



Leeds
Safeguarding
Children Board

Safeguarding Children and Young People through Family Engagement

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1. Introduction

What is this policy? This policy is about engaging with families, parents and carers in order to form restorative relationships which will in turn support the safeguarding of children and young people. Within this policy the term “family” is used to describe parent / carers and family members such as siblings as well as extended family members.

Why do we need this policy? Research shows that a restorative relationship, one which is open and honest and built on mutual respect and trust, allows both high support and high challenge. This provides a foundation to ensure that professionals are working in partnership “with” parents, carers and families to appropriately meet their needs, and that this is taking place in a safe way. It will support a change in language from one which potentially blames the child, young person or family for example “un-cooperative or disguised compliance” to that which is more partnership orientated and places an onus of practitioners to work positively “with” families to build effective partnerships.

What is the purpose of this policy? The purpose of this policy is to support the restorative approach within Leeds, and help practitioners and families recognise the benefits in relation to safeguarding.

Who is this policy aimed at? This policy is aimed at practitioners working with families either regularly or occasionally. These practitioners will come from a wide range of agencies both statutory and non-statutory.

The key contact for comments about this policy is: lscb@leeds.gov.uk

2. Principles /ethos

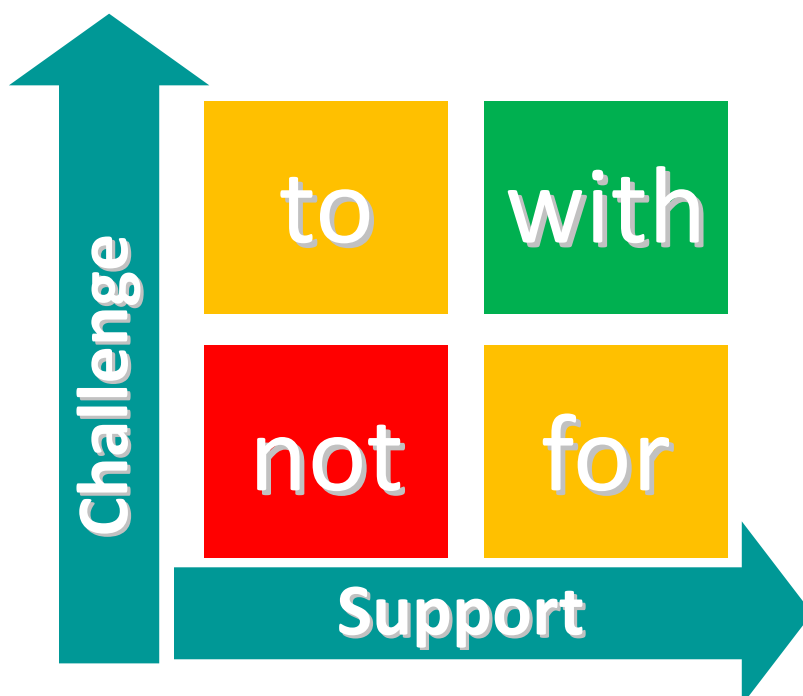
Leeds LSCB and its partner agencies believe that a restorative approach can enable practitioners and families to develop appropriate relationships to ensure children and young people are safeguarded and the needs of the family met.

A restorative relationship is one whereby all individuals are willing to provide, and accept support, but also willing to provide, and to be challenged. These relationships take time to develop and are predicated on working in partnership “with” families not doing things “to” or “for” them.

Families, and individuals within them, will engage with practitioners in different ways and at different levels. A range of social, cultural and psychological factors influence an individual’s behaviour, and the reasons for differing types and levels of engagement will vary and may include past and present experiences with professionals; perceived expectations; cultural reasons; not wanting support and personal circumstances. This does not mean that families cannot be engaged with, rather that practitioners, through a restorative approach, should identify the most appropriate way to engage with each individual family and family member.

The work we do is underpinned by the language (verbal & written) we use with parents and / or to describe parents. A restorative approach results in a change of language to that which is supportive, encouraging and which doesn’t blame but is challenging where appropriate. The focus should be on achieving positive outcomes with the family.

The ‘four ways of being’ (adapted from: Wachtel T & McCold P in Strang H & Braithwaite J (eds), (2001), *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) supports the restorative approach and identifies how practitioners should work with families through the provision of high support and high challenge, whilst minimising the use of “for” and “to”.



Adapted from: Wachtel T & McCold P in Strang H & Braithwaite J (eds), (2001), Restorative Justice and Civil Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

3. What children, young people and families want

Restorative relationships should take account of, and build upon what children, young people and families say they want from professionals. This includes, but is not exclusively:

- a sensitive and responsive approach
- being open and honest
- not making assumptions
- not judging
- being trustful and using appropriate language
- undertaking what you say you'll do for example calling someone back
- listening to the wishes and desires of individuals

Children have said that they need:

- **Vigilance:** to have adults notice when things are troubling them
- **Understanding and action:** to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- **Stability:** to be able to develop an on-going stable relationship of trust with those helping them
- **Respect:** to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not
- **Information and engagement:** to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans
- **Explanation:** to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response
- **Support:** to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family
- **Advocacy:** to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views

Working Together 2015

This should guide professional engagement, and professionals should consider that what a child or young person states they want or need often reflects what adults say they want and need (and vice versa).

4. What is a good restorative partnership?

The essence of restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. When we work with and alongside people, rather than make decisions about them in isolation, there is strong evidence to say that outcomes for children and their families are improved

Restorative practices are an important part of the way in which we support families to become better equipped to solve their difficulties and address challenges. It enables those who work with children and families to focus upon building relationships that create change. Creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support. Working *with* families, rather than doing things to them or for them builds resilience, enhances problem solving skills and fosters compassion over aggression.

An outcome focused approach, working towards agreed goals, rather than focusing on processes will also have a positive impact on engaging with families. This helps us to keep families at the heart of everything we do.

Looking at what parent / carers and children or young people identify as what they need / want as outcomes (even if they may not be the same as what a professional may identify) will support a partnership of negotiation. This includes understanding how everyone wants the outcomes to look and feel as well as agreeing how to measure if that is happening and why; who needs to be involved in making the changes and what practical steps are going to be taken to achieve the outcomes.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The safety and welfare of children, young people and their families is paramount, and practitioner's roles and responsibilities should reflect this.

Practitioners should make every effort to restoratively engage with families in order to fulfil this responsibility. Relationships take time to establish, and should be established in accordance with the needs of the family and the individual members. Practitioners should take time to understand how individual members wish to build the relationship, what may hinder engagement and try to identify ways in which to reduce the impact of that on the development of restorative relationships.

This may mean working in a variety of ways; making changes to routines and usual engagement techniques; identifying and learning about previous experiences or cultural sensitivities.

Practitioners should be flexible in their approach in order to identify how to develop and support a restorative relationship.

As part of the support families need there will be an element of challenge when areas which need change or additional support is required, or may not be taking place. Practitioners should be willing to challenge where appropriate as well as provide support. This may feel difficult for a practitioner; however a restorative relationship should provide the foundation for challenge alongside support.

As part of ongoing records practitioners should also record challenge, along with the family's response to this, as well as the provision of support. This will evidence a restorative approach and the outcome of appropriate challenge.

Effective engagement is also achieved through an appropriate balance of input from agencies; repetitive, overwhelming input from agencies or practitioners may result of decreasing rather increasing engagement. Therefore practitioners should work together to assess who needs to work with a child, young person and their family, what the individual remits of each are and how duplication can be avoid through sharing

assessments / information, working in partnership and agreeing who will undertake areas of work which overlap.

Practitioners need to ensure that families understand why they are working with them and what is expected of them. As part of an open and honest approach practitioners should also inform families what steps they may need to take should identified risks not be reduced or other risks emerge. To ensure understanding practitioners should consider whether:

- A parent has a low level of literacy, and needs verbal rather than written communication.
- A parent needs translation and interpretation of all or some communications into their own language.
- It would be helpful to a parent to end each contact with a brief summary of what the purpose has been, what has been done, what is required by whom and by when.
- The parent is aware that relevant information / verbal exchange is recorded and that they can access written records about them.

6. Assessing need for change

Accurate information and a clear understanding of what is happening to a child or young person within their family and community are vital to any assessment. The usual and most effective way to achieve this is by engaging family members and children in the process of assessment, reaching a shared view of what may need to change and what support is needed, and jointly planning the next steps.

The principles of restorative practice “doing with not to” or “for” allow families to work alongside professionals to honestly identify areas of strength and weakness, areas which may need change and to develop plans which the family are supportive of, and willing to engage with.

Assessments undertaken *with* families will allow for families to self-identify where they see there may be need for change or support, as well as areas where they consider their strengths to be. Alongside this practitioners should challenge families if they don't agree with their assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. This will allow for an agreed assessment of the family and any potential risks for children and young people.

Similarly developing, and monitoring, plans for implementing change *with* a family will be more effective. Families involved with the development of plans will have greater ownership and will be able to guide how realistic steps and goals are for them to achieve and to challenge professionals if they disagree. However practitioners should again be willing to challenge if they don't agree with how a plan is being developed or implemented.

Undertaking assessment, and monitoring plans, within the context of a restorative relationship, through which the family are open to engaging is obviously easier. However should engagement be limited professionals should explicitly identify and record what areas of assessment are difficult to achieve and why, and should be included within any assessment of risk to the child or young person.

Where it is perceived that multi-agency working, or support from numerous agencies is having an impact on levels of engagement practitioners should meet to discuss and assess how to work in partnership to meet the needs of the family and increase their engagement.

7. Supporting family engagement

Professionals should comply with their agency's and professional codes of conduct, policies and procedures in respect of the appropriate treatment of service users. This will ensure families are treated fairly and will positively impact on engagement.

