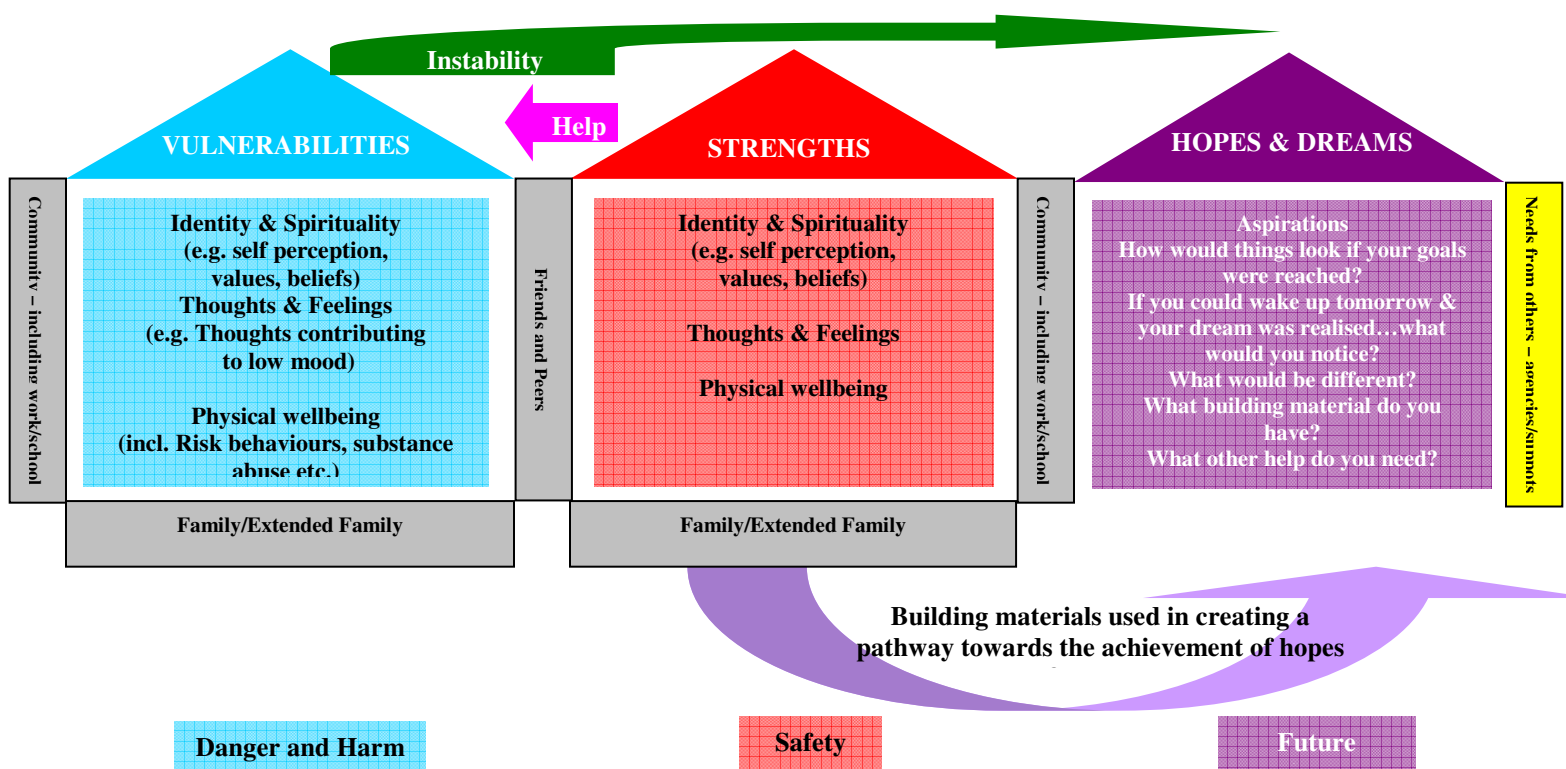


# The Three Houses<sup>©</sup> Model

-A tool for gathering information

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## **Introduction**

The Three Houses is an information gathering tool developed from the concepts of Te Whare Tapa Wha (Professor Mason Durie), resiliency theory, solution focused theory (Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg), and Signs of Safety (Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards). It is divided into three houses which represent Vulnerabilities, Strengths, and Hopes and Dreams. It also includes a pathway which outlines the intervention steps required to achieve the described goals. It is applied with a child/young person, the family and also the worker. It works from a systemic perspective that recognises the interdependent nature of all those involved, and aims to bring together each person's set of houses to help build toward solutions and develop interventions

