

child protection professionals, but increasingly this role is handed over to the safety network. Most safety plans in the highest risk cases are created when the family is separated, either with the children in alternative care or the alleged abuser out of the family home. As the parents and family members engage in, and progress with, the safety planning process, it is important that the child protection agency reward the parents' efforts and build their hope and momentum by successively increasing their contact with their children and loosening up the professional controls on the contact arrangements. Once a safety planning process has begun, it is important that momentum and focus is maintained and that a completion date is identified. Safety planning usually takes between 3 and 12 months.

## 8.2 Involving children in safety planning

### 8.2.1 Safety House

Sonja Parker from Perth has developed a Safety House tool (Parker, 2009) that extends the Three Houses process and visually engages children in creating the safety plan. The Safety House explores five key elements with the child:

- i. What life will look like in the child's Safety House and the people who will live there.
- ii. People who the child thinks should visit and how they should be involved.
- iii. People the child sees as unsafe.
- iv. Rules of the Safety House.
- v. Safety Path: using the path to the house as a scaling device for the child to express their readiness to reunite or their level of safety in the family.

Undertaking the Safety House process with children should be done with full knowledge of the adults and with the children fully aware the parents are working with 'safety people' to create a new set of rules for their family so everyone knows the children are happy and safe.

This creates a context where the child's safety house can readily be brought to the parents and network and their ideas can contribute directly to growing the plan. This also underlines for the parents and network that the people they are ultimately most accountable to is not the statutory authorities but the children themselves.

