

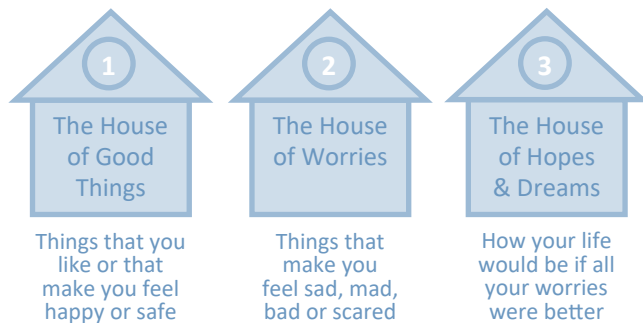
THE THREE HOUSES

SUMMARY

The Three Houses is an information-gathering tool used to elicit the child's perspective on what's working well, what they are worried about, and what they think needs to happen with their family.

PREPARING PARENTS

- Make the Three Houses process as open and transparent as possible to parents.
- Explain the process and why you want to complete it with the child. Show the parent a picture of the tool so they understand what it will look like.
- If the child is in the parent's care, obtain their consent.
- Ask if they want to do the tool with you before you complete it with their child.
- If meeting the child for the first time, invite them to introduce you to the child, and/or ask what will help put the child at ease.



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WORKING WITH THE CHILD

- Evaluate, on a case-by-case basis, whether to do the tool with siblings together or separately.
 - Completing it with siblings may reassure younger children and engage teens. Completing it separately can give information from each child's perspective.
- Introduce yourself: "Part of my job is to help kids and their families with worries they are having. I talk to lots of kids, and one thing that helps me do that is something called the Three Houses. Can I show you what that is?"
- Ask the child's permission to do the activity and tell them about confidentiality limits: "Sometimes kids tell me things I feel worried about and have to talk with other people about, but if so, I'll tell you I have to do that. Are you still OK to do the activity with me?"
- If the child wants an adult to stay near, ask them to sit apart from you and the child to quietly observe.
- Give the child the choice of you or them drawing, and/or drawing something other than houses (i.e., cars, apartments). Use a separate piece of paper for each house so they can be shown one at a time to the parents.

- Ask what the child wants to call their houses. They can also draw a picture for the name (i.e., sun = Good Things, cloud = Worries).
- Ask if they want to write or want you to write.
 - It is usually easier for children to draw and workers to write their words next to the drawings.
 - If they have you write, use their exact words.
 - If it gets hard for the child to talk and write, offer to take over the writing if they want.
 - Always check in with the child about what you write or draw with them.
- Ask whether they want to start with the House of Good Things or the House of Worries.
- Work to elicit concrete details from the child to narrow the focus specifically on the impact of the caregiver's actions, identifying *harm/danger* and *safety*.
- Watch for signs of trauma or stress; this can include the child seeming distracted or unable to sit still, "spacing out" or "checking out," or even leaving the activity. Know when kids have had enough, and stop if needed.

HELPFUL TIPS

Questions should not contain the answer.

Don't refer to information that wasn't told to you by the child.

Be sensitive to nonverbal cues and "I don't know."

Weave in and out around sensitive topics as needed; move on to a less threatening topic and try again later.

Try the "Three Classrooms" for kids having difficulties at school.

WRAPPING UP

- Explain you would like to help the child with their worries/hopes and share their Three Houses with their parent(s) (or other adult).
 - Do not share with a parent if you feel there will be negative repercussions for the child.
 - Otherwise, ask the child if it would be OK with them to share their drawings with their parent.
 - Does the child want to be there to share it or want you to do so without them?
 - If they do not consent to share with their parent(s), ask if there is a "safe" person they would like to share their Three Houses with.
- In cases of immediate child safety threats, explain what you need to do and why, and what will happen next.
- Thank the child for doing the Three Houses with you and tell them they did a great job. Ask if they have any worries about it or if they think there is anything you should change for next time.

SHARING WITH PARENTS

- Begin by asking what the parent thinks the child might have said about their good things, worries, and hopes and dreams.
- Start by showing them the House of Good Things first.
- Ask what the parent notices most about their child's Three Houses, what it brings up for them, and what they think needs to happen next.
- Observe the parent's reaction to the child's words and pictures; a lack of response may signal greater danger for the child.
- Ask the parent what they think would need to happen for the child's House of Dreams to come true.

UTILIZING THE INFORMATION

Case Plans

- Use the Three Houses to help define what behaviorally-based case plan objectives would look like from the child's perspective. What would the parent need to do in order to make the child's House of Hopes and Dreams a reality?

Court Reports

- Use the information gained in the Three Houses process to incorporate the child's/youth's perspective, in their own words, into your court report.

Structured Decision-Making

- Use the information from the Three Houses process to inform the Family Strengths & Needs Assessment.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS & PROMPTS FOR COMPLETING THE THREE HOUSES

QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN

Introduction

- I've been talking to your mom and dad about some worries in your home; is it OK if I talk to you?
- Where would you like to start?

House of Good Things

- This is the house where you can draw, write, or tell me about the things in your house that make you happy or feel safe or that are fun.
- What do you like about school?
- What are your favorite things to do at home? Who do you most like doing those things with?
- What is your favorite thing about your mom/dad?
- What things make you happy or feel good?
- What would other people say you are good at?
- Is there anything else you'd like to put in this house?

House of Worries

- This is the house where you can draw, write or talk to me about things in your home that worry you or make you feel scared, upset or sad.
- Lots of kids I talk to have worries, which are things that make us feel sad, mad, bad or scared. Are there any worries you might have? Can we put those in your house of worries?
- Is there anything or anyone that makes you feel sad at home or school? Bad? Mad? Scared?
- Is there anything else you think should be in this house?

House of Hopes & Dreams

- This is the house where you can draw, write or tell me about what would be different in your house if your House of Worries could go away.
- If all the worries at home were gone, what would you like to have happening?
- What would be different if all the worries were gone?
- What else would you like to have in your house of hopes and dreams that would help with the worries?
- Is there anything else you'd like to put in this house?

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER YOUTH

Introduction

- There's an activity I'm thinking of trying with your younger brother or sister — will you try it out for me?
- I'm learning to use this tool, and I was wondering if you'd be willing to do it and tell me what you think?

House of Good Things

- What does a good day look like for you?
- What do you feel best about in your life right now?
- What things do you think you are good at?
- Who is someone who matters to you? What do you think they would say you are good at?
- Who helps keep you safe?
- How do you help keep yourself safe?

House of Worries

- What's something you don't feel so good about?
- What are your top three worries?
- What makes things worse at home?
- Are there thoughts and feelings you have that make you get in trouble or do unsafe things?

House of Hopes & Dreams

- When you were little, what did you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to be now?
- What would the person who matters most to you say you would be doing in the future that would make them proud?
- If you woke up tomorrow and all the trouble was gone, how would you know it was gone, and what would be happening instead?
- What's one thing that would help with the bad stuff?
- What are the two best/two worst things you experienced with your parent(s) that you want/don't want to pass on to children of your own?
- What's one thing you can start today that will help keep you safe/help you feel OK? What other help do you need?

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

- How are you sleeping? Is it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep? Or do you feel like you sleep too much?
- How is your eating? Do you feel less hungry than you used to? Or do you feel like you're eating more?
- Do you ever have headaches or stomachaches?
- Do you ever feel anxious or worried? Tell me more...
- Do you feel like you can pay attention OK at school?
- When you feel sad or scared, what helps you feel better?

PROMPTS/REFLECTIONS

- "Sometimes it's hard to know what to say..."
- "Other kids sometimes..."
- "That's really brave."