

The Three Houses Tool

The Three Houses tool is a mechanism for enabling a child to provide their assessment of their life. The child's own assessment is very often, far more powerful and revealing than a professional assessment of that child, and very often, has far greater effect on adults involved with the child than professional assessments. Judges receiving court reports on the child and family and authorities who review the files are consistently impressed to read a three houses style assessment **since it directly communicates the child's voice and perspective while demonstrating that the worker has engaged with the child.**

Introducing the Three Houses to the child

"In the first house we will write (or draw) things you like in your life; that's the House of Good Things."

- *What makes your house strong, happy, or good?*
- *What is good about living/visiting with your mom or dad?*
- *Who are the people that you like to spend time with?*

"In the second house, write (or draw) your worries" (This is the House of Worries)

- *What makes you angry, sad, scared?*
- *What worries you about your time spent with mom or dad?*
- *Is there anything else you think needs to be in your house of worries?*

"The third house is the house of dreams where we can write and draw how you would like things to be in your life if all your worries were solved" (This is the House of Dreams/Wishes)

- *How would you like things to be in your house/life?*
- *Who else would you like to have in your house of wishes/dreams?*
- *If you had one wish about your house, what would that be?*

In using the three houses with children, always make sure to use the child's exact words and ideas. Always read everything back to the child before finishing. This gives the worker an opportunity to ensure that they are accurately reflecting the child's views and it also provides an opportunity to dig further into an issue that the child has raised, but the worker feels they may benefit further exploration. Involving the children in this process will sometimes slow down how the professionals act. It is important to go at the child's pace.

Presenting the child's views to parents and others (with the child's permission, if possible)

Workers often find that taking the child's words and pictures back to the parents/caregivers is often the catalyst that makes the adults see the situation differently and to face the problems more openly. When bringing the child's three houses to parents, begin with the "house of good things" as this shows the parent that the worker is able to see things in a **balanced way** and creates an opportunity **to build engagement with the parents** around the positives. A good strategy in bringing the information to the parents is to ask them what they think the child would have described as good in their life, what worries their child and what are the child's hopes/dreams. **This strategy also gives the worker assessment information into the parent's insight into their child's perspective.**

Three Houses can be strengthened by also asking:

Who lives inside the house? Who comes to visit inside your house? Who do you wish would visit? Who should not be able to visit or live in your house? Why not? What should the rules of the house be about this?

• What's going well

• What are you worried about? • What needs to happen?



House of good things

I don't get shouted at when I am with dad.
I like living with daddy because I get lots of hugs.
When I'm with daddy I can play with my toys.



House of worries

I was not happy at my mam's house because she shouted at me a lot.
Mam locked all of my toys away and I didn't get all of my Christmas presents they were put in mam's wardrobe.



House of wishes

My wish has come true.
I'm living with my daddy and brothers.
I wish we had a big house so we had our own room and didn't have to share our beds.