

# Children first and at the heart of all we do

DUDLEY CHILDREN'S SERVICES PRACTICE FRAMEWORK • JUNE 2022



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## FOREWORD – BY CATHERINE DRISCOLL – DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES

### Restorative Practice: What is it and why is it Important to us in Dudley?

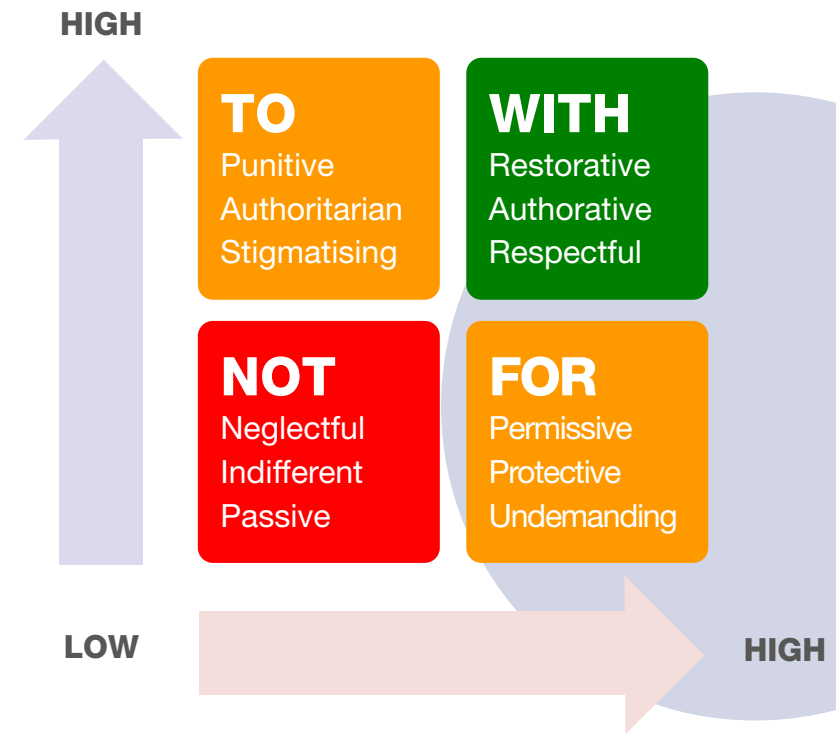
Restorative practice is a value-based relational way of being, that is needs led and strengths focused. It embodies a set of core beliefs, principles and behaviours that promote a way of being with people that actively and explicitly promotes change by working WITH people on a high challenge, high support basis.

Restorative practice is important to us in Dudley and lies at the heart of our ambition to be ‘Child Friendly Dudley’ providing us with an overarching framework for practice and basis for our organisational culture.

Restorative practice provides us with a mindset, language and behaviours that strengthen our relationships with children, young people, families, communities, our partners and our workforce, empowering them to collaborate and share responsibility using solution-focused approaches to support positive change.

Through the consistent and systematic application of restorative practice we aim to work with families to achieve greater stability and to reduce risk for children and young people, increasing well-being and building resilience within families. By working in partnership, encouraging and promoting the involvement of children, young people and their families in decision making, we create opportunities to support and enable families to build and strengthen their capacity to address their own difficulties much more effectively.

‘Four Ways’ - Adapted and used with permission L30 Relational Systems



## Core Personal Strengths - Children, Families and Professionals

In Dudley we recognise that practitioners need to connect and work with families in relational ways to develop different ways of thinking about their experiences, difficulties and the support they need. The need to do this and the importance of relationships is highlighted in final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022;

'Families are complex, intimate and relational, and these are features that public services struggle to work with. Like so many services, children's social care is wired to manage risk, respond to episodic need, and gatekeep access to services. While relationships are rich and organic, children's social care can be rigid and linear. Services are often completely disconnected from the relationships around families that could ultimately offer the solutions. Scarce resources, reactive crisis management and a mindset that does not recognise the importance of family and community are all part of what is keeping services from meeting the needs of families, especially when it comes to considering children's need for connection and love.' (McAlister 2022, p.19)

Our core practice values reflect the personal strengths needed to build and maintain human connections between practitioners, children and families.

Being able to practice and develop these personal and behavioural strengths enables families to improve their self-determination and make active choices. The same personal strengths enable individual practitioners to retain empathy in the face of sometimes challenging work - and practice with respect, empathy and good authority.



Catherine's Driscoll



## Restorative Strengths-Based Practice Framework

Dudley's Restorative Strengths-Based Practice Framework is founded on the fundamental idea that families and their networks are of primary importance and the most important influence on improving outcomes for children.

