

A photograph showing the silhouettes of two people holding hands in a field at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and lens flare effects. The person on the right is standing on a slight rise, while the person on the left is slightly lower. The background is a soft, hazy sky.

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SOP MODULE 4

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

ARKANSAS DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

January 2022

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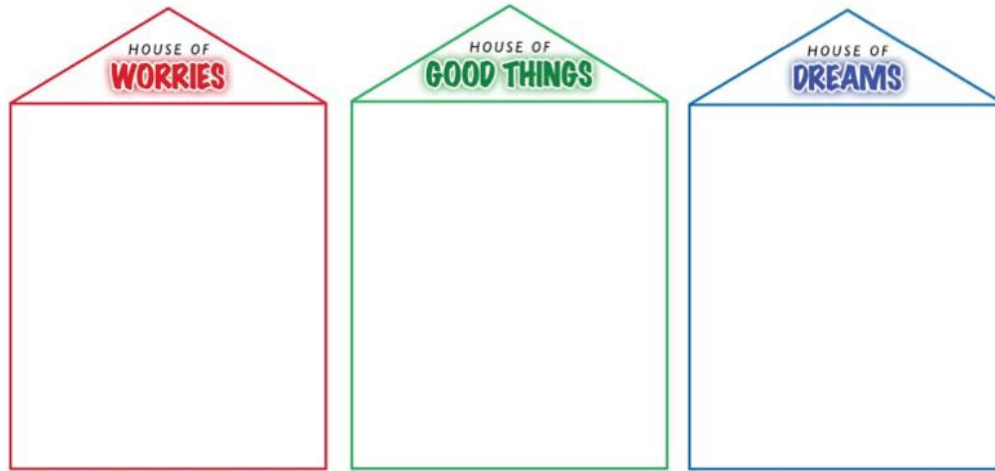
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THE THREE HOUSES

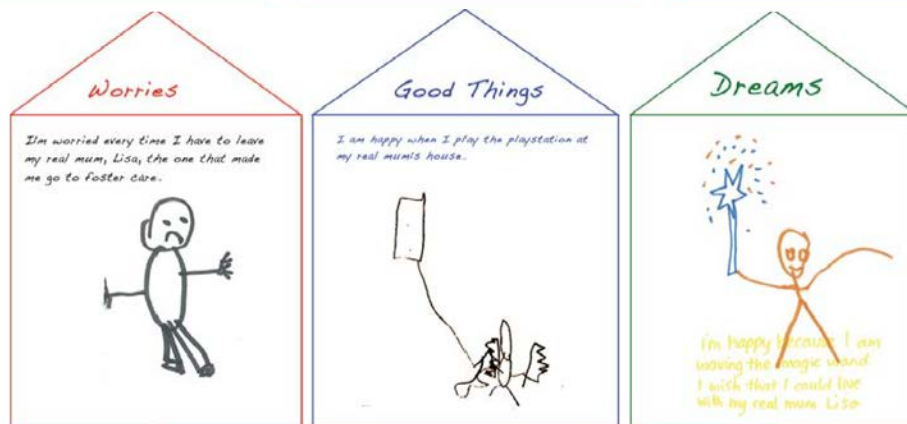
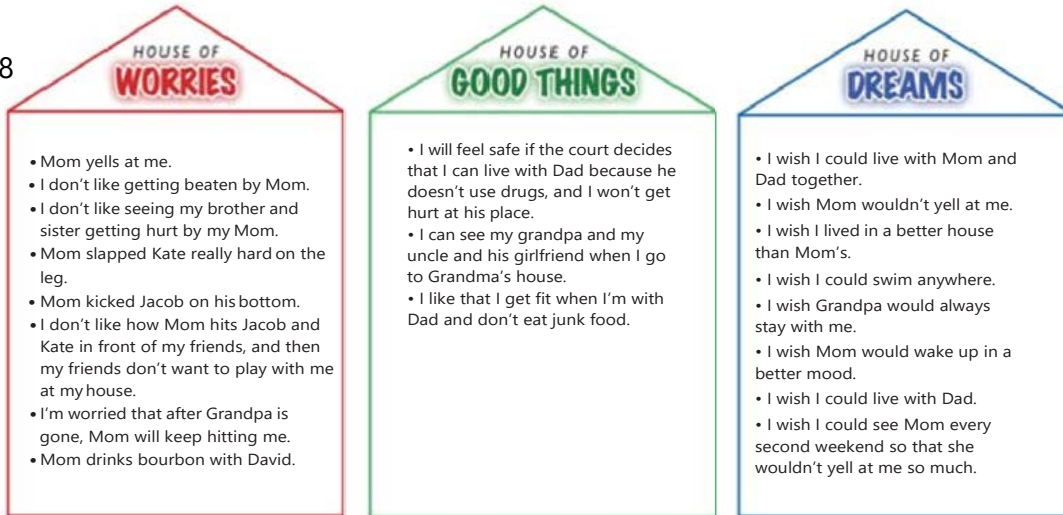
Used with permission from Nicki Weld.

A tool that engages children in child protection assessment and planning



CASE EXAMPLES

Emma, age 8



USING THE THREE HOUSES

Used with permission from Nicki Weld.

- 1. Prepare.** It helps to begin with as much information about the child's background as possible. You will also need the following materials: paper (one sheet for each house as well as some spares), colored pencils, and markers. When deciding where to meet with the child, choose the venue where the child is likely to feel most comfortable.
- 2. Get permission to interview the child.** Sometimes, child protection workers must interview children without advising the caregivers or seeking their permission. Whenever possible, however, caregivers should be notified in advance. You can show them the Three Houses tool to help them understand what the worker will do.
- 3. Decide whether caregivers should be present.** Sometimes child protection workers must insist on speaking with children without a caregiver present. Whenever possible, let the caregivers and the child choose. If this is not possible, make all efforts to explain to the caregivers why it is necessary for the worker to speak with the child alone.
- 4. Explain and work through the Three Houses.** Use one sheet of paper per house. Use words and drawings as appropriate and anything else you can think of to engage the child in the process. The child can rename houses, use toys, make Lego houses, use picture cutouts, and so forth. Let the child decide where to start. It is often best to start with the House of Good Things, especially if the child is anxious or uncertain.
- 6. Explain to the child what will happen next and involve the child in it.** Once the Three Houses process is finished, it is important to explain what will happen next to the child and to get permission to show the child's Three Houses to caregivers, extended family, or professionals. Children usually are happy to share their Three Houses, but some children's assessments could raise concerns and safety issues that must be addressed before sharing with others.
- 7. Present the child's Three Houses to caregivers.** Workers usually begin with the House of Good Things. Before you show the child's Three Houses, it can be useful to ask the caregivers what they think the child put in each house.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF ARIANA'S THREE HOUSES

AUGUST 26, 2010

The Three Houses activity was explained to Ariana (age 6), and she agreed to draw pictures in each of the three houses and that it would be okay for the social worker to share them and to capture her words for all the grown-ups involved.

Ariana began answering the questions with fantasy or pretend play responses. She eventually moved into reality discussion and would move back to the fantasy discussion when she became uncomfortable with the conversation. Themes within her fantasy play were that she becomes a superhero and is rescuing children or animals. She also began to cough and rapidly blink her eyes when she became nervous.

Child: *Ariana*

Date: *August 26, 2010*

HOUSE OF GOOD THINGS (RENAMED HOUSE OF CUTE THINGS)



Ariana reported that in her House of Cute Things, nothing gets her mad or worried and nothing happens to her. She drew a picture of a castle with herself, her biological mother, Tammy; her new baby brother, Steven Jr.; and her foster sister, Amanda (because she likes her). In the House of Cute things, there is no father. She said it's good that she has a baby brother.

Upon further inquiry, Ariana stated that she had a "real" father, "Daddy Luis," whom she no longer sees, and "Daddy Steven," with whom her mother had "Little Steven." She was able to articulate the family's story of who got together and who broke up when and when children were born.

Child: Ariana

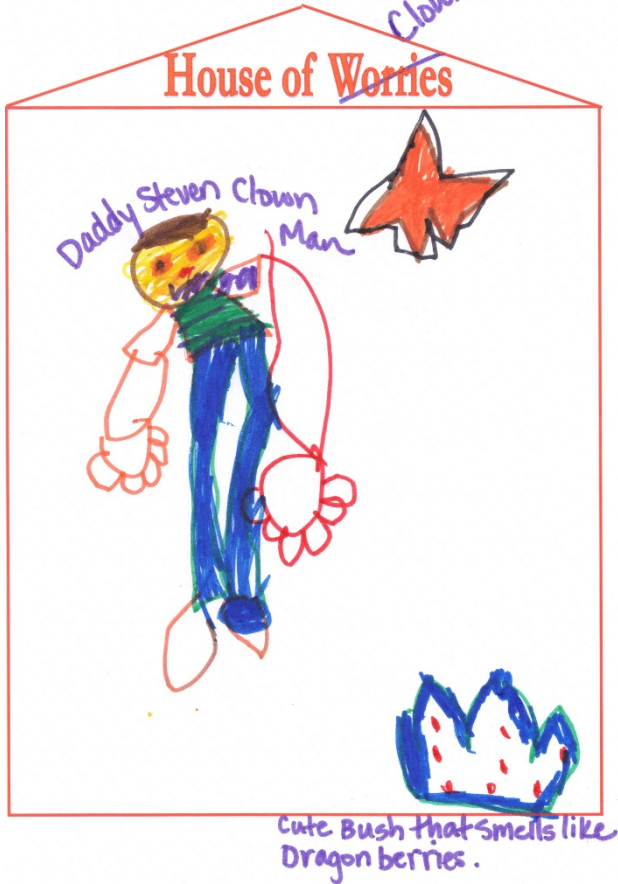
Date: August 26, 2010

HOUSE OF WORRIES (RENAMED HOUSE OF CLOWNS)

In the House of Worries Ariana drew Steven Sr., her mother's boyfriend, with very large arms and hands and a scary mouth. She referred to him as "Daddy Steven," and she stated that he looks like a freak. She also said his face is stupid, and she mimicked his loud angry tone when he said, "Shut up! I'm going to hit you!"

Arianna said plainly that he is evil and is like a maniac. "He bit mommy on the neck, stole my mommy's purse, and pushed her down the stairs. I'll poke him in the eye and hope he dies. I threw him out the window and he married another woman."

When asked how this made her feel, she stated that she didn't want to talk about it anymore. She reverted back to the fantasy play about how she is a superhero and that she hides her wings so no one can see them.



Child: Ariana
Heather

Date: August 26, 2010



HOUSE OF DREAMS

Ariana drew her foster sister, Amanda; Amanda's two friends, both named Jessica; her foster mother, Ann Marie; herself; and her cat, Bella (whom Steven Sr. killed when she was living at home). When I asked her to tell me about Bella, she stated, "Nothing happened to her. She lives with Tammy." She later stated that they gave Bella to Nana Jeanie (Tammy's mother).

Ariana stated that if Daddy Steven is not in her House of Dreams, her worries will go away. She also said Tammy lives in the room downstairs in her House of Dreams. And she feels sad that she doesn't live with Tammy or the baby.

She stated that she has two families—she lives with her foster family right now, but she doesn't know if they are relatives. She likes Tammy's house, but no bad stuff happens at Ann Marie's (her foster mother's) house.

She said, "Hey lady, thank you for making me draw those pictures," before she left the office.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF KENDRA AND ELIJAH'S THREE HOUSES

The Three Houses activity was explained to Kendra and Elijah (both age 6). Initially, they agreed to answer questions and let the worker write down the answers. Later during the activity, Kendra and Elijah agreed to draw pictures of some things.

Kendra and Elijah were very nervous and began answering the questions with "I don't know" and silence. They eventually engaged in conversation but would hesitate again when they became uncomfortable. Both children began to giggle and stare at each other when they were worried about answering questions.

Elijah asked how answering questions would help them if they told the truth. The workers explained that their job is to try and help their family. Elijah responded with a fantasy response, asking if the workers were like superheroes. When they saw the worker as a superhero figure, the children became more comfortable with answering questions.

During this Three Houses activity, there were two homes on the same property (blue house and grandma's house), so multiple houses were completed.

HOUSE OF GOOD THINGS (RENAMED AS HOUSE OF LIKES)

BLUE HOUSE

Blue House	<u>Likes</u>
loves trampoline at both homes	
Spending time with mom + dad	
loves cat Harry Potter he is at both homes.	
likes playing outside	
Kendra loves her black heels & they both love fidgets.	
mom + dad likes to paint dad use orange & red when they paint	
DHS Playroom is fun like old foster home	

Kendra and Elijah said that in their house of good things for the blue house, they loved their trampoline. Both children said they really love spending time with mom and dad. Kendra mentioned that she loves her cat Harry Potter, and he is mostly at the blue house.

The children love to play outside, and they do that a lot at both homes. Kendra said she loves the new black wedges that she has at her mom's house (blue house). Both children love fidget toys, saying they have a bunch of them in the blue house.

Both children stated that painting is their favorite thing to do with mom and dad. Elijah said that dad's favorite colors to paint with are red and orange. Kendra brought up that she loved living in her old foster home when she and Elijah came into care last time. She ran to a spot in her room, got a slap bracelet, and said the previous foster mom gave it to her before she went back home with mom.

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

Grandma's House

LIKES

loves hugs from grandma

love spending time w/ grandpa

love watering plants w/ grandma

love Harry Potter the cat he is @
both homes

Grandma's House is safe b/c DHS
says so

[loves when grandpa picks up from
school]

When Kendra and Elijah switched to talking about grandma's house, they started talking about how they love hugs from grandma. Both children like talking to grandpa. Kendra said she loves watering plants with grandma.

Both children brought up their cat, Harry Potter. Elijah said Harry Potter comes to both homes a lot, so they still get to play with him at grandma's house. Elijah stated that another thing he likes about grandma's house is that it is safe because Department of Human Services (DHS) says so.

Kendra said she loves it when grandpa picks them up from school. Elijah agreed.

HOUSE OF WORRIES (RENAMED AS HOUSE OF WORRIES/FEARS)

BLUE HOUSE

Blue House

Worries/Fears

Kendra - afraid of spiders

Elijah afraid of nothing

both say they have to walk around mice & that is a little scary

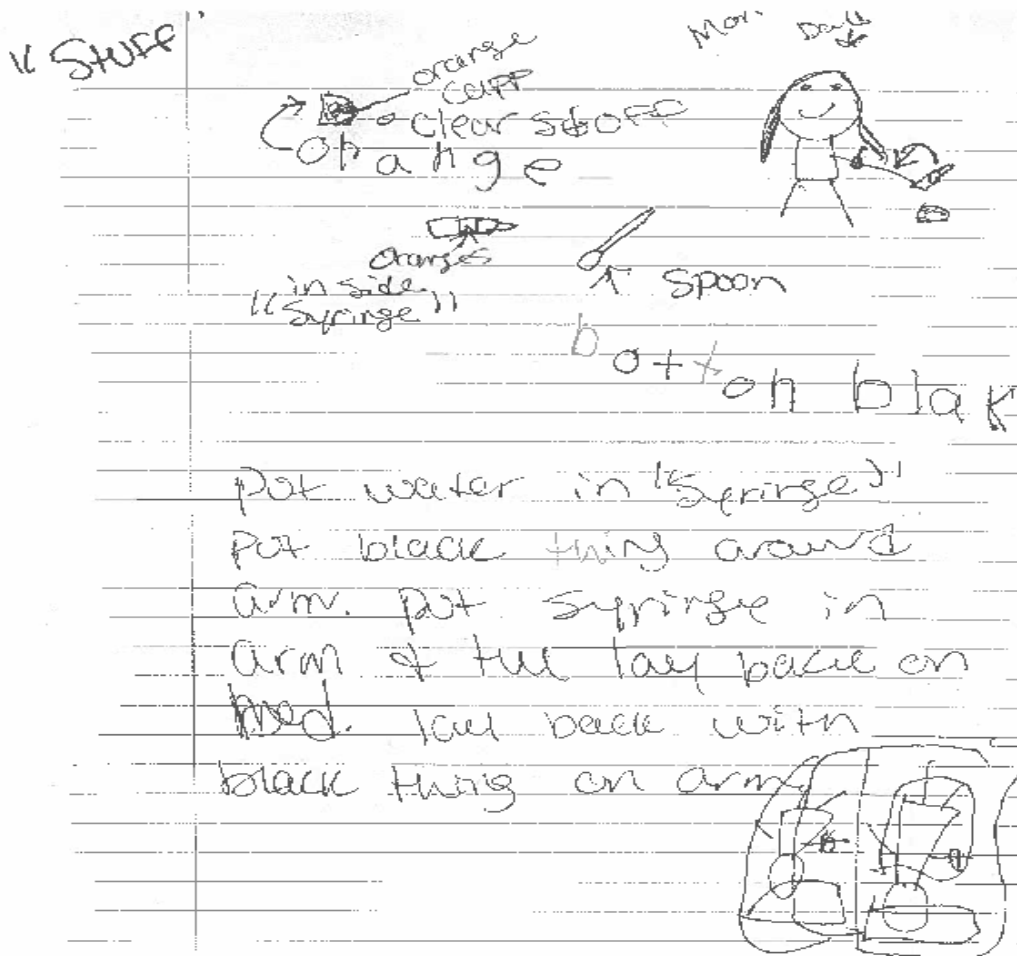
Mom hears noise alot & that is kinda scary. Its kinda scary when mom & dad ask us to go in different room to do there stuff. they do stuff once a day sometimes more.

they fall asleep alot we dont wake them we play until they wake up. they do stuff in living room sometimes.

What is
stuff →

What to tell the twin

- mom & dad when he is there come out of room & there is blood every where.
 - on hands (top of hands)
 - Face
 - arms
- mom is sleepy alot
- DHS is bad b/c we cant be at blue house.



put water in the syringe
 put black thing around
 arm. put syringe in
 arm of the lay back on
 bed. lay back with
 black thing on arm

Kendra said the blue house has a lot of spiders, and that is kind of scary. Elijah said he is afraid of nothing because he is the brother. Kendra said that mom hears noises a lot, and that is kind of scary.

When asked about the noises, Kendra said she hears them through the walls. Elijah said it is only kind of scary when mom and dad ask them to go to a different room to do their stuff. When asked what was meant by "stuff," Kendra stated mom and dad do their stuff once a day, sometimes more.

Elijah stated, "Yeah, they fall asleep a lot. We don't wake them; we play until they wake up. Their stuff is in the living room sometimes, but we know not to touch it because it's bad." When asked if they could draw "stuff," both children looked at each other. Kendra said they were afraid to tell the truth. The workers assured them that their job is to keep them safe, and in order to do that, there has to be honesty.

"Like a superhero," Elijah said. The worker said yes and talked about how superheroes save people and help families that need help, and the worker explained his job is to make sure they are safe. Kendra said, "Mom and dad (when he is at home) come out of the room, and there is blood everywhere dripping from their arms and hands, sometimes even their faces."

Elijah said mom is sleepy a lot. When the children were asked again if they could draw what the "stuff" looked like, they were excited to start drawing. Kendra described her drawing as "mom with a black, plastic stretchy thing with those things that you use at the doctor's office." Elijah said it was a "syringe."

Both children worked together to create the drawing. Elijah made sure that "the spoon with the black stuff on the back" was in the picture. Both children described the colors of the substances in the syringes. When mom and dad are done with the syringes, they "fall out" sometimes, Kendra said. When the worker asked what "fall out" meant, Elijah and Kendra acted out putting the syringe in their arms, and then both fell back on the bed at the same time with their mouths open. A picture of the parents "falling out" after using the "stuff" was drawn at the bottom.

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

Grandma's House Worries / Fears

- Spiders everywhere
- Sometimes ants everywhere
- We have to lie b/c if not we will get taken away.

The children said spiders are everywhere in grandma's house, too. Elijah said there are ants everywhere sometimes, and they do not like bugs. Kendra and Elijah said they have to lie about it because if they do not, they will go back to DHS.

HOUSE OF HOPES AND DREAMS (RENAMED AS HOUSE OF DREAMS)

BLUE HOUSE

Blue House

House
of Dreams

- Wish daddy "Trey" was home more. Works a lot & stays with his mom & dad.
- Don't want to hide from DHS when knocks on the door happen. (Kids have to hide in laundry room) "even when the light man came they thought it was DHS so we had to hide."
- Wish both homes were safe. Grandmas House is safe.

Kendra said she wished dad could be home more often because he works a lot and stays with his mom and dad. Elijah said he also misses dad. When the children were thinking about their dreams in the blue house, they said they would love to be in a home where they do not have to hide from DHS. The children explained that they have to hide in the laundry room, under clothes, when there are knocks on the door. Elijah told a story about the week before: He said the "light man" knocked on the door, and he and Kendra had to run and hide because mom thought it was DHS. Kendra said she wished both homes were safe, like how DHS says grandma's house is safe.

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

At this point in the interview, The worker could tell that the children were getting anxious and distracted about what was happening in the home. As a result, they did not complete a House of Dreams for grandma's house.

Special Considerations When Communicating with Children and Adolescents

Introductions/Engagement

Adults consider introductions to be adequate for the engagement stage of an interview, including maybe one or two sentences of “small talk” to connect. That strategy may work for adults but is less effective with children.

Greet the child, introduce yourself, and explain your role. Ask what the child’s name is, what would s/he like to be called?

Explain your note taking. Do they want paper, pencil to write on during the interaction?

After introductions, move into the engagement stage with children.

Goal is to help the child or adolescent to become more comfortable with the environment and with you.

Ask open-ended questions to engage the child in descriptive conversations about life situations and non-abuse related memorable events. Tell me about...

Engage the child in friendly conversation and convey interest in the child’s responses by asking follow-up questions.

Establish agreements for child’s response such as “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember” and emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. When the child does know, encourage her to answer completely.

For investigations, consider conducting credibility assessment (understanding the difference between the truth and a lie).

Gathering Information

Initial questioning must not be abuse/neglect specific. Ask initial questions in an open-ended manner:

- “Do you know why we are talking?” or
- “Do you know why I came here to talk with you today?”

For investigations:

If child denies the event, narrow the focus of the question:

“Remember I told you that my job is to talk with kids? Well, sometimes I talk with kids who have a problem. Have you had a problem with someone?” or “Do you have any problems that we should talk about?”

When child acknowledges abuse/neglect i.e. “the problem,” move on to information gathering.

Questioning techniques should reflect the child’s age and developmental level. Do not confuse chronological age with normal developmental stages.

Length and Timing of Child Interviews (GENERAL)

Age/General Timeframes

Young Preschool 30 minutes maximum

Preschool	30-40 minutes
School-Age	45-50 minutes
Adolescent	50 minutes

Interview Timing

Assess what you know first through thorough case review and then decide what specific information you need to get from a child.

Gather as much background information as possible before the interview.

Avoid keeping a child waiting for an interview.

Keep the length of the interview appropriate for the child's age.

Keep the interview as short as possible but complete. Be efficient with questioning.

Interviews must not be rushed, and children must not feel pushed for information because of the interviewer's schedule.

Avoid interviewing a young child at certain times:

- at his or her regular nap time,
- late in the afternoon,
- after a distressing event such as a medical or dental appointment, or
- just before or during mealtime.

Children's Cognitive Development

Piaget's four stages of intellectual (or cognitive) development: (<https://www.webmd.com/children/piaget-stages-of-development>)

Sensorimotor. Birth through ages 18-24 months

During the early stages, according to Piaget, infants are only aware of what is right in front of them. They focus on what they see, what they are doing, and physical interactions with their immediate environment.

Between ages 7 and 9 months, infants begin to realize that an object exists even though they can no longer see it. This important milestone -- known as object permanence -- is a sign that memory is developing.

After infants start crawling, standing, and walking, their increased physical mobility leads to more cognitive development. Near the end of the sensorimotor stage (18-24 months), infants reach another important milestone -- early language development, a sign that they are developing some symbolic abilities.

Preoperational. Toddlerhood (18-24 months) through early childhood (age 7)

Young children are able to think about things symbolically. Their language use becomes more mature. They also develop memory and imagination, which allows them to understand the difference between past and future, and engage in make-believe.

Their thinking is based on intuition and still not completely logical. They cannot yet grasp more complex concepts such as cause and effect, time, and comparison.

Concrete operational. Ages 7 to 11

Elementary-age and preadolescent children show logical, concrete reasoning.

Children's thinking becomes less focused on themselves. They're increasingly aware of external events. They begin to realize that their own thoughts and feelings are unique and may not be shared by others or may not even be part of reality.

Formal operational. Adolescence through adulthood

Adolescents are able to use symbols related to abstract concepts, such as algebra and science. They can think about things in systematic ways, come up with theories, and consider possibilities. They also can ponder abstract relationships and concepts such as justice.

Children's Language Skills

The younger the child, the more limited the vocabulary. Younger children are not used to having conversations about past events.

Age 3-4 (On Average)

- vocabulary can range from about 500 to 3,000 words
- can identify more than five parts of their own bodies
- can usually talk well enough for strangers to understand, knows some basic rules of grammar
- can carry on conversations, tell stories

Age 5-6

Basic language structures of most children are established and they can:

- define some simple words
- accurately name three or four colors
- tell stories with sentences

Their language sounds (on the surface) like an adult's due to their larger vocabulary. This does not mean that these children have achieved mastery of their language, particularly concepts such as:

- abstractions (e.g., truth or misunderstanding),
- relation of age, time, speed, size and duration

- How old is she? When did it happen? How fast was the car going? How big was the knife? How many times did it happen to you?
- may still struggle with certain family relationships expressed by kinship terms such as parents, aunts, grandfather, etc.
- may respond to recognized words or phrases without considering the entire question.

By age 10 or 11

Most children have acquired the ability to use language more skillfully.

Can describe experiences and talk about their thoughts and feelings.

Has a much greater attention span.

Can see the point of view of others.

And by age 12-14, young teens have the ability to express complex thoughts and are usually able to express their feelings.

Special Considerations for Younger Children's Thinking/Cognition

Numbers

Young children may not be able to count events. Even if a child can count from 1 to 10, he or she may be recalling numbers by rote without understanding number concepts.

Decide if the child understands number concepts:

- Ask the child to choose four blocks from a pile or to hand you six pennies from a display of a dozen pennies.

Counting the number of times something happened is a more difficult task than counting blocks.

Children who can count objects may not be able to count events accurately.

Specific acts may be easier for the child to count. For example, if you ask a little boy how often his mom left him alone, he may count only the times she was gone, and he wasn't watching his favorite cartoon show.

Time

Children do not learn to tell time until about the second grade. Clock time and calendar time are confusing for young children.

To establish a time, ask questions relating to familiar routines:

- right before bedtime or after lunch
- nighttime or daytime

For clues to time frames, ask questions relating to people, places and events:

- “Who was your teacher when this happened?”
- “Where were you staying that day?”
- “Was it hot outside or cold?”

Personal Descriptions

Asking preschoolers about a person’s age and physical characteristics may produce inaccurate information.

Young children cannot accurately respond to a question about a person’s age, but may be able to respond to questions about life-stage.

For example, when trying to establish the age of an offender, ask if the person is old enough to:

- be a daddy,
- drive a car,
- be a grandmother, and so on.

Children are often unable to give a description of an unfamiliar person’s appearance because of their limited ability to attend to multiple details.

They may concentrate only on one striking characteristic (scary face, bushy eyebrows, mustache, and beard).

Ask many clarifying and probing questions when trying to establish personal descriptions.

Check out previous answers with differently worded questions.

Perspective

Preschoolers have great difficulty viewing the world from another’s point of view.

Children assume that adults see things just as they do.

They may even believe the adult is thinking the same thoughts about the event as they are or that adults are privy to knowledge only the child really knows.

It seldom occurs to children that adults can misinterpret what they have said.

If you have misinterpreted what a child has said, he or she will not tell you that you have misunderstood and may not even realize the misinterpretation exists.

Use focusing skills: clarify, summarize, paraphrase, reframe

Do not ask children to speculate about people’s intentions, thinking, feelings and perceptions.

Causality and Magical Thinking

There is a brief developmental phase in which children think inanimate objects are endowed with animate attributes, such as thoughts, feelings, or willfulness:

- A child may think when a paper is cut, the paper feels pain, or
 - A vacuum cleaner is purposefully trying to get them.

Children may misunderstand causality. A child may think the mom got upset because the child was a victim of sexual abuse and not realize that the mom is upset because of the abuser's actions. This, in part, explains why children feel blame for the abuse they have experienced.

Magical thinking is different from fantasies or lies.

Misunderstanding

Children aren't always aware of what they do not know.

They may try to answer confusing questions, thinking that they do in fact understand them or trying to "help" the adult.

They may respond to a small part of the question they did understand, ignoring other parts of the question that may be crucial to your getting complete information.

Anticipate the difficulties young children have in understanding some of the concepts. It is a mistake to wait for a preschooler to tell you she/he doesn't understand.

It is helpful to explain to a child that answering "I don't know" or "I don't remember" is okay. You can test willingness to do this by asking a question you are sure the child cannot answer.

When Questioning Children

Discuss with the child how he or she may answer questions.

Explain that some questions are hard to answer, even for adults. Say, "Sometimes we don't have an answer for a question. If I ask you a question and you don't know the answer you can say 'I don't know' or 'I don't remember'."

When necessary, use multiple choice questions - offer more than two choices and ask the question again with the choices reordered.

Use open-ended questions.

Use ridiculous questions to help elicit a clarifying response.

Avoid

- leading questions
- tag questions
- stacked or multiple questions
- garbled questions
- "why" questions
- repeating the same question; rephrase the question

- The child may assume their first answer was incorrect.
- responding to every answer the child gives with another question

Children are literal and concrete.

- Be alert to the tendency of young children to be very literal and concrete in their language.
- “Did you have your clothes on?” might elicit a “no” answer if the child had on pajamas or a swimsuit or even one item, such as a shirt or socks.

Do not tell a child to answer a question with “yes” or “no.” May interpret that to mean they can’t answer “I don’t know,” or “I don’t remember.”

Take care when using “Wh” questions (what, where, who, why, how, when). These words can be confusing, especially why, how, and when questions before the age of 10. Consider the child’s language development when asking these questions.

Words To Avoid

Avoid legal jargon like, “We’ve ascertained that...,” “What, if anything...” or “Did there come a time when...”

Avoid using the words *story*, *make-believe*, or *pretend* that suggest fictional accounts to children.

Examples:

- “Tell me your story in your own words.”
- “Pretend you are back at Uncle Robert’s house.”
- “Make believe that your daddy is here. What will he do?”

Avoid words that mean one thing in a child’s world and another in an adult’s world, because they produce inaccurate information.

Avoid overuse of phrases or remarks that suggest evaluation of the child’s responses. These statements attach value to the child’s answers, not to his or her effort and can pressure the child. The child may give answers that please the interviewer instead of describing what actually happened.

Examples:

- “That’s good.”
- “Good girl” or “Good boy”
- “Great!”
- “You’re answering all my questions so nicely.”

Interviewing Techniques

Children:

Praise the child's efforts with neutral language, not his or her responses.

- "You're really trying hard."
- "I know some of this is hard to talk about."
- "I see you're really trying."

Tell the child when you are moving from one subject to another or from past to present. This helps the child relate comments to an established context.

Assure the child that what has happened is not his or her fault. (This is especially important if the child discloses sexual abuse.)

Pretend you do not understand or know something to encourage a child to elaborate or clarify.

Use feigned forgetfulness to invite a child to elaborate or clarify.

Use deliberate misstatements to see if a child feels comfortable enough to correct your errors. "Now, you're four years old, right?" or "Your last (or other) name is Jones, isn't it?"

Do not assume that the abused child has negative feelings about the abuser or that a sexually abused child has negative feelings about the abuse.

Use empathy, reflective listening, and attending skills.

Break eye contact during difficult points in the interview (look at your hands or elsewhere) to relieve pressure or a child's feelings of being scrutinized.

Use names rather than pronouns.

Ask the child to demonstrate understanding rather than asking, "Do you understand?"

Choose easy words over hard ones.

Use show me or tell me rather than describe or identify.

Use short sentences and short questions

Adolescents: (some say the hardest group of all)

Although teens may "look" more like adults, it is important to remember that their brains are still in development.

In terms of development, they are changing quickly. Their physical, social emotional, language, and cognitive areas are undergoing profound changes.

Use simple, informal language when conversing with teens.

Use humor (not too much!)

Be shock-proof. Although teens are often easily embarrassed, they may seem to take delight in saying things to shock or impress you.

Model limit-setting, in terms of what is acceptable language and behavior.

Carefully use praise and compliments. Adolescents usually see through attempts to “win them over” through compliments.

Negotiate within limits to give a sense of power and control.

Refuse to impose personal beliefs or give ultimatums.

Convey hope, energy, and enthusiasm.

Avoid labeling behavior, e.g., good, bad, problematic, normal, abnormal

Avoid giving advice.

Avoid over-relating (trying to sound “cool” by using current slang.)

Ask adolescents to journal or blog about things they are concerned about and need to discuss with you in the future.

Use Sentence Completion to Encourage Verbalization – say the first part of the sentence and ask them to finish.

What I really want most is If I could I would ...

What I like most about my life is... When I’m sad... My sister... My brother....

What I hate most about my life is... When I’m angry... I like...

When I’m afraid... My mom... One day...

My friends... My dad... I hope...

I worry about... My greatest fear is... What bothers me most is...

I’m best at... My future... I would like to change...

Role-Play

Use role-playing to help adolescents work through difficult or unfamiliar upcoming interactions such as court appearances, reunification with a caregiver, or addressing/confronting a caregiver about an issue. Any scene can be played out several times, each with a different outcome.

Interviewing Tools

Revised 07/30/2021

SOP uses the Three Houses and Safety House to help bring the voice of the child into the assessment and planning process.

There are comprehensive guides on using SOP related tools that can be found at

<http://www.partneringforsafety.com/resource-booklets.html>

Use the Three Houses with children to answer the Three Questions, i.e., information about danger, safety, and what needs to happen from the child's perspective.

The 3 Houses are:

House of Good Things

House of Worries

Hopes and Dreams

Go over the 3 Houses outside the presence of the caregiver.

With children, start with Good Things.

All you need is a sheet of paper and something to write with. If the child is not old enough to write, but can draw, they can draw and you can write. Or they can just tell you and you can write.

Can use these descriptions:

House of Good Things: things that make the child feel safe, happy, and secure

House of Worries: things that make child feel sad, scared, or unsafe

Hope and Dreams: if all your worries were gone, what is going on?

Closing the Interview

Ask the child or adolescent if he or she has questions to ask you.

Ask what the child or adolescent wants, hopes, or fears will happen next.

Praise the child's or adolescent's efforts within the interview, not specific content or information.

Don't make promises you cannot keep.

Below is a table to help learners keep in mind about the kind of information that children can reliably give based on age considerations that came from the National Child Advocacy Centers website.

Guidelines for Age-Appropriate Interview Questions

Age	C-O-N-C-R-E-T-E				A-B-S-T-R-A-C-T			
	Who	What	Where	1x / >1x	How	Sequencing	When	# Times
3								
4								
5-6								
7-9								
10-12								
13+								

Dark shading indicates that a developmentally “typical” child may be able to answer these types of questions. Light shading indicates that some children at that age may have the capacity to answer these question types.

Remember: age and ability are enhancers; trauma affects how events are stored and recalled.
Allison M. Foster, Ph.D., Assessment & Resource Center, Columbia, SC, 2015

<https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Questioning-Children-Graph.pdf>

* **Concrete** refers to things that can be experienced through the five senses. **Abstract** refers to ideas, concepts, and qualities.

Additional sources of information on interviewing children and adolescents:

Interviewing Children

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/Interviewing_Children_0508.pdf

The Child Interview. Practice Guidelines.

<http://www.canee.net/files/The%20Child%20Interview.%20Practice%20Guidelines.pdf>

Child Forensic Interviewing: Best Practices

<https://ojdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/248749.pdf>

Child Welfare Information Gateway

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/ia/investigation/interviewing/>

Effective Child Interviewing: Developmental Considerations

https://uwnetid.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/acwe/RCT/EVqXtzTMz_1GgDrHmcrEg2MB85pKndlCbeoldffj6zVNCw?rttime=j0BTouo42Ug

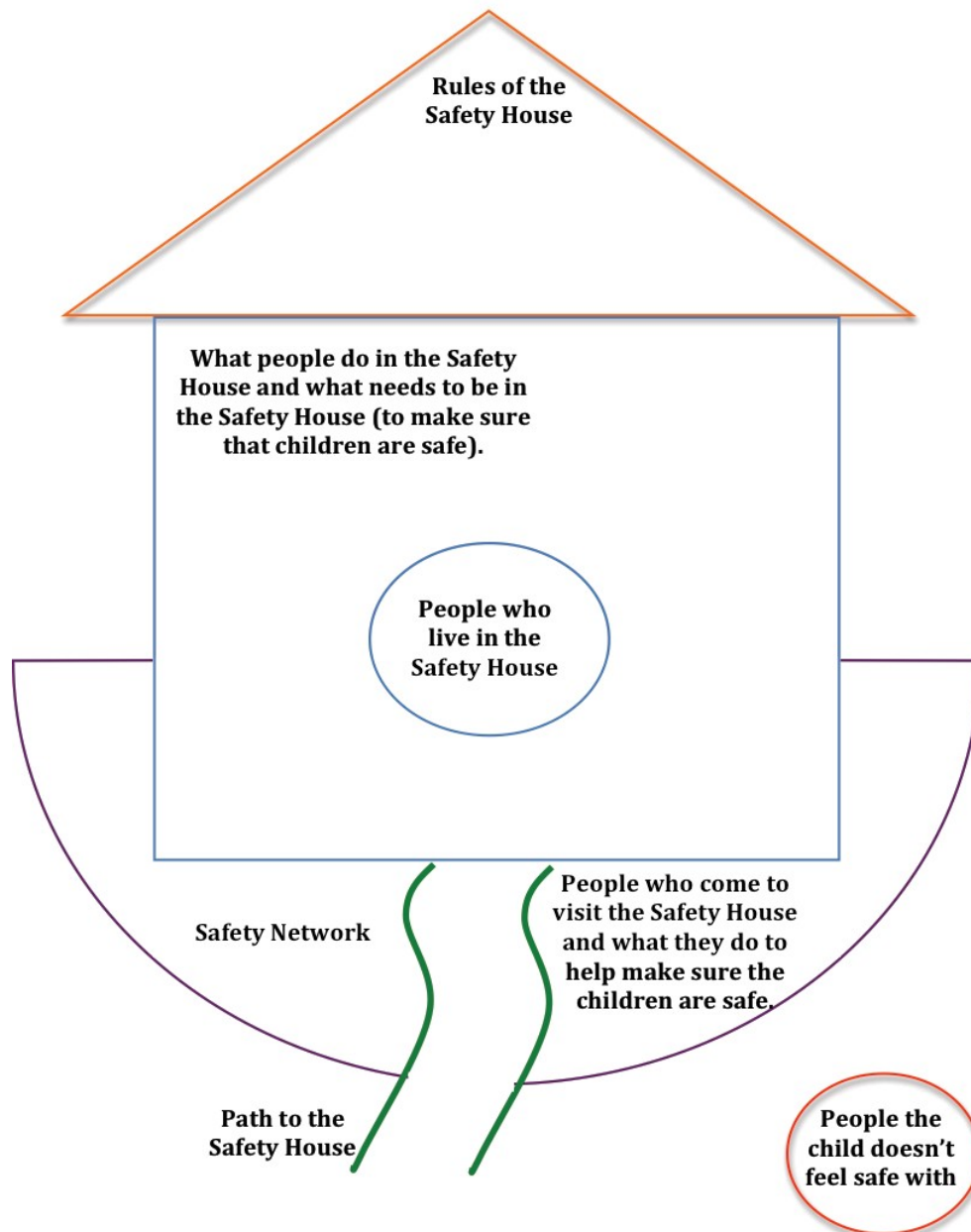
Guides for SOP Tools

<http://www.partneringforsafety.com/resource-booklets.html>

THE SAFETY HOUSE

Used with permission from Sonja Parker.

A tool to involve children in the safety planning process



More information is available in the Safety House booklet available at partneringforsafety.com

Zoe's Safety House

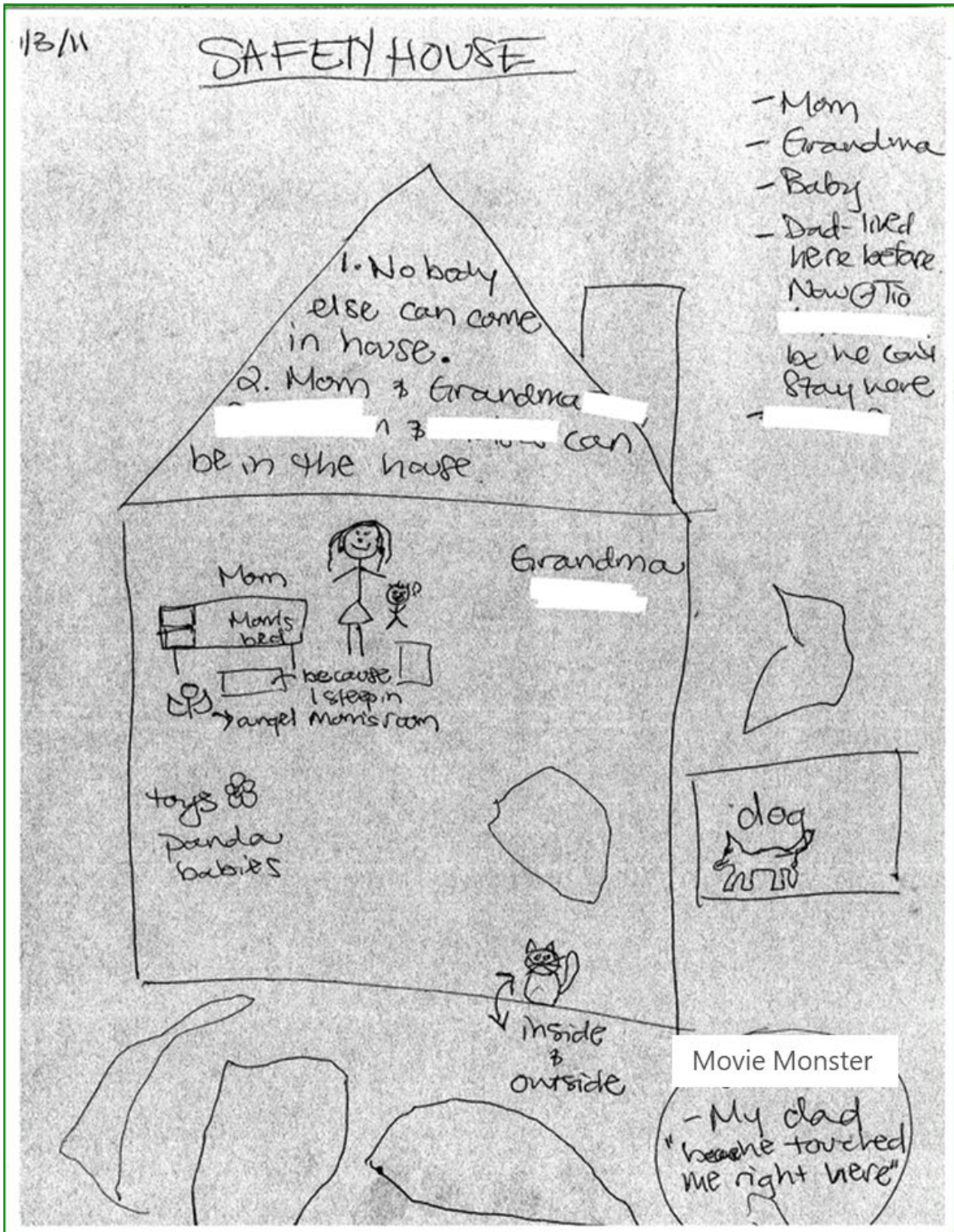
Rules

1. No Fighting or hitting because I get really hurt and mum gets hurt.
2. Shane can't come around and if he bashes on the door mum will tell him to go away or she'll call the Police.
3. If mum gets really sad then someone has to help her because she cries and stays in bed and then she doesn't get up. Nana could come over.
4. I get to stay at my school because I like my school now and I don't want to go to a new school and I want to stay at my school.



not shane he can't come over

DAWN'S SAFETY HOUSE



This Safety House was completed with a 4-year-old girl due to worries of sexual abuse. The child already had been interviewed a few times, and Dawn (a child welfare worker in San Diego County) needed a tool that is developmentally appropriate to use with a child and could be used to elicit more information.

Three Houses did not seem appropriate because of concerns that the child would get distracted by multiple sheets of paper. Instead, Dawn decided to use the Safety House. This was the first time Dawn used the tool.

First, Dawn used some basic scenarios, such as crossing the street, to assess the child's understanding of the word *safe*. When Dawn asked the child about the rules of crossing the street, she came up with "holding someone's hand and not doing it alone." The child said these rules keep her safe.

Dawn described the Safety House and said it was the child's house where she would always feel safe and protected and where nothing could hurt her.

Dawn asked the child to name all the people who live in her real house. Dawn wrote their names to the right of the house. The child said her dad used to live in her house, but now he lives at his uncle's house (per current court order).

Dawn asked the child what makes her feel safe. The child started by telling Dawn about her toys and dolls. Dawn explained to the child that since these things make her feel safe and protected, they belong inside her Safety House. Dawn asked the child if she wanted to draw or write them down, or if she wanted Dawn to do that for her; she asked Dawn to do it. The child took ownership of the exercise and told Dawn not just to write names, but actually draw.

Dawn asked the child who makes her feel safe and protected, and she said her mom. Dawn asked if she should write mom's name or draw mom. She replied, "Draw Mom's bed. I slept in there last night." Dawn drew the mom's bed, and then the child told Dawn to draw her blanket next to it because she sleeps on the floor by her mom's bed. Dawn asked if she feels safe sleeping in mom's room, and she said yes.

The child told Dawn to draw the angel that she sleeps with. Dawn found this interesting because the family is religious, and it seemed clear that the child understood that things that protect her and make her safe should be included in this house. The child told Dawn to draw her mom and the baby because they should sleep with her in the room, too. She also added grandma to the house.

The child added the cat to the house, but she wanted to be clear that when she has allergies, the cat has to go outside. She told Dawn to draw it like that—that the cat was sometimes inside and sometimes outside. She clearly understood that she has control over who and what was allowed inside the house, and it was okay to put something outside if it bothered her.

Dawn asked the child if anything or anyone ever makes her feel scared or not safe. She immediately looked at her closet door and said, "Chucky [from the *Child's Play* movies]. Chucky is in my closet. I'm scared of him." (Dawn was told that the child is afraid of Chucky because her older cousins showed her the movie, and it scared her.) Dawn asked her if Chucky should be allowed in her Safety House, and she

said no. Dawn asked where Chucky should be, and she said outside. Dawn drew a circle and told her she could put Chucky in the circle, outside the house, because she should always feel safe in her house.

Dawn asked if anything or anyone else makes her feel scared, and she replied, "Daddy." Dawn asked why. She hesitated, looked around the room, and said, "I don't remember now." Dawn told the child it was okay and that it is always okay to say "I don't remember" to her.

Dawn asked if anything or anyone else should be outside of her house. She said the dog because "he jumps on me." Dawn asked the child if the dog scared her and if it should be in the circle outside the house. She said no; it should be in the backyard. Dawn wrote "dog" where the child directed her to put it, and then the child insisted that Dawn draw an actual dog.

Dawn went back to the circle and asked the child if she could tell her why she thinks her dad should be in the circle outside the house. "Because he touched me," she replied. Dawn asked her where he touched her. "Here," she answered, putting her palm on her vagina, outside her clothing.

Dawn asked if there was anything else that should be in the picture of her Safety House, and she said no.

Dawn told the child she could make any rules she wanted so that she feels safe and protected, and they would write them down on the roof of her Safety House. The child asked if her mom was going to paint them on the actual roof. (This was also interesting; it is developmentally appropriate for her to think that concretely.) Dawn explained to the child that she would not paint them on the actual roof, but they could write down the rules on the roof in the picture so that everyone knows they must be followed to keep her safe.

Dawn asked the child what rules she would like to have, and she said she did not know. Dawn asked if she wanted rules about who was allowed in her house, and she said, "Nobody else that does not live in my house can come in my house. They live at their house." When Dawn asked who should be allowed in her house, the child replied, "Mom, Grandma, and my brothers can be in the house."

This tool helped a very young child understand the idea of safety, and it gave her some power in creating her own safety plan. It was an excellent interview tool: It gave Dawn great information for her case, and it also helped her begin safety planning with the child in a concrete way. Dawn planned to take out the Safety House every few weeks and use it to discuss safety and assess how well the family is following the current safety plan. It was also helpful to have something concrete for Dawn and the child to work on together; it grounded the interview and helped Dawn bring the child back to focus when she became distracted.

ADAPTATION: THE FOREVER HOUSE

Overview: This is your house in the future where you will live permanently with one family.

Inner circle: Who lives with you in this house?

Outer circle around the house: Who would you like to have come visit you when you are living in your 'Forever House'?

Red circle to the side: Are there any people you don't want to have come visit or any people you would rather not stay in contact with?

The roof: What kind of rules will your 'Forever House' need to make sure you always feel safe and welcome?

The path: If the beginning of the path is where you don't feel a part of a forever family and the end of the path is where you have a 'Forever Home' and you feel really safe there and like you belong, where are you on that path? What can we do so you could be one step closer to this house?

Adapted by Karen Martin from the 'Safety House' tool developed by Sonja Parker:
<http://www.aspirationsconsultancy.com>

PROMPTS FOR THE SAFETY HOUSE

Used with permission from Sonja Parker.

INSIDE THE SAFETY HOUSE: THE INNER CIRCLE AND INSIDE THE HOUSE

INNER CIRCLE

- Ask the child to draw a self-portrait and leave extra space.
- Who else would live in your Safety House with you?

INSIDE THE HOUSE

- Imagine that you are back home with _____ (e.g., mom and dad), and you feel as safe and happy as possible. What sorts of things would _____ (e.g., mom, dad, big sister) be doing?
- What important things would _____ (e.g., mom and dad) do in your Safety House to make sure you are safe?
- Do you need any important objects or things in your Safety House to make sure you are always safe?

SAFETY HOUSE VISITORS: THE OUTER CIRCLE

- Who would visit you in your Safety House to help make sure you are safe?
- When _____ (each of the safety people identified above) visit you in your Safety House, what important things will they need to do to help you be safe?

UNSAFE PEOPLE: THE RED CIRCLE

When you go home to live with _____ (e.g., mom and dad), is there anyone who might live with you or visit you who makes you feel unsafe?

RULES OF THE SAFETY HOUSE: THE ROOF

- Remember when we talked about all the adults who are working on a safety plan for you when you go home? They are trying to decide the rules of the safety plan. What do you think? What would the rules of the Safety House be so that you and everyone else would know that nothing like _____ (use specific worries) would ever happen again? What else? And what else?
- What rules would your _____ (e.g., sister, brother, grandma) want?

STAYING ON TRACK: PATH TO THE SAFETY HOUSE

- Let's say the path begins where everyone was very worried, you could not live with Mom and Dad, and you had to live with _____ (e.g., brother, grandpa). The end of the path, at the front door, is where all those worries are gone, and you will be completely safe living with Mom and Dad. Where are you on the path right now?
- Let's say the beginning of the path is where you feel worried that if you go home to live with Mom (or stay overnight), she will start using drugs again and be unable to look after you properly. At the end of the path, at the front door, everything in your Safety House is happening, and you're not worried that Mom will use drugs again. Where are you on the path right now?