



Department  
for Education

# **Children's Social Care National Framework**

**Statutory guidance on the purpose,  
principles for practice and expected  
outcomes of children's social care**

**December 2023**

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# Introduction

## About this guidance

Children’s social care has the power to transform lives; wrapping support around children, young people and families can bring about profound and positive changes that help them to flourish.

Every day, local authority children’s social care supports around 400,000 children<sup>1</sup>, and in the last 8 years, on average, around 5 children in every classroom in England were supported by a social worker<sup>2</sup>. These children, young people and families deserve the highest standards of practice, from compassionate and skilled practitioners, who can support them to address the challenges they face.

Local authorities provide this support in partnership with other agencies, including the police, health, and education. Local authorities cannot meet the needs of all children, young people and families alone, they need to collaborate with others to draw on the knowledge, skills and expertise of other agencies. For this reason, whilst this guidance is about local authority children’s social care, the responsibilities of all agencies to contribute to effective multi-agency working is reflected as the first enabler to good outcomes.

Helping whole families to bring about change can be motivating and inspiring, but the work that practitioners do every day is complex, nuanced and demanding. In this environment, where decisions can have significant consequences, everyone needs a shared vision for what children’s social care should achieve, as well as a clear and common view about what is needed to make that happen. The National Framework is statutory guidance from the Department for Education and is central to setting direction for practice in children’s social care as part of the reforms set out in [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#).

The National Framework brings together the **purpose** of local authority children’s social care, the **principles** by which children, young people and families should be supported, the **enablers** that should be in place so the system is effective, and the **outcomes** that should be achieved so that children and young people can grow up to thrive. The National Framework puts the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of practice, so they can have a say in how they are supported.

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<sup>1</sup> [Children in need, Reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Drivers of activity in children's social care - GOV.UK \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

Central to the National Framework is a belief that the lives of children, young people and families can be different, and that it is the role and responsibility of those who work in and with children's social care services to hold tight to this belief. Achieving the outcomes of the National Framework will require the determination of the whole workforce to continually improve practice. Having high aspirations for families will not be enough. Everyone needs to ask themselves how those aspirations are shaping their practice and informing the work they do.

## The Children's Social Care Dashboard

The National Framework will be supported by the **Children's Social Care Dashboard** (the Dashboard), which will bring children's social care data together in one place to understand progress towards the outcomes of the National Framework.

The Dashboard will include indicators, which will provide information on what is happening in practice. The initial indicators will be developed from data that is currently available. There are limitations with the existing data and over time the indicators in the Dashboard will evolve as government addresses data gaps and moves towards collecting data that better helps us understand outcomes for children's social care.

The Dashboard will serve as a **learning tool**, which should enable local authorities to reflect on their own practice over time, as well as to learn best practice from others. It should help central government understand system-wide successes and issues, identify how much consistency exists in achieving positive outcomes for children, young people and families, and notice when barriers are being faced. The first version of the Dashboard will be published in 2024 to support learning and help bring transparency to the outcomes in children's social care, so everyone can work together to continue to improve practice.

The National Framework should be read in conjunction with the Children's Social Care Dashboard and Indicator Update. This outlines the use and purpose of the Dashboard and the rationale behind the chosen shortlist of indicators. The policy paper also sets out the plan for how we will roll out the Dashboard.

## Support to embed the National Framework

Local authority senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners will be interested in reading the accompanying document, Improving practice with children, young people and families. This advice sets out the support available to help embed the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, and the National Framework in practice.

## Review date

This guidance will be kept under review and updated versions will be issued as necessary.

## What is the status of this guidance?

This guidance is issued under:

- section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State
- section 10(8) of the Children Act 2004, which requires each person or organisation to which the section 10 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State
- section 11(4) of the Children Act 2004 which requires each person or organisation to which the section 11 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State

It applies to all children who come into contact with children's social care up to the age of 18 years whether living with their families, in the care of the local authority, or living independently, and care leavers up to the age of 25.

This document should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise.

Throughout the National Framework, the term 'children's social care' refers to the local authority services that exist to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who, without the provision of services, are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly or further impaired, or is disabled (section 17, Children Act 1989)
- assess the needs of young carers, and whether they require support (section 17ZA, Children Act 1989)
- provide accommodation to any child in need who requires it (section 20, Children Act 1989)
- promote welfare and safeguard looked after children and to ascertain wishes and feelings of children, parents and carers and give them due consideration in decision making (section 22, Children Act 1989)

- provide a range of support to a child who has left care (section 23A, 23B, 23C, Children Act 1989)
- undertake enquiries when there are concerns a child may suffer significant harm and take action to keep them safe, including taking the child into care (section 47, section 31, Children Act 1989)
- deliver services and support to looked-after children and care leavers, local authorities must have regard to the corporate parenting principles (section 1, Children and Social Work Act 2017)

Partner agencies hold important and related duties which mean they need to work collaboratively with children's social care as they commission and deliver services that support children and young people to thrive:

- Health and housing authorities have a duty to assist a local authority with enquiries where a child may be at risk of significant harm (section 47, Children Act 1989).
- In discharging their functions health, police, schools, probation, youth offending teams and others must have regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (section 10, 11, Children Act 2004).
- Health, police and local authorities have a joint and equal responsibility to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, alongside other partners (sections 16E and 16F, Children Act 2004).

## Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is written for those who work in and with local authority children's social care and contains information that may be useful to children, young people and families who receive support from children's social care.

## Children, young people and families

The National Framework sets out important information which **may help children, young people, and families to understand what to expect from children's social care** when a local authority offers help, protection or care. It describes how practitioners listen, communicate with and support families.

These groups may find this guidance particularly useful:

- Children and young people, who have or have previously had a social worker, family support worker or personal adviser.

- Children with special educational needs or a disability who receive support from their local authority under section 17, Children Act 1989.
- Children who identify as young carers or are identified through a local authority needs assessment as young carers.
- Family and friends of children and young people who have a social worker, family support worker or personal adviser.
- Parents and carers of children and young people, including kinship carers, foster carers, and adoptive parents, who have had a social worker, family support worker or personal adviser.

Children, young people, and families may be interested to read a version of this guidance, written specifically for this audience. [A version for children, young people and families is available.](#)

## **Local authority senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners**

Senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners should use this guidance to **understand what is expected of their work with children, young people and families**. It should be used in the design and delivery of services, and should underpin the interactions between practitioners and children, young people, and families. This guidance should be used to reflect, learn, and improve practice to achieve good outcomes.

These individuals, within local authorities, should read and follow this guidance (this list is alphabetical and is not exhaustive):

- Councillors, including Leaders of Councils and Lead Members for Children's Services
- Designated Social Care Officers
- Directors of Children's Services
- Family hub workers
- Family support workers
- Heads of Service and Service Managers
- Housing and tenancy officers
- Independent reviewing officers

- Local Authority and Children’s Trusts Chief Executives
- Local Authority Designated Officers
- Local Authority residential children’s home managers
- Local Authority residential children’s home staff
- Local Authority Special Educational Needs and Disability teams
- Local Authority youth workers
- Multi-disciplinary practitioners commissioned or employed by the local authority
- Personal advisers
- Regional Adoption Agency leaders
- Social workers and practice supervisors in children’s social care
- Social workers, support staff, and others working in adult social care
- Virtual School Heads

## Safeguarding partners and other agencies

Multi-agency working is included in the National Framework as the first enabler, and partner agencies should recognise their role in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and families.

Safeguarding partners<sup>3</sup> and relevant agencies<sup>4</sup> **should read the National Framework alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children (Working Together)**. They should consider the National Framework when developing local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, understand how local authorities will approach their duties, and identify what local authorities will need from partner agencies.

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<sup>3</sup> A safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 as: (a) the local authority, (b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area, and (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area.

<sup>4</sup> Relevant agencies are those organisations and agencies whose involvement the safeguarding partners consider are required to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children and young people. Organisations that meet these criteria are set out in Regulations: The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency (England) Regulations 2018.

Individuals and organisations who work with local authority children's social care should read and respond to this guidance (this list is alphabetical and not exhaustive):

- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
- Education and early years, including Multi-Academy Trust leaders, school and college leaders, teachers, Designated Teachers for Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, school governors
- Health practitioners, commissioners and providers, including Chief Executives and leaders of Integrated Care Boards, named and designated professionals, paediatricians, GPs, nurses, midwives, health visitors and school nurses, speech and language therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, adult and child mental health workers
- Independent fostering agencies' chief executives, managers and staff
- The judiciary
- Policing, including chief constables, officers, support staff, Violence Reduction Units, and Police and Crime Commissioners
- Probation workers
- Providers of youth custodial establishments
- Regulation 44 officers
- Residential children's home providers, managers and staff
- Voluntary, charity, and social enterprise organisations
- Youth offending practitioners
- Youth workers

## National Framework: Key Concepts

To support individuals and organisations to read and understand the National Framework, this chapter includes definitions of some of the key concepts and terminology used within the guidance. Further definitions can be found in the glossary.

### Enabler

The enablers described in the National Framework refer to aspects of the children's social care system that facilitate effective support for children, young people, and families. The enablers are foundational to good practice. There are 3 enablers:

- Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- The workforce is equipped and effective

### Outcome

The outcomes described in the National Framework are what children's social care should achieve for the children, young people, and families they support. They reflect the core purpose of children's social care. There are 4 outcomes:

- Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network
- Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

### Senior Leaders

In the National Framework the term 'senior leaders' refers to the range of roles and individuals that set the vision and strategy for children's social care and are responsible for designing and delivering services that address the needs of children and young people.

The exact roles or titles will vary by local authority, but in general, 'senior leaders' refers to local political leaders, typically the Lead Member for Children's Services, who are responsible for setting vision and are democratically accountable, as well as leaders including Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services, Heads of Services and Virtual School Heads. These individuals will

hold important, and sometimes statutory, responsibilities for working with other agencies to develop a shared vision for how services should work.

## Practice Supervisors

In the National Framework the term ‘practice supervisors’ refers to those in middle-management positions who are qualified, registered, social workers and whose primary function is to supervise the practice and decision-making of child and family practitioners, and to develop the skills of individuals and teams within children’s social care.

As with senior leaders, the exact roles, or titles will vary by local authority, but in general, ‘practice supervisors’ refers to team managers, service managers, and principal social workers.

## Practitioners

In the National Framework the term ‘practitioners’ refers to those working directly with children, young people, and families, building relationships and providing support. To a certain extent, everyone in children’s social care might be considered a practitioner, given their practice affects the lives of families, and many practice supervisors and senior leaders will also be working directly with children and young people.