## **Application to practice**

The Three Houses tool can be completed in any order and should be discussed openly with the client including why the worker has chosen to use it, and for what purposes the information will be used. It is designed to be completed with clients, with the purposes of having their views understood and heard, and also for workers where appropriate to contribute their thoughts. The worker's main role however is to help facilitate completion of the tool, and this can be done with drawing, words or any other media that may be helpful.

### **1. CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **A. Young People**

##### **The First house – Vulnerabilities**

**Vulnerabilities** include all those aspects inside and around a young person that make them more at risk of danger and harm. They can be both psychological and social, and include others views and attitudes as well as that of the client. There needs to be an opportunity for the young person to first describe these and then the worker to add their view and that of others who are in the young person's picture or world. The word

“vulnerability” is used to reduce potential blaming and shaming and acknowledges that we all carry vulnerabilities which are more prevalent at different times in our lives.

**Inside** the first house the first panel addresses spirituality or identity. It describes how the young person sees themselves, how others might see them and the emphasis is on less than positive self perceptions, or an identity or identification that brings them harm or danger or threatens this to others. These perceptions of identity are key, and form the centre of a young person’s vulnerabilities.

The next internal panel refers to any thoughts and feelings that the young person experiences that increase their risk of harm or danger. These might relate to certain situations and may affect the young person’s mood or behaviour. It is important that the worker make these links and thus identify situations when they most often occur. Also here, learning disabilities and low self esteem should be mentioned.

The last panel refers to physical well being, and includes sexual health, personal cares, and behaviour that affect the body’s performance in a negative way. Information around substance abuse and at risk behaviours such as deliberate self harming should be included here. The worker can add their view of what has been observed should the young person be unable or unwilling to name certain issues.

**Outside** the first house, a wall of external vulnerabilities extends, beginning with the family. Aspects within the young person’s family that increase risk of danger and harm need to be included here. This could be the family using the young person in an objectified way, responding negatively to the young person, and sanctioning of illegal or dangerous behaviour. It might be that the family may be absent, or unwilling to be involved in the young person’s world. Again, worker and other’s perceptions can be included after the young person has had a chance to describe first what they perceive.

The next wall looks at friends and peers and how their behaviour might contribute to increasing the young person’s vulnerability to danger and harm. Again this looks at behaviour and the influence they have with the young person. It looks at activities they are engaged that increase danger and harm. It identifies any messages that they give the young person that are not keeping them safe from danger and harm.

The final wall addresses community, work or school. It may highlight a lack of these or environments that are not helpful or positive. It is important that the young person name these in their language and that they are explored in terms of how they are not currently assisting the young person.

### **The Second House –Strengths**

**Strengths** include personal attributes, values, beliefs, characteristics, attitudes, protective factors, and other factors that can be used in a positive way to contribute to change and build safety. They are not necessarily “fixed” attributes, and discussion should be held to determine where they are effective and how we can help them become so. They are essentially a pool of resources, and discussion of them helps validate the potential for change.

Within the **second house** we have a description of internal strengths. The same process is followed beginning with spirituality or identity. The emphasis is on spirituality or identity that is positive and helps the young person to be safe or keep safe from harm. It again draws out self perception and focuses on core issues. Key questions might be “How would you describe yourself to someone who had never met you?” “What are some good things about you?”

The second panel gathers information about thoughts and feelings that are positive and help the young person to feel good about them self. This is about self messages and again the worker should draw out specific situations when these occur. The worker also has an opportunity to add their perceptions and give specific examples of these to make them more real to the young person. For example, instead of saying “You are great with your little brother”, they might say “When I see the way you listen and pay attention to what your little brothers says by using his words and acknowledging his feelings, I think you do a great job at helping him feel heard.”

