

Framework for practice

Collaborative Assessment and Planning Framework

Worry Statements

What are Worry Statements?

The *Child Protection Act 1999* (s. 10) refers to an “unacceptable risk of harm”, which is **significant harm which has not yet occurred but is likely in the future, given risk factors identified in the present**.

A child is assessed as “in need of protection” if the level of risk is identified as likely (probable), not just possible (may occur); the probable harm will have a significant detrimental effect on the child if it does occur; and there is not a parent able and willing to protect the child from this future significant harm.

“Worry statements” document unacceptable risk of significant harm to a child. “Worry Statements” describe actions or inactions that may happen in the future to significantly harm the child if nothing changes.

When to write a worry statement

Worry statements can be developed to focus our assessment and planning at different points on the child protection continuum.

At the investigation and assessment (I&A) stage, worry statements can be used to identify what Child Safety is worried might happen to the child **in the future**, based on our assessment of past/current harm.

Where the outcome of an investigation and assessment is **substantiated harm or risk of harm, child in need of protection**, a worry statement is developed to assist everyone to understand what Child Safety is concerned might happen to harm the child in the future if nothing changes.

Tip: Where harm is substantiated, a harm statement will be written and a worry statement will be developed for each harm statement. Where only risk of harm is substantiated, NO harm statement is written and the worry statement/s will be developed in response to the complicating factor/s that give rise to the future risk of harm.

Once a case is opened for ongoing intervention (IPA or CPO), the **worry statements** articulate the probable future harm and the reason Child Safety is, and continues, to be involved. If further harm is substantiated while the case is open, or Child Safety become aware of other significant complicating factors that give rise to the future risk of harm, the worry statements should be updated to reflect this.

Tip: Progress made by parents in relation to addressing the documented worries is captured in the strengths and protection sections of the Collaborative Assessment and Planning (CAP) Framework Tool.

Worry Statements and Structured Decision Making (SDM)

The Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment is the assessment the Department uses to guide our assessment of whether the child is in significant and imminent danger.

When an immediate harm indicator is selected on the SDM Safety Assessment tool, and the particular harm has already occurred, this should be reflected in a harm statement and will have a corresponding worry statement. If the immediate harm indicator selected refers to a **risk of harm** that may occur in the immediate future - for example, "The physical living conditions are hazardous AND pose an immediate threat"- this should be recorded as a complicating factor and a worry statement is then developed to respond to this complicating factor.

The Family Risk Evaluation (FRE) Tool is the SDM tool that helps to estimate the likelihood of repeat maltreatment for a child. Individual items on the FRE assessment that relate to current harm will be documented as a harm statement while those that relate to future risk of harm will be documented as complicating factors. Significant harm and significant risk of harm both require worry statements to identify Child Safety's concerns in relation to what might happen to the child in the future if nothing changes.

How to write a worry statement

Each harm statement (physical, emotional, psychological) and complicating factor that is related to a significant risk of harm should have a corresponding worry statement. A worry statement uses clear, behaviourally focused descriptions of parental action or inaction and the future danger this poses to a child. Worry statements help everyone (especially the child and their family) to understand what Child Safety is worried might happen to the child/ren in the future if nothing changes and why Child Safety is involved.

A worry statement is future focused and must include:

- Who is worried
- What are they worried the parents/caregivers might do or not do (stated in clear, easy to understand behavioural terms) and in what context or circumstances; and
- What the possible future impact of this parent/caregiver behaviour might be on the child.

Worry statements should be written in plain language that is easily understood by the family. Do not use jargon or words that don't have clear, shared meanings. While worry statements may be developed initially by Child Safety, it is usually possible to jointly construct worry statement with the family over time (for example, using the parent's or child's language and/or including alternative views).

Agreement about past harm is not necessary to achieve agreement in relation to worries for the future. For example, the harm statement:

- "Child Safety is aware that on three occasions over the last year, Simon (Dad) has gone to the casino and lost a lot of money, drunk a lot of alcohol and then touched Selina (his daughter) on the vagina and put his finger in her vagina. Selina reports this made her feel scared, sad, bad, unsafe and confused. Simon and Sharon (Mum) say that dad has never touched Selina".

Could have a **worry statement** as outlined below:

- Child Safety and Selina are worried that if Simon (Dad) is alone with Selina (daughter), that he will touch Selina on the vagina or behave in sexual ways and that Selina will feel sad,

bad, unsafe and confused. Simon and Sharon say that dad has never touched Selina but they are also worried that Simon will be accused of touching Selina again in the future.

Examples of Worry statements

Example of alleged significant harm (notification/pre- investigation and assessment) worry statement:

- Child Safety is worried that Amy (mother) and Jason (father) will spend money on drugs and inject speed every day and then won't be able to feed, look after, supervise or care for Shanaya (7 years), Jake (5 years) and Poppy (18months) properly and the children might be hurt while wandering the streets, get sick from not having enough to eat, and feel scared, worried and alone.

Example of a substantiated investigation and assessment worry statement:

- Child Safety is worried that Maria (mother) will pinch Aran (age 5) and Asnee (age 4), hit them around the head with her hand and whip them with a cane when they are naughty, and that Aran and Asnee might be badly hurt in the future. Child Safety is also worried that if Maria disciplines the boys by physically hurting them, Aran and Asnee will get more and more scared of her and won't want to live with her.

Example of a substantiated "unacceptable risk of harm" investigation and assessment worry statement - no actual harm has occurred but there is unacceptable risk of significant harm as the child (or unborn) does not have a parent able and willing to protect them:

In this instance **no actual harm has been experienced by the children and no harm statement** has been documented.

The parental behaviours (actions or inactions) that are likely to cause future harm are documented as complicating factors, for example:

- Sarah (mother) has been stopped by police twice for drink driving. On the most recent occasion Sarah's blood alcohol level was very high at .23 and her family describe her as an alcoholic. On both occasions of drink driving, Sarah had both children in the car with her.

Two corresponding worry statements are then constructed:

- Child Safety is worried that Sarah will drink alcohol and drive with the children in the car and that she will have an accident and both she and the children could be seriously injured or die.
- Child Safety are worried that if the children are alone with Mum when she drinks alcohol, that she will become so drunk that she won't be able to care for and look after them properly.

Example of an ongoing intervention worry statement (CPO with LTG to the CE):

- Child Safety, Police, Mary and Rob (carers) and Bronte (mum) are all worried that if Noah smokes weed, misses school and shoplifts he will not finish Year 12 and might end up with criminal convictions and so won't be able to get the job that he wants or be able to travel overseas.

General Tip: By avoiding words like "continue" and "again" in worry statements, we avoid a dispute about whether or not something happened in the past. This doesn't weaken the worry statement, but remains focused on what we're worried will happen in the future, rather than what we think happened in the past.