While this is not an exhaustive list, ‘practitioners’ refers to social workers, senior practitioners, family support workers, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency practitioners with expertise in specific fields such as domestic abuse, mental health, and substance misuse.

## Children in care

In the National Framework the term ‘children in care’ refers to all children whose care is being provided by the local authority.

Legislation uses the term ‘looked-after children’ to refer to children who are being cared for by the local authority, whether that is under section 20, or sections 22 and 31 of the Children Act 1989. Legally, the language of ‘children in care’ does not include children accommodated and looked after under section 20. However, children and young people often tell local and central government that the term ‘looked-after children’ is unhelpful, and we have made the deliberate choice to use ‘children in care’ throughout the National Framework to refer to all children, regardless of the legal provision under which they are being cared for by the local authority.

Children and young people will, of course, have different views on the language used to talk about their care, and practitioners will want to explore these with individuals.

## **Children and young people**

In the National Framework the term 'children and young people' refers to people under the age of 18 or 25.

A full definition of 'children' is provided in the glossary of this document and refers to individuals under the age of 18. Some adolescents will prefer the term 'young people', rather than 'children', and there are some young adults who will continue to receive support from children's social care as care leavers or through education, health and care plans, up to the age of 25. The terms, 'children and young people' are used to be inclusive of these individuals.

As with other terms, practitioners will want to explore the views of individual children and young people to understand how they want to be addressed.

## National Framework – one page summary

### Purpose of children's social care

Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect them by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

### Principles of children's social care

- Children's welfare is paramount.
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to.
- Children's social care works in partnership with whole families.
- Children are raised by their families, with their family networks, or in family environments wherever possible.
- Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families.
- Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances which may impact children, young people and families.

### Enablers

- **Enabler:** Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- **Enabler:** Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- **Enabler:** The workforce is equipped and effective

### Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- **Outcome 2:** children and young people are supported by their family network
- **Outcome 3:** children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- **Outcome 4:** children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

## Purpose and Principles of Children's Social Care

This chapter describes the purpose and principles of children's social care and sets the context for how each of the outcomes in the National Framework should be achieved.

### Purpose of children's social care

Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect them by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

### Principles of children's social care

Children, young people and families, wherever they live, should be confident that local authority children's social care respects their rights and the services that they commission are delivered with consistency.

There are several principles that are cross-cutting and underpin the expectations for practice described in each chapter of the National Framework. They are drawn from, and should be considered in parallel with, legislation and statutory guidance including Working Together to Safeguard Children, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

- **Children's welfare is paramount:** decisions about help, protection and care for children must always be made in their best interests (section 22(3), Children Act 1989).
- **Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to:** Children and young people's views should be sought and heard at every stage of support, and they should contribute to decisions made about their lives, wherever possible. Advocacy, advice, and assistance must be available to assist them in any representations they may wish to make to the authority (section 26A, Children Act 1989).
- **Children's social care works in partnership with whole families:** children, young people and families are heard, and practitioners build strong relationships with families based on respect. They acknowledge strengths within families and recognise that families, and family networks, will often have solutions to their own challenges, and that holding a focus on the whole family is often the best way of improving outcomes for children and young people.

- **Children are raised by their families, with their family networks or in family environments wherever possible:** children's social care recognise that the best place for most children to grow up is in their families, or with kinship carers (section 17(1)(b) Children Act 1989). Sometimes this will not be safe or possible, and in these situations, efforts are made to support relationships between children and young people with their siblings, family, and friends (section 22C, Children Act 1989). When children and young people need care to be provided by the local authority, such care is safe and prioritises consistency, stability, and lifelong loving relationships with those who are important to children and young people, so that they are supported to thrive.
- **Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families:** Local authorities foster strong supportive relationships with other safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including education settings, to coordinate their services and to respond to the needs of children, young people, and families in the round. From strategic and operational leadership to practitioners supporting individual families, safeguarding partners and relevant agencies are proactive in seeking and sharing information, knowledge, and skills with other agencies.
- **Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances impacting children, young people, and families.** Leaders and practice supervisors foster a culture of practice where the individual and protected characteristics of families are respected, and the diversity of individual needs and experiences are addressed through the support provided. Practitioners recognise the differences between, and are confident to respond to, circumstances where children experience adversity due to poverty and acute family stress, and situations where children face harm due to parental abuse and neglect. Leaders, practice supervisors, and practitioners use reflective discussions so that practice is inclusive and engages all families, whatever their background and context.

## Enabler: Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective

### Overview of this enabler

Local authorities, police, health, and other relevant agencies, including early years, education settings, and voluntary organisations have responsibilities to work together so that children and young people can be supported for their safety and wellbeing.

### Summary of this enabler

All agencies are ambitious and strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies have an integral role in helping local authorities to achieve the outcomes of the National Framework. All agencies use their unique expertise to collaborate, support and enable positive long-term outcomes such as good child development, good educational attendance and attainment, good physical and mental health, family stability and the prevention of crime.

Many children, young people and families who need support will get the help they need from their own family network, or universal and early help services delivered by a range of local agencies. However, some families will need support from children's social care, and this will require multi-agency input so that families can access the help and expertise they need.

Local authorities have specific duties towards children and young people in their area.

**There are shared and equal responsibilities that require the leadership and commitment of all safeguarding partners and their relevant agencies, including education settings.**

Together, the safeguarding partners have shared responsibilities for the organisation and delivery of services that meet the needs of children, young people and families and, along with relevant agencies, such as educational settings, youth offending services and voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations, everyone has a critical role in supporting local authorities, along with the police and health, to achieve the outcomes in the National Framework.

### How this enabler is supported in practice

All organisations, including safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, should use the National Framework to:

- **raise aspirations** for what high-quality support and practice with children, young people and families can achieve

- establish a **shared approach** and strong relationships across agencies, so everyone can engage constructively in delivering effective support to children, young people and families
- **embed voices** of children, young people and families in the design and delivery of services and support
- determine the right **support, challenge, and accountability** across agencies so that everyone can work towards the goal of seeing families thrive, and understand the impact of their services in helping to deliver that ambition

## Following the National Framework alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children

Multi-agency working is at the heart of effective support for children and families and is part of the legislative and regulatory frameworks for protecting children, promoting their health and wellbeing, and providing care where it is needed. Agencies should continue to read and adhere to the wide range of guidance that exists in relation to their specific responsibilities for children and young people.

Agencies should be aware of their statutory duties and responsibilities outlined in **Working Together to Safeguard Children (Working Together)**, which is the multi-agency statutory guidance that sets out how organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including identifying and responding to their needs. Working Together sets out effective multi-agency arrangements that safeguard children.

Working Together includes multi-agency expectations for strategic leaders, senior or middle managers and for those involved in direct practice. Multi-agency practice expectations apply to all agencies and practitioners involved in supporting children and young people. The practice expectations are organised around 5 key principles: to **collaborate**, to **learn**, to **resource**, to **include**, and to **mutually challenge**. They set out how safeguarding partners and other agencies should work together and align their practice, including towards the outcomes in the National Framework.

The National Framework is statutory guidance for local authorities and sets the outcomes that children's social care should achieve. Local authorities can only achieve these outcomes with the full cooperation of other organisations. **Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including education settings, should read and respond to the National Framework, alongside Working Together.** The National Framework does not replace other guidance on multi-agency working and must be read in parallel with Working Together.

## **Following the National Framework alongside the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice**

Local authorities have important duties towards children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. They must deliver their responsibilities, with a view to integrating education, training and health and social care, where this would improve the overall quality of provision for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities.

The SEND Code of Practice sets out that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) must make joint commissioning arrangements for education, health and care provision, informed by a clear assessment of local needs. This multi-agency collaboration ensures that there is a joined-up approach that prioritises identification, assessment, and support.

Agencies should be aware that the SEND Code of Practice gives statutory guidance on the duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The SEND Code of Practice sets out how agencies should support children under section 17 (Children and Families Act 1989) or section 2 (Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970). The SEND Code of Practice says that local authorities, in carrying out their functions, must have regards to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young people and the child's parents
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- the need to support the child or young people, and the child's parents in order to facilitate the development of the child or young people and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood

These principles reflect the expectations for practice described throughout the National Framework, and which see the voices of children, young people and families as central to support to improve outcomes. Crucially, local authorities will only achieve the outcomes in the National Framework for children with special educational needs and disabilities with the knowledge, expertise and support of other organisations. Agencies should read and respond to the National Framework, alongside the principles and outcomes set out in the SEND Code of Practice.

## Following the National Framework alongside other pieces of guidance

Safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies, including education settings, have guidance that relates to how they work to protect the safety and support the wellbeing of children and young people. The National Framework does not replace these pieces of guidance, and should be read alongside guidance (the list below is alphabetical and not exhaustive):

- [Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners](#)
- [Statutory framework for early years foundation stage \(EYFS\)](#)
- [Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk in the NHS – Safeguarding accountability and assurance framework](#)
- [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines](#)
- [Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children](#)
- [Authorised professional practice for policing](#)

## **Enabler: leaders drive conditions for effective practice**

### **Overview of this enabler**

All leaders from local authorities and children's trusts, including Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Directors of Public Health, and Lead Members for Children's Services, should conduct their responsibilities in ways that support and empower the wider children's social care workforce to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people, and families. They promote the use of evidence to inform and improve how services are commissioned and delivered.

### **Summary of this enabler**

Leaders can transform the communities that they work in. This requires the passion, commitment, knowledge, skills, and expertise of every kind of leader. From senior political and corporate leaders, those designing and managing services, like practice leaders and principal social workers, through to those overseeing practice, like team managers. Leadership in children's social care is not solely about a position in an organisation – regardless of seniority, individuals working in children's social care can practise leadership, and use their influence to improve their organisational and practice culture, and advocate for children, young people, and families.

Leaders at every level should model the strong relationships they want to see between practitioners and children, young people, and families. They need to use every tool available, whether that is partnerships, the expertise of their workforce, the wisdom and insights of those with experience of interacting with children's social care, or data and technology, to set the conditions for practice and to continually improve the services they provide.

### **Expectations for practice**

#### **How senior leaders should support this enabler in practice**

- Leaders put the National Framework's principles for practice at the heart of their leadership approach and embed these principles as core values in their organisation. They prioritise regular and open discussion with their organisation so that everyone understands how the principles deliver better outcomes.
- Leaders at every level of the organisation lead by example: they are visible, approachable and have the knowledge, and experience for their role. They model integrity and creativity in their work, and demonstrate clarity of purpose for their teams, organisation and with partner agencies.

- Leaders recognise that their leadership of their organisation will affect how practitioners understand and respond to children, young people, and families. Leaders act with care, compassion, respect and offer constructive challenge when it is needed.
- Leaders are tenacious in their approach to meeting the outcomes set out in the National Framework and their commitment to delivering impactful services. They are resolute in providing the conditions for effective practice so that every service they commission and every individual in their organisation is able to support children, young people and families to thrive. They model effective advocacy for children, young people and families across their organisation, with partner agencies, and to their own workforce. They continually expect and celebrate excellent practice.
- Leaders have a local practice framework and create a shared strategic vision for local services, which they encourage their workforce, commissioned services, and partner agencies to use, to facilitate a shared understanding of how to approach working with children, young people and families.
- Leaders understand the children, young people and families that live in their area, and design services that will meet their needs, based on the best available evidence of what will improve outcomes. They model an understanding of how economic and social circumstances can affect children, young people, families, and communities.
- Leaders prioritise funding and resources that help families early so children and young people can thrive. Funding achieves value for money and is spent on interventions that make a difference to children, young people, and families.
- Leaders are transparent and accountable for their performance and the impact of children's social care practice on children, young people, and families. Leaders managing social workers are mindful of the employer standards for social workers and consider this in their approach to supporting the workforce. Corporate and political leaders are supported to engage with the impact of practice on children, young people, and families.
- Leaders at a corporate and political level take an active interest in the commissioning and impact of children's social care in their area. They consider how other services, delivered by the local authority and their partners, can support better outcomes for all children, including children in care and care leavers.
- Leaders understand the importance of quality services and are assured that effective auditing and assurance processes, including direct feedback from

children, young people and families, are in place. Where possible these are multi-agency, so as to build a commitment to learning and improvement amongst all partners and relevant agencies.

- Leaders hold colleagues at every level of their organisation to account when there are concerns about how aspects of children's social care services are being delivered.
- Leaders value the support of other local authorities in their region and are proactive in contributing to, and learning from, regional improvement. They work to build collaboration, understanding and shared practice models across agencies and work constructively with their colleagues across the country, particularly where children, young people, and families move across areas.
- Leaders work in their organisation and with partner agencies so that the services they run respect the rights of, and address uneven provision of services for, children, young people and families. They address discrimination and promote equality.
- Leaders are confident in using robust evidence of what works and relevant, timely, data to understand and improve outcomes and practice. They use technology and administrative support to enhance practice, support information sharing and reduce the burdens of bureaucracy for practitioners so they can prioritise spending time building relationships with children, young people and families.
- Leaders seek to improve their own knowledge and expertise. They keep abreast of changes in guidance, emerging evidence, and practice innovation and support their workforce to remain up to date when changes should affect local practice.
- Leaders oversee swift responses to serious incidents, taking prompt steps to learn from incidents and implement changes to practice. Leaders encourage the workforce to reflect regularly on what works well and what could be improved in day-to-day practice.
- Leaders put in place clear mechanisms for children, young people and families to raise concerns. They listen to the voices of children, young people and families and act on any complaints swiftly.
- Leaders have clear processes to hear, and respond to, the concerns of the workforce, as well as for whistleblowing.

### **How practice supervisors should support this enabler in practice**

- Practice supervisors promote and govern practice within their organisation. They are knowledgeable and skilled, set high standards for practice and support and encourage others to do the same.
- Practice supervisors recognise their influence as leaders of practice and take responsibility for contributing to an inclusive workplace culture. They share feedback to help senior leaders to improve the practice environment. They help to develop a culture of learning and improvement, where staff are sufficiently supported, stretched, and mentored to meet their aspirations.
- Practice supervisors shape and influence the culture of practice by providing a safe, calm, and well-ordered environment for all staff. They use resources to best effect and facilitate reflective discussions.
- Practice supervisors promote reflective thinking and methods, supporting effective discussions between practitioners and other agencies, so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place in practice. They are emotionally intelligent and use supervision to support practitioners in their own reflection.
- Practice supervisors are knowledgeable in the legal, regulatory, procedural and performance frameworks within which they operate, are confident to support practitioners to navigate complex decisions within these frameworks and provide opportunities for staff to give and receive feedback.
- Practice supervisors give social workers time and space to learn, observe the practice of others and to analyse what went well and what could be improved in their interventions.
- Practice supervisors work with their peers across agencies to build relationships based on collaboration, understanding and shared practice models.
- Practice supervisors act as a conduit of information between senior leaders and practitioners in their local area and champion each group when required. They embed the principles of children's social care, set out in the National Framework, within their teams and discuss where those principles are not being met in practice.
- Practice supervisors demonstrate a high level of resilience within pressured environments and respond to situations in calm, measured and pragmatic ways.

### **How practitioners should support this enabler in practice**

- Practitioners recognise that they can demonstrate leadership in their roles and act as leaders for their colleagues. They use their knowledge and skills to contribute to the culture of practice and improve support for children, young people and families.

- Practitioners share feedback to help leaders to improve the culture in which they practise. They are strong advocates for high standards of practice amongst the workforce and for support for children, young people and families that meet their needs.
- Practitioners work with children, young people and families in a way which demonstrates the principles of children's social care, set out in the National Framework. They discuss with leaders and practice supervisors how the principles are being met.
- Practitioners amplify the voices and feedback from children, young people, and families in respect of services. Practitioners confidently raise issues and concerns with senior leaders and practice supervisors to identify improvements needed in how services are being delivered.
- Practitioners provide contextual information to help leaders understand data, support internal quality assurance processes and identify how to change practice.

## Enabler: the workforce is equipped and effective

### Overview of this enabler

The whole children's social care workforce plays an instrumental role in delivering good outcomes for children, young people, and families. They should bring empathy, energy and motivation to their daily work. They should be supported, by their organisation, to use the breadth of their knowledge and skills to transform the lives of children, young people and families.

### Summary of this enabler

Practitioners have a powerful part to play in improving the lives of children and families. There is a wide range of staff and practitioners who make up the children's social care workforce, and each has the opportunity to be invaluable in helping children, young people and families to thrive.

Practitioners use their expertise to offer compassionate and motivational support that addresses the seemingly intractable problems facing families. Every local authority will rely on a host of practitioners, such as family support workers and residential children's home workers, who will work alongside children, young people and families, and, as registered professionals, there are unique and important standards and responsibilities<sup>5</sup> for social workers. The diversity of roles and practitioners working within children's social care all provide a different, and essential, set of skills, and the workforce is at its strongest when there is positive, collaborative working across different specialisms.

The work they do can be demanding, complex and emotive, which means that leaders at every level of their organisation need to be aligned in their vision to support the workforce to be effective. Team managers have a vital role in providing day to day support and supervision, and across children's social care, service managers, assistant directors, Directors of Children's Services, Chief Executives and corporate and political leaders all have a part to play in resourcing the workforce and cultivating the working conditions and learning culture that help practitioners support children, young people and families. Practitioners are committed to supporting the families they work with, and constantly seek to improve practice in their area to improve outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> [Professional standards - Social Work England](#)

## Expectations for practice

### How senior leaders should support this enabler in practice

- Leaders understand the complex realities of frontline practice. They consider their workforce their greatest asset and support them in delivering impactful services, which achieve the outcomes of the National Framework, as part of the long-term ambition for children, young people, and families to thrive.
- Leaders prioritise consistency of practitioners for families and support all practitioners, including social workers, family support workers and personal advisers, to spend time with, and build strong and stable relationships with, children, young people, and families.
- Leaders have a workforce strategy, commission services and recruit practice supervisors and practitioners with the knowledge, skills, and experience to deliver the outcomes set out in the National Framework. Leaders invest in practitioner training, development, and wellbeing. Leaders reflect on the diversity of their workforce so it reflects and can meet the needs of the local area.
- Leaders prioritise a stable and permanent workforce and only employ agency social workers as a temporary measure when absolutely necessary, so that children, young people and families can maintain consistent relationships with practitioners.
- Leaders identify and remove unnecessary bureaucracy, including with the help of technology and administrative support, and are mindful of practitioner workloads, including both the number of children and young people they are supporting, and the complexity of their family dynamics.
- Leaders enable their practitioners to have the knowledge and skills they need to support the children and young people they work with, and oversee regular, consistent, reflective supervision for practitioners to support their practice, development, and wellbeing.
- Leaders support early career social workers, as they start out in practice, to access the provision and training they need to develop their practice and to benefit from the expertise and support of more experienced colleagues.
- Leaders provide the workforce with suitable opportunities to deepen their knowledge, develop new skills and put learning into practice. They identify appropriate training for those working with groups with specific individual needs or protected characteristics, including support for disabled children.

- Leaders support managers at every level of the organisation to have manageable spans of control and they are able to provide the support and supervision that allow practitioners to work effectively with children, young people and families.
- Leaders support the workforce to value understanding differences between families and to manage relationships with children, young people and families in a way that addresses their personal circumstances and experiences.
- Leaders encourage the workforce to practise in a way that is goal-oriented, purposeful, effective, and capable of making a tangible difference in the lives and wellbeing of children, young people, and families. They promote evidence-based approaches in practice wherever possible.
- Leaders create the conditions and culture that supports innovation in practice, where challenge is welcome, practice supervisors and practitioners feel safe, and they are encouraged to learn and develop.

### **How practice supervisors should support this enabler in practice**

- Practice supervisors understand their role in shaping and supporting the workforce to respond to the complex realities of practice. They recognise, respect and value the expertise of practitioners and promote a workplace culture where they are able to work effectively and achieve the outcomes of the National Framework.
- Practice supervisors are unwavering in their commitment to provide high-quality supervision to their teams so practitioners can reflect on their practice. Supervision should help practitioners to learn and improve, and feel supported in their wellbeing, with strategies in place to help manage the causes of stress and anxiety.
- Practice supervisors actively promote and encourage direct work with children and families, and as far as possible, continue to engage in direct work as part of their own roles. They allow time and space for practitioners to prioritise family visits and support practitioners to analyse direct work to think about the impact of their practice on families.
- Practice supervisors encourage practitioners to continue learning throughout their career and model dedication to their own practice development. In doing so, practice supervisors are mindful of the needs of their local area, emerging research and evidence, and the perspectives of local families.
- Practice supervisors recognise the strengths and development needs of practitioners and use practice observations, reflection, and feedback mechanisms to develop practice through appropriate training. They reflect upon the confidence

of practitioners and adapt management and leadership style according to the needs of individuals and the organisation.

- Practice supervisors help practitioners to adopt an approach to practice which is proportionate to identified risk and need. They use supervision processes to challenge the balance of authoritative intervention and collaborative engagement. They support their teams to address discrimination and promote equality.
- Practice supervisors support their workforce by sharing information between leaders and practitioners about the needs of both the workforce and the families they work with.

### **How practitioners should support this enabler in practice**

- Practitioners are clear about how their role in children's social care can help to achieve the outcomes set out in the National Framework, and meet the long-term ambition for children, young people, and families to thrive.
- Practitioners prioritise family visits and direct work to build strong, respectful relationships with children, young people, and families. Practitioners are confident and capable to identify children and young people's needs and make decisions about what needs to happen to meet their needs, in circumstances that can involve risk, complexity and uncertainty.
- Practitioners use supervision to reflect on their practice and to prioritise their learning and development, so they have the knowledge, skills and experience needed for their roles. Practitioners continue to learn throughout their career and develop their skills based on the latest evidence from the sector.
- Practitioners are committed to managing their practice with children, young people and families so it is impactful. They are goal-oriented in their work and use research and evidence to support children, young people and families in a way that is purposeful and effective.
- Practitioners recognise the rights of children, young people and families, and work with them in a way that upholds those rights and considers how different experiences may affect how individuals engage with children's social care. They address discrimination and promote equality.

# Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

## What this outcome is about

Children's social care helps children and young people by supporting whole families and their networks. They work in partnership with parents and carers to address difficulties that families face and are committed to keeping children and young people within their family, wherever it is safe to do so.

## Summary of this outcome

We want to see all children, young people, and families able to thrive, and able to access support to realise this ambition. This might involve support for families where children have special educational needs and disabilities, or helping whole families where there are concerns about the wellbeing or safety of children and young people, so that all children, whatever their circumstances, can have the best possible start in life.

Staying together is about finding ways for children and young people to remain living with their families, wherever it is safe for them to do so. To make this possible, practitioners offer tailored help and support to families, responding to the reasons why children and young people's needs are not being met. This often involves supporting parents, carers, and family networks to increase their capacity to provide loving care to children and young people.

For some this will mean supporting parents and carers in addressing challenges in their own lives, such as domestic abuse<sup>6</sup>, mental and physical health problems, substance misuse, deprivation, and housing instability, through the advice and services of partner agencies. For others this will be through the provision of services, for example, providing short breaks to meet the needs of disabled children, or working with partner agencies and the family network to provide support and respite where children and young people are providing care to their parents, siblings, or family members. For others, support will focus on developing parent or carer skills to care for, and support the development of, children and young people, by improving the quality of relationships, introducing consistent routines, and encouraging engagement in education and wider community activities.

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<sup>6</sup> As defined in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) behaviour is 'abusive' if it consists of physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological, emotional or other abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

Central to this approach is a determination from practitioners to build on family's strengths and use their professional knowledge and skills to build strong, compassionate relationships with children, young people, and families so they can know what is happening in their lives. Those working in children's social care know that for some families, difficult circumstances may be affected by factors such as poor living conditions and economic hardship. Senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners are committed to working respectfully with families and partner agencies.

## **Expectations for practice**

### **Responding to the voices of children, young people and families**

- Every area uses a proactive and systematic approach to listen to the individual and varied voices of children, young people and families from different groups in the local area, to understand their needs, and hold themselves to account for providing respectful, quality services.
- Every area supports families to understand children's social care and engage with services from their first interactions with the local authority. They are supported to identify and include their family network from the outset, and the views of the family network are considered when considering the best interests of children and young people.
- Every area makes sure that practice is flexible and adaptive so that the perspectives of children, whatever their age or ability, can be heard, including, where required, through the provision of independent advocacy. This includes consideration of the wishes and feelings of children who are not yet old enough to talk or who, for reasons of disability, cannot communicate verbally or prefer other means of communication, as well as provision for children for whom English is not their first language.
- Every area supports children and young people to share their wishes and feelings freely and independently from the views of parents, carers, or other adults in their lives.
- Every area has mechanisms for seeking to understand the hopes and aspirations of children and young people so that this information can shape individual support and the design of local services.
- Every area uses data and evidence to support reflection on how children, young people and families are responding to the help available and explore, with them, whether it is meeting its objectives.

## How senior leaders should achieve this outcome in practice

- Leaders design services that are ambitious for the best possible outcomes of children, young people, and families. As part of this process, leaders consider the journey of the whole family through services, and from their first interactions with children's social care, place strong relationships and effective communication with parents and carers at the heart of practice.
- Leaders identify the needs of children and young people in a local area, including the needs of disabled children and of young carers, through robust data and evidence and design services so that support, information, and advice is available to meet their needs, working with their whole families.
- Leaders support services to deliver help, which is rooted in communities, so that it is timely, accessible to local children, young people and families and does not feel stigmatising. When support is offered, it is based on individual needs, and where required makes use of specialist help. This includes collaboration to develop a joined-up approach to working with adult social care services, especially where children and young people are providing care for family members.
- Leaders establish teams of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners who use multi-disciplinary and multi-agency expertise to help children, young people, families, and their networks.
- Leaders address the needs of different children through the help available in the local area. This includes children that can be overlooked, including vulnerable infants, teenagers, disabled children, young carers, those living with families with no recourse to public funds, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Leaders identify and address barriers to support for children, young people, and families. They are proactive in tackling areas of practice that are felt to be stigmatising. Leaders understand that families of disabled children may face challenges which are associated with their child's disability rather than as a result of safeguarding and create processes that allow families to access the support they need.
- Leaders are confident that decisions about access to targeted support are clear and equitable, so that children and young people from different socio-demographic groups experience consistency in the kind of support available. Leaders identify and use workforce expertise to inform decisions about how to provide help, protection, and care when it is needed.

- Leaders design services so that when targeted support is not needed by children, young people and families, there are clear routes that help them to access the universal services that will meet their needs.
- Leaders understand the importance of education as a protective factor, which helps to keep children and young people safe and able to reach their potential. Leaders establish strong partnerships with education leaders, setting high aspirations for engagement in education and support to address barriers to attendance and attainment.
- Leaders value the expertise of the Virtual School Head and, where needed, support them to champion improved educational outcomes for children and young people.

### **How practice supervisors should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practice supervisors understand that the first interactions a family has with children's social care, from the point of an initial referral, can influence how they respond to the help available. They support their teams to endeavour to make the first interactions positive, welcoming, and inclusive, involving whole families and their networks.
- Practice supervisors are child-centred and promote whole family approaches to help meet their needs. They encourage practitioners to reflect on relationships between the whole family and provide constructive challenge and advice to help them to understand how best to provide support.
- Practice supervisors recognise that receiving help from children's social care can be a stigmatising experience and are proactive in encouraging their teams to tackle stigma, build strong relationships with children, young people and families and communicate clearly and effectively. They consider the needs of families of disabled children, or where children are providing care for a parent, sibling, or family member, where safeguarding is not the primary reason for accessing support.
- Practice supervisors support practitioners to work creatively, explore new ideas and initiatives to solve problems, and draw on the expertise of other agencies and professions to meet the needs of children, young people, and families.
- Practice supervisors work with their colleagues in education settings so that children and young people have consistent access to learning and are able to reach their potential. They build strong relationships with colleagues in schools

and education settings to promote attendance and recognise that when attendance falls, this may be a sign of other difficulties in their lives.

- Practice supervisors establish strong working relationships with Virtual School Heads in their local authority to learn from, and draw on their expertise, so that children and young people can be supported to overcome barriers to attendance and attainment.

### **How practitioners should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practitioners use strength-based approaches to build trusted relationships that help children, young people, and families, working with them to identify what is working well in their lives and how their strengths could support them in other areas too. Practitioners are confident to identify the needs of disabled children and support families to meet their needs.
- Practitioners manage their first interactions with families carefully, clearly explaining their roles and the help that is available. Practitioners prioritise understanding the whole family and building relationships with all of the family network, from the outset. Practitioners understand that different families may have different relationships and a family network is not confined to relatives.
- Practitioners understand that stigma can be a barrier to children, young people and families asking for, and responding to, help that is available. Practitioners recognise that disabled children and their families, or families where a child provides care for a family member, may face barriers in coming forward to access support. Practitioners adapt their practice to overcome barriers for individual children, young people, and families, taking account of their needs and preferences for how they receive support.
- Practitioners work confidently and respectfully with children, young people, and families from diverse socio-demographic groups. They engage sensitively with families, respecting different models and attitudes to parenting and care.
- Practitioners are mindful of the importance of challenging their own and others' hypotheses about what is happening in families, recognising how their own beliefs and experiences can affect their understanding of a family's circumstances.
- Practitioners, as part of their support for children, young people, and families, mitigate the impact of poverty and stress, providing advice and advocacy that helps families to access financial support, housing, and community resources to meet needs. Practitioners identify and differentiate when families need support

due to deprivation, and situations where children's needs are not being met by parents and carers due to abuse and neglect.

- Practitioners support parents and carers to understand their histories and experiences and make sense of what influences the love and care they provide to children and young people. Where needed, practitioners draw on the expertise of other agencies or professions to support parents.
- Practitioners work sensitively, with whole families, to identify and address the impact of adversity and trauma in their lives. Practitioners reflect on how adversity and trauma might affect how a family engages with children's social care, and they use their expertise to explore these ideas with family members with care and compassion. Practitioners help families to understand how experiencing harms, such as domestic abuse, mental health problems, substance misuse, and exploitation, impact the children and young people's safety and wellbeing. Practitioners recognise that children and young people can be victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse<sup>7</sup>.
- Practitioners use the knowledge, expertise, and resources available through voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations in the local community, to find solutions to problems that families, face.
- Practitioners use research and evidence to inform practice and to provide meaningful and tailored help for children and young people, parents, carers, siblings, and family networks so that they can thrive.
- Practitioners are confident to use a broad range of tools, such as chronologies, rich genograms, and family maps, to assess the needs of children and young people and build relationships to help them.
- Practitioners understand the importance of education as a protective factor, which helps to keep children and young people safe and able to reach their potential. Practitioners consider, and integrate into support plans, the educational needs of children and young people, including how to improve attendance and attainment.

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<sup>7</sup> Under section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are recognised as victims in their own right where they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either victim or perpetrator of the abuse, or either the victim or perpetrator of the abuse has parental responsibility for that child.