The third panel looks at how the young person cares for themselves physically and aims to find exceptions if the young person is engaged in harmful activities such as drug or alcohol abuse. A discussion of basic self cares can be addressed and named if the young person is achieving these, such as personal hygiene or good sexual health practices.

Outside the second house, we again begin with family and the strengths that they offer to the young person. These should relate to keeping the young person safe, although some strengths may not yet offer protection. They still should be named as they can be built on. An example of this might be that the young person's mother might phone from her work to make sure he got home safely from school, but he is still alone for a long period of time before she gets home. The worker too needs to reflect on the strengths they perceive in the young person's family and name these to specific individuals if need be.

The next wall looks at strengths that contribute to safety from the young person's friends. Again detail needs to be drawn out and it be ascertained what individuals specifically do to contribute to safety. Intimate relationships may be named here and it important the worker be non judgemental around these, focusing instead on what they offer. It is most important that the young person's perception is recorded as it is their information that is being gathered.

The final wall again looks at community/ school/work but this time looks at the safety that these environments bring. Positive role models, and attributes of these need to be listed. Simple aspects such as giving the young person a structure and context to their day can be drawn out or listed under the worker's view.

### **The Third House – Hopes, Dreams, Goals.**

The Third House is the place of **hopes, dreams and goals**. This is the house where the client has an opportunity to express their aspirations for their lives and their family. It creates the sense of potential and hope that things can be different. It allows workers to see and hear clients beyond the presenting problems.

For a young person it is the house or home they would wish to have or live in, the type of person they would wish to be, and the place where their goals can occur. Its emphasis is on where they would like to be, what they would like to be different in the selves and their world. It asked three simple questions beginning with the miracle question:

- i. If you could wake up tomorrow and be the sort of person you would really like to be, how would you know you were different? How would you feel, what would you think? What would have changed?**

- ii. How would other people know you were different? What would they see that would tell them this?**
- iii. Ask them to write or draw all these ideas inside the Third House**
- iv. If you could change three things around you, what would you change? How would you know things were different around you? What would you notice had changed?**
- v. What would others say about your world that they would notice as different?**
- vi. Ask them to write or draw all these ideas around the Third House.**
- vii. Look at their picture together and then ask them to:**

**Reflect on the Second house (strengths) to see what building material they have available to build the third house.**

**Refer to the First house (vulnerabilities) to look at what might make the Third House unstable and how the Second house could help.**

**Finally ask them “What other help do you need to build this house?”** and add these ideas around the blank area of the Third house. These will include agencies, programmes, therapy, behaviour strategies, people, mentors, and protective factors that will keep the house strong. The pathway to building the House of Hopes and dreams can then begin to be detailed, using the House of Strengths and the information around the house of hopes and Dreams. This will be further developed with the parent/caregiver, worker, and other agencies’ information. It should include small achievable measurable steps, so that change can be noticed and scaled where appropriate.

## **B. Children**

The application of the Three Houses changes in relation to children, with the concepts being simplified to be contained in one house while the emphasis remains on gathering their information. The concepts still remain the same but are less abstract.

The worker needs to take into account developmental aspects, most children around six years and up can draw a simple house however checking should occur that the concept of a house is one they can grasp.

When using the Three Houses children's tool, the worker begins by asking the child to draw their house. It is important the worker be mindful of basic engagement skills such as appropriate language, positive tone, getting down on the child's level, expressing interest and enthusiasm in the child, while remaining natural and congruent.

Once the child has drawn their house, the worker invites them to tell who lives in their house and to draw these people inside the house. While the child is drawing, the worker asks general questions about the people being described, are they a boy or girl, how old are they, (this may be harder for younger children to answer). Are there any pets that live in the house?

The worker then asks the child to talk about some of the things they like doing in the house. This is about activities and interests and keeps the focus general and is easy to answer promoting early confidence and sense of expert. The worker can ask who they do these activities with and also about who visits the house including friends, to start to gain a sense of who else might be in the child's world.

