

Children and Families Social Work & Early Help Relationships First Practice Model

Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.

Our 'Relationships First' Practice Model

Relationships that **C**onnect; **B**uilding our **C**ommunities

Our Mission: When the people that love and care for you are having difficulties, we support them to keep you safe and make changes that last. If they can't, even when we and the people in your life that love you have given your carers all the help we can, we will work to put in plans so that you are loved, happy, safe and supported.

Systemic						1 guiding principle	
This means that we think about individuals and understand difficulties in the context of their relationships and connection within the world that they live. We work in a relational way recognising the strengths and stories of others. We understand that we are unlikely to create sustained change without a relationship with the child and their family, and without their support. We value the relationship that we have with others – children and young people, their families and our colleagues. We build relationships first. We put relationships first.							
Signs of Safety, Wellbeing & Success		Trauma informed		Family Focused			3 Strengths based approaches
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Our Mission for the children and young people we help and support


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Our Guiding Principle

Our “Relationships First” practice model is underpinned by systemic theory. This means that we think about individuals and understand difficulties in the context of their relationships and within the world that they live. We work in a relational way recognising the strengths and stories of others. We understand that we are unlikely to create sustained change without a relationship with the child and their family, and without their support. We value the relationship that we have with others – children and young people, their families and our colleagues. We build **relationships first**. We put **relationships first**.

For our practice this means that we are transparent in approaching our work to build trust and gain positive outcomes. We work collaboratively with children and families, and each other. We work ‘with’ as opposed to doing things ‘to.’ We recognise strengths in children and families and in our colleagues, and we utilise their expertise. We are hopeful. We have high aspirations for ourselves and those we work with. We provide high challenge and high support in equal measure.

Three Strengths Based Practice Approaches

	What this means in practice
Signs of Safety 	<p>Signs of Safety is a strength based, solution focused approach to working with children and families. It is a questioning model that recognises families’ own expertise in their situations and supports the worker to take them on a safety planning journey to their own solutions.</p> <p>We use the Signs of Safety model across our social work and early help services. All practitioners use the Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning process. Within this process practitioners seek to identify the family’s strengths (what is working well), develop a shared understanding of the network of the concerns (what we are worried about) and to build on the family’s own solutions and to address jointly defined goals (what needs to happen).</p>
Trauma informed	<p>A trauma informed approach seeks to prioritise physical and psychological safety by building trust, allowing choice and creating a culture that focuses on collaboration. In doing so we allow children, young people and their families to feel that “nothing’s done to me or for me without me.” Being trauma informed shifts our thinking, so we ask what has happened to you, rather than what is wrong with you.</p>

What this means in practice	
	<p>Trauma informed is not about following a set technique or way of doing things, it is a way of being and a way of reflecting about all that we do with children and families. It is when practitioners connect and engage with children and their families, build relationships and really understand what’s going on for them, that we can truly make a difference.</p> <p>In being trauma informed every contact is seen as an intervention and an opportunity to create change. Within our practice we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realise the widespread impact of trauma and support potential paths to recovery; • Recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma in the children and families we work with, as well as our staff; • Respond by seeing all that we do, including our assessments, plans, practices, and policies through a trauma lens; • Actively seek to prevent re-traumatisation through the work that we do together.
<p>Family focused</p> 	<p>Family focussed is based on the principle that safety in its whole for a child / young person can only ever be temporary without healing, connection and belonging.</p> <p>By positioning ourselves as family focused we start from the view that there is always a family or network for the child / young person and they can be found if we try. We continually ask ourselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who loves the child? Who does the child love? • Who may love the child? Who might learn to love the child? <p>A family focussed approach supports us to see people for their capabilities, their unique gifts, their strengths and their importance to the child.</p>

Five objectives for our practice



Manage risk with safe uncertainty

The work that we do together with children and families is not an exact science. ‘Safe uncertainty’¹ is a concept we apply to risk assessment and management in which we accept that we can’t know everything about a person or a situation, and keep open minded to what we don’t know and remain ready to accept and respond to new information and understanding. In doing so, we balance our professional expertise, knowledge and beliefs with our uncertainty, our “authoritative doubt” - moving us towards positions of enquiry and collaboration rather than definition and control. Working with safe uncertainty provides a path to creativity, to seeing things in new and different ways. It opens up space for other views to be heard, and possibilities and opportunities to be identified.

We recognise that there will be many things that remain unclear or uncertain throughout our involvement; including the family’s capacity to make or maintain changes. In aiming to reach a position of ‘safe uncertainty,’ we leave space so that we are able to consider when there is sufficient safety so that our involvement is no longer needed despite the inevitable uncertainty about the future.

	Uncertainty	Certainty
Safe	Safe uncertainty A state of flow and exploration with multiple explanations for the problem and the solution.	Safe certainty The problem can be solved or that it is solvable and that the risk can be eradicated.
Unsafe	Unsafe uncertainty Hopeless, having a problem and feeling that there is no solution.	Unsafe certainty Having a problem but being clear what is causing it and what will solve it.

Use restorative interventions that protect and heal

We have an impact on children and families from the moment that we first meet them. Every moment and interaction can be an intervention, and an opportunity to create change. The relationship between the practitioner and the family is a vehicle for restorative and strengths-based interventions that support families to identify solutions drawing from their own resources. We intervene at the earliest opportunity, and ensure families understand the reason for our involvement, even if they don’t share our concerns.

We recognise that each family is unique and sometimes they will need the help of others including family members and specialist services. We build meaningful relationships with families and other professionals that make a difference through interventions that have purpose and are proportionate to need. We celebrate progress and success with families, as they make changes that bring safety and protection for themselves and their children.

Make lasting change

The work that we do with children, young people and their families has the potential to transform lives and shape futures for the better. We are committed to the children and families that we work with, and stick by them when things are tough. We stay involved in the lives of children and families for as long as we collectively feel is needed to have made meaningful, sustainable changes that have the potential to last.

Research tells us that having a network of extended family, friends and other professionals who would like a person to succeed can help make the work we do with families even more effective. When we are family focused and involve everyone that is linked and important to the child, there is the opportunity to break secrecy and shame, support healing and build lasting safety.

¹ (Mason, 1993), ‘Towards Positions of Safe Uncertainty’. *Human Systems*, 4 (3-4) 189-200.

Children have safe and loving homes

We want all children to grow up in a safe and loving home. We believe that children and families have the right to be together, and we do everything that we can to support families to stay together and to develop their natural safety network so that they have loving and stable relationships that enable this to happen. We support children to be safe, and to feel safe. We put love at the heart of what we do, and we find all the people who care and are connected to the child, recognising the importance of relationships and the importance of children being cared for by people that know and love them already.

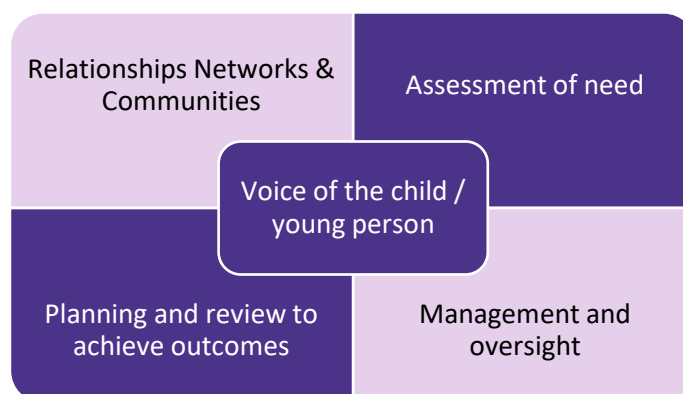
When children have to come into our care, we find them a safe and loving home, not a 'placement.' We find carers who we know can learn to love them, and who are able to protect them from further harm and help to heal the abuse and trauma that they have experienced.

Nurture lifelong relationships and connections for children

The single factor most often linked with positive outcomes for children is meaningful lifelong connection to their family and those people important to them. When becoming a child in our care is the best choice, we recognise that the child's relationships and communities will often become more, not less, important to them and their identity.

We support children in our care to develop and maintain loving, stable and warm relationships and lifelong connections with those people important to them. We do this because we want the children in our care to thrive, to have relationships that support, sustain and give them strength throughout their lives. We know that it is through their important relationships that children in our care remain connected to their social, relational and cultural context. Relationships and connections with family and important people can offer a nurturing foundation, allowing children in our care to have a sense of belonging, to feel loved, and to have the opportunity for relational repair and healing. Sustaining their valued relationships and connections is our best hope for the child, and a pathway to reunification.

Our 5 Pillars of Practice



Voice of the child / young person

What can be learned through direct work or achieved during a home visit cannot be underestimated. The child's voice is a key that opens the door of our understanding and is a powerful catalyst for change. The engagement of all our senses in home visits, including what we see, hear, smell and feel within the child's surroundings is an essential aspect of our practice and provides the greatest insight into what it is like to live in the child's world.

Children and young people must have ownership and be able to influence the assessments of their needs, the plans that are made for them, and the support that they receive. It is through the relationship we build with a child or young person that we will best develop an understanding of their world, and the difference that has been made.

Relationships, Networks & Communities

Collaborative relationships with children their families and other professionals working them is the bedrock of effective practice in responding to situations where children suffer abuse. If we are going to make a real difference, and one that lasts, we need to do the work together with children and families. Every contact is an intervention, and an opportunity to create connection and change with a family.

Research suggests that having a network of extended family, friends and other professionals who would like a person to succeed can help maximise the effectiveness of professional intervention. To establish a permanent naturally connected support network around a child, we need to work with and not do to. When we are family focused and involve everyone that is linked and important to the child, there is the opportunity to break secrecy and shame, build lasting safety, provide healing and develop lifelong connections.

Assessment of Need

Assessment is how we make sense of complex and difficult situations, and through that understanding, find ways to navigate towards solutions. Assessments help us to understand, analyse and record what is happening for children and young people within their families and the wider context of the community in which they live. Assessments represent our best understanding of the child's needs, and whether they are in need or likely to suffer significant harm. The decisions that are made within the assessments we complete can have an enormous impact on the lives of children, young people and their families.

We approach assessments with curiosity and honesty. We think critically and help families to think their way into and through worries and concerns, and to identify their strengths, successes and solutions. We ensure that a child's needs are assessed holistically, taking into account the views of the child and the people in their life that love and care for them and a range of factors that impact on a child's wellbeing. This will include the child's developmental needs; parenting capacity; and the family and environmental factors that affect a child's identity.

Planning and review to achieve outcomes

Our practice and the plans we develop are built on the belief that children and families have the right to be together whenever this can be achieved safely. Effective planning helps us answer the most challenging of questions: what do we need to do and see to be satisfied that the child or young person is safe, their needs are being met and they no longer need our help because they are not at risk of harm?

To achieve the best possible outcomes we involve the child, their family and safety network as soon as possible in our work with them. We are honest about what we are worried about, and work together to outline what needs to change. We develop plans together with children, young people and their family and professional network and identify how we can work together to make things better through clear actions. Planning in this way means that within our practice, even during difficult times, we are respectful, family focused and strengths based, transparent and directed by the needs of child and their family.

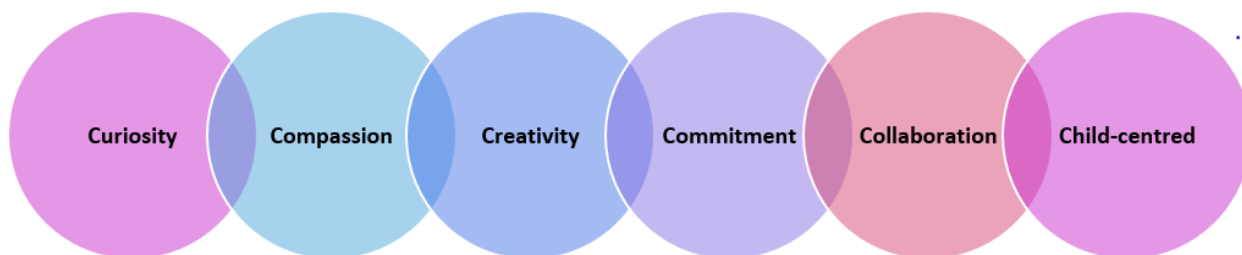
Management and oversight

Social work and early help are relational and caring roles; practitioners feel deeply about the children and families that they support. The work that we do is seeped and soaked in trauma; the lives of the people that we work with are complex, and the work is sometimes distressing. We are mindful of secondary trauma, that the story of children and families we work with can become our story. Good supervision is fundamental to good practice, and is critical in supporting us to be a truly trauma informed and responsive workforce.

Staff are empowered to develop their professional skills and expertise; to and be accountable for their own practice, seeking guidance and support when they need it; and delivery of kind, responsive and purposeful support for children and families. Children, young people and their families benefit from rigorous management

and oversight so that we remain focused on the child and their needs; the impact of our involvement; and timely decisions about what we need to do next.

Our Values



<p style="text-align: center;">Curiosity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exploring what is happening by observing, listening, asking questions, checking out, reflecting, and having brave and challenging conversations. ▪ Taking account of changing information and different perspectives. ▪ Maintaining an open mind, seeing past the obvious, not accepting things at face value. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Compassion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connecting and engaging with a person beyond the symptom, behaviour, label or crisis. ▪ Allowing people to feel seen, heard, noticed, valued, listened to, important; that they matter and that we care. ▪ Working with empathy and kindness, putting thought into our actions to build relationships.
<p style="text-align: center;">Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being bold and ambitious, embracing change and looking for better ways to deliver our services. ▪ Building and sharing new skills to create services that suit the needs of each child and family. ▪ Innovating and trying new things not just doing what we've always done if it isn't getting the results our children deserve. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sticking with children and families, especially when things are at their most worrying. ▪ Doing what we have said we will, and giving people our full attention and help when they need it most. ▪ Striving to do and be our best and bring out the best in others by reflecting, adapting, and developing our skills, knowledge and practice.
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working 'with' not to doing things 'for' or 'to.' ▪ Recognising and developing strengths in children and families, and in our colleagues. Utilising their expertise and resources to make things better. ▪ Having respectful, open and trusting relationships that make change possible. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Child-centred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding the child's life, allowing them to be heard and responding to their views and feelings. ▪ Recognising that children need to be loved by a network of trusted people around them. ▪ Safety and needs of the child come first; progress is measured by the difference made for the child.