





3 CHILDREN'S SAFETY NET

Children need to be surrounded by adults who care about them. Mums, dads, grannies, grandads, family friends and relatives are all part of children's safety net and important people in family life. The birth of a child also provides an opportunity to create new relationships and deepen existing ones.

What kinds of safety nets do the children in the group have now? When is the time to try and find new people for a family's safety net? How could you encourage parents of small children to expand their safety net?

Discussing safety nets

Intimate relationships support children. Parents, siblings, friends and grandparents ideally offer the support children need in their growing environment. A safety net also supports the mental health of the whole family. At best, children's relationships with adults are such that they can safely, at their own leisure, form their understanding of the surrounding world and their own place in it. Adults' mutual relationship and their presence also support children's development.

Unique attachments between adults and children thrive within families. One of the important tasks of a family is to develop both children and adults' ability to get along with different kinds of people.

Social relationships within families go through a change as a child is born, at times making some relationships closer and others more distant. Families' safety nets can be discussed even before the birth of a child on visits to maternity and child health clinics. Grandparents' involvement has been shown to have a positive effect on children's development and the wellbeing of families, as well as, on the number of children in a family. When expecting a child, the future parents create images of themselves as a mother and father, but the reality may turn out to be something quite different. Thus, it is important to be able to find support in family and friends, who may gain new significance after a child has been born. The strength of the wider family is its constancy, which provides a feeling of safety and offers support in different crises.


However, many families lack a family network nowadays, or wider families live far apart, which means they may not be there to help in the day-to-day life of the new family. Child health clinics and day care centres can help come up




Every newborn child inherits two legacies. One is where the child is born and the other is to whom. A child is born into his/her country and the culture of the community, but also to the unique situation of his/her family. (Theodore Lidz)




HOW DO YOU BRING
UP SAFETY NETS
WITH PARENTS?



HOW DO YOU
ENCOURAGE
PARENTS TO
EXPAND THEIR
SAFETY NET?



DO YOU MONITOR
THE CHANGES IN
FAMILIES' SAFETY
NETS DURING THE
EARLY YEARS?



Parent groups have a positive impact on how adults see themselves as parents. Peer activities broaden parents' social networks and friendships; enable the availability of a wide variety of support and information; offer parenting support, encouragement and help in day-to-day life; lower stress, and boost psychosocial health. (Haaranen 2012)

with ideas for finding new support such as adopted grannies and granddads and other people going through the same stage in their life. Peer groups, family hubs and family mentors can form a significant part of a family's safety net.

Providing children with time and confidence

Adults who show interest in children boost their confidence and help them form positive relationships with the surrounding world. It is important for adults to stop and think what each child in a given situation needs. Children often desire for everyday shared activities, predictable daily rhythm and above all intimacy and cuddles. The challenge may be to find the time for family moments in our hectic lives. But when adults abandon their busy schedule for a moment and stop to genuinely listen, children feel precious and loved. Building trust takes time, mindful presence and engaging with a child.

Everyday coping

Being a responsible adult means that you look after the children, set boundaries for them and respond to their needs. It also means that you face your own, even challenging emotions, such as fear, inadequacy, guilt, grief and disappointment. It may not always be easy. Thus, adults must look after their own coping too, because adults who can hold their own provide security for children. Other parents and various peer support groups are an important resource for adults and families in general. Asking for help and looking for social support are important mental health skills, which adults can teach children too through their own actions.

Families' safety nets

Child health clinic nurses and ECEC professionals can bring up safety nets in their discussions with parents. It is a good idea to emphasise their value and significance to all families. Many families may experience loneliness, and discussing safety nets might give new insights and ideas for improving their circumstances.

It is important to monitor the development of a child's safety net through the early years. Changes in safety nets and the ways to strengthen them can be discussed with families. Protective networks can also include social relationships formed through hobbies, clubs and the church. It is possible to consciously teach children how friendships and family relations are valued and cherished and to highlight that friends and friendship are important for people because everyone needs others to share their joys and sorrows with. Friends can also be found through online peer groups.

Child health clinic and ECEC professionals have their place in families' safety nets, and for some families that role is bigger than for others. Adults grow into parenthood as their children grow. The support that child health clinics and ECEC offer to parents is important. It protects childhood and strengthens wellbeing.

Safety net to support children's mental health

Help children and families

- to recognise their safety nets
- to expand their safety net to include people outside their immediate and wider family
- by bringing up safety nets in discussions with the adults in the family
- by informing families about municipal and third sector services, which are available for them to strengthen their safety net.

As a supportive adult for families

- Remember sensitivity: all families are different.
- Become involved.
- Listen to the children and families – remember empathy, connection and genuine caring.
- Know your limits.
- Ask parents about coping and their need for support.
- Keep your skills up-to-date.

(ETENE 2013)

Cooperation with parents

Utilise the Children's Safety Net poster and the exercises connected to it.



DO YOU KNOW
WHAT SERVICES YOUR
MUNICIPALITY OFFERS
TO FAMILIES?

HOW DO YOU
HELP FAMILIES
FIND THESE
SERVICES?



Tiny mouse scurrying - bouncing rhyme

RHYME AND ACTION SUGGESTIONS

*Tiny mouse scurrying,
tiny mouse scurrying.
Such soft cheeks for petting,
such soft cheeks for petting.
Bunny rabbit bounces,
until the sun rises.
Bunny rabbit bounces,
until the sun rises.*

ACTIONS FOR THE RHYME

Adults can use a finger to draw on children's backs, and once the children have learnt the rhyme, they can do the same on another child's back.

Tiny mouse scurrying – moving your fingers across another person's back

Such soft cheeks for petting – use your whole hand to gently pet the back with downwards movements.

Bunny rabbit bounces, until the sun rises – press your index finger in different places across the back.

BOUNCING

Tiny mouse scurrying – rock the child on your lap.

Such soft cheeks for petting – pet the child's cheeks.

Bunny rabbit bounces, until the sun rises – bounce the child on your lap.

DOING THE ACTIONS YOURSELF

Tiny mouse scurrying – skitter your fingers up the other arm.

Such soft cheeks for petting – pet your own cheeks.

Bunny rabbit bounces, until the sun rises – hands bounce up and down on your lap.

PLAYING RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS

Tiny mouse scurrying - triangles

Such soft cheeks for petting - maracas

Bunny rabbit bounces, until the sun rises – drums or claves

MOVING

Tiny mouse scurrying – running around in a circle or freely around the room.

Such soft cheeks for petting – you stop and pet your own cheeks.

Bunny rabbit bounces, until the sun rises – bouncing up and down.

Children get to feel closeness sitting on an adult's lap. Touching creates a positive mood between a child and an adult. Children thrive when they notice that adults enjoy their company. The joy is infectious! A rhyme also has a calming effect at bedtime (drawing softly on a child's back surrounded by peaceful, quiet atmosphere.)

Tuuli Paasolainen

Translation: Aino Kattelus

(Paasolainen, T. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo. 2009, Laula lelut laatikkoon. 2016)



MARY'S SWAYING

France

C F C G7 C G7 C

1. Ma - ry's sway - ing to and fro, mum and dad are hol - ding on.

5 C F C G7 C F C F

This is where I want to be! Fee - ling light and care - free!

9 C F C G7 C G7 C

Ma - ry's sway - ing to and fro, mum and dad are hol - ding on.

Tune: Twinkle, twinkle little star

Lyrics: Tuuli Paasolainen Translation: Aino Kattelus

Mary's swaying to and fro, mum and dad are holding on.

This is where I want to be! Feeling light and carefree!

Mary's swaying to and fro, mum and dad are holding on.

The child is gently swayed as close to the floor as possible in a strong piece of cloth.
The adults hold the cloth tightly in their hands. The child can also be swayed on your lap.

The words mum and dad can be replaced with appropriate names: Jane and Max hold... Gran and grandad hold...

Or if there is just one adult Jane is tightly holding on... etc.

(Paasolainen, T. Musiikki-iloa kymmenen kiloa. 2015)

Children experience intimacy and connection, when they get to sway in a strong piece of material surrounded by adults and other children. They are being looked after. Singing together conveys the mood better than when you speak, strengthening the interactive experience. Small positive encounters grow into a strong, supportive foundation for each child's unique and special life.

- What does it feel like to be close to an adult?
- What kinds of things do you like to do with your family or parents?
- Which adults are important to you and who do you do fun things with?
- How does it feel to be part of a group of people of different ages, for example on a trip or in a party?
- What happens when you are on holiday?
- Can you think of a nice holiday memory? Why is that memory pleasant?
- What kinds of fun things do you do with adults?
- Who are your important adults?



Balloons in the air

For this exercise, the children must be in a sizable room with plenty of space to play with balloons. They are given a few balloons, which they aim to try and keep up in the air for as long as possible. The children hit the balloons up to keep them off the floor. But instead of being a competition, this is an activity with a shared goal.



Kim's game

The group collects small items that convey safety to the children. The items are then placed in the middle of a circle and covered with a cloth. One child at a time gets to remove one toy, whilst the others guess which toy is missing. Afterwards, each child gets to name one important adult outside their immediate family to whom they like to tell things.



Let's look at art: Riviera

This artwork is by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt. The artwork is called *Riviera*. It was painted in 1930 with oil paints on canvas. The size of the artwork is 26 x 40 cm.

What a wonderful sunny and warm day! What a sparkling blue sea before your eyes and warm sand between your toes! Can you feel the warm summer breeze on your skin? Did you remember to apply suntan lotion to stop you from burning?

Venny Soldan-Brofeldt travelled to the French Riviera to admire the sights and enjoy lovely beaches such as this one. Venny also painted on her trips. On the French Riviera, Venny painted this artwork called *Riviera*. Maybe Venny felt the glorious pale sand under her feet, when she painted, and sat under a parasol, just like the people in the painting.

The colours in the painting are bright and vivid. The blue of the sea and the yellow of the parasol glow beautifully. Blue and yellow are complementary colours. Have you ever seen a colour wheel? A colour wheel shows you that red and green are also complementary colours. Can you find these complementary colour pairs in the painting?

The sea looks inviting, and there is a boat sailing in the horizon. The painting shows a scene at the beach. The mood on the beach seems to be light, and no one is in a rush to go anywhere. The beach has a safe and affable atmosphere. The adults seem to be sheltering from the sun under their parasols, and the children are playing in the sand. Would that be a nice place to be? Do you think the water is so warm that you could go and swim there?

The *Riviera* painting comes across as unfinished, as if Venny had started painting it but then stopped. Venny has painted the artwork on canvas with oil paints, but she has not filled the whole canvas. Can you see the spot that has not been painted? You may wonder why the painting was never finished? Could Venny have felt like joining the others on the beach to enjoy the summer's day, or would she maybe have had to rush to catch a train and did not have time to finish the painting?



Let's take photos!

Children get to photograph adults who are important to them. Discuss with the children who they see as the important, safe and friendly adults in their life. The group should also consider what kinds of moments with

adults feel special. The children make a plan and take the photos based on their ideas. Anyone can take a photo anywhere, by using a mobile phone, for example.

The photos are then printed and hung on the wall for the children in the day care centre to enjoy. Printed photos are nice memories and can empower and provide comfort during the day in the day care centre.