Professionals should be aware that some families, including those recently arrived from abroad, may be unclear about why they have been asked to attend a meeting, why the professional wants to see them in the office or to visit them at home. They may not be aware of roles that different professionals and agencies play and may not be aware that the local authority and partner agencies have a statutory role in safeguarding children, which in some circumstances override the role and rights of parents (e.g. child protection).

Professionals should seek expert help and advice in gaining a better understanding, when there is a possibility that cultural factors impact of engagement. Professionals should be:

- Aware of dates of the key religious events and customs.
- Aware of the cultural implications of gender.
- Acknowledge cultural sensitivities and taboos e.g. dress codes.

Professionals may consider asking for advice from local experts, who have links with the culture. In such discussions the confidentiality of the family concerned must be respected. Using decision making processes that are culturally appropriate to the family can be effective, i.e. the use of a Family Group Conference to support key decision making.

Professionals who anticipate difficulties in engaging with a family may want to consider the possibility of having contact with the family jointly with another person in whom the family has confidence. Any negotiations about such an arrangement must similarly be underpinned by the need for confidentiality in consultation with the family.

Families may develop or increase resistance or hostility to involvement if they perceive the professional as disrespectful and unreliable or if they believe confidentiality has been breached outside the agreed parameters. Professionals should acknowledge and apologise for any mistakes.

Practitioners should ensure that engagement is with all family members (including extended family and those the family consider as their wider family). This should be considered when reflecting on levels of engagement for example are all members of the family engaging and to equal levels; What does engagement look like for each individual family member?

As part of engaging with a family the views of all members should be sought and in the most appropriate way. This is particularly important in relation to children and young people, and those with additional needs.

8. Supervision and support

Practitioners should regularly be provided with, and access appropriate supervision. This should in itself be restorative in nature to allow for high support and high challenge.

Supervision should be structured such that it allows practitioners to identify strengths and concerns in relation to engagement with families, and the impact of that on assessing risk for a child or young person. It should also allow for personal reflection; identifying how a professional feels and any concerns they may identify (see [LSCB Supervision: Policy and Guidance](#) for guidance on the provision of supervision).

Practitioners should also have access to appropriate training in relation to restorative practice, building effective relationships and assessing risk.

Should a practitioner identify that the engagement of children, young people and / or family members is such that this impacts of their assessment of risk a practitioner should discuss this with line manager, colleagues and other practitioners working with the family. As part of this practitioners should consider why engagement may not be effective, or what may have altered in order to change levels of engagement; what can be done to improve engagement and how this is restoratively explored with the family and / or individual.

It may result in a practitioner re-evaluating their approach to date and making changes in order to strengthen the relationship. Similarly it may result in a need to challenge and identify possible changes from family members in order to increase engagement. Should the impact of a change in engagement be such that a practitioner is concerned with regards to the safety and / or welfare of a child then the practitioner should discuss this with their line manager and take appropriate action.

Each agency should have a supervisory system in place that is accessible to the professional and reflects practice needs. Managers should encourage a culture of openness, where their professionals are aware of the support available within the team and aware of the welfare services available to them within their agency. Managers must ensure that staff members feel comfortable in asking for this support when they need it. A 'buddy' system within teams may be considered as a way of supporting professionals.

Professionals must feel safe to admit their concerns knowing that these will be taken seriously and acted upon without reflecting negatively on their ability or professionalism.

Discussion in supervision should examine whether the engagement of the service user is preventing work being effectively carried out. It should focus on the risk factors for the child.

An agreed action plan should be drawn up detailing how any concerns regarding levels of engagement can be managed or reduced. This should be clearly recorded in the supervision notes. The action plan should then be discussed with the family.

The professional should prepare for supervision and bring case records relating to concerns regarding levels of engagement. Supervisors will not know about the concerns unless the professional reports them.

9. If outcomes aren't being achieved and risk is not being reduced

Work with families and individual members should follow the principles of being reasonable, relative and respectful. You should work SMARTly with families to set expectations, timescales and outcomes as well as identifying how you (or others) will support them to achieve these outcomes.

It should also be clear what the potential next steps would be should it be difficult or unlikely for identified steps (and overall outcomes) be achieved. This would include revisiting and assessing plans, considering alternative steps, assessing levels of risk and may include the use of more formal processes such as Child Protection Plans or legal proceedings.

In a small number of cases families will either be unable to, or may deliberately not engage with practitioners. In these such cases the 'four ways of being' allows for the consideration of the need to dip back into the "do to" or "for" box and the aforementioned steps of revisiting plans or potential using formal processes should be considered.

Throughout practitioners should be mindful of risk levels for children and young people, and discuss concerns with Line Managers and within supervision in order to get support and assist decision making.

10. Additional Information

Additional information can be found via the links below:

Supervision

[LSCB Supervision: Policy and guidance](#)

Models of change / collaborative engagement

[Procheska & DiClimente Model of Change](#)

[Solution Focused \(taken from the HENRY\)](#)

[Scaling the Ladder \(Leeds City Council Children and Families Public Health Team\)](#)

[Family Partnership Model & Helping Process](#)

[LSCB Recording of meetings by parents and carers](#)