

## Knowledge Bite

### Writing Risk- Focussed, Succinct Safeguarding Letters for Children

As demand in EIT and the pressure on FCAs continue to rise, work is ongoing to consider how Cafcass can ensure that every child is safeguarded, the best outcomes are achieved, and the health and wellbeing of FCAs remains a priority.

Over the years the safeguarding letter has evolved from being a short letter summarising agency checks and providing initial advice, to a lengthier, more analytical letter which sometimes resembles a 'mini section 7 report'.

We have recognised the need to revisit the requirements of the WTFH role, as set out in the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP). The CAP is clear; at this stage of proceedings, the court does not need a long, detailed report, what is needed is a short letter from the FCA summarising the risks for each child and giving clear advice about what needs to happen. Where no safeguarding concerns are raised, we report this to court, promote swift resolution, and encourage families to reach agreements where safe to do so. High quality work for children does not need a long analysis at the EIT stage.

This knowledge bite is aimed at EIT FCAs, managers and practice supervisors to clarify expectations for EIT work to ensure that all children receive a good service in the context of high demand.

### The EIT role as set out in the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP)

#### **1. Prior to the FHDRA, FCAs should only discuss with parents (or other parties) matters relevant to risk.**

Such steps shall be confined to matters of safety. The Cafcass Officer or (in Wales) the Welsh Family Proceedings Officer (WFPO) shall not discuss with either party before the FHDRA any matter other than the one which relates to safety. The parties will not be invited to talk about other issues, for example relating to the substance of applications or replies or about issues concerning matters of welfare or the prospects of resolution. If such issues are raised by either party, they will be advised that such matters are deferred to the FHDRA when there is equality between the parties and full discussion can take place which will be a time when any safety issues that have been identified can also be taken into account.

#### **2. The safeguarding letter should only include information that is relevant to risk.**

Cafcass / CAFCASS Cymru shall record and outline any safety issues for the court, in the form of a Safeguarding letter

## Professional Curiosity



Professional Curiosity is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, applying critical evaluation to any information received and maintaining an open mind.

All identified risks, including those in the application/statements, must be addressed during the assessment and this needs to be clearly recorded on the child's record.

Top tip – using a template when completing your initial case review and including a 'risk' heading is an effective way of ensuring that risks raised in the application are addressed during interviews. Here is an example initial review template that may be helpful: [Initial Case Review Template](#)

Have you asked enough questions to understand what the risks mean for me?



**Remember - evidence of your professional curiosity, and your thinking about what the risks mean for children, needs to be clear in the contact log. Only information relevant to risk needs to be included in the safeguarding letter.**

If concerns are raised about mental health:

- What behaviours are causing concern?
- How does/could this impact upon parenting?

NB. Simply reporting that a parent has depression is meaningless; what does it mean for the child?

If domestic abuse concerns are raised:

- What has the child seen and heard?
- What is the nature of the abuse (behavioural examples)?
- Most serious incident? Most recent incident? Pattern of behaviour? Escalation?

NB. [See the Domestic Abuse – Practice Pathway](#)



If concerns are raised about alcohol and/or drugs:

- What substances are being used?
- Where is the child when substances are used?
- Does usage impact on parenting and, if so, how?

The [Interview Plan EIT Telephone Calls](#) should be used to support a professionally curious approach during telephone interviews.

Remember, your risk analysis needs to be explicit in the contact log. Many FCAs use a 'risk analysis' heading when recording interviews and reviewing agency information; this is a great way of evidencing your thinking with just 1 or 2 sentences about what the information gathered means for the child in terms of risk and impact.

Remember, include it in your safeguarding letter only if it's relevant to risk!

## Children's uniqueness and diversity needs

As per the [WTFH SOPs](#), diversity information for the adult and child should be collated during the safeguarding telephone interview. Diversity in safeguarding letters should be relevant to the assessment of risk and include information that may affect a child or family's vulnerability or may impact directly on the application or the decision to be made by Court.

At the WTFH stage we need to ask enough questions to establish whether there are diversity factors that increase a child's vulnerability or increase risk.



“Tell me about your child; what is special and unique about them?”

“What about your child makes them more vulnerable/resilient?”

What does the court need to know about your child when considering this application?”

“How is the court application impacting upon your child?”

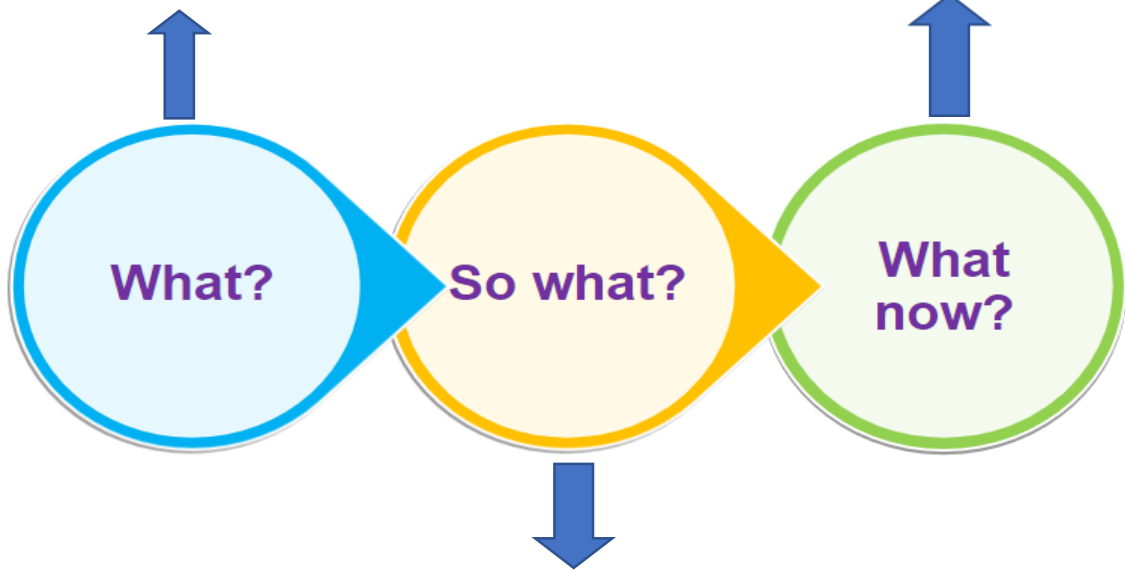
## What to include in a Safeguarding Letter?

As highlighted above, the CAP is clear that the safeguarding letter should **only include information relevant to risk**.

- If no safeguarding concerns are raised during interviews, simply say ‘no risk issues were identified’
- Avoid generic sentences and focus on a concise paragraph which provides a clear and well-reasoned rationale for your advice to the court
- The [Munro questions](#) can support you to write a concise risk analysis
- When writing the letter think, ‘what?’, ‘So what?’, ‘Now what?’

This is your summary of the risks identified from agency checks, previous Cafcass records and interviews.

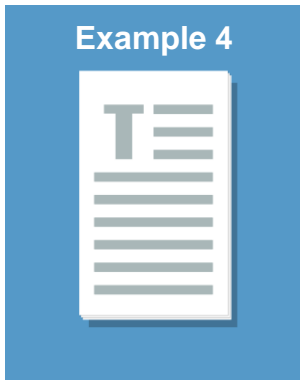
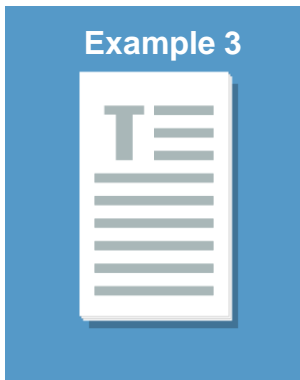
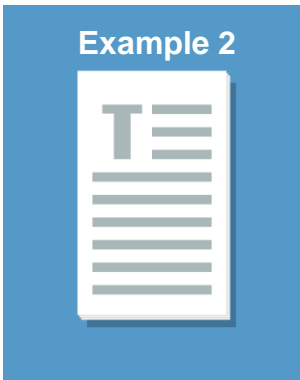
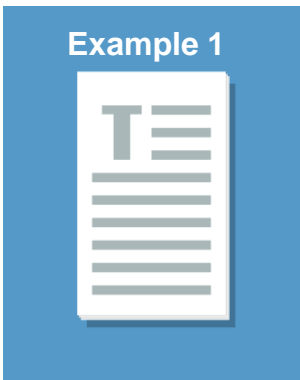
Clear and well-reasoned advice.



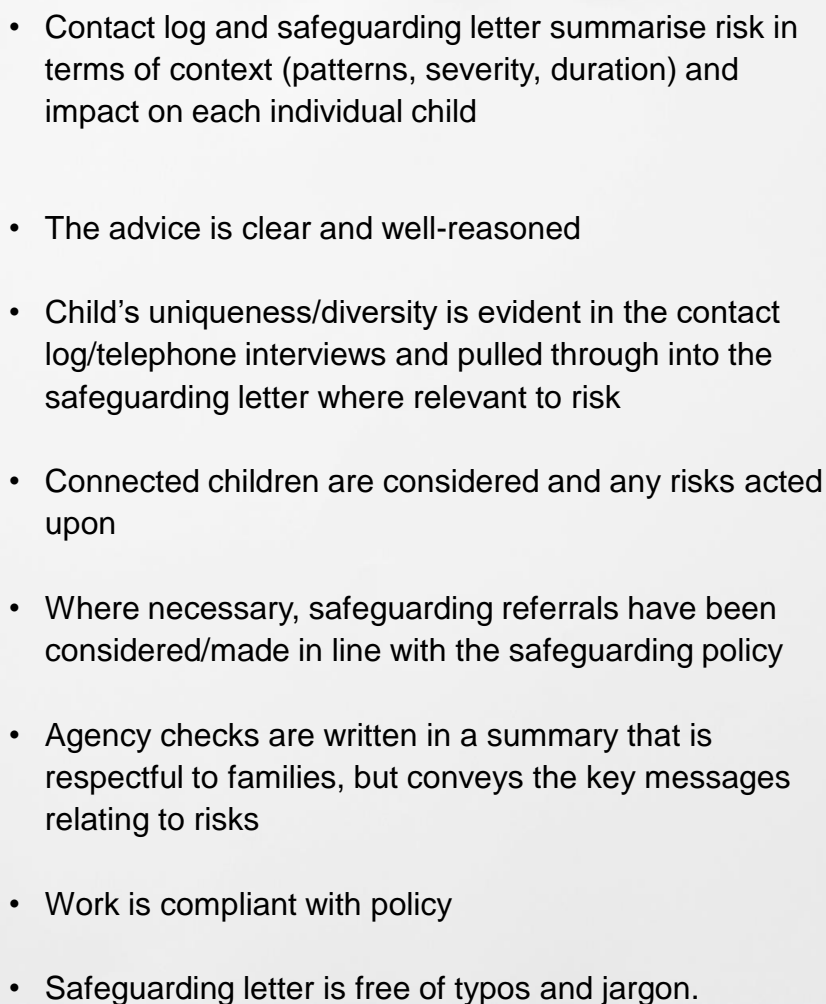
A concise paragraph to explain if, and why, you are worried about the child/ren.  
Consider any diversity factors that may increase risk/vulnerability.

The [guidance tool](#) may help to think about what to include in the safeguarding

Here are some examples of short, risk focussed safeguarding letters, which may be a useful guide. Click on the examples below.



## What are your managers/practice supervisors looking for when reviewing children's records

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- Contact log and safeguarding letter summarise risk in terms of context (patterns, severity, duration) and impact on each individual child
  - The advice is clear and well-reasoned
  - Child's uniqueness/diversity is evident in the contact log/telephone interviews and pulled through into the safeguarding letter where relevant to risk
  - Connected children are considered and any risks acted upon
  - Where necessary, safeguarding referrals have been considered/made in line with the safeguarding policy
  - Agency checks are written in a summary that is respectful to families, but conveys the key messages relating to risks
  - Work is compliant with policy
  - Safeguarding letter is free of typos and jargon.

### Key Messages for teams:

- Stay focussed on risk during interviews and be professionally curious
  - Show your thinking on the contact log
- The safeguarding letter just needs to summarise what the risk is, if and why we are worried about the child/ren, and what needs to happen.