If we work with families in relational ways, keeping children at the heart of decisions that affect them, we can enable families to solve their own problems earlier and more effectively providing the right amount of support for the right children for the right amount of time, ensuring that intervention in family life only occurs when necessary but is timely, appropriate and proportionate.

The guiding principles of our practice framework are:

- The safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount, and all our judgements and decisions reflect this
- Children and Families are the experts in their own lives
- Every child and family have strengths, on which they can draw and build on
- We best serve children and families through collaborative work
- Every decision about a child is important and made with the right oversight and openness to challenge
- We each take responsibility for our own practice and professional judgement



## CHILDREN'S VOICES PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

Dudley Children's Services is committed to the active engagement and involvement of our children and young people. We support and empower young people to make sure that their views, hopes and aspirations are heard so that they can directly influence decision making and the services provided for them and co-produce their own plans. Doing this enables them to make a positive contribution to their communities develop personal and social skills as valued citizens of Dudley.

### Our guiding principles and values

- Every child has the right to be heard and is supported to express their views, thoughts and feelings
- Every child is a unique individual, and we understand their family and heritage
- Every child has strengths and talents that we will celebrate, nurture and support
- Every child has the right to understand why we are helping them and the decisions we make
- The child's record belongs to them, we record their own words and show respect with honesty about their circumstances

### Best Practice is:

- Working directly with the child, alone wherever appropriate. We observe behaviour and responses and are open to non-verbal communication. We listen to children with the intent to understand and are sensitive to the child's changing circumstances, development and unique communication needs
- Encouraging and nurturing children's unique strengths and talents, building their self-esteem and resilience – celebrating them, their progress and achievements whether little steps or giant strides
- We co-produce plans with children focusing on achieving good outcomes with them in a way that helps them understand their story and experiences
- Support children to find the people in their family or network who will keep them safe and help them and/or their families to make change

## WORKING WITH FAMILY NETWORKS

Dudley Children's Services believe that families and their networks are the most important influence on improving outcomes for children. We believe that if we work with families in relational ways, offering high challenge and high support, whilst keeping children at the heart of decisions that affect them, we can enable families to solve their own problems earlier and become more resilient.

By providing the right amount of support for the right amount of time, we ensure that the local authority's intervention in family life only occurs when necessary but is appropriate, proportionate and timely ensuring that decisions are focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for children without delay.

### **Our guiding principles and values,**

- Family relationships and networks are enduring and have significance for children. We believe that children should live with their families, when they are able to care for, nurture and love them
- We listen with to families with the intention to understand their stories and experiences as we believe these are important, powerful and influential
- We work 'WITH' families on a high challenge high support basis, respecting their identity, supporting them to gain control and make good decisions for their children
- We recognise the importance of children's wider kin and work with these networks to enable children and their families to flourish

### **Best Practice is:**

- Behaving with respect towards family members and acknowledging the importance and impact of their relationship with their child
- Working with diverse, whole family networks using chronologies and cultural genograms effectively to support families to tell their story so that this can be understood from a relational perspective
- In our assessment of family members, balancing their strengths and assets in managing risks of harm to a child
- Using 'My Family Network Meetings' and Family Group Conferences to help families develop their own solutions to the difficulties they are facing
- Empowering parents to take ownership of and responsibility for their choices and decisions
- Celebrating progress and achievements for families

## COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LISTENING

Dudley Children's Services believe that good communication with children, families, communities, practitioners and partners is critical to achieving the best outcomes for children. Communication can be either verbal (spoken or written) or nonverbal (using gestures, signs, or actions to convey a message). The majority of human-relations issues originate as a result of inadequate communication. We believe that good communication occurs when the meanings of the phrases and other symbols used and acted upon by the sender and receiver are shared.

### Our guiding principles and values

- We always listen with the intention to understand
- We believe that communication should be 'ethical' – honest, open, inclusive and fair
- Communication should be respectful, emotionally intelligent, engaging and solution focused
- Where we have concerns and worries these are expressed clearly, simply and in a way that is understood by everyone, checking that children, families and practitioners have an appropriate and shared understanding
- We focus on the issue not the person and avoid using language that blames, creates shame and builds barriers

### Best Practice is:

- Creating safe opportunities for children, young people and families to express themselves, be heard and their perspectives understood. We use circles to share power, explore worries and strengths and working creatively towards shared goals
- Using language that is free from jargon and acronyms that exclude people and prevent them from understanding what is being communicated
- Delivering challenge and feedback using 'affective statements' to ensure that there is clarity about the behaviour or issue being communicated and what is needed
- Using restorative dialogue to explore issues and support others to tell their story, consider and understand effect and explore solutions



## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the most powerful tool to build shared ground and achieve change. Trusting, empathetic and purposeful relationships are fundamental in enabling children and families to see their story differently and support the best outcomes. Our relationships are built on respectful and open communication, the same principles apply to all those we work with.

### Our guiding principles and values

- We understand that the relationships children and young people have with their birth families and networks have significance and meaning for them, including those absent and dysfunctional relationships. We believe that strong, healthy and 'life-long' relationships are fundamental to building children's resilience and sense of permanence and are key to them achieving positive outcomes, wellbeing and attainment
- We believe in the power of connection and that we should connect before applying content, appropriately investing social capital in the relationships we have with children, young people, families, our partners and each other
- We acknowledge the context of professional intervention and the power this gives us through a clear, person-centred explanation of our roles and responsibilities
- We cultivate good relationships based on high challenge and high support with our colleagues, partners and wider networks
- We are honest in our relationships with others and accept that difference and disagreement can be positive in forging stronger relationships when effectively handled

### Best Practice is:

- Focusing on working 'WITH' children, families, our partners and each other on a high challenge, high support basis. We acknowledge at times we may have to offer more challenge or support but seek to do this in a 'WITH' way
- Understanding families as people who may be experiencing problems and difficulties, we do not define or refer to people by the problems they are experiencing
- Working with and alongside children and families, understanding the nature and context of their relationships and family stores through the use of tools such as chronologies and cultural genograms. Building, maintaining and where needed repairing relationships to support families to be resilient
- Applying respect and integrity, adhering to our professional standards and ethics acknowledging and respecting the those of our partners
- We are mindful of professional and personal boundaries in all our relationships

## PARTNERSHIP

Through partnership we bring together a team with professional and personal diversity. This promotes better decision making and supports professionals to take responsibility for their contributions to developing a shared understanding of effective protection and care for children. Partnership relationships are respectful and open, with a determined focus on achieving the best outcomes for the child.

### Our guiding principles and values

- We share a commitment to restorative and strengths-based practice with our partners and work pro-actively to a work as a team
- Teams keep their focus on the child, identifying and breaking down barriers to ensure the services we provide are responsive and timely for children
- As an organisation we learn positively from the outcomes of decision making and interventions, including when these are difficult or challenging
- The practitioner allocated to the child or young person holds overall accountability for safeguarding and care decisions – partners offer child-focused reflection, challenge and are responsible for their professional practice and the contribution this makes to achieving the best possible outcomes for children

### Best Practice Is:

- Understanding which relationships have the most impact for children and recognise that every interaction is an intervention that can make a difference
- Children and families know the names of key professionals in the team around them, why they are involved and how to contact them
- Meetings for children take place with clear communication, shared purpose and partnership between families and professionals
- Information and insight are shared in line with relevant procedures and partners work together on analysis
- Plans for children are relevant, timely and SMART. Planning for children is a collaborative process involving children, families, their identified networks and the professionals working with them

## REFLECTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PRACTICE

Supporting practitioners to critically analyse their practice and confidently exercise professional judgement is fundamental to achieving the best outcomes for children and their families. We also recognise that holding and managing trauma with families can be emotionally challenging for practitioners. Our managers are skilled and experienced leaders who support every practitioner to harness their skills and knowledge, enabling them to develop practice wisdom and become highly effective agents of change.

### Our guiding principles and values

- High Support and high challenge behaviours and mindset are our way of being in Dudley and enables practice to be responsive and effective for our children and families
- Leaders and practitioners are always open to exploring and examining their own values, assumptions and responses
- Our leaders model values and behaviours which enable practitioners to grow and develop
- We combine curiosity about emerging research and evidence with local insight and knowledge, to explore what works in practice for Dudley

### Best Practice is:

- Supporting and developing our workforce to be confident and competent. We provide a range of learning opportunities for individuals, teams, the service and across the partnership
- Acknowledging that decisions are sometimes made in a context of uncertainty and bring thorough and clear oversight to the balance of risk and benefits
- Learning from success as well as the things that we need to do better and reflect routinely and openly what works well.
- We pro-actively manage practitioners' workloads to enable them to develop effective and impactful relationships with children and families - this includes volume and complexity to enrich professional experience

## EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

We use evidence and insight to help families re-frame their views and narratives to see their situation differently. We reflect on their experience and ours to help prioritise safety and loving care for their child. We offer practical hands-on support providing opportunities to learn new skills, and alternative ways of parenting and care. The most impactful interventions are co-created with families through skilled and flexible practice.

### Our guiding principles and values

- We gather evidence collaboratively with children, their families and networks to support them to review and re-frame their situation
- We share and model practical interventions with families which help them protect and nurture their child through shared learning
- We encourage hope for families and children by working with them to identify their goals and take practical steps to achieve them
- We use tools and interventions known to have a proven track record and evidence of efficacy and reflect on their impact through conversation and formulation
- Evidence based practice supports knowledgeable and ethical professional practice using evidence to strengthen our assessment practice and decision making

### Best Practice is

- When working with children and families, recording their story to enable them to see patterns, connections and relationships
- Using evidence of their experience and story to explore emotions and behaviours and the effect of these. Through this we empower families to take control of change, finding solutions to best meet their needs
- Applying research and evidence about what works for children to our practice
- Reflecting on our effectiveness as individual practitioners and as a partnership team, using evidence-based tools and insight in planning

## HOW WE KNOW OUR WORK IS AT ITS BEST:

### Children's voices

- The case summary gives a good sense of the child, their special interests and what is important to them
- Life story work has been completed with the child and reflects their understanding with compassion and respect for their story and family
- Examples of direct work which are creative, purposeful and provide insight into the child's view
- Children we are working with have an up-to-date plan that is relevant, realistic and SMART
- Chronologies are up to date and impact focused
- Families have an accurate cultural genogram that is a living up to date document
- There is clarity about how the child's voice shapes decisions

### Family

- Examples of direct work with family members which are creative in exploring change
- Assessments tell families stories they are transparent and balanced looking at strengths, assets, opportunities and provide a clear analysis of risks
- Plans promote positive attachments and relationships including friends and important people in the child's network. Fathers are engaged and included
- Our records about family members and relationships are clear and precise about the evidence we have used to assess ability to care for the child. They are respectfully expressed
- Assessments and plans are written in a way which the family can understand

## Partnership

- Information from partners is shared in a timely way and forms part of the evidence base for assessment, planning and review
- Meetings for children are purposeful, regular and well attended with children, families and partners providing updates about progress and outcomes
- Records provide evidence that partner relationships are honest and respectful, both with the child and family, and our partners.
- Life Story work includes significant professionals who know the child

## Relationships

- Evidence of timely responses to children and family when they get in touch and contact us for support
- There is evidence that the family have been involved in and influence assessments, conference and reviews which is evidenced in minutes
- Practitioners have good relationships with a range of family members and important people. Evidence of the practitioner working alongside the family
- Examples of direct work with families exploring their story, strengths and hope
- Minutes record partnership challenge, which is respectful of others professional assessment, and accepts that managed risk is an aspect of decision making

## **Evidence based practice**

- Examples of interventions show conscious design and collaboration with children and their families
- Plans reflect timely, practical interventions and assess their impact
- Plans reflect the hopes and aspirations of children and their families, together with the SMART steps to make progress
- Evidence is thoughtfully and promptly assessed to determine thresholds for intervention, and in written representation in court and other proceedings
- Evidence based tools record and reflect a range of perspectives about a child and family – tools are shared with the family and we can see how they have expressed themselves

## **Supported and reflective practice**

- A child's record shows reflective and purposeful supervision
- We invest in Practice Education which keeps a sharp focus on contemporary practice
- Practice is assured through regular deep-dive and thematic audit and routine reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and wider service
- We invest in Research in Practice and the development of our own Good Practice Portal on the CPP website
- We offer a strengths-based practice training programme that is reflective of the needs of individual practitioners, teams and services to deepen and strengthen practice

## OTHER RESOURCES

We subscribe to Research in Practice which has a broad range of learning resources available to suit your learning style and needs

<https://www.rip.org.uk/>

The Social Care Institute for Excellence has a range of resources around strengths-based practice with children and young people.

[https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-basedapproaches/young people](https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-basedapproaches/young%20people)

The Family Rights Group work with parents and families whose children are engaged with social care services. Their website provides valuable insight into the key concerns families experience and can help you re-frame your own practice.

<https://www.frg.org.uk/>

Dudley Centre for Professional Practice website <https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/> where key information can found including Dudley's Policies and Procedures can be found <https://dudleychildcare.proceduresonline.com/index.html> and practice standards <https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/practice-standards>. Good practice examples can be found in the Good Practice Portal in the staff only area.