

Southampton Practice Framework

Working with Families



1. Introduction

I am pleased to introduce the Working with Families Practice Framework which sets out the key theories, values, principles and approaches that inform the way we work with children and families in Southampton, and how we work together as professionals.

We have developed our practice framework using a systemic approach – that is to say, we have picked evidence-based ways of working that focus on relationships and recognise that individuals are always embedded in their social context. Whilst the Framework itself may be new, there is much contained within it that will be familiar. This is because it represents the continuation of our journey in Southampton, reflecting and building on what we have achieved to date, and forming a base from which to shape and achieve our child-friendly ambitions for the future.

It provides a structure through which everyone can be part of working together to achieve our shared outcomes for children and families. It helps to provide everyone who works with us, and those who may be interested in working with us, with a sense of the organisation we are, what we value, how this drives the way we work now, and what we want to achieve for the future.

Over the past few years we have been implementing a Restorative Practice approach in Southampton. Our practice framework is designed to translate restorative practice into meaningful change for children and families. As such, it provides opportunities for us to use and explore complementary strengths-based approaches to enrich and develop our direct work and relationships with children, families, carers and each other.

The framework has been developed, and will continue to develop, with the input of staff and from children and families themselves. It will continue to evolve over time and will be a 'live' process that we are all engaged with every day – challenging us, guiding us and setting an expectation for how we will do our absolute best for with children and families.

Rob Henderson,

Executive Director for Children and Learning

2. Why have a practice framework?

A Practice Framework provides an evidence-based structure within which knowledge, learning and good practice can be shared. It gives a common language to communicate across teams and enables staff to further explore the theories and approaches that shape the way they work.

It also represents a collaborative approach to working with children and families. It is a reminder of our collective responsibility to ensure that we are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons. As the needs of children and families change and they move between different services, an embedded Practice Framework should ensure that they experience a degree of coherence and consistency in the way we engage and work with them.

The work we do with children and families is complex and wide-ranging, spanning many teams. A Practice Framework helps to 'centre' our services, ensuring that the different work we do across the department is grounded in the same theories, approaches, and values, principles and beliefs. It provides staff with the foundation to bring practice to life and make a real difference for children and families.

It also helps to articulate to the outside world what it means to be part of Southampton City Council's Children and Learning service, attracting staff who are interested in the way we work, and have the right outlook and skills to be part of our journey.

3. Working with Families Board

The Working with Families Board meets every two months and is chaired by the Head of Service for Safeguarding, Integrated and Specialist Services. It has cross-service and partnership representation and has the responsibility for implementing the practice framework and the way in which practice transformation is managed.

The board will be a decision-making board, agreeing (with head of service input) the development activities, their prioritisation, and whether these can be offered in-house, using internal resources or whether commissioning is required. The work reviews progress against the implementation plan.

It is our ambition to train staff up to foundation level on the core approaches:

- Restorative Practice
- Trauma Informed Approach
- Motivational Interviewing
- Strengthening Families

A reflective practice resource will be developed to help staff identify the impact of applying these approaches. All permanent staff who have been trained in specific techniques, will be expected to cascade their learning to their colleagues. The Working with Families Board will inform and respond to our 'learning loop' activity. Permanent and agency staff will also be encouraged to attend practice weeks; webinars and workshops; briefings and learning circles, as forums to support their understanding of the practice framework.

Training will be over a two-year timeframe. It will be a staged approach, as we are mindful of the pitfalls of overwhelming staff with too much training at once, which is not conducive to learning. In 2020 / 21 our priority has been to roll out good quality restorative practice training. In the coming year we will set out the training structure as part of our development of our Children and Learning Academy.

4. How we developed our framework

What our children told us:

Children in Care Council Person Specification

This is what we think makes a good worker

A social worker should be reliable and do what they say they are going to do

A social worker should respect me and my parents and carers

A social worker should be a good listener and hear what I am saying

A social worker should be able to communicate with me properly and be sure I understand

A social worker should support me with opportunities

A social worker should try to know what I am feeling

This is how a worker should make us feel

That we can trust them

Like an individual

That you like working with us

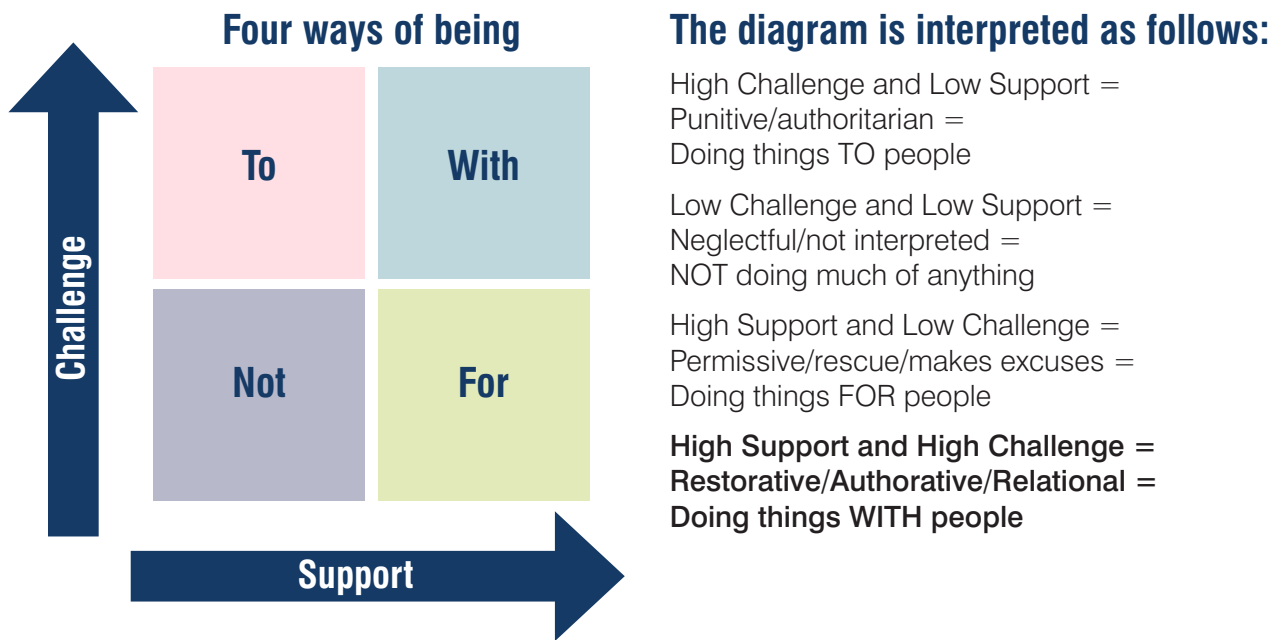
That you want to spend time with us

That you are there for us

That you try to make us happy

That you are someone we can talk to

The best way to see this and to share with colleagues, is a diagram such as the one below:



(Fig. 1) Source: LCC, adapted from Wachtel and McCloud (2001)

What our staff told us: #teamSouthampton
 Practice Framework should support a culture of High Support and High Challenge:

1. Compassion
2. Commitment
3. Communication
4. Compliance

Our Behaviours:

- Confident
- Accountable
- Inquisitive
- Respectful
- Working as a team

The Southampton 5 – What we should see on every child’s file:

1. An up-to-date assessment written in a language that either the child or the family can understand.
2. An outcome-based plan written with the child/family.
3. A chronology, which analyses the impact of previous events for the child
4. A clear record of the last visit and meaningful work undertaken
1. A clear supervision that focusses on the plan and the needs of the child.

5. Our Vision and Principles



Our Vision

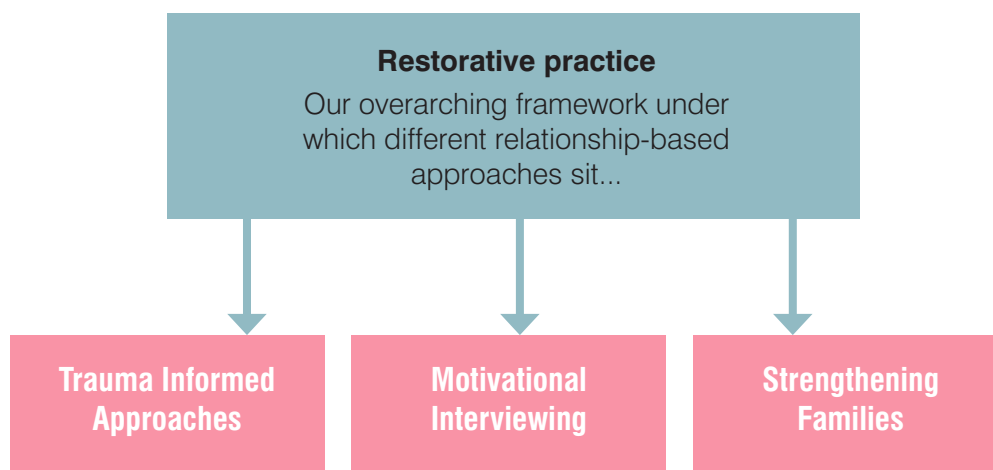
“We want all children and young people in Southampton to get a good start in life, live safely, be healthy and happy and go on to have successful opportunities in adulthood”.

Our Principles

These are the principles that are integral to our work and which guide our approach to working with children, young people and their families.

- Putting the child at the centre of all our decision making
- Promote a relationship-based approach with children, young people, families and partners
- Work as early as possible with children, young people, families and partners before issues escalate
- Work alongside whole families and communities, listening and building on their strengths – doing it with them and not to them
- Promote a culture of strong support and challenge

6. Our Practice Framework



What this means in practice...

Relationship-based Developing strong relationships between practitioners and families to make change	Self-reflective Thinking about our own beliefs and values and how they influence our work
Evidence-based Using evidence based interventions to support change	Confidently holding risk Whilst working with families to minimise risk through change
Strengths-based Doing more of what works and less of what doesn't, building on strengths	Supervision Using supervision to generate ideas about how to make change

7. Restorative Practice

Restorative practice describes a way of being, an underpinning ethos, which enables us to build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm when relationships breakdown.

It is founded on the principles of working 'with' people, rather than doing 'to' or 'for' others. When we work with and alongside people, rather than make decisions about them in isolation, outcomes and impact are so much greater.

This approach can be used by senior leaders, managers and staff teams to reflect on their approach to working 'with' each other, as a whole system, to maximise opportunities to affect sustainable change within the organisation and with children and families. This builds a strong relational staff culture, which is reflective and resilient.

Restorative practice is a consistent approach that follows the journey of the child; from effective early help and intervention, maximising the use of local strengths and resources; through to safeguarding and protection of the most vulnerable.

The reason we have adopted restorative practice as our overriding approach is because working restoratively recognises that the child is at the heart of all that we do. Their family and other people of significance to them are their greatest resource, we need to ensure their voice is heard. This includes being explicit about the 'bottom line' to safeguard and protect a child. It overtly uses a 'high challenge' and 'high support' approach, which builds on strong relationship-based practice between children, families and professionals. This provides a way of working which is family led, jointly owned and created, achievable and builds sustainable change. It reduces the likelihood of dependency on professional services.

8. Related Techniques

Trauma Informed Approach

Research has been undertaken over the past 25 years into the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), that affected psychological, social, and health wellbeing, and the responses to life challenges made by those who experienced ACEs. The initial study led to further research that identified the effect of ACEs on brain development and function.

These extensive studies now show how ACEs can impact on the child/teenager/adult's brain processing response to dealing with life challenges and highlight that a person who has experienced significant ACEs may be hyper alert and in constant readiness to Fight/Flight/ or Freeze in response to presenting situations, and not be as able to process information and reason. Some 'life choices' or behaviours may be linked to these self-preservation responses.

The reason we have chosen to adopt a trauma informed approach as a component of our practice framework is that it supports a deeper understanding of the impact of past experiences, providing a foundation for effective, emphatic work with families.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a client-centred approach to strengthen individuals own motivation to change and support them in making changes. The approach fits well with the restorative principle of working with and has an evidence base of being effective in working with those who find changing behaviours a challenge.

Through use of appropriate questioning families can be enabled to explore the need for change from their perspective, leading to them owning action plans. The reason we have chosen to adopt motivational interviewing as a component of our practice framework is that it can provide the worker with skills for engagement with families, help with what language to use in questioning, listening skills, and how to resist jumping in with solutions.

Strengthening Families

Strengthening families is a model that recognises that while families face challenges they also embody strengths. In Southampton, we are focused on using this model to deliver our child protection conference activity with families and partner agencies.

This approach is already used in Southampton and we have taken the decision embed it in our practice framework because evidence tells us that it

- Supports collaborative working with families and professionals to identify risk.
- Emphasises the importance of social workers' relationships with clients.
- Seeks to achieve positive outcomes by developing relationships and ensuring that families are Listened to, respected and actively involved.
- Is specific about concerns.
- Identifies what resources are available to the family and what needs to change to reduce the level of risk to the child.
- Is characterised by critical reflection on issues; quality practice decision-making and interventions; engagement with families; and responsiveness to their needs, while maintaining a child protection focus.

9. How will we know that our Practice Framework is making a difference?

Feedback from children, their families, our staff and partners is helping us reflect on the impact that the practice framework is having on staff, and their direct work with children and families. We have invested in an annual review of progress, coordinated by an independent evaluator. As part of this we receive insights into the impact of training and learning activities offered as part of the process of embedding the framework, to understand how it is being used, and where further work is needed.