

Strengthening Families

Policy

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2.01	21/07/2017	Operational Policy	Minor updates.
2.2	04/01/2021	Niki Patmios	Removed elements of Structured Decision Making (SDM). Aligned with 'Guidance: Strengthening Families Practice' document.

Acronyms	Full form
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
NT	Northern Territory
TFHC	Territory Families Housing and Communities
the Act	Care and Protection of Children Act 2007

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1. Policy Purpose

To outline the comprehensive safety planning and case planning that Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) may provide to children and families after a child protection investigation has been completed and it is determined that ongoing case management will be required in a Strengthening Families case.

2. Policy Statement

Following the completion of an investigation it may be assessed that a child is at risk of future harm or could be in need of protection, but is safe to remain at home while TFHC work with the child and their family under a Strengthening Families case to mitigate this occurring. The purpose of opening a Strengthening Families case is to provide short-term intensive support and assistance to a child and their family that increases their ability and capacity to keep their child safe, in their care ongoing. Promoting family functioning and safeguarding the child's safety and wellbeing is paramount.

The intent of Strengthening Families is to complete the comprehensive safety planning process with the child, their parents and the parent's network in a planned way that builds on existing strengths and safety and enables children to remain safely at home, connected to culture, language and family.

The Child Protection case is closed and a Family Support, Strengthening Families case is opened for comprehensive safety planning. The parents must agree to this support and undertake to work with TFHC. If the parents do not agree to a Strengthening Families case, consideration needs to be given to whether a support service can achieve risk mitigation or whether statutory intervention is required.

It is important to discuss the processes involved in completing Strengthening Families safety planning with parents/caregivers and their network. The discussion should include providing the following information:

- The requirement for parents/caregivers to participate in network meetings and the development and regular review of the comprehensive safety plan at those meetings;
- The expectation that parents/caregivers will actively address the identified concerns within given time frames in line with the Strengthening Families Plan; and
- TFHCs' role to promote the child's safety and wellbeing and to take appropriate action if the level of risk to the child remains the same, or increases while support is being provided. This action may include making an application to the Children's court for a care and protection order on behalf of the child.

3. Strengthening Families case management

Practitioners address the complex range of safety and wellbeing issues affecting the child and family through ongoing assessment, planning, review and monitoring of the comprehensive safety plan. Strengthening Families case management seeks to:

- Work with parents and their network to address the child protection concerns identified in the danger statement and to achieve the safety goals so everyone has a clear understanding of what the worries are, why TFHC is involved and what needs to happen to close the case; and
- Identify how the parents can be supported to meet the needs of the child and reduce the level of danger by facilitating the active participation of the child, the child's family, the naturally connected network and relevant others including professionals and those who are naturally connected to the child.

Intervention with a family is planned to strengthen protective factors, develop safety, and to test the safety plan over time, demonstrating sustainable safety for the child. There are a range of options for intervention to support the needs of the family, for the parents/caregivers to demonstrate positive changes in their parenting, and to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child.

4. Closing a Strengthening Families' case

It is important to close cases when the safety goals have been achieved by the parents and their network. It is the Practitioner's role to have clear timeframes outlined in the Strengthening Families Plan that demonstrate what actions need to be taken and by when to achieve safety for the child and for the case to be closed.

A Strengthening Families case can be closed when the safety of the child has been sufficiently increased in line with the agreed Strengthening Families Plan, in relation to the child protection concerns expressed in the danger statement and a final meeting with the family and support network has been held. From this meeting, a final record will be documented in the Network Meeting Minutes template to identify that the safety goals have been achieved by the parents and network, the final safety plan is included.

The decision to close a Strengthening Families case should be discussed with the TFHC Team Leader or the TFHC Manager who must approve the case closure. Refer to the Strengthening Families Practice Guidance.

Refer to the Strengthening Families Practice Guidance.