

Purpose of the Signs of Safety Harm Matrix

- The Signs of Safety Harm Matrix provides a clear structure to assist professionals to analyse any harm that has occurred to children caused by adult behaviour or the harm that has happened to a child/teen when the young person is engaged in at risk behaviours. The Harm Matrix magnifies the information that is recorded in the Past Harm analysis category of the Signs of Safety three column map.
- Most child protection assessments tend to focus on concerning adult behaviours such as violence, drug use, mental illness, poor standards of care and are not explicit about the impact of the concerning behaviours on the young person. The Signs of Safety Harm Matrix assist professionals to carefully think through and articulate impact on the child.
- Since the best predictor of the future is the past, harm analysis provides the best foundation for creating danger statements. Clearly thinking through the detail of the harm causing behaviour and its impact on the child/young person enables professionals to prepare explicit and detailed danger statements and allows them to then work with the family in a clear and focussed way.
- Analysing cumulative harm is typically the most difficult assessment in child protection work. The Harm Matrix is particularly useful in analysing cumulative or chronic harm such as the damage caused to children because of ongoing neglect, substance use, mental illness or domestic violence.

- There are two steps to using the Matrix:

1. The worker unpacks the information they have in relations to the adult's behaviours, the chronicity (frequency), severity and the impact on the child into the dimensions of the blank matrix. The worker focusses on the first known incident, the worst incident they know of and the most recent incident that has caused concern. This step generally reveals more about what isn't known than what is which leads to step two.
2. The worker then creates questions to ask professionals and the family, in each of the dimensions, to explore in detail the adult's behaviours and the harm to the child. The worker should focus on impact dimension of the Matrix (since this is the most important aspect in thinking about future danger) and use relationship questions to help people to think about differing perspectives. Once they have gathered sufficient information. To have created a clear picture for themselves of the harm to the child/ren, the worker uses this information to inform what it is they are worried will happen to the child if nothing in this family changes. This forms the danger statements.

Important to Remember

In using the Harm Matrix, be mindful that child protection professionals open cases for assessment and intervention focused solely on danger (future risk of harm) where no past harm has occurred. A typical case of this sort is a situation where a homeless, and isolated pregnant 15-year-old teenager who has been raised in care. In this situation the teenager has likely not harmed a child but for many reasons professionals will have serious concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the expected baby.

