



# Tools for Integrating the Child's Perspective in Child Welfare

*Adapted from the Winter 2015 issue of Reaching Out*

*This article looks at two tools that can help children share their perspective in a way that contributes to child welfare risk assessment and safety planning and is appropriate to their level of development.*

## THE THREE HOUSES INFORMATION-GATHERING TOOL

The Three Houses is an information-gathering tool designed specifically to build rapport with children and youth, and discover their feelings and thoughts about their families and the child welfare intervention. The process used to complete the Three Houses allows social workers to bring forward the voice of children and young people in the safety planning process. It was designed in 2003 by New Zealand child welfare workers and trainers Nicki Weld and Maggie Greening in response to feedback from family and youth court judges who identified a lack of children and family voice in the safety plans they had reviewed. Within the Safety Organized Practice (SOP) framework, the tool allows child welfare professionals ask the three key questions of SOP – "What are we worried about? What's working well? What needs to happen next?" – in a way that children can understand and respond to.

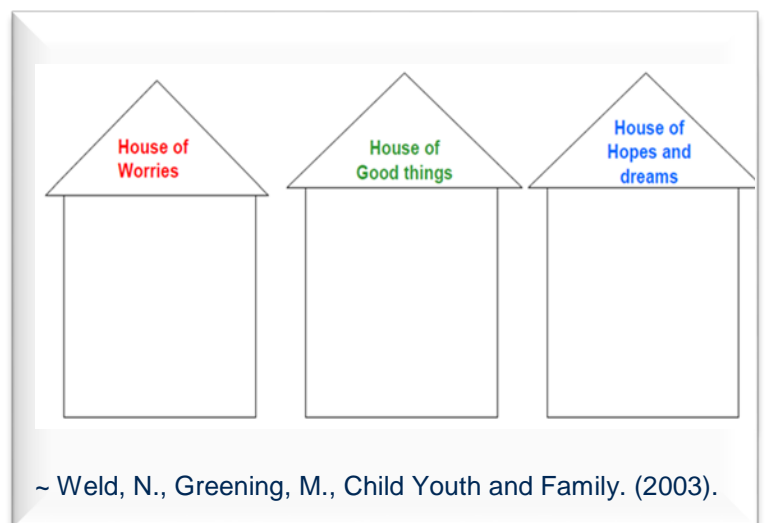
### THE PROCESS

Social workers using the tool will present the child with pictures of three houses, or let the child draw their own. Children will have the opportunity to draw their own answers into the houses or have the child welfare worker record their responses. The tool can generally be explained to children as follows:

**House of Worries:** *"This is the house where you can draw, write, or talk to me about those things in your home that worry you, that make you feel scared, upset, or sad."*

**House of Good Things:** *"This is the house where you can draw, write, or tell me about those things in your home that make you happy, feel safe, and are fun."*

**House of Hopes and Dreams:** *"This is the house where you can draw, write, or talk to me about what would be different in your house if your house of worries could go away."*



~ Weld, N., Greening, M., Child Youth and Family. (2003).

## SHARING THE THREE HOUSES

After completing the Three Houses, the social worker will explain to the child what will happen next and ask the child if it is okay to share their Three Houses, and, if so, with whom.

If it seems safe for the child, the Three Houses will then be shared with the parents. When safe, sharing the houses is very important, as parents and others should understand how the child is seeing their situation so that they can make better informed decisions during the safety planning process. The Three Houses can also identify areas or situations of trauma that the child has experienced and should be included in the case plan. Working with children to identify trauma exposure is a critical area of assessment.

## THE SAFETY HOUSE INFORMATION GATHERING TOOL

The Safety House tool, developed in 2009, grew out of a desire to include children's voices and ideas in the safety planning process. It is used with a child or youth as part of the overall safety planning process and is designed to help the child or youth make sense of and participate in this safety planning process.

In using the Safety House tool, the outline of the house is first drawn by the child; then, the worker uses the structure of the Safety House to elicit the child or young person's views about the specific safety arrangements that would need to be in place to make sure that any worries were addressed. The child's views are recorded in the Safety House in both pictures and words. The child or young person then creates a "safety path" to their Safety House, locating themselves on the safety path as a way of representing his/her assessment (or scaling) of current safety within the family.

The Safety House is primarily a safety planning tool for use with children, but its use is not restricted to formal safety planning. The Safety House can also be used to seek a child's views as part of the development of a reunification plan or as part of a family preservation program (seeking the child's views on what would need to happen for him/her to

remain in the care of his/her family and continue to be safe in relationship to the worries). It can also be used as part of a rapid-response conferencing process in a situation when a child may have been hospitalized following a significant alleged non-accidental injury. Wherever adults are talking together to explore future safety, the Safety House can assist in bringing this conversation to children in ways that they can make sense of and actively participate in the case plan.

**To read more about tools for integrating the child's perspective, please see the Safety Organized Practice edition of our child welfare practice journal *Reaching Out* at <http://bit.ly/ReachingOutJournal>**

**For additional resources on Safety Organized Practice, please visit our SOP Resources Page at <http://bit.ly/SafetyOrganizedPractice>**

### THREE HOUSES: ORIGINS



*Three Houses creator Nicki Weld explains the creation and evolution of the Three Houses tool in a short video produced by the Northern California Training Academy.*

Visit <http://bit.ly/threehouses> to view the brief presentation.