- Practitioners advocate for the highest aspirations for children and young people's education, and draw on a range of expertise where needed, including through Virtual School Heads, Designated Safeguarding Leads or Designated Teachers.

## **Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network**

### **What this outcome is about**

Children's social care supports children and young people by building relationships so that key people in the lives of children and young people, who form their family network, can help to provide safety, stability, and love. Involving family networks needs to happen at every stage, when children and young people are supported by children's social care, including if they are going to, or have, entered care. When children are being raised by someone in their family network, we refer to this as kinship care.

### **Summary of this outcome**

Often there are wider family relationships and networks that exist and can provide much-needed help when families experience challenging problems. These relationships can be a source of practical support that allow parents and carers to increase their capacity to meet the needs of their children and young people.

In some situations, where it is not safe for children or young people to stay living with their parents, or they are on a journey to be reunified with their parents, kinship care can be the best option to keep children and young people connected to those they know and love. Kinship care can be any situation in which a child is being raised by a family member who is not their parent or a friend – it can be temporary or long-term. For other children and young people who are in or leaving care, family networks might be small or limited, and practitioners will offer support to strengthen safe connections and establish lifelong loving relationships.

Family networks can help parents and carers to address their own needs, and offer stability for children and young people, but they might need the help of practitioners to make this happen. Children's social care needs to consider how to unlock family networks and identify kinship carers to be a source of support, whenever children and young people need help, protection, or care. This support can enable children and young people to remain living with parents and carers, and when this is not possible, allows them to grow up with lifelong loving relationships, even if they are not living with their birth family.

### **Expectations for practice**

#### **Responding to the voices of children, young people, and families**

- Every area seeks and hears the views of children, young people, families, and family networks, including kinship carers, to understand how to design services

that support children and young people to stay living with, and connected to, those they know and love.

- Every area supports children and young people to work with practitioners to identify their family networks and to discuss the support, love and trust they feel with them.
- Every area seeks and hears the views of children and young people and uses them to inform decisions on how their family network can care for them.
- Every area incorporates the views of parents into plans to keep children safe through their family network. Family networks are encouraged to report how much support they receive.

### **How senior leaders should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Leaders recognise that networks are integral to effective support and protection for children, young people, and families. Support is not limited to parents and carers, as services recognise that extended family can play an important role in helping to keep children and young people connected to their family network.
- Leaders should publish a local policy setting out the approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children in kinship care in their area<sup>8</sup>. This should include a named responsible manager for kinship care within the local authority who will oversee the policy.
- Leaders design services to include family networks from a family's first interactions with services and empowers practitioners to work with networks at every stage of support for children, young people, and families. This includes how to support disabled children with the help of their family network.
- Leaders provide clear information and advice to families, which helps them to feel empowered to make decisions about how best to care for children and young people in their family networks, and to explore the option of kinship care when it is needed.
- Leaders use their funding flexibly so that when it is in the child's best interests, members of the family network and kinship carers can access the right support, without needing to become foster carers.

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<sup>8</sup> [Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities](#)

- Leaders put in place meaningful and collaborative forums with children, young people and families, such as family group decision making<sup>9</sup>. They prioritise formal and informal kinship care arrangements, where safe to do so, to avoid children and young people unnecessarily entering care.
- Leaders recognise the complex family dynamics that surround kinship care and they commission services that can provide support to kinship carers who are managing challenging family relationships.
- Leaders recognise that kinship carers may require additional support to look after children and young people when they cannot live with their birth parent. They will know and signpost to the support kinship carers and children in kinship care are eligible for, and they will consider what additional support may be required.

### **How practice supervisors should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practice supervisors recognise the importance of family networks and support practitioners to explore the key relationships around a family, and address and work through complex dynamics from the first interaction with services.
- Practice supervisors are aware of the local offer for kinship support and help practitioners and families to navigate the offer, providing access to the relevant information, advice and resources where needed.
- Practice supervisors encourage the use of shared forums to inform plans to meet children and young people's needs, making use of tools such as family group decision making, to bring together information and resources for families at the right time.
- Practice supervisors recognise that some families may experience barriers to accessing support. Practice supervisors proactively support practitioners to challenge themselves on their assumptions, build relationships with whole families, and access learning opportunities to develop their skills and engage with empathy. This should include attending to the needs of disabled children, as well as to relationships that may not always be given attention in practice, such as the role of fathers.

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<sup>9</sup> Family group decision making is the umbrella term for a family-led forum where a family network makes a plan in response to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. These can take different forms; family group conferences are one model of family group decision making. The Department for Education does not prescribe a specific model. There is further information in the glossary.

- Practice supervisors champion the reunification of children from care to their families and family networks, where it is safe to do so, and promote practice that is focused on creating opportunities where reunification can be possible.
- Practice supervisors are aware of circumstances which mean that children and young people may not be able to be supported by their immediate family network, for example, where unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may not have a family network in the country, or children have experienced harm as a result of their wider network or community. Practice supervisors help practitioners think creatively about how to provide the right kind of support for these children that develops a strong network of relationships in their lives.

### **How practitioners should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practitioners identify existing support networks with children, young people, and families from their first interactions with children's social care, seeking to understand who they define as their family, and who is important in their lives. This might include non-familial relationships, such as lifelong friends, youth workers, teachers and members of their local community or faith-based organisations.
- Practitioners value the insight of family members and support networks, seek out their views and take appropriate action to respond to any concerns they might raise about the support and care that is provided to children and young people.
- Practitioners are mindful of how family dynamics can change. They remain alert to new information that would improve their understanding of the relationships within the family network and take action when children and young people need protection, or their needs are not being met.
- Practitioners understand that family members do not operate in isolation and recognise that family networks come in many forms. They are confident to identify complex dynamics, and work sensitively and constructively to help families build, strengthen, repair, or manage relationships. They help to manage family time between children, young people, parents, carers, and family members.
- Practitioners are alert to working in partnership with family members and support networks that might ordinarily be overlooked as important sources of care and support, challenging their own views about the type of support available. They consider how family networks can provide support to disabled children and to young carers.
- Practitioners take steps to build and strengthen family networks where they are weak and help them to build support systems where they do not yet exist. Where

practitioners support children in care they consider every possible option for safe reunification.

- Practitioners work with family networks and kinship carers to help them access information, advice and training, alongside financial and peer support that equips them to meet the needs of their children and young people, and provide them with a loving, safe and stable home.
- Practitioners bring the family network together to explore safe and loving family-led options for the child's care before the local authority issues care proceedings, wherever it is safe and possible to do so. Practitioners bring families together in family-led forums, that have been thoughtfully and carefully prepared. These forums should allow families time and resource to respond to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. Practitioners may use approaches, such as family group decision making in delivering these forums.
- Practitioners conduct assessments of prospective kinship carers so that they can provide a safe and stable home for their kin, and they help them to access the support they need to provide short term or long-term care.
- Practitioners are mindful of circumstances where a child or young person is not able to be supported by their immediate family network, for example where it is unsafe to maintain relationships, or a child or young person's family and network are in another country, such as for unaccompanied asylum-seeking. Practitioners think creatively, and act decisively, to support children and young people to develop a strong, caring network of relationships in their lives.

## Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes

### What this outcome is about

Children's social care acts swiftly to protect children and young people from harm, whether that is at home, where they live, or outside in their wider neighbourhood, community and online. Children's social care manages the uncertainty and nuances of the complex circumstances in which harm takes place, working in partnership with other agencies to increase safety.

### Summary of this outcome

There are some children and young people who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm unless there is substantial and sustained change to their circumstances. This harm can come from inside or outside the home, including online, and some may experience harms concurrently. **For this reason, addressing harms from in and outside the home are addressed under the same outcome in the National Framework.**

Harm can be the result of actions by parents, carers, or other individuals in the family, or a consequence of the context and environment children and young people experience outside of their home, including online and where children go missing.

Any child or young person, no matter who they live with, can experience abuse, neglect and exploitation. Practitioners are alive to the possibility that children and young people who live with their families, family network or kinship carers, and children in care, can experience harms in and outside of their homes, and need the protection and support of safe and caring adults in their lives.

**Children's social care has specific responsibilities, with the local safeguarding partners, to make any necessary enquiries where significant harm is suspected and to take swift action to protect children and young people.** Protecting children and young people from abuse, neglect and exploitation is the cornerstone of how, in the long-term, they will thrive. The duties for child protection are set out in legislation and in Working Together to Safeguard Children alongside national multi-agency standards for child protection. Working Together covers the processes, decisions and responsibilities for all safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including education settings.

Children's social care has social workers, along with other practitioners and partner agencies, who are skilled in building strong relationships with families and carers, assessing children and young people's safety, and deciding how to protect them. This will involve observing interactions between children, young people and their families or family

networks, seeking to understand the capacity of parents and carers to protect them from harm, and listening to their voices. Practitioners will be curious about the daily lives of children and young people and remain alert to the possibility that individuals in their lives may intentionally try to hide their experiences of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Children's social care will work with whole families, foster carers, residential children's homes staff, and with partner agencies in the community, to address the reasons why children and young people are experiencing harm. For a minority of children and young people, there are occasions when it is not safe for them to remain living with their birth parents and in these situations children's social care will explore how family networks and kinship care can help provide safety. Sometimes children's social care will make an application to go to court, for judicial decisions to be made about where the child should live.

## **Expectations for practice**

### **Responding to the voices of children, young people, and families**

- Every area supports children and young people to explore with practitioners the concerns about their safety and wellbeing, including being supported to share their experiences, and their views on the support that would make a difference in their lives.
- Every area supports children and young people to share their wishes and feelings freely and independently from the views of parents, carers, or other adults in their lives.
- Every area incorporates the views of children and young people, families and family networks into assessments, plans and decision making.
- Every area seeks the views of parents and carers to understand the kind of protection they believe the children and young people in their family need. Family networks are listened to so as to understand their perspective on the care being provided by parents and carers, the challenges to providing an appropriate standard of care and the protection that children in their family need.
- Every area considers the views of children, young people and families, and family networks, before a case is taken to court and throughout court proceedings.
- Every area provides regular information to children, young people and their families on the decisions being made about their lives, so they are clear what is happening, how decisions are made, and why.