Either by this natural progression or as a new question, the worker then asks the child if they could draw some of the things that they do outside of their house. These will include the child's wider world, including extended family, school or kindergarten/ kohanga, sports, clubs etc. Questions such as "What do you like to do at school, who do you go visit, what friends do you play with at school, or outside of school?" are general, and help the worker understand what happens outside of the home. Open questions should be used, followed by probing questions that build on the child's information to develop the picture.

The worker then asks the child if they could draw some of the things that they do outside of their house. These will include the child's wider world, including extended family, school or kindergarten/ kohanga, sports, clubs etc.

Looking at the picture of the child's house together, the worker goes over the pictures, checking with the child that they have got the correct information. This demonstrates that the worker has heard the child's information, and provides an opportunity for details to be clarified although again developmental aspects need to be considered.

The worker then asks the child about what things in home make them feel happy or good, and gets the child to draw yellow suns by these things or smiley faces. Another option here is to use a set of smiley face stickers or bear "expression" stickers that can be placed on the picture by the child. This may be about people, pets, behaviour or activities in their lives. The worker repeats this question for things named outside of the house.

The worker then says that sometimes things happen in and outside our houses that can make us feel sad and asks the child if there are any things that make them feel sad at home or outside of home.

**NB.** If the child discloses new abuse at this stage, the worker must gently affirm the child's feelings and explain that they will need to talk to another person about these things who has a special job of helping children who have these types of sadness. Otherwise the worker can ask the child to draw small clouds or sad faces next to the people or activities. Again sad or frown face stickers can be used. If the child becomes sad at this point, the worker needs to affirm their feelings and be supportive

If sadness has been named, the worker then ask the child by referring to the suns or smiley faces if any of these things help with the sad faces or clouds. This can give the worker an idea of what strengths might be used in the future to help the child.

The worker then comments on the work the child has done of drawing their house and asks if there is anything else in their picture that the child feels is missing. This should be asked by "You have done such a great job of drawing me your house and all the things around your house, I just wondered if there was



anything you felt you wanted to have in the picture?” This is an opportunity for the child to add anything else they would like to and for the worker to ask open questions around this.

By the end of the application of the Three Houses tool in relation to a child, a worker should have a good sense of the child’s home and wider world and the information has been gathered in way that is non threatening and lead by the child. Their picture is to be saved as a contributing house to the overall set of information gathered.

## **2. PARENTS /CAREGIVERS**

To gather the parent’s perspective on the situation, the Three Houses tool follows initial interview questions around assessing danger and harm and the current concerns. The Three houses tool creates an opportunity for the parents to contribute their views, stepping away from can feel like a question and answer session led by the agency.

### **The Second House - Strengths**

Following the format of the Three Houses, the worker presents a simple outline of a house and asks the parent/s to imagine this to be their house with their family living in it. Beginning with the 2nd house – Strengths, the worker asks the parent/s to reflect on how they would describe the family or household’s positive aspects to someone who didn’t know them. The worker may need to prompt here, suggesting that some families would say, “We’re a close unit”, “We are a strong family”, “We stick together”. This is to draw out an identity for the family, how they see themselves in relation to others that is positive. The worker can make observations here, under *other’s view*, if they have had a chance to observe the family, and their comments must be focused on strengths of the family.

From here the worker moves to looking at thoughts and feelings, and links this to the relationships within the household. The worker asks “What are the positive relationships in your household, who’s close to who, who gets on well?” The worker should aim to draw out thoughts and feelings between those in the family that encourage positive interactions and commitment to managing difficulty. The worker needs to come

back to the parent/s and ensure that they include themselves in this picture , eg looking at the spousal relationship and their role in other relationships. In particular the worker needs to ask direct questions about parenting styles that the parents use that are positive and keep the children safe. Personal attributes of managing stress should also be listed here. The worker needs to continuously link the information to how these relationships, interactions, and behaviour help keep everyone safe. If there is a lot of existing difficulty and examples of positive interactions are hard to name, the worker needs to ask about situations when there was no difficulty and what was different at these times.

The last inside component of the second house is looking at the physical environment, including income, and what works well to keep the household functioning. This looks at roles that are working well, and again how practical limitations or problems are resolved.

Moving to the outside of the second house the worker asks what relationships with extended family help to keep the family functioning well and safe from danger and harm. This needs to be made specific to individuals. The attributes of these individuals need to be described, so their roles can be clearly seen.

Positive relationships with friends are next explored and a clear picture gained of what type of support and how this provided. Again names and details are important and **how** the parent/s utilise these particularly in time of difficulty or need. It is also useful to explore here how the parent/s contribute to friendships with others so their strengths in forming and maintaining relationships can also be seen.

Finally the worker asks the parent/s to think about the community they are a part of and any agencies or groups that offer them or their children support in a positive way. This might include early childhood, providers and other supports that they can identify. If the parent/s finds this difficult it may be helpful to brainstorm all the community involvement they have, and for them to detail which are helpful and what it is specifically that they do that they parent/s find useful.

### **First house - Vulnerabilities**

The worker then moves to the first house of vulnerabilities, and beginning with the family identity, asks if the parent/s see any difficulties with how the family sees themselves. It may be useful to ask here how they

think others might see them, and check for variation between the second house and the first. The worker needs to ask “Are there any ways that you see yourself as a family that do not keep you or children safe or increase the risk of danger and harm?” Examples of this may be identity that is criminal related or linked to a family name that creates difficulty through association.

The second component of the first house addresses thoughts and feelings that exist in the house or family that do not promote safety. This includes discussing interactions between individuals and behaviour that exists within the household. It is important that the worker remain non judgemental and that their observations be recorded under *others view*. The worker needs to open and clear about interpersonal behaviours that are not promoting safety if the parent/s are reluctant to name these. It is also helpful if the worker can draw out when these are likely to occur to determine what triggers are involved.

The third inside component of the first house addresses environmental issue that are creating difficulty. These might be a lack of money, alcohol, drug issues, lack of food, poor hygiene, and health issues including disabilities. In some ways these are the internal stresses that are acting on the family. It is important the worker records what the parent/s identifies as well as their own observations. Again all should link back to factors that increase danger or harm for the children or young person.

Moving to the outside of the house the worker explores with the parent/s what extended family behaviour is not helpful in terms of promoting safety or who increases stress. If there is reluctance for family to name this, worker observations can be listed and clearly owned as the worker’s perception. These can be checked back with the family which can generate useful conversation about concerns the agency may hold.

The second external component asks the same question of friends and social contacts. The question can be asked in relation to keeping the parent/s safe from harm either to or from others or to themselves, and their children. By asking the question as to who is not helpful, reduces personal attacks by instead focusing on behaviour. It may be that some people will be listed in both House one and two, and this is fine, as discussion can arise from the observation.

Finally the third external component of the first house is addressed which is around community factors. This looks at agencies and other structures that exist around the family. The worker should not be surprised if

their agency is listed here or react to this. Remember this is a tool to contribute to intervention planning and the question “What can we do to move from here to the second house?” is valuable. Again some agencies or environments may be represented in both houses and this is an interesting observation to discuss further.

**The Third house - Hopes, dreams, and goals.**

On completion of the first House the worker can then move to the third house of Hopes, dreams, goals. In looking at this House, the parent/s have an opportunity to explore what they would like their family to be like. This may also include how they would like to see themselves behaving or feeling. Again the concept of the miracle question is used here.

The following questions are asked:

- i. “If you could wake up tomorrow and your family would be just how you wanted, what would be different?”**

**“How would you know things were different?”**

**“If others were to come by what would they notice that would be different?”**

- ii. “What strengths can you use from your second house to help make these things different?”**

Reflecting on the first house,

- iii. “How can you use the strengths in the second house to help against the vulnerabilities making the house unstable.**

And finally,

- iv. “What other help will you need to help you reach your Third house?”  
Include agencies, external supports etc.**

On completion of the Third house the worker is to thank the family and says that all information will be brought together for a discussion on how best to increase safety for everyone by working toward reducing danger and harm.

### **3. THE WORKER**

The Three Houses lastly focuses on the worker as a contributing factor to a family picture. It is impossible for a worker to not bring their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences with them to a family. In fact it is these very things that can assist to help the family build safety and reduce danger and harm. However the Three Houses model requires that time be taken for the worker to name these while working with a family. It will be most effective for the worker to complete their part of the Three Houses model with a supervisor.

In relation to the worker, the Three Houses model takes the same concepts but applies them differently. Throughout the process, the worker must continuously reflect on themselves and the family they are working with.

#### **The First house - Vulnerabilities**

With the First house – vulnerabilities, the worker is asked with regard to the first component – spirituality/ identity, how they would describe their current self concept as a worker and how this might impact in an unhelpful way on the family. The supervisor then asks if there are any beliefs and values they hold that they recognise contribute to a picture of increasing risk of danger and harm for this family. This is a chance for a worker to explore areas of their own culture and belief system and life experiences that may lead them into professional dangerousness. It is important the supervisor reflect on the type of maltreatment and on parenting behaviours and ask what beliefs the worker holds around these. This is not an exercise in making the worker feel wrong, judgemental or judged, it is simply to name what is recognised as beliefs or values that could unwittingly increase the risk of danger and harm.

The second component of the first house asks the worker to identify any feelings and thoughts around the family and in particular the type of maltreatment, which may become obstacles to them working effectively.

These can be identified by the supervisor asking how the worker tends to react to the family or more widely to the behaviours and actions that have been identified. It is important that the supervisor and the worker determine how these will be unhelpful (how they might be acted out) and what impact they might have on the workers interactions with the family.

The third component to the inside of the house is physical issues that may lead the worker to act in a way that does not promote the safety of the child. The supervisor and worker need to explore where the worker is at in terms of physical and mental wellbeing and if there are any current concerns. This will include stress.

Moving to the outside of the first house, the supervisor and social worker explore whether there are any issues in regard to the worker's home or family that will impact on their interventions. Examples might be that the worker's own family and the case have parallels that will reduce objectivity, or that there are current stresses or demands from within the worker's family that will create difficulty.

With regard to the component of friends, this is changed to the agency that the worker is a part of. Current issues around resourcing, expectations, and workload need to be identified. Any restraints should be noted and again there is opportunity for the supervisor to add any additions under others view. The supervisory relationship can also be reflected on here, as there may be aspects which are not working for either party.

The final component of the first house looks at the community including other agencies that the worker may identify as creating difficulty or not increasing safety. There may be interagency conflict or relationships that are not positive. Any of these that will impact on the workers interaction with the family need to be noted.

### **The Second house- Strengths**

Moving to the second house the supervisor and worker address the worker's spirituality or identity that will enhance safety through the beliefs and values the worker holds. The supervisor needs to link these back to the child focus and ask the worker to give examples of behaviour that have related to these in past cases. The cultural context of the worker also features here in terms of identifying strengths that will play a role in assisting the family.

The second wall of the second house looks at the worker's thoughts and feelings about the family and about what is occurring. This is an opportunity for the worker to reflect on what they have observed as positive thoughts or feelings in relation to the family that will assist their intervention and involvement. It may relate to what they have heard or observed.

The third internal wall of the second house draws out the positive aspects of the workers physical and mental health, supports relating to energy they have available, and how they are generally feeling in themselves which will assist the family through what they have to offer.

The external wall of the second house looks at how the workers home life and family offer the worker support and strength. These points are noted as they become the foundation that the worker comes and returns to work from. Strengths here enable the worker to more actively engage with the family.

The second external wall reflects on positive aspects of the agency, including co workers, the team, staff morale, and energy and enthusiasm from those around in the workplace. Supervision can also be looked at regarding how it is supporting the worker, and the supervisory relationship can be considered here in terms of what it offers to the case.

Lastly other agencies in the wider social service community need to be considered, in particular relationships and networks that will assist the worker with the case. This will form the external support structure to the worker, and also identify possible resources for the family. Identifying strengths help reduce worker isolation and emphasis interagency communication and collaboration.

### **The Third House – Hopes, Dreams and Goals**

In the Third House the supervisor and worker consider the hopes and goals the worker has for the family.

The supervisor can ask the following questions or the worker can answer them and bring them to the supervision session.

- i. **“If all the family’s issues disappeared, what would be different? How would you know?”**
- ii. **“If things had changed in this family what change would be obvious in the child?”**
- iii. **“What hopes, dreams and goals do you see for this family?” AND “What will tell you that you can close this case?”**
- iv. **“What will you need to do in order for this to occur?”**
- v. **“What can be used for your second house to help you achieve this?”**
- vi. **“How can your second house support any issues from your first house that might stop you doing this?”**

This completes the third house, linking the worker back to the family outcomes.

On completion of the tool with each person involved, there is now information gathered that can be collated to begin to build toward an intervention plan. The worker first takes a summary of each person’s houses including their own and beginning with the first house notes key vulnerabilities and factors that increase danger and harm. These can be named specifically and generally and include everyone’s views.

Once the vulnerabilities have been identified, including their own, the worker identifies from the second houses what strengths each person has available to them and around them to manage the vulnerabilities and work toward the achievement of the goals listed in the third houses. These are placed in next to the vulnerabilities.

Finally using the third houses the worker lists everyone’s hopes, dreams and goals. In particular the worker draws out commonalities so a common purpose is identified. Specific goals also need to be noted. The goals are placed next to the strengths with a gap in between.



The gap will represent the pathway from the strengths and vulnerabilities to the house of hopes and dreams. The worker then needs to meet with the family to decide who will do what, with what type of support, building on their strengths and managing their vulnerabilities to help get them to the new house they want to have.

An ideal way to have this discussion is to have a family meeting, where the worker begins by naming the current concerns about danger and harm factors that have required the agency to be involved. The worker explains that they have all come together to look at how we can manage these concerns. The worker then presents the summarised information of everyone's houses ensuring everyone has a copy of their houses to add any additional information they consider important that has been missed. The purpose of the meeting is to identify what is needed to connect the house of strengths to the house of hopes, dreams and goals, while being mindful of the house of vulnerabilities.

The pathway needs to be concrete and measurable with specific steps and tasks that each person will undertake. People's capacity, confidence and willingness should be checked out for each step or task that they undertake. It is important to set small goals that people can achieve to build confidence in the plan. Each person should leave the meeting being clear about what their next step to achieve the House of hopes and dreams is. The worker needs to continuously link back to their strengths and resources and discuss how these can be "operationalised" so they help build future safety and change. The worker should also be upfront about the vulnerabilities and what might hinder the achievement of the goals and identify ways to help overcome these.

The worker needs to contribute their three houses, in particular their hopes, dreams and goals for the family, and what they have to offer to the process of getting to the goal house. By the end of this process, everyone should have clear tasks and a review time set to see how everyone is going. In between this the worker will meet with each person reviewing their tasks and seeing what progress is being made. The worker also needs to meet with their supervisor and check how they are going with their tasks and managing their vulnerabilities.

Alternatively if time is an issue, the Three Houses can be done for the first time within a family meeting or family group conference in a group discussion. It is still useful to summarise the concerns which have led to

everyone being present. Then it can be useful to start the discussion with the Hopes and Dreams of all those involved. From there strengths are useful to identify followed by vulnerabilities, as this will increase confidence for people to share vulnerabilities if their strengths have already been named. The pathway then is built with everyone's input. This method will lead to a more generalised discussion but still has merit in identifying strengths and providing an opportunity for others to hear what others think and feel.

The Three Houses model offers an opportunity not only to identify concerns but also strengths, and how these can be built on as resources to counteract vulnerabilities and to contribute to future goals. The model also aims to gather information that is generated by the members of the family, therefore gathering their perspective, and recognising that family is intrinsic to children and young people. It is designed to build rapport and create a process of doing with as opposed to doing to or doing for. It is holistic and systemic in nature, and reduces the need to constantly go back asking for further information. It is designed to unify by creating common goals but does not demand any one person's view be forfeited including the agency's. The Three houses can be used in any order and it requires workers be able to ask questions that build on information given. Finally the tool does not belong to the agency, it belongs to the family and recognises the contribution and impact a worker has when they become involved with them.

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