



City of York Council Children's Social Care Practice Framework

2020 - 2022





Every conversation starts with the child



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Introduction

This document sets out the ambition and focus of City of York Council Children's Social Care (CSC) Practice Framework.

This Framework, in line with our workforce strategy recognises that the children's workforce is our biggest asset and critical to achieving our ambitious plans for improving outcomes for children and their families.

As a result, the focus of the framework is to define the strategic ambition of York CSC to enshrine and articulate the key theories, values, principles and approaches in the way we work with children and their families. To work with parents, children, young people and multi-agency partners to embed the principles described in this framework and to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people in the city. Put simply, we want to ensure that every conversation starts with the child.

Critical to this is also the recognition that our leaders, employees and partners are part of a learning organisation. Our learning culture is one where we learn from our children, young people and their families and from our partners, social work and corporate colleagues.

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Principal Social Worker

Systemic practice is a way of working which emphasises people's relationships as key to understanding their experiences and affecting change. Families are worked with rather than 'done to'. Systemic practice can be seen as a way of acting, thinking and viewing the world, which focuses on relationships and recognises that individuals are always embedded in their social context.

Over time, relationship patterns both enable and limit processes of development and change. In practice, this means that problems in families are always part of larger processes. This implies that individuals cannot act entirely on their own, either for good or bad. Change in one part of a relational pattern, or system, can be expected to create adjustments throughout the family and immediate context. Systemically informed practice, with its focus on problems in their social and relational context, also takes account of the efforts made by professionals to help families and individuals achieve change.

City of York Social Work Vision and Values

The overarching vision of City of York Council is

“A better start for children and young people”

and we look to achieve this through our mission statement;

“Every conversation starts with the child”

Through our practice we adhere to our values that ensure we can deliver positive outcomes:

- **Everyone feels safe**
- **Risk is understood and managed well**
- **Practice is consistently good**

These principles were defined by and developed by Social Workers and the values they aspire to in their own practice:

- That children are at the heart of everything we do
- That all services are of high quality and effective
- Outcome driven and impactful for children and young people
- Effective early help (least intervention)
- Effective partnership working
- Committed workforce
- Being part of high performing teams
- Reflective and responsive to change
- That a learning culture is promoted



Principles and foundations for success

- Children and young people and their families receive the right help at the right time and benefit from high quality social work.
- We manage and reduce risk in a timely way
- We consider the least prohibitive interventions at all times (Children Act 1989)
- Children and young people are empowered to have their voices heard, and their wishes and feelings are understood.
- Children and young people experience positive, loving, trusting and nurturing relationships with significant others and have a stable place which they call 'home'.



The Good Help model

This framework links with broader initiatives that York is adopting in terms of addressing the need to provide public services, and in particular of achieving positive outcomes for children and families, in the context of rising demand and reductions in resources.

The Good Help model aims to identify those services that can be significantly improved, and 'ignite' professionals inside and outside of those systems to create change. It was established in 2018 with a mission to mainstream good help in professional work and daily life; so that it is deeply established where it is most needed and cannot be easily uprooted. 'Good Help' focusses on early intervention and prevention, enabling the growth of a wider movement of professionals beyond the existing network.

Specifically:

- that practitioners know what is happening locally
- families are directed to community resources
- that positive change within the community is supported

These principles resonate within this practice framework in encouraging all professionals to come together under a shared 'umbrella' and speak with the same voice.



Getting the basics right

Staff have told us that:

- Kindness and respect must sit at the heart of all that we do
- As we model relationships with families, this must be mirrored within our teams and our relationships with multi-partners.
- 'Respectful uncertainty' should be employed at all times in our work
- The timeliness of interventions is critical
- Respectful relationships with each other will promote a stable workforce
- The adoption of a learning culture throughout the service, from student social workers to newly qualified staff, experienced staff to senior management will help to promote a sense of togetherness
- This approach needs to be a whole system approach across the service – this goes beyond the work of individual practitioners and working with multi-agency partners
- A common methodology, language and understanding will promote consistency
- The whole workforce, should be engaged with its emphasis on reflective practice, this will encourage whole team 'ownership'
- Staff should be supported to use this approach by their managers
- Systemic Practice should be understood and embedded across the authority
- There should be clear expectations of staff, irrespective of which agency they work for

Engagement with partners

In order to achieve our objectives of providing a common understanding across the City of York in terms of risk, it is imperative that this framework is well understood by partners so that these principles can be embedded across all services.

The City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership has been involved in the development of this framework and training opportunities will be widely shared in order that all colleagues working in the City of York understand and promote the principles as we embed systemic practice.



Our practice model – one approach

Systemic practice seeks to make sense of the world through relationships, focusing on the whole family system rather than individuals.

Through a systemic approach, change can be achieved through exploring relationship patterns and understanding how they impact on children.

City of York has taken the positive decision to adopt systemic practice as its practice model: a training plan is being developed which will see all social workers and their managers in York systemically trained by 2023. This training will be extended so that it is available for multi-agency partners to attend to ensure universal understanding of the principles of systemic practice, a joined up approach, consistent language and management of risk

- Existing expertise will be identified within the service
- Those already trained will be supported to work with colleagues to change the culture and conversation of ways of working with colleagues
- We will adopt a system of regular 'unit meetings' where cases are brought for systemic modelling and discussion
- We will support and encourage reflexive discussions
- We will develop the use of consistent social work tools across the service, for example cultural genograms and Social Graces

What difference does it make?

- Children and families are empowered, with every conversation starting with the child.
- Creates sustainable change
- Families feel listened to

Essential tools in working systemically

- The relevant people talking and listening to each other in a space (or succession of spaces) dedicated to the task. This means that quite a bit of preliminary thinking may need to happen before any meeting takes place, to ensure this is as efficient as possible. Establishing an effective initial space is likely to be the role of the social worker or professional faced with a referral.
- Tools for understanding the story so far, such as a genogram, timeline or ecomap.
- Tools for understanding or working towards agreement of what needs to be done and the timescale for achieving this. There may be constraints for decision-making, such as legal processes, the needs of people concerned and the evidence base for possible interventions (Stratton, 2011; 2016).
- A dedicated space to reflect, review the process and ensure that positive developments are supported appropriately



Other strength based practice models which sit under the umbrella of York's systemic framework

Relationship-based practice

Emphasises the professional relationship that becomes the medium through which the practitioner can engage and intervene with the individual

Family Group Conferencing	Graded care profiling	Motivational interviewing	Trauma-informed practice	SOS	Restorative practice
<p>A direct application of systems theory and systemic thinking, which involves extended and wider family.</p> <p>FGC is all about transferring the power to the family, builds on the strengths of families and focusses on solutions by enabling the family to come together to solve their own difficulties. Builds directly on a strengths based and solution focused approach</p>	<p>A practice tool which gives an objective measure of the quality of care in terms of the carer's commitment</p>	<p>Helping to change behaviour through exploration and resolution of ambivalence</p>	<p>A strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of trauma, creates opportunities to rebuild control and empowerment</p>	<p>The Signs of Safety approach is a relationship-grounded, safety-organised approach to child protection practice, created by researching what works for professionals and families in building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children.</p>	<p>The aim of restorative practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships</p>

Impact.

With the implementation of the shared practice framework we will;

- Create a shared understanding of risk
- Create an enabling environment and common practice between professionals
- Establish a single theory of practice across the workforce so we speak the same language and work in the same way with children and families
- Promote effective information sharing between agencies through shared understanding (key to good assessment of risk)
- Strengthen the relationships at the heart of children's lives to increase stability, create real change for families and better support for children and young people
- Ensure that young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential whatever their circumstances
- Ensure that communities are kept safe and resilient
- Ensure that children and young people across the City of York keep safe, are happy, healthy and thrive
- Throughout the implementation of the practice framework, Children's services will continue to work with partner agencies to promote common understanding of the model and the impact this is having on families.



What young people have told us;

She understands me like nobody else does and talks to me with an open mind, she is supportive, caring, funny, lively and just a great person to call your advocate.

I'd just like to thank her so much for coming into my life, I don't think I would have survived being in care if it wasn't for her.

I never knew the bond I would have with her would be as strong and as trusting as this.

All the way through my experience of being in care, this amazing woman has never left my side. She has stuck with me and helped me through every little thing.

Treat us as you would your own. Don't assume that we are a reflection of what is written on our files. Take time to get to know us and help us to feel listened to and valued.



Young people have stressed the importance of establishing good quality relationships with the professionals in their lives (via 'Show me that I matter') and told us;

- They should be listened to more
- Their mental wellbeing, and access to mental health services, should be seen a priority

This reinforces that continuing to embed our mission that 'every conversation starts with the child' is crucial – so that children and young people see that their needs are always at the forefront of our practice.