## How senior leaders should achieve this outcome in practice

- Leaders know how well children and young people are protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation in and outside of their homes. Leaders are engaged with practice supervisors and practitioners so that they have their 'fingers on the pulse' of practice quality.
- Leaders support practice supervisors and practitioners by creating a culture that is both determined to protect children and young people, and which recognises the challenge of keeping children and young people safe in circumstances where there can be a high degree of uncertainty.
- Leaders model strong, compassionate and collaborative relationships in their own organisations and with other agencies, so that where support services are jointly commissioned and delivered, the needs of children and young people experiencing abuse, neglect or exploitation can be met.
- Leaders support critical challenge within their own organisation and with other agencies. In doing so, leaders encourage openness, respect and humility, so that everyone can share information, learn from others, and question assumptions, so that there are robust plans to protect children and young people from harm.
- Leaders provide an effective framework to oversee robust investigations where there are concerns about abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They are confident that there is decisive and rapid action to keep children and young people safe.
- Leaders organise services so that decisions about what must happen to protect children and young people are led by skilled and experienced practitioners, and that responses protect individuals and address the context in which harm is taking place. Leaders identify and use social work expertise to protect children and young people from harm.
- Leaders recognise that working with children and young people experiencing harm is complex. They support their workforce to navigate this complexity, so that practice supervisors and practitioners are equipped to understand and identify what constitutes harm and make decisions and intervene effectively to increase safety.
- Leaders are mindful of the impact of child protection enquiries on families, and work with safeguarding partners to analyse data to reflect on local practice, so that enquiries are effective and only happen when they are needed.

- Leaders put clear information sharing processes in place in their local authority and support safeguarding partners to identify, share and discuss relevant information and data between partner agencies.
- Leaders oversee robust decision-making so that the Public Law Outline is used in an effective and timely manner, so that a case only goes to court when all other child protection options have been explored and where it is in the child's best interest.
- Leaders recognise that children in care, for whom they have corporate parenting responsibilities, can experience abuse, neglect and exploitation, including when they are being cared for by the local authority. Leaders are diligent and determined to prevent circumstances where children and young people could experience harm, to identify it where it is happening, and to take rapid action, including in how commissioned services are managed, so children and young people are protected. As corporate parents, leaders work in partnership with other agencies to protect children and young people in their care and commit to shared learning so that practice can continually improve.
- Leaders encourage a culture of curiosity, learning and reflection, so that the organisation and individuals can improve practice. Leaders do not blame their workforce when there are serious incidents and focus instead on identifying and sharing learning and adapting systems and practice to improve responses to abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Leaders work closely with their whole workforce to identify and address barriers to support for marginalised groups. They understand that some groups may be less willing to engage with services that could help to keep children and young people safe and work to overcome this.

#### *Responding to harm outside of the home*

- Leaders create a shared understanding of harm outside the home, in partnership with other agencies, and work collaboratively to develop a shared strategic response that protects children and young people. Leaders are mindful of how data is collected, used, and shared across organisations, and take action so that strategic responses are ethical.
- Leaders provide services that put the needs of children and young people first, recognising that many children are perceived, and treated, as older than they are but that they are first and foremost children in need of help and protection. Leaders understand that the likelihood of harm outside the home is more acute for some groups of children and young people, and that some are more likely to be

mistakenly perceived as adults, which can be a barrier to accessing help and support.

- Leaders understand that parents, carers and family networks are often not recognised as sources of support when children and young people face harm outside of the home. They model a strategic commitment to approaching parents, carers and family networks as partners who can protect children and young people, wherever it is safe to do so.
- Leaders understand and address the possibility that children and young people are blamed for the harm they are experiencing, are criminalised, or have their needs overlooked due to complex circumstances where they are also involved in instigating harm.
- Leaders recognise the importance of collaboration with local communities, voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations, the Youth Offending Service, and colleagues working in education, health, and policing, to meet the needs of some children and young people. Leaders use these relationships to create safe places for children and young people and streamline local services to avoid unnecessary duplication.

#### **How practice supervisors should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practice supervisors know how their teams are working with children and young people to protect them from abuse, neglect, and harm in and outside of their homes. Practice supervisors are concerned with the quality of practice.
- Practice supervisors recognise and proactively address the high degree of uncertainty involved in protecting children and young people, supporting practitioners and other agencies to manage anxiety and deliver proportionate interventions to increase safety.
- Practice supervisors build strong relationships with key individuals in other organisations and use these relationships to effectively identify, share and discuss relevant information and data between partner agencies. They recognise the limits to their own knowledge and skills, encourage critical challenge amongst their teams and with other organisations and seek the expertise and insights of other agencies where it is needed.
- Practice supervisors oversee robust investigations where there are concerns about abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Alongside practitioners and other agencies, they engage in critical challenge and take decisive and rapid action to keep children and young people safe.

- Practice supervisors remain mindful of the impact of child protection enquiries on families and reflect on how enquiries are used in local practice so that they take place only when they are needed.
- Practice supervisors work with peers and their teams so that practitioners with the right skill set are assigned to support children, young people, and families. Practice supervisors deploy qualified social workers to protect children and young people from harm.
- Practice supervisors help practitioners to identify when the Public Law Outline is needed. Decisions to progress to the Public Law Outline are effective and timely, and only take place when all other child protection options have been explored and where it is in the child's best interest.
- Practice supervisors understand their corporate parenting responsibilities for children in care, and work with leaders and practitioners to prevent children and young people from experiencing harm. They are alert to circumstances where children and young people in care are vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation. They support practitioners to critically analyse and reflect on situations where children and young people might need protection and take rapid action, in partnership with other agencies, to address harm where it is happening.
- Practice supervisors provide supervision to facilitate curiosity, learning and reflection, and build on the strengths of practitioners, helping teams to navigate their professional authority with care and compassion. Practice supervisors focus on learning, rather than blaming practitioners if there are serious incidents.
- Practice supervisors champion inclusion and promote the rights of children, young people and families across their own organisation and with other agencies.

#### *Responding to harm outside of the home*

- Practice supervisors address barriers to support for children and young people, recognising that some are perceived, and treated, as older than they are. Practice supervisors know that the likelihood of harm outside the home is more acute for some groups of children and young people, and some are more likely to be mistakenly perceived as adults. They work with practitioners to address barriers to support for these groups.
- Practice supervisors advocate for children and young people when responding to harm outside of the home. They address issues where children and young people are criminalised or blamed for their experiences, and champion careful consideration of how information and data about their lives is shared across organisations.

- Practice supervisors promote consideration of parents, carers and family networks as partners who can protect children and young people, and support practitioners to identify how these relationships can make a difference when children and young people face harm outside of the home.
- Practice supervisors are proactive in identifying and building relationships with local charities and voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations, the Youth Service, and colleagues working in education, health, and policing, recognising that some of these organisations can help to meet the needs of children and young people.

### **How practitioners should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practitioners understand the distinction between safeguarding, which includes all activity to promote the welfare of children, and child protection, which is focussed on addressing the significant harm that children might experience. Practitioners make use of local processes to take rapid action to protect children and young people. Practitioners consider how children’s experiences within their families and family networks can interplay with harm outside of the home and identify what needs to change to protect children.
- Practitioners are confident to use their knowledge and skills to respond to actual or likely significant harm. Practitioners conduct enquiries, and working with partner agencies, to consider the duration, severity, and frequency of harm. Practitioners develop robust and manage plans to protect children and young people and are mindful to avoid drift and delay.
- Practitioners draw on the expertise and insights of colleagues in children’s social care and partner agencies, to enrich their understanding of families’ needs. Practitioners recognise the limits of their own knowledge and skills and ask for help when they need it. Practitioners confidently provide and seek critical challenge, engaging with colleagues in their organisation and other agencies, to challenge assumptions and test plans to protect children and young people from harm.
- Practitioners are confident to build strong relationships with children, young people and families, to understand their daily lives. Practitioners engage in frequent and meaningful direct work and observation to communicate effectively with children and young people of different ages and abilities (including children who are not yet verbal, or children with special educational needs and disabilities which affect communication). Practitioners identify the strengths within a child or young person’s life, and their aspirations for the future, so they are seen as a whole individual, not just as someone experiencing harm.

- Practitioners integrate their help and protection roles with confidence and compassion, making good use of their professional authority, clearly conveying their concerns to parents, carers, family networks and other agencies so everyone is clear about what needs to change in children and young people's lives.
- Practitioners use professional curiosity and critical analysis to challenge themselves to consider all relevant evidence to understand and explore the circumstances of a child or young person's life, recognising that how their circumstances appear may not reflect their reality. Practitioners remain alert to the possibility that children and young people are experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation as a result of actions by parents, carers or other individuals in their lives.
- Practitioners seek, share, and analyse information proactively and discuss with partner agencies to build a full picture of a child or young person's experiences. They share information in a way that takes into account ethical considerations and any disproportionality in its use, which may affect minority groups.
- Practitioners make use of the Public Law Outline in a timely and effective way, helping families to understand why it is necessary, and what needs to happen to avoid children and young people entering care. Practitioners only progress to this stage, when all other child protection options have been explored and where it is in the child's best interest.
- Practitioners recognise the corporate parenting responsibilities for children in care and are determined to protect children and young people from harm. They build strong relationships with the children and young people they support, understand their lives and are alert to situations where they may be vulnerable. They work with children and young people, those caring for them, and partner agencies, to increase their safety and address harm where it is happening.
- Practitioners are mindful of how discrimination may affect how children, young people and families experience support from children's social care. Practitioners recognise how their own professional beliefs, views and expectations may influence their practice and decision-making. Practitioners understand the impact of economic and social circumstances of families and use this insight to build relationships, so that the support they offer can be effective.

#### *Responding to harm outside of the home*

- Practitioners seek to understand the context in which harm is happening to children and young people, including consideration of coercion, responses to

adversity and trauma, as well as the impact of special educational needs and disabilities.

- Practitioners are confident to respond to situations where children and young people are involved in the harm towards others and remember that first and foremost, they are children in need of help and protection. Practitioners remain curious about what is driving their behaviour so as to provide support that meets their needs.
- Practitioners approach parents, carers and the family networks as partners who can protect children and young people when they are facing harm outside of the home, wherever it is safe to do so. Practitioners help families to understand exploitation so they can better meet the needs of their children and young people.
- Practitioners understand the risks that individual children and young people are blamed for the harm they are experiencing, are criminalised, or have their needs ignored due to complex circumstances where young people are also involved in instigating harm. Practitioners act as advocates for the children and young people they are supporting, so that services can meet their needs.
- Practitioners offer children and young people resources and activities in their local area and support them to build strong relationships with friends and family networks, so they can develop a sense of community, respect and belonging.

## Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

### What this outcome is about

Children's social care provide homes that offer love, care, protection, and stability for children and young people who are cared for by the local authority, or who are care leavers. The care that children and young people receive helps to address experiences of adversity and trauma and gives them the foundations for a healthy, happy, life.

### Summary of this outcome

For children and young people who cannot remain living with their families, in family networks or kinship care, local authorities provide the care they need. Children in care, who are looked after by the local authority, and young people who are care leavers, need the same love, protection and stability as any other child or young person. The local authority, as the corporate parent, is responsible for making sure that where children live, and who cares for them, can meet their needs, and that as they transition to adulthood, they have the right support in place to thrive. To do this effectively, practitioners build relationships with children and young people to get to know them and understand their interests and aspirations.

Children in care and care leavers all need adults in their lives who are ambitious for them to reach their potential, and can offer lifelong, loving relationships. Achieving positive outcomes for care leavers and enabling them to meet their potential starts with effective support when children and young people are in care. **For this reason, we have one outcome focused on both children in care and care leavers.**

Children and young people who cannot live with their birth families often experience barriers in relation to their education, health and their long-term stability, and they can be vulnerable to exploitation. These barriers persist after children leave care too. As the corporate parent, local authorities should establish a strong ethos of long-term support, collaborating closely with education leaders and practitioners, including Virtual School Heads to help children and young people to access appropriate education, employment and training to achieve their aspirations and goals. Local authorities and health partners, including the local Integrated Care Board, should work together to make sure that children and young people have access to health services to improve their mental and physical health, and when leaving care, health assessments are part of their pathway planning. Local authorities should also work closely with housing partners to support care leavers, so they have barrier-free access to suitable good-quality housing.

A growing number of children in care, or young people leaving care are those who are, or have been, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Whilst in the care of a local

authority, these children and young people should be afforded full access to the care and services to which they are entitled. Support should identify and address their needs, reflecting their immigration status and potential future pathway.

## **Expectations for practice**

### **Responding to the voices of children, young people, and families**

- Every area asks children and young people about where they want to live and what is important to them in a home, if they cannot remain living with their family, family network or kinship carers. These conversations are conducted with sensitivity and explore children and young people's identity and background, avoiding assumptions about what children and young people might want without talking to them first.
- Every area has clear expectations and processes, so that children and young people receive regular information about the decisions being made about their lives, so they are clear what is happening and why. Decisions are explained sensitively to children and young people and attention is paid to barriers that children with special educational needs and disabilities may face in receiving and understanding information and decisions being made about their lives.
- Every area listens to the views of families and family networks when children and young people need to be cared for by the local authority, so that appropriate plans, which are in children and young people's best interests, can be made. Clear and sensitive information and advice is able for families and family networks to understand the decisions being made for children and young people.
- Every area recognises, and has clear expectations and processes, so that the important insights of kinship carers, foster carers and residential children's home staff and supported accommodation providers are used to helping inform plans and decisions for children and young people.
- Every area gives children and young people regular opportunities to share their hopes, dreams, and aspirations, and this informs individual support and the design and commissioning of local services. This includes through the provision of children in care councils.
- Every area invites children and young people to be involved in identifying training, development and support needs for foster carers, residential children's home staff, supported accommodation providers and key workers. They are given opportunities to be involved in the programmes that support carers to improve their knowledge and skills to provide better standards of love, care and support.

- Every area supports children and young people to articulate their views, including through access to independent advocacy (with services available to support those with communication difficulties), so they are aware of their right to advocacy and know what to do and who to talk to if they are unhappy or if they do not feel listened to. Advocacy services meet the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services.
- Every area supports kinship carers to share their views and experiences to inform how local services are designed and delivered.
- Every area supports foster carers and adopters to share their views and experiences on the services they have accessed, to inform how they are designed and delivered.

### **How senior leaders should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Leaders champion corporate parenting and act as corporate parents themselves, working with partner agencies to create a culture where everyone is ambitious to be the best 'parent' for children in care and care leavers, asking themselves whether the services and support provided for children in care and care leavers would be good enough for their own child. Leaders draw on the services of the whole local authority and partners agencies, to provide the best possible support for them to thrive.
- Leaders commission services in such a way that all those providing care or support for children and young people, including disabled children, work to the best standards of care, hold the highest aspirations for the lives of children and young people and work towards meeting the outcomes within the National Framework.
- Leaders undertake sufficiency planning and work with other local authorities and partners to jointly invest in care options that meet the future needs of children. Leaders commission and manage services so that placements in their area can meet the individual needs of children and young people. Leaders are confident to operate in accordance with legislation, guidance and best practice to care for children and young people.
- Leaders design services with Integrated Care Boards so that appropriate provision for children with complex needs can be jointly commissioned and funded.
- Leaders build strong relationships with local health services so that children in care and care leavers can access the physical and mental health support they need.

- Leaders build strong relationships with Youth Offending teams so that children in secure settings are supported by a multi-agency approach and have step-down plans in place.
- Leaders prioritise making sure children in care and care leavers have, and can maintain, lifelong loving relationships with family and friends that go beyond the professionals in their lives. Where these do not exist, leaders help services identify and establish support networks, including through the use of family finding, mentoring or befriending services.
- Leaders are confident in how they commission services, so that those providing care or support to children and young people, such as foster carers, residential children's home staff, supported accommodation staff and staff in health settings, have the training, knowledge, and skills, to provide safe, loving and supportive care.
- Leaders set expectations that children in care and care leavers have access to information, advice, and support to share their views on decisions about their care and understand their rights, including through the use of advocacy services.
- Leaders notify other local authorities when children are moved to their area, when this is the most appropriate placement for the child, and it is consistent with their care plan<sup>10</sup>. They provide education and health partners with relevant information so that children's need can be met. Where children are moved out of area, leaders retain clear visibility of the children in their care so that appropriate love, care, protection and support remains in place.
- Leaders prioritise making sure that children and young people can live and stay in a home that meets their needs as long as possible, remaining close to, and connected with their family network. This includes supporting children and young people to remain at their school, or if this is not possible, making decisions about school places ahead of moving.
- Leaders promote reunification with family and family networks for children and young people, wherever it is safe and in their best interests.
- Leaders are proactive in providing support, care, and accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and work collaboratively with peers in

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<sup>10</sup> [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010 Part 3 Regulation 13](#)

other areas to meet the needs of these children, and commission relevant services.

- Leaders direct services so that where long-term fostering, or adoption, is the right permanence option, children are found permanent loving families as quickly as possible. Leaders work with Regional Adoption Agencies to actively remove barriers to children being adopted, including addressing unnecessary bureaucracy in matching and recruiting sufficient adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds.
- Leaders support creative and innovative practice that is tenacious in engaging children, young people and families, to avoid scenarios where deprivation of liberty orders are the only reasonable option. Leaders help practice supervisors and practitioners to reflect on the seriousness of deprivation of liberty. They work collaboratively with other agencies, including health, to develop personalised plans to meet the child or young person's individual needs, and consider how children and young people will experience this severe action, and whether alternatives would better meet their needs. Where deprivation of liberty is the only option, leaders direct practice supervisors and practitioners so appropriate step-down arrangements are in place.
- Leaders are ambitious for the outcomes of children in their care and champion their support and access to appropriate education, training, and employment. Virtual School Heads are empowered and supported in their leadership roles to work across children's social care, and with educational settings, to help improve the attendance and attainment of children and young people in care.

#### *Support for care leavers*

- Leaders commission services to put young people's voices and needs at the centre of decision making as they transition to adulthood, so effective support is wrapped around those leaving care. Leaders direct services and work with partners so that young people are prepared for the challenges of living independently, including where care leavers need timely assessments to access support from adult social care. Leaders champion services to strengthen strong, loving relationships for care leavers, with help available to build networks of support with friends, family and their wider community.
- Leaders support care leavers to live in safe, suitable accommodation, with a wide range of accommodation options available to young people and appropriate levels of support that meet care leavers' individual needs. They facilitate joint working with housing services to develop a comprehensive range of accommodation options to meet care leavers' needs. This could include giving care leavers priority

for social housing and the use of rent guarantor schemes to support care leavers to access private rented accommodation. Every effort is made to avoid care leavers becoming homeless.

- Leaders establish and maintain strong relationships with health services so care leavers can access help when they need it. Leaders are determined to use the resources and tools they have available to tackle disparities in the physical and mental-health outcomes of care leavers.
- Leaders champion ambitious changes to increase the number of care leavers in further education, higher education and apprenticeships. As far as possible, leaders work with local partners to remove barriers to these opportunities, creating and improving access to education, employment, and training, including within the local authority.
- Leaders work closely with Jobcentres on an up-to-date care leaver protocol in place, making personal advisors aware of the support available through the Jobcentre.
- Leaders recognise the needs of care leavers who are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. They commission services to best meet their needs, reflecting their immigration status and potential future pathway.

#### **How practice supervisors should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practice supervisors are ambitious for children and young people in care and motivate their teams to advocate for the best opportunities and outcomes for children and young people in their care. Practice supervisors swiftly address complacency so that the support available for children and young people is of the highest standard.
- Practice supervisors set a culture that expects practitioners to get to know the children and young people they are working with, understand what they care about and need, and design individualised support that is in their best interests and supports their overall health and wellbeing, including for disabled children.
- Practice supervisors use the resources of their local authority to best effect, so that practitioners are supported to find the right home for children and young people who cannot remain living with their families. Practice supervisors prioritise care provided in loving family environments for children and young people, that is near to safe family networks.
- Practice supervisors champion and as far as possible, support children and young people to maintain lifelong loving relationships with family networks and friends that go beyond the involvement of professionals in their lives. Where these do not

exist, practice supervisors prompt practitioners to work creatively to strengthen and establish relationships.

- Practice supervisors recognise the significant impact on the whole family when children and young people enter care. Practice supervisors lead by example and encourage practitioners to take time to build relationships with the whole family, treating them with care and compassion. Practice supervisors are committed to providing appropriate information and support to parents and carers with respect and without judgement, when children or young people have entered care.
- Practice supervisors consider all options for reunification of children and young people with their family and family networks where safe to do so. They provide creative ideas, constructive challenge and advice to practitioners to overcome complex circumstances that would hinder reunification and provide ongoing support post-reunification to support families.
- Practice supervisors use their knowledge of the regulatory and legal frameworks of children's social care, to help practitioners understand and promote the rights of children and young people, including through providing them with information, advice and support to share their views on decisions about their care, and access advocacy services, including where children are in care out of their local authority area or at a distance.
- Practice supervisors understand the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and support practitioners to provide services, so children and young people can access the support they need that reflects their immigration status and legal entitlements.
- Practice supervisors foster creative and innovative practice with children, young people and families, to avoid scenarios where deprivation of liberty orders are the only reasonable option. They are mindful of the seriousness and impact of deprivation of liberty for children and young people. Practice supervisors are confident in collaborating with other agencies, including health, to develop personalised plans to meet children and young people's individual needs. They consider how children and young people will experience this severe action, and whether alternatives can be used to better meet their needs. They identify the step-down arrangements needed if a deprivation of liberty orders is the only suitable option.
- Practice supervisors are committed to working with Virtual School Heads and designated teachers to promote the attendance and attainment for children and young people in care.

