

HARM & DANGER STATEMENTS

SUMMARY

Harm Statements and Danger Statements ensure everyone involved with a referral or case has shared understanding of the caregiver's actions that harmed the child and that create worry about possible future danger.

PURPOSE

- Harm Statements and Danger Statements (sometimes known as Risk Statements) are brief, behaviorally-based statements that help families, network members, service providers and staff become very clear about why Child Welfare is involved with the family and what we are worried may happen in the future.
- The purpose of these tools is to help *shared understanding* with the family and network regarding worries around the parent(s)' behavior and impact on the child, and also help focus the safety plan and/or case plan on the factors affecting the child's safety.
- Harm and Danger Statements are developed through the process of Safety Mapping in a Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting with a family and their network. Through this process, it is important to separate Harm and Danger from Complicating Factors.

HARM STATEMENT

- The Harm Statement describes in simple, behaviorally specific language the actions (or inactions) of the caregiver, and impact on the child, that brought the family to the attention of child welfare.

HARM STATEMENT ELEMENTS (PAST)



Harm Statements are about what already happened.

- There is not always a direct past impact on the child, even though what happened may be very worrisome. For example, mom passed out while the baby was in the crib, but the baby was fine. In these cases, you can create a Danger Statement alone, and/or create a Harm Statement that addresses how a parent's actions or inactions *could* have impacted the child. Sometimes parents are reluctant to agree to a Harm Statement in these situations; in that case, you can let it go and create a Danger Statement.

DANGER STATEMENT

- The Danger Statement is a clear, specific description of a parent's possible future behavior that may impact the child moving forward.
- The Danger Statement focuses on what we're worried will happen in the future if the parent's behavior does not change.
- The Danger Statement contains three parts: who is worried (possibly including the caregiver), the potential behavior (action/inaction) by the caregiver, and potential impact on the child.

DANGER STATEMENT ELEMENTS (FUTURE)



Danger Statements are worries about the future.

RISK STATEMENT

- The Risk Statement, developed by Sue Lorbach, is similar to a Danger Statement but does not include who is worried, and adds context. Context is under what circumstances (who, what, when, where, how) the risk to the child may be present.
- The format of a Risk Statement is: **[Child's name] may be [risk] should [context]**. For example: "Johnny may be seriously physically hurt should his dad get drunk and hit him on the back with a belt again."

DEVELOPING HARM & DANGER/RISK STATEMENTS

- Harm and Danger Statements should align with the safety threats identified on the SDM Safety Assessment tool, or if no safety threats were identified, the area(s) on the SDM Risk Assessment tool that we are worried will cause future danger to the child.
- Developing a provisional or "working" version of the Harm Statement can begin with the first phone call to the intake hotline, which is helpful in clarifying what is being reported about the parent's behavior and impact

| TERM | DEFINITION |
|-----------------------------|--|
| HARM | Actual experiences of past/current harm to a child by a caregiver. |
| DANGER | Worries that the caregiver's behavior may cause harm to the child in the future. |
| COMPLICATING FACTORS | Things we are worried about but are not actual harm to the child by the caregiver. |
| SAFETY | Acts of protection by the caregiver demonstrated over time. |
| SUPPORTING STRENGTHS | Positive things in a family's life that do not specifically address the danger. |

on the child. However, the true Harm and Danger Statements that will be used throughout a referral or case must be developed with the family and their Safety Network.

Intake/Screening

- To develop a provisional Harm Statement, ask thorough questions to identify the parent's behavior and if there was impact on the child. For example, if the caller says the mother is "mentally ill" or "using drugs," how do they know this? What does her behavior look like? What is the impact on the child?
- Does the caller know if there has ever been a time that the problem was not happening for the family? What did the parent's behavior look like during that time?
- Are there other things the caller is worried about in the family, but which are not harm or danger to the child (i.e., complicating factors)?
- Include a provisional Harm Statement in the Screener Narrative and specify Complicating Factors identified.

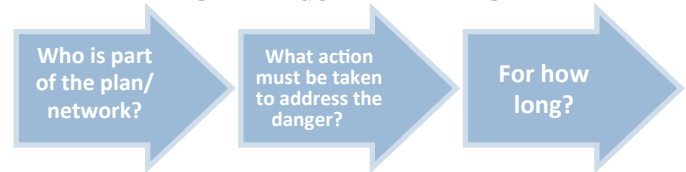
Investigating Social Worker

- After Intake has developed a working Harm Statement, the investigating social worker should schedule a CFT meeting to complete Safety Mapping and develop the true Harm and Danger Statements with the family and their network. *See SOP Quick Guide: Safety Mapping.*

SAFETY GOALS

- Safety Goals are developed from the Harm and Statements; they are clear statements, usually a few sentences long, about what actions the parent(s) or caregiver(s) will take, with the support of their network, to help everyone involved with the family know that the child will be safe.

SAFETY GOAL ELEMENTS



USE IN PLANS & COURT REPORTS

Safety Plans

- In the safety plan, state the Harm and Danger Statements and Safety Goal developed with the family.
- Use the Harm and Danger Statements and Safety Goal to develop a behaviorally-based safety plan with the family and their network. *See SOP Quick Guide: Safety Planning.*

Case Plans

- In the case plan, state the Harm and Danger Statements that were developed with the family, as well as the Safety Goal.
- Use the Harm and Danger Statements and Safety Goal to develop a behaviorally-based case plan with the family and their network. *See SOP Quick Guide: Behaviorally-Based Case Plans.*

Court Reports

- In the court report, document the Harm and Danger Statements that were developed with the family, as well as the Safety Goal.
- Discuss the parent(s)' progress toward the Safety Goal, using behaviorally-based language to explain your assessment of how they are or are not meeting the goal.

SAMPLE HARM STATEMENT, DANGER STATEMENT & SAFETY GOAL

| Harm Statement | Danger Statement | Safety Goal |
|--|--|---|
| Dad punched mom in the face and stomach and tried to strangle her against a wall while she was holding the baby and 5-year-old Jeremy was in the room. Jeremy was terrified and told the police he thought his mom was going to die. Jeremy reported his dad calls his mom bad names and it makes him sad. | CWS, mom and grandma are worried that dad will hit, strangle or otherwise hurt mom in the future, and that the baby or Jeremy will get hurt when dad hurts mom; that the baby and Jeremy could have their brain development and well-being affected by watching their dad verbally or physically abuse, hit or strangle their mom; or that dad could even kill mom and the children will be left without their mother. | Dad will work with a network of family, friends and professionals to create a plan and show everyone that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He understands the impact of witnessing violence on his children and will ensure they are never exposed to it again. He will always refrain from hitting mom, choking her, or using any other forms of violence. He will always co-parent with mom in ways that are respectful and polite, and never use name-calling or put-downs. Mom will work with a network of family, friends and professionals to create a plan and show everyone that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She understands why she stayed in a relationship where there was violence, how to identify signs of violence, the impact on her children of witnessing violence, and how to keep herself and her children safe from exposure to violence in the future. She will reach out to her support people to help her accept her feelings about being by herself and parenting separately. CWS will need to see this plan in place and working continuously for at least 6 months to reassess whether to recommend shared custody with dad. |

Note: Use the parents' actual names, not "mom" or "dad," in the Harm Statement, Danger Statement and Safety Goal