to assessing and mitigating risk of harm to children.

It has been developed with and for child protection practitioners to help them gather information about risk of harm to children, make sense of it and formulate strategies to improve their safety.

Harm for the purpose of child protection intervention is defined by the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* as physical injury, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological harm, and harm to physical development or health. Risk is the relationship between the degree of harm experienced and the probability of harm cumulatively occurring or of protection being provided to determine immediate and future child safety.

The S.A.F.E.R. kids framework supports the best interests case practice approach to assess risk. It helps practitioners to look for and promote strengths and protections to increase safety. Effective risk assessment requires critical thinking considering all information sources about children's safety and development and balancing risk and protective factors in the family.

# S

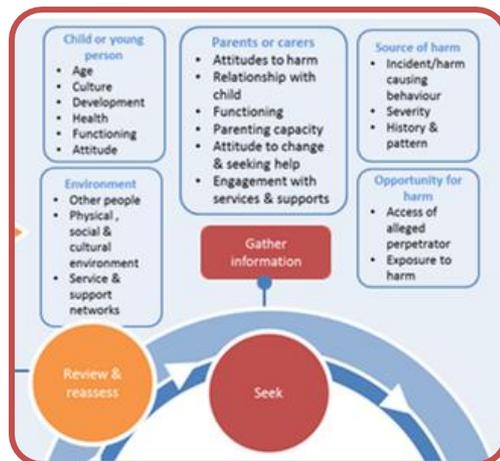
## Seek information

### Collect and validate information

Information is the foundation of effective risk assessment and mitigation planning. The pieces of information collected form a picture about a child's safety in the past and in the present. Be curious and open-minded, while thinking critically and addressing information gaps.

Collect information about:

- the child or young person – their age, their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual development, and their health, attitude, functioning and capacity
- their parents or carers – their attitudes to harm and to supports and services, their attitudes to and relationship with the child or young person and any siblings, their parenting capacity to act protectively and harm they have exposed other children to, and their functioning, including their own exposure to harm and violence, mental health, alcohol and other drug use and other family stressors
- the environmental context – others in the child's life, their physical, social and cultural environment, including housing and community and cultural connections, and the services and supports available and the child's and parent's attitudes to them
- any sources, past patterns and escalation of harm
- any opportunity for harm in the future.



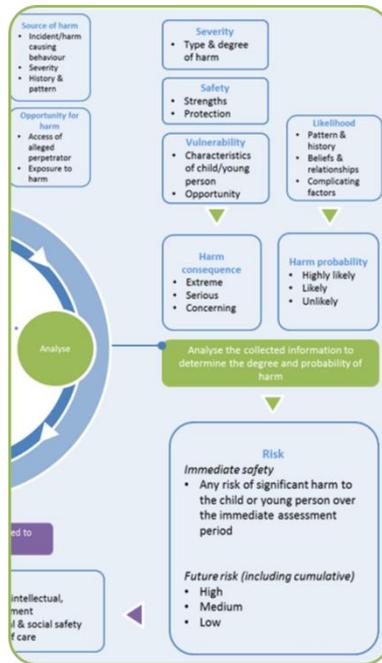
# A

## Analyse

### Organise information to determine the degree and probability of harm

Analyse all of the collected information according to:

- the severity of believed harm – the type and degree of harm which has, is, or is likely to be experienced, including patterns of past harm and harm that has accumulated or is likely to escalate
- the degree of safety for the child or young person – strengths in relationships, skills and personality, and protective actions to care for and safeguard the child
- the child or young person’s vulnerability to harm - their characteristics and functioning, and the opportunity for harm or protection
- the likelihood of the believed harm occurring, cumulating, continuing or recurring – prior patterns and history of harm, harm frequency, severity and escalation, attitudes and harmful behaviour to the child or other children or young people, and complicating factors that individually or in combination diminish parenting capacity to care or protect a child or young person.



### Determine harm consequence and harm probability and risk to immediate safety and future harm

# F

## Formulate

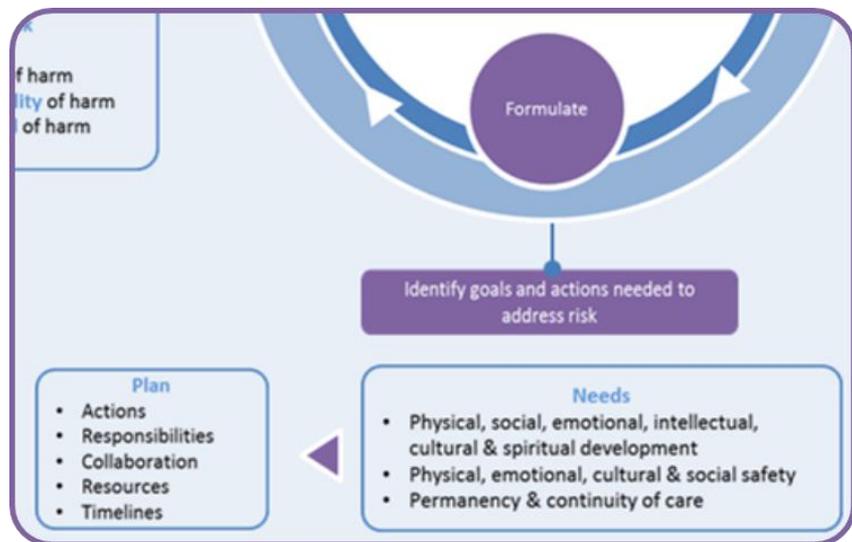
### Form a plan to improve safety and wellbeing

Use the risk of harm determined to identify the goals and needs of the child or young person in relation to their:

- physical, social, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual **development**
- physical, emotional, cultural and social **safety**
- **permanency** and continuity of care.

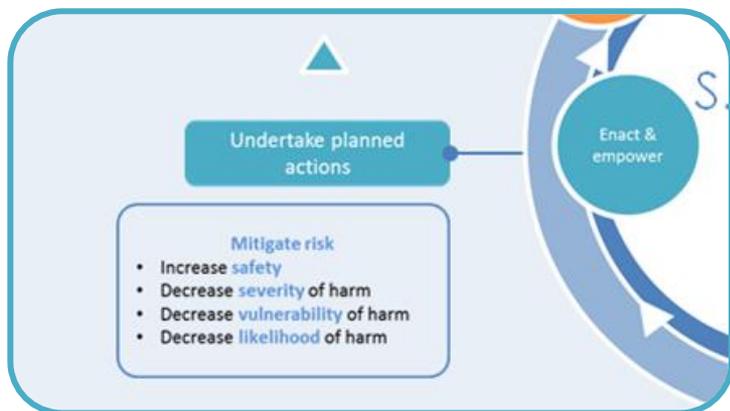
Actions lead directly from identified goals and needs, and must specify:

- who is responsible for undertaking the action
- who the person responsible for the action needs to collaborate with to achieve it
- resources available
- resources that need to be put in place and how this will occur
- timelines for action.



# E

## Enact & empower



### Act to mitigate risk

Each action should aim towards:

- increasing safety for the child by improving strengths in their relationships, skills and personality, and the protection provided to them through care and safeguards
- decreasing the severity of, vulnerability to and likelihood of harm to the child or young person.

### Empower children, young people and families

Practice with children and young people should aim to empower them to find their voice and speak out about their experiences in a safe environment.

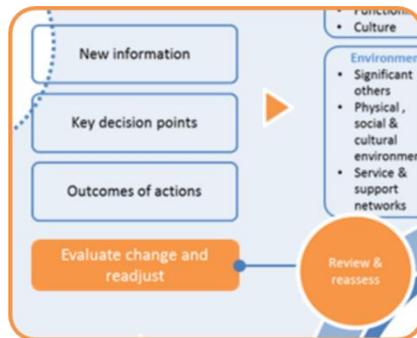
Children, young people and families need to be empowered to connect with their communities in ways that are meaningful to them and that will strengthen their resilience.

# R

## Review & reassess

### Evaluate changes and make adjustments

Review is a continual and ongoing process. As actions are completed and at key decision points, consider whether their outcomes have been achieved, what worked and what could be improved.



### Make every interaction count

New information or changes in the circumstances of a child, their family and environment need to be reassessed using the S.A.F.E.R kids framework. It should be analysed to determine whether there is a change to harm consequence and probability and the risks to immediate future safety and mitigation actions modified or added to address needs.



A guided approach to risk assessment & mitigation planning in child protection

- New information
- Key decision points
- Outcomes of actions

Evaluate change and readjust

Undertake planned actions

- Mitigate risk**
- Increase **safety**
  - Decrease **severity** of harm
  - Decrease **vulnerability** of harm
  - Decrease **likelihood** of harm

- Plan**
- Actions
  - Responsibilities
  - Collaboration
  - Resources
  - Timelines

- Child or young person**
  - Age
  - Culture
  - Development
  - Health
  - Functioning
  - Attitude
- Parents or carers**
  - Attitudes to harm
  - Relationship with child
  - Functioning
  - Parenting capacity
  - Attitude to change & seeking help
  - Engagement with services & supports
- Source of harm**
  - Incident/harm causing behaviour
  - Severity
  - History & pattern
- Environment**
  - Other people
  - Physical, social & cultural environment
  - Service & support networks
- Opportunity for harm**
  - Access of alleged perpetrator
  - Exposure to harm

Gather information



Identify goals and actions needed to address risk

- Needs**
- Physical, social, emotional, intellectual, cultural & spiritual development
  - Physical, emotional, cultural & social safety
  - Permanency & continuity of care

- Severity**
- Type & degree of harm

- Safety**
- Strengths
  - Protection

- Vulnerability**
- Characteristics of child/young person
  - Opportunity

- Likelihood**
- Pattern & history
  - Beliefs & relationships
  - Complicating factors

- Harm consequence**
- Extreme
  - Serious
  - Concerning

- Harm probability**
- Highly likely
  - Likely
  - Unlikely

Analyse the collected information to determine the degree and probability of harm

- Risk**
- Immediate safety**
- Any risk of significant harm to the child or young person over the immediate assessment period
- Future risk (including cumulative)**
- High
  - Medium
  - Low