Clarity and Grace Amidst the Murky and Conflictual Waters: Bringing the Key Voices Into the Family Group Conferences and Meetings

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9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Three-Hour Breakout Sessions

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Greenway Ballroom A

The presenters will bring their experience as trained family group facilitators and licensed Signs of Safety trainers to help participants gain new skills to engage families in enduring safety planning. The presenters will model the importance of engagement on all levels: how to gather, through preparation before the FGDM meeting, and share the voices of the social worker, parents, and children through a simple framework that will lead to purposeful and clear planning for safety and well-being. Participants will practice key elements, tools, and questions that will immediately apply to their work within the agencies and families they serve.

*Practice, Skills, and Knowledge*
Agenda/Flow

- Introductions
- Sharing the process
- Signs of Safety Framework
- Clarity on Vision/Goals
- Sharing, Practicing the Tools
- Bringing it to the Meeting
- Reflection
Clarity, is this possible in this type of work? How?

If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.

– Albert Einstein
What makes this work “Murky”, Conflictual?
Is this even possible?

How do we show, demonstrate grace, kindness and love to these difficult and conflictual families?
On a scale of “0” to “10”, where “0”=

I’m frustrated because I get people together but by the end of the meeting we rarely have clarity for a safety or permanency plan that makes us more confident that the child will actually be safe in the home, it is usually all about the services...

and “10”=

I usually always walk away from my meetings feeling like I have used that time to its fullest potential by creating a plan for safety or permanency that is all about the details of what I’ve heard from the child and family that would actually keep the child safe and well...

what is your #?

What might bring your # up?
Signs of Safety Roots

Solution Focused Brief Therapy
Steve deShazer    Insoo Kim Berg

(De Jong & Berg, 2008)
Signs of Safety Roots

(De Jong & Berg, 2008)

Solution Focused Brief Therapy Principles

- The client is the expert of his/her own life
- If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it
- If you find something that works, do more of it
- If it’s not working, do something different

(De Jong & Berg, 2008)
“The Preparation” for Creating Shared Vision

1. Conversation with Worker
2. Conversation with Parent(s)
3. Conversation with the child(ren)
4. Inviting the Family Network.
The safety of children is dependent upon the effectiveness of the safety plan.

The safety plan is developed based upon a clear understanding of the safety goal.

The safety goal is the inversion of the danger statement.

The usefulness of the danger statement depends upon the degree to which we understand past harm (and existing safety).

The strength (value) of existing safety is based on it’s relevance to the building blocks (mortar).

Quality harm statements can only be captured when we use our EARS to understand the child’s experience.
Referral Safety Info given:

- History of drug use by both parents. History of domestic violence, both verbal and physical, between the parents. The children have all witnessed severe verbal arguments and some physical abuse as well. Current relationship status between parents is not clear. History of verbal abuse (e.g. name calling) of 15 yr old daughter by dad. Recent diagnoses of anxiety and depression for mom. Recent job losses for both parents, leading to financial stress.

After talking with the Social Worker and interviewing her she shared some more of the history:

- Maltreatment or Incident leading to the county being involved. Main report was about a dirty home, parents were acting eractic, saw a drug pipe. House smelled bad, dirty dishes. LE went with a SW in February, heard yelling and violent arguing. They separated the parents and talked with them. Mom did a drug test, mom was positive for Meth. Home was filthy, there were dog feces in the home. The kids ended up being placed with the Grandparents.
Harm Statements

Components of Harm Statements:

- What happened to the child (or allegedly happened)?
- How did it (or allegedly) impact the child?

Based upon the facts about what has happened in the past.

- Severity, Incidents, Impact

Clearly understanding the details of past harm = clearer danger statements.

“Adam” Example:

On January 3, 2011 it was reported that Adam (3yrs old) was playing at the playground and fell and broke his leg and that his Mom, Jackie was at home sleeping at the time. The police found Jackie passed out on the couch with a blood alcohol level of .24. When another adult found Adam at the playground he was crying and couldn’t walk; he said he was scared and didn’t know what to do.
Danger Statements

Components of Danger Statements:
- Who is worried
- Possible behavior of offender
- Possible impact on the child

Based upon our worst fears (informed by the pattern of past harm) for the future safety of the child.

Clearly defined danger statements = more relevant existing safety.

“Adam” Example:
Child Protection Services, the doctor at the hospital and Adam’s dad, are worried that Adam’s Mom might drink too much or get drunk while she is caring for Adam and might not know where Adam is or what he is doing to the point where Adam could get hurt again and be scared and not know what to do.
Danger Statements/ Worry Statements

- **Fighting.** The Agency is worried that even though the parents really love their kids and don’t want them to see fighting, we are still worried that the parents, because of financial stress and other dynamics between the parents, that they could continue to get in arguments with yelling and the fighting could get more intense, could get physical and the kids could be scared like they were before where they would either leave or hide in the closet. The worry is that the kids could see their parents get hurt, the kids could get caught in the middle and could be hurt themselves.

- **Drug use.** The Agency is also worried that because of past positive drug tests and from the parents reporting that they used in the past because of financial and family stress. We are worried that the parents could start to use again, causing them to not be safe with each other, as parents, they might allow unsafe people to be around the kids.
Safety Goals

Components of Safety Goals:

- What is the goal or “end game”
- What needs to be happening differently in the care of the child related to the danger statement
- Who needs to be convinced that it is happening sufficiently enough to ensure safety for the child(ren)

Based upon a vision for future safety that is adequate to address the danger

“Adam” Example:

The agency will be able to close the file when everyone can see that Mom will always be sure Adam is being cared for by someone who is sober and can supervise him so that, even if he has an accident or gets hurt, someone is there to help him. Everyone needs to be confident that the safety plan will keep working once the Agency closes their file.
Danger Statements & Safety Goals

Worst Fears?  ➔  Danger Statement

► ...what could happen?
► ...how it might impact the kids negatively?

Best Hopes?  ➔  Safety Goal

► ...what should happen?
► ...how it might impact the kids positively?
Safety Goal Practice

- Pair up and write out a possible Safety Goal(s), if you were the Facilitator, based on the Danger Statement(s).
Ben case Safety Goal’s

► Fighting: The parents have created a Safety Plan with the help of their Safety Network that shows everyone that even if the parents aren’t getting along, the kids will always feel safe and cared for. This plan has been demonstrated to work and the family, children and Network are confident.

► Drug Use: The parents have created a Safety Plan with the help of their Safety Network that shows everyone that the parents will demonstrate that they will follow their plan by dealing with stress in ways that model for their kids a sober life and the kids know that their parent will be sober when in the parenting role.
Moving to Vision and Family Goals

- Kids: Safety House
- Parents: Future House
Involving Children

According to Andrew Turnell, a considerable amount of research shows children and teenagers who have been involved in the child protection system consistently say they felt like ‘pawns in big people’s games’ and have little say or choice in what happens to them.

(Turnell, 2012, p. 27 & Turnell, 2010, p. 3)
The Safety House

Rules of my safety house

People who live in my safety house

People who come to visit my safety house

People I don’t feel safe with

(Parker, 2009)

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1. Inside the Safety House: The Inner Circle and Inside the Four Walls

- Child draws self in the inner circle (leaving space to draw others).
- Who else would live in your Safety House with you?

Inside the house:

- Imagine that you are with mommy and daddy and you felt as safe and happy as possible, what sorts of things would ______ (eg. Mommy, Daddy, big sister) be doing?
- What are the important things that ______ (eg. Mommy and Daddy) would do in your Safety House to make sure that you are safe?
- Are there any important things that need to be in your Safety House to make sure that you are always safe?
Safety House
(Parker, 2009, p.21)

2. Visiting the Safety House: The Outer Circle

- Who would come to visit you in your Safety House to help make sure that you are safe?
- When _______ (each of the safety people identified above) comes to visit you in your Safety House, what are the important things they would do to help you be safe?
- If worries started to happen and all these people were visiting who would be the person to notice things weren’t okay?
- What should ____ do when they come to visit to make sure they pay attention to how things are going?
- What would you want ___ to do if they noticed worries?
3. The Red Circle: Unsafe People

- When you go home to live with ______ (eg. Mom and Dad), is there anyone who might live with you or come to visit who would not make you feel completely safe?

- What would those people be doing that would make you feel unsafe? Have there been times where you did feel safe around ___?

- What was ____ (or other people) doing to make you feel safe?

- If ____ were to visit/live with you, what rules would we need to have to make sure you are safe?

- What would need to happen in order for the person to be able to come and visit/live with you? What would other people need to do to make sure you feel safe and are safe if they were to visit?
Safety House
(Parker, 2009, p.21)

4. The Roof

▶ Remember we talked about how all those adults are talking together to make a safety plan for when you go home?

▶ One of the things they are trying to decide is what the rules of the safety plan should be. What would the rules of your safety house be so that you and everyone would know that nothing like _______ (use specific worries) would ever happen again?

▶ What else and what else?

▶ If your _______ (Mom/sister/brother/grandma, etc.) was here, what would they say need to be the rules of your safety house?
5. The Safety Path

If the beginning of the path is where everyone was very worried and you weren’t able to live with Mom and Dad and you had to go and live with ______ and the end of the path at the front door is where all of those worries have been sorted and you will be completely safe living with Mom and Dad, where do you think things are right now?

If the beginning of the path is that you feel very worried that if you go home to live with Mom (or have an overnight stay) that Mom will start using drugs again and then not be able to look after you properly and the end of the path at the door is that everything in your Safety House is happening and you’re not worried at all that Mom will use drugs around you again, where are you right now?

What do you think needs to happen for you to move a little bit further along your safety path and be closer to your safety house?

What would need to happen for you to feel so safe that you could move to the end of your safety path and even be able to step inside your safety house?
Safety House Example from Family Group
Ben Bevis (SafeGenerations)

My Safety House

Rules of my Safety House

1. No Fighting (Yelling, Physical) just talk about it.
2. Family Fun Nights (At least one night/week)
3. Equally pitch in to keep the house clean (Take care of it)
4. Use nice Words- No cussing. When you are mad, talk about it, don't throw things, find an easy way to calm down.

Communicating with nice
Self-Control: Words, actions and anger. No more fighting!
Cleaner House
Working together

People who come to visit my Safety House

Safer: Father/son.

Path Definition: Son of mother. A place to feel safe. This life is an unknown. maternal of path. Not safe. This life is a new phase.

Daughter’s Position on Pathway towards more safe.
Son’s Position on Pathway towards more safe.
M-Friend: Not a good influence.

Adaptation of Sonja Parker
“Safety House”

Grandparents: Support-us: Money if needed, necessary things for home, another place to go for a break. Talk to them.

Friends: Hilary (best friend), Jane, Ann, Matthew. Tell me support, help get stuff done.

My dad: I can be open with him.
The Path of 10 and 15 year old

15 Yr Daughter: What brings me up the path some: They visit and I feel like I talk more with my mom. Mom seems to be doing better. Getting stuff done. My Grandparents have supported me a lot, they talk with me. It will take more time.

What needs to happen next:
- Mom and Dad: Parents need to figure out arguments, work it out, don’t give up right away. - Dad to come see us more.
- (Mom) Do more with my mom/ More time together: Have a Girls Day, Just even somewhere small- 1-2 times a week.
- Me and Dad: Communicate easier with Dad. We could sit down and talk things through and how we need each others help.

Next Smallest step with Dad: Talk a little during the visits.

10yr old Son: What brings me up the path some:

Feels Happy where I’m at right now, but want to go home. It is letting parents have time to settle what they are doing. So far it’s given them a couple of months to help them improve on their fighting.

To Move up path:
- Knowing when we can go home.
- More Communication
- Mom and Dad spend time together communicating, figuring out how to deal with problems by talking.
- Mom and Dad would work on talking to each other more instead of yelling, So we can go home!
In small groups:

- Discuss your best strategies and questions for how you would bring information from a child’s safety house to the safety network. Write down:
  - How would you share the information?
  - What questions would you ask the safety network to get them thinking through what the child has shared and how this should be incorporated into the family driven safety plan?

Sharing the Safety House Exercise
Future House

- Originally developed to be used with families to have conversations about the family’s goals related to child protection being out of their life.
- Can be used in any context to create a preferred future and a detail vision for what life could be like.
- Creates a vision for future best hopes.

Parker, 2011
The Future House
(Parker, 2010)

Imagine this is your future house, where all of the problems that led to CPS being involved with your family have been sorted out and you’re able to be the parent you’ve always wanted to be?

What would you be doing in your care of your children if all of the problems had been sorted out?

What else would you be doing? What else?

What would _____ (other people - children, partner, grandparents, friends, CPS etc) notice you doing?

What would ___ (other parent/partner) be doing?

Scale of 0 - 10, where are you on the safety path?

10 - All of these things are already happening, all of the time.

0 - None of the things in my future house are happening yet.

More specific and clear the description, the greater the chance of this happening.

Compliments - How did you do that/get that happening?

Exceptions - What parts of your Future House have happened in the past month, even in small ways?

Next Step - What needs to happen for you to move one step closer to your future house?

What’s already happening to get you this far along the path?
Blank Future House

__________Life:

Support:

What I’m already doing:

Next steps

Adaptation of Sonja Parkers “Future House” Tool. Aspirations Consultancy
Think of a family you are currently working with where the Future House could be helpful.

Write down how you would imagine asking your first question for the house.

Meet with a partner and you role play the parent or youth you are thinking about, your partner will role-play you as a facilitator or worker. You can use the questions or make up your own. Enjoy!

Future House Exercise
How could you see the Future House being helpful in your own work?

What questions do you have about the tool or the process of using the tool?

Future House Debrief
With a partner discuss your ideas on how you might bring all of these components to your FGC?

Write down your ideas
**Family Group Process- How Ben walks through the process for the meeting.**

Introductions

Ground rules: Keeping the Child as the key focus. How will we do that? (Picture, code word)

Purpose of Meeting - Shared by the Social Worker and possibly the parents if willing.

Strengths/Existing Safety: Remember, Planning is already happening here!

Concerns/Worries (Danger): Family share if they are willing.

Planning:

- Start with sharing the Safety House (Child’s vision of what safe looks like)
- Future House (Parents Vision for What Safe looks like)
- Sharing the Workers Bottom Lines/ Find out Family and Networks Bottom Lines given the Safety Rules.
- If Workers have Bottom-lines for Services from the courts. Ask questions around “How will going to Tx help you be the dad you want to be to your child?“
- Using the Safety Rules: What would be the key Safety Rules that need to be in place (Language that the child can understand)
- Using the Safety Planning Template to create the Adult Safety Plan (Triggers, Red Flags, Preventative Plan)
- Talk through how people will be involved with this plan, opportunities for natural Tests, Etc.

Putting it on a scale: 0-10. What’s their number, what brings them up. What are they willing to do, for how long as a part of this Safety Network? Plan the next follow-up meeting.
Family Safety Plan Example from a FGC Ben Bevis (SafeGenerations)

Rules for Safety House: (Created by the kids- Daughter and Son and agreed upon by the parents and “Family Network”)

Rule 1. No Fighting (Yelling, Physical) just talk about it.

Example: - When Mom and Dad have something to discuss and are getting frustrated about. They won’t use names... If Dad is feeling frustrated enough (Feeling Rage, Mom is feeling her blood boil)

Rule 1. No Fighting (Yelling, Physical) just talk about it.

Example: - When Mom and Dad have something to discuss and are getting frustrated about. They won’t use names... If Dad is feeling frustrated enough (Feeling Rage, Mom is feeling her blood boil)

Dad would take 20 minutes to 30 min walk or break. Mom will not follow Dad... or

Mom - If I got frustrated with Dad, I might take the dog for a walk instead of egging each other on.

Dad will try and record the conversations to keep calmer and play them back so they know what they sounded like.

- How to Practice the Talking vs. Fighting?: Dad and Mom will meet together on Wed. Face to face and work at talking something through that is less intense, not finances.

*If the 20 minute Time out didn’t work and things were getting more heated: Mom, Dad or kids could reach out to someone on their “Network”

Mom’s Friend: she would text or Call the mom and dad. Send a message to Jessica and she will check in with Daughter to see how she is doing.

Aunt M- If Mom’s Friend is not available Melissa will check in and come over if needed.

Grandma- If Melissa is not available, Grandma will come over.

Aunt A- If Grandma is not available, Amanda will...

Aunt J-If Amanda is not available, Jessica will.

Possible places where the kids can go if needed: Mom’s Friend, Melissa, Grandma, Jessica.

Overnight Breaks: Aunt J’s, Grandparents, and Aunt A...

Rule 2. Family Fun Nights (At least one night/week)

Ideas for Possible Next Steps to start Family Fun Nights:-When could these start? Who could make sure it’s going well, supervised Family Fun Nights at first- by who?

In the future: How often would these happen?

Rule 3. Equally pitch in to keep the house clean (Take care of it)

Ideas for Possible Next Steps to Practice this House Rule: - If the family network: Grandma, Grandpa, Aunts could talk to the parents about this first to make a plan. Maybe practice this with yard or house work at the Grandparents, then maybe transition to cleaning and taking care of the family home to get it ready for moving back in? When, who would be there, could the parents and kids work together and maybe the extended family could assist as needed. Maybe add a fun element. Pick a date?

Rule 4. Use Nice Words- No cussing. When you are mad, talk about it, don’t throw things, and find an easy way to calm down.

-Practice on Visits, phone calls? Mom, Dad, Daughter, 10yr old, 4yr old during visits.
How was this Family Group Process different than others you've experienced as a worker?
What are the standouts from today?

What vision did you gain from today that you might put into your own practice with families or your staff that work with families?

Reflection
References


