

SAFETY PLANS - WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

A Resource for Parents written by Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter Peer Parent Expert

What is a safety plan? <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/nsw-child-protection-guide-for-families/when-a-caseworker-visits/safety-plans.html>

A **safety plan** is a short-term plan made **with you** to keep your child safe **right now**.

It is:

- A list of what DCJ believe are **dangers** affecting your child's immediate safety
- A list of **tasks** that explain what will be done to keep your child safe straight away
- Clear about **who** will do each task and **when**

A safety plan **is not a legal document**.

It is **not a long-term plan** and it is **not a punishment**.

If you don't follow the safety plan you are risking your children being removed.

Who makes the safety plan?

You and the caseworker **make the safety plan together**.

- You have the right to be involved in every part of it
- Your child can also have a say about what helps them feel safe
- Family members, friends, or support people may be included if you agree

If you feel the plan is being written *about you* instead of *with you*, you can say so.

<https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/contact-us/complaints-and-feedback.html>

What are "dangers" and "tasks"?

- **Dangers** are the things the department believes are affecting your child's safety right now
- **Tasks** are the actions that will happen immediately to manage those dangers

Tasks should be:

- Clear
- Realistic
- Time-limited
- Something you've agreed to or understand

Examples of tasks:

- Changing something at home
- Stopping or starting a behaviour
- A family member helping with care at certain times
- Urgent help organised by the caseworker (for example, cleaning, removing unsafe items)

You should understand **why** each task is there and **how long** it is expected to last.

Your voice matters

You have the right to:

- Say what you think will help keep your child safe
- Ask what supports are available to help you
- Ask questions if something doesn't make sense
- Have a support person with you at meetings
- Take notes or ask for copies of what's written

Stress and fear make it hard to think clearly.

Having someone you trust with you can really help.

Support people and advocates

You can ask for:

- A family support worker
- A parent advocate
- A disability advocate
- Legal advice (always ask for this)

Legal Aid NSW can explain your rights and give free legal advice.

If you are a person with disability, the safety plan must match your abilities.

If you have an intellectual disability, **Intellectual Disability Rights Service** can support you

📞 1300 665 908

If English is not your first language, you have the right to an interpreter.

You or the caseworker can contact **Translating and Interpreting Service**

📞 131 450

After the safety plan is made

- The caseworker will check in with you about how the plan is going
- The plan should be reviewed until the dangers are no longer there
- Any changes must be written down and shared with you

If the plan changes without your knowledge, raise it with the caseworker straight away.

If the safety plan feels hard to follow

Safety plans can feel overwhelming or scary. You're not expected to do this alone.

If you're struggling:

- Tell the caseworker as soon as possible
- Be honest about what's getting in the way
- Ask for tasks to be changed if they are unrealistic
- Ask for support to stick to the safety plan (e.g. financial support to travel to services)

The plan should help keep your child safe, not set you up to fail.

What you can do

- Ask questions if you don't understand something
- Speak up if a task doesn't feel realistic
- Get support from advocates, family, or services
- Ask for help early, that is a strength, not a failure
- Keep notes of conversations and ask for copies of written plans
- **GET LEGAL ADVICE**

"I wish I had understood the importance of the safety plan. I was terrified, exhausted, and just trying to keep my head above water, I didn't realise this was the point where asking for the right support could change everything. I agreed to the safety plan but couldn't follow it because I didn't have the support I needed to do the tasks properly. Maybe if I had asked for more support my child would not have been removed."

"Parents need transparency with safety plans. Mine said I could use substances away from my child, so I did. My child was removed immediately. I wish DCJ had clearly said, 'If you use, your child will be removed,' instead of putting it in a plan that felt safe to follow."

Domestic Violence and Safety Plans – What Parents Need to Know

If domestic violence is part of your situation, safety plans can be especially complex and stressful.

Safety plans are meant to keep children safe **right now**, but when violence is happening, they can sometimes place unrealistic expectations on the parent who is being harmed.

A safety plan **should focus on the danger**, not punish the parent who is trying to survive it.

Important things to know:

- You should not be treated as the risk because someone else is using violence
- A safety plan should clearly explain **what DCJ expects** and **what the consequences are** if the plan cannot be followed
- You have the right to ask how domestic violence will be viewed and recorded
- You have the right to ask what support will be provided to help you stay safe

When you are living with fear, pressure, or control, it can be hard to think clearly or challenge what is being written. Many parents agree to safety plans while overwhelmed, exhausted, or terrified, without fully understanding how their actions may later be interpreted.

Be careful of unclear or conditional safety plans

Some safety plans appear to allow certain actions, but the consequences are not clearly explained. If something is written into a safety plan, ask:

- *Is this truly allowed?*
- *What will happen if this occurs?*
- *Will this lead to removal or escalation?*

If the answer is unclear, ask for it to be explained **in plain language and in writing**.

You have the right to transparency

You deserve to know:

- What actions will be seen as protective
- What actions may lead to removal
- What support will be offered to help you meet the plan

A safety plan should never feel like a trap.

If it does, ask for help, ask for changes, get legal advice and have someone with you.

You are allowed to ask for help.

Needing support does not mean you are failing your child.

For more information or to hear about who we are <https://finclusionh.org>

Contact Information:

- Email: contact@finclusionh.org
- Support: 1300 942 598
parentpeersnewcastle@gmail.com
- Website: <https://finclusionh.org>

