

**SMART PLANNING IN SOCIAL WORK: SOME TIPS – nb SMART = S specific M measurable A achievable R realistic T timely**

**Outcomes:** *where possible*, an outcome should be stated in the positive ie what is wanted – rather than what is *not* wanted<sup>1</sup>. Whichever planning ‘framework’ you use, plans will not be smart if the outcomes you want are not clear enough. For us, an outcome is the *good thing we want a particular child to have or experience as opposed to the bad thing that is happening now*. **The outcome should describe what that good thing will be.** Parents respond better if asked to achieve future positives rather than ‘stop’ some past negative eg ‘managing behaviour without hitting children’ is better than ‘stop hitting child as punishment for bad behaviour’. When setting outcomes, picture what the better care will look like – what would you see, hear (smell?). If you’re struggling, write down the opposite of current poor care. Turn these into outcomes.

**Specific** start by describing this *particular* child’s needs as precisely as possible. Avoid clichés or describing needs using ‘universal’ terms eg “*X needs to reach his full potential*”. All children need that. Do not describe needs in ‘service terms’ eg ‘*X. to be referred to CAMHS*’ is not enough. This is an action not a need. If the purpose of the referral isn’t clear the ‘plan’ will fail. The need might be ‘*everyone to understand why X hurts herself when upset by cutting her arms and for X to be helped to deal with upsets without hurting herself*’. Action would be, refer to CAMHS. Use plain language not jargon. Real example ‘*there are ongoing concerns about neglect of X who has suffered poor hygiene and presented at school hungry and wearing inappropriate clothes. He has little bedding which is also dirty*. Perhaps list as X needs to have clean hair, teeth and skin every day -X needs to wear clean clothes everyday. These should be the right clothes for the weather, including shoes - X needs to have breakfast lunch and evening meal every day - X needs to sleep in a clean bed every night with enough clean covers to keep him warm.

**Measurable** understandably, workers struggle with some things that aren’t easily measured *in numbers*. ‘*Jimmy to have 100% school attendance*’ is easily measured. Measuring whether a child is less neglected or emotionally abused is harder. But, again, consider what is it that the child witnesses, says and does that is worrying? For those that can’t be measured numerically, work out what opposite ‘good’ things the child might witness, say or do and choose those as your measures. Example: 8 year old witnessing ongoing physical DV from Dad to Mum. Child herself looks anxious, is aggressive with classmates, drew ‘worries’ of Dad hitting mum. Measurable might include **child** will say she hasn’t seen or heard Dad hit Mum. This can be counted (= o). ‘Softer’ measures could include she is less aggressive in class and puts ‘normal’ 8 year old anxieties in the ‘House of Worries’.

**Achievable and Realistic** to me these are, basically, the same. Plans should not require parents to provide more than ‘good enough’ parenting. In law good enough is the type of care that ‘could be reasonably expected of a parent of a similar child’. This means what level of care would *most* children of a similar age get from a reasonable parent *and how would most such children present*. It does *not* mean what care would other abused or neglected children receive and, how would such abused children present. Although, if a child has special needs through eg disability, ‘good enough’ care means parents doing different or extra things to meet their children’s needs: which is exactly what most parents of CWD do – so this is still a comparison with a similar child.

**Timely** make sure you’ve agreed deadlines!

**Miscellaneous** no column in the plan, including ‘needs’ columns should have ‘narrative’ records of visits, historical info (that’s for chronology) etc just cut and pasted in. Always ask parents and, as appropriate, children if they understand what’s written down in the plan. Don’t over-complicate plans. Weed out any need or action that will not address the key risk or need.

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<sup>1</sup> It won’t always be possible to do this. But where it is it helps if it is done, for reasons explained in document.