### *Support for care leavers*

- Practice supervisors manage effective planning and decision-making for children and young people as they approach and transition to adulthood, allowing sufficient time for plans to be developed and implemented before a child turns 18. Practice supervisors support practitioners to discuss the decisions and opportunities that care leavers will need to consider early on, so that there is time to listen to their views and establish support.
- Practice supervisors liaise and partner effectively with adult social care so that assessments are completed in a timely manner and care leavers can continue to have appropriate support that meets their needs and aspirations.
- Practice supervisors partner with housing services on a comprehensive range of accommodation options to meet care leavers' needs. Every effort is made to avoid care leavers becoming homeless.
- Practice supervisors build relationships with local health services, helping them to understand the needs of care leavers and increase access to health support. Practice supervisors are mindful of tackling disparities in physical and mental-health outcomes for care leavers.
- Practice supervisors support the development of dedicated and bespoke pathways for care leavers that support young people to access education, employment and training that allows them to realise their ambitions for their own futures, including working with Jobcentres and employers.
- Practice supervisors recognise the needs of care leavers who are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and provide support reflecting their immigration status and potential future pathway.

### **How practitioners should achieve this outcome in practice**

- Practitioners identify homes for children and young people who cannot live with their family or family network that provide them with safe, loving, and supportive care. In identifying where children and young people can live, including disabled children, practitioners promote safe relationships with siblings and family networks, and as far as possible find homes that are near to these individuals. For many children and young people, meeting their needs in this way will mean prioritising kinship care or foster care, over residential settings.
- Practitioners help children and young people to develop and nurture loving relationships throughout their time in care. Practitioners work with families and

family networks, supporting them to access services that aid their wellbeing. Wherever possible, practitioners promote reunification.

- Practitioners work with colleagues in residential children's homes and supported accommodation providers and provide support to foster carers, kinship carers and adopters, to help children and young people to maintain relationships with their family and their networks.
- Practitioners use their knowledge, skills, and experience to respond to mental health problems, and confidently signpost to help from health professionals, so children in care can readily access the specialist support they need from health services.
- Practitioners hold supportive and sensitive conversations to prepare children and young people for adulthood, involving them at every stage so they can understand their individual options for where they can live and how they can be financially stable. This includes working with housing services and Jobcentres, as well as partnering with adult social care to support some young people with disabilities. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children approaching adulthood, practice supervisors support practitioners to help children and young people understand how their immigration status may influence their potential future pathway.
- Practitioners prioritise helping children in care access independent visitor schemes, family-finding programmes, advocacy services, peer support and mentoring and befriending services.
- Practitioners keep a clear and comprehensive record of decisions and life events in the lives of children and young people, so that they can access and understand their histories in this way, should they wish to.
- Practitioners talk to children and young people in care so they are aware of, and able to use, independent local authority complaints procedures. Staff listen to complaints carefully and learn from them.
- Practitioners support adopted children to bond with their adopted parents from the first time they meet and get the support they need, when they need it.
- Practitioners support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with an awareness of their needs and experiences. They help children and young people form networks in the local area, feel part of their community and access services.
- Practitioners prioritise giving kinship and foster carers delegated authority to make day to day decisions regarding the children and young people in their care. Any information that may be required to enable a foster carer to take a decision about a child is provided promptly.

- Practitioners only consider pursuing deprivation of liberty orders for children to live in secure homes as a last resort, when it is in their best interests, and when all other alternatives have been exhausted or determined to be unsuitable. They are conscious of the seriousness and impact of deprivation of liberty for children and young people and work with practice supervisors so clear and appropriate step-down arrangements are in place.
- Practitioners have high, long-term, ambitions for children and young people and draw on the expertise of Virtual School Heads and designated teachers to improve their attendance and attainment. Through every phase of education practitioners support children and young people to access appropriate education settings, training and, in the long-term, employment.

#### *Support for care leavers*

- Practitioners help care leavers to develop and nurture loving relationships with family networks and friends, throughout their time in care and beyond. Wherever possible, practitioners help care leavers to make use of family-finding programmes, advocacy services, peer support, mentoring and befriending services.
- Practitioners support children and young people who need the support of adult social care to be assessed in a timely way so their needs can be met.
- Practitioners are committed to helping care leavers to live in safe, suitable accommodation. Care leavers are supported to access a range of housing options, including Staying Put, Staying Close (where available) and supported lodgings. Every effort is made to avoid care leavers becoming homeless.
- Practitioners use their knowledge, skills, and experience to respond to mental health problems, and support care leavers so they can readily access health services.
- Practitioners support care leavers to access appropriate education, employment, and training. This could include working with Jobcentres and employers and helping care leavers to identify and apply for opportunities, including schemes designed for care leavers, such as those available through the Care Leaver Covenant.

## Glossary of terms

**Abuse** - A form of maltreatment of a child or young person. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse, including where they see, hear, or experience its effects.

Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or extra-familial contexts by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

**Care Proceedings** - When a local authority needs to get involved with a family to keep a child safe, they may initiate court proceedings, known as care proceedings.

**Child in Need** – defined in section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children’s social care services, or the child is disabled.

**Child in Need plan** – Child In Need plans set out the support to be provided to a Child in Need and their family by children’s services.

**Child protection** - Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

**Children** - Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

**Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) Guardian** - When working with children in respect of public law legal proceedings, the Cafcass worker is known as a children’s guardian. The guardian’s most important role is to make sure that local authority arrangements and decisions for and about children protect them, promote their welfare and are in their best interests.

**Children’s homes** - The Care Standards Act 2000 provides that ‘an establishment is a children’s home... if it provides care and accommodation wholly or mainly for children’.

**Children’s Social Care** – Children’s social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect children and young people by intervening decisively when they

are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

**Corporate parent** - the term used to describe the local authority who has responsibilities to support looked after children and care leavers in a way that other children are supported by their parents. Corporate parenting principles are set out in <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/section/1/enactedSection> 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

**Domestic abuse** - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced the first ever statutory definition of domestic abuse (section 1 of the Act). The statutory definition is clear that domestic abuse may be a single incident or a course of conduct which can encompass a wide range of abusive behaviours, including a) physical or sexual abuse; b) violent or threatening behaviour; c) controlling or coercive behaviour; d) economic abuse; and e) psychological, emotional or other abuse. Under the statutory definition, both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and they must be 'personally connected' (as defined in section 2 of the 2021 Act). The definition ensures that different types of relationships are captured, including ex-partners and family members.

**Early help** - In the current system, early help is non-statutory multi-agency support provided by local authorities and partners to children and families. Early help is often delivered within universal services at lower levels of need.

**Extra-familial harm** - Children may be at risk of or experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse and exploitation in contexts outside their families (see glossary definition of extra-familial contexts). While there is no legal definition for the term extra-familial harm, it is widely used to describe different forms of harm that occur outside the home. Children can be vulnerable to multiple forms of extra-familial harm from both adults and/or other children.

Examples of extra-familial harm may include (but are not limited to): criminal exploitation, such as county lines and financial exploitation; serious violence; modern slavery and trafficking; online harm; sexual exploitation; child-on-child (non-familial) sexual abuse and other forms of harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children towards their peers; abuse, and/or coercive control, children may experience in their own intimate relationships (sometimes called teenage relationship abuse), and the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation.

**Family group decision making** - This is the umbrella term for family-led decision-making forums, where a family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment, and private family time to make a plan to response to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. At pre-proceedings

stage, successful family group decision making also includes having an independent coordinator. Family group decision making can take different forms; family group conference is one model. The Department for Education does not prescribe a specific model, but a process which follows the steps set out above.

**Family network** - A group of people close to a child, made up of relatives and also non-related connected people (where connected people has the same definition used in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 in addition to close family friends who have a connection with the child). A family network could include step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends.

**Kinship care** - Kinship care is any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term.

The following are all types of kinship care arrangement, however this list is not exhaustive:

- a) Informal kinship care arrangements (not approved foster care) including:
  - i. A private family arrangement in which a close relative who does not hold parental responsibility, raises the child and
    - the local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child; and
    - where a Family Court has not made an order in respect to the care of the child.
  - ii. Where a child under the age of 16 is being provided with accommodation for less than 28 days by an individual in their own home who is not a close relative.
  - iii. Where a 16 or 17-year-old is being provided with accommodation by an individual who is not a close relative in their own home.
- b) A private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative\* of the child looks after the child for 28 days or more\*\* (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989)\*\*\*
- c) Where a 'lives with' child arrangements order\*\*\*\* has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent (see glossary in annex [X] regarding who is a parent).
- d) Where a special guardianship order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child's special guardian.
- e) Where a child is a 'looked after child' by virtue of either an interim or final care order or being accommodated by the local authority (usually under section 20 of the

Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as 'kinship foster care' or 'family and friends foster care'):

- i. The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
- ii. The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment.

f) Where an adoption order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

\* In relation to private fostering, "relative" has the meaning given in section 105 of the Children Act 1989. It includes only the following: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership), and stepparent (a married stepparent, including a civil partner).

\*\* For the purposes of this kinship definition, the term private fostering arrangement includes only individuals accommodating a child. It does not apply to organisations or bodies.

\*\*\* 16- and 17-year-olds who are disabled will be deemed to be in a private fostering arrangement.

\*\*\*\* Pursuant to section 8 of the Children Act 1989.

**Looked-after child** - A child is looked after by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (section 20 Children Act 1989) or are subject to a care order (defined in section 22(1) Children Act 1989).

**Multi-agency working** - Work across organisations to meet children's needs including effective information sharing, joint decision making and co-ordinated interventions.

**Multi-disciplinary working** - A range of practitioners and professionals from different backgrounds working together to enable the best outcomes for children.

**Parent** - the definition of parent includes:

- 'any birth parent, with or without parental responsibility for the child', 'Any stepparent, with or without parