**Involving and Strengthening the Family’s Network of Safety and Support**

An important component of the Partnering for Safety approach is supporting families to strengthen and involve their network of safety and support.

The safety and support network is made up of people who will support the parents to create and sustain safety for the children and who will hopefully continue to play this role long after professionals have stopped working with the family. The safety and support network provides support to the parents and safety for the children (and in some situations, safety for the adult whose behaviour we are worried about).

A strong and active safety and support network provides professionals with confidence that the parents have the support they need to ensure safety for the children for as long as the children are vulnerable to the identified dangers or challenges that the family are facing.

**Role of the Network**

There are a number of different roles that the network can play in supporting the family. Not every network member needs to be involved with all of these roles. Some may only have one or two roles and each person can play a different role in supporting the family.

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| **Role of the Network** | **Description** |
| **Safe caregiver** | Being a safe adult who supports the family by providing safe supervision and protection for the child, when the parents are not able to. |
| **Planning support** | Helping the family to work with professionals to develop strong and realistic plans to address the worries or the challenges that the family are facing (eg. immediate safety plans, case plans, contact plans, long term safety plans). |
| **Educator, Coach & Mentor**  | Coaching and mentoring parents to support them in learning new parenting skills and behaviours eg. teaching a new mum to set up routines, helping parents to have positive discipline strategies, learn to cook, etc. |
| **Emotional support for parents and CYPs.** | Checking in with parents & children/young people and providing emotional support when it is needed eg. Being the person who a parent calls if they are feeling overwhelmed or are worried that they may not be able to keep to the case plan/safety plan.  |
| **Practical support for parents and CYPs**  | Providing practical support to the parents and children/young people - eg. taking them to appointments, helping with practical things like shopping, transport, appointments, etc.  |
| **Encouraging parents to seek help when needed**  | Helping parents to identify signs of relapse or signs that things are not going well and seeking help (as per the case plan or safety plan).  |
| **Seeking help for family if parents are not able or willing to seek help** | Being the person who will alert professionals that things are not going well, if the parents are not able or not willing to ask for help at that time eg. if the plan is not being followed or if the child may be in danger. |

**Helping families to identify network members**

The table below can assist workers to have conversations with parents about who could be part of their network of safety and support and what role each person could play. Breaking the role of the network into a number of distinct and specific roles can make it easier for parents to understand the role of the network and help them to identify people in their life who could play these roles. The final question about what difference it could make for the family to have someone supporting them in this way can help parents to see the network not only as an intrusion that is being enforced by child protection, but also as a support and resource to their family.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Role of the Network** | **Who will do this?** | **What will they do?** | **When will it be done?** | **What difference will it make for our family?** |
| Safe caregivers |  |  |  |  |
| Planning support |  |  |  |  |
| Educator, Coach & Mentor  |  |  |  |  |
| Emotional support for parents and CYPs. |  |  |  |  |
| Practical support for parents and CYPs  |  |  |  |  |
| Encourage parents to seek help when needed  |  |  |  |  |
| Seeking help for family if parents are not able or willing to seek help |  |  |  |  |

**Circles of Safety and Support Tool**

If parents are struggling to identify people for the different roles of the network, the circles of safety and support tool can help to identify other potential network members. This tool can be used with parents, as well as children and young people and network members who are already involved.

 You can download a detailed booklet on the use of the Circles tool at www.partneringforsafety.com/resources

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Other questions to use with the circle tool (to identify people for the inner circle):

* *Who in your life already knows what is going on and that you are dealing with some difficult issues?*
* *Who in your life “has your back”—who you feel you can trust?*
* *Which people know you at your best?*
* *Who are the people that you celebrate with, when things are going really well?*
* *If you suddenly became sick, who would you trust the most (e.g. to care for your child, to take you to the doctor)?*
* *If your child was here right now, who would they say they trust the most? Who would your child say they want help from?*
* *If you had to begin by picking one person in your life to come to a meeting, start talking to, and share the details of our work with, who would you want that person to be?*

**Partnering with the network**

Within the Partnering for Safety approach, the assessment and monitoring of the network is part of an overall framework of partnering with the network.

Partnering with the network is more than just checking up on them to verify that they are doing what they say they will do. It involves working in partnership with the network to support them in fulfilling and maintaining their role.

Partnering with the network involves four inter-related elements:

**Partnering with the network**

1. **Supporting the network to identify and maintain their role**

The first step involves helping the network to identify the most appropriate role for them (in collaboration with the parents and the child/young person). How have they supported the family in the past? What do they feel most equipped and willing to do in the future? Partnering with the network involves assisting them to assess their capacity, willingness and confidence to fulfil and maintain their role (see table below).

Support may also involve services or direct work with the network members to help them gain the knowledge, skills or confidence they need to fulfil their role, or to assist them in healing relationships (eg. between the parent and the network member) so that they are able to meet and work together more effectively.

1. **Monitoring/building confidence**

Meeting and talking with the family and network regularly is very important, especially in the beginning. This helps to build our confidence that the network have the support they need - as well as the willingness and capacity - to maintain their roles and to work with the family to ensure the child’s immediate and/or long term safety and wellbeing.

It also helps everyone to identify any gaps or challenges the network may be facing in fulfilling their role, so that we can collaboratively determine what other support may be needed or what changes may be required.

1. **Affirming/Recognising progress**

It is vital that we recognise and affirm every bit of progress the family and network are making, not only to meaningfully document progress, but also to help build the family and network’s confidence that they have the capacity to maintain the plan and ensure the child’s safety and wellbeing (whether that is immediate or long term). Recognising and affirming progress also helps to build hope, energy and motivation toward long term change.

Every bit of progress that is identified is then documented within the CAP framework (under strengths and resources, or under actions of protection if the actions of the parents and the network lead to safety and protection for the children).

1. **Reviewing the role of the network**

The final component involves reviewing the role of the network.

Are there enough people in the network to cover all the roles that are needed? Are extra people needed? Does there need to be a change of person for any of the roles?

Do the network have the support and/or resources they need to fulfil their roles? Is additional support required?

Has there been a break down in relationships between the network and the family or between network members. Is additional support required to help the family and network heal relationships?

**Partnering with the network table**

The table on the next page can help you to support the network in their role, by collaboratively planning with the network and the family.

**Partnering with the Network Table**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Role of the network** | **Who will do this?** | **What will they do?** | **When will it be done?** | **What difference will it make for our family?** | **Capacity, Willingness and Confidence?** | **Strengths?** | **Challenges?** | **Support/****resources needed?** |
| Safe caregivers |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Planning support |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Educator, Coach & Mentor  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Emotional support for parents and CYPs. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Practical support for parents and CYPs  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Encourage parents to seek help when needed  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Seeking help for family if parents are not able or willing to seek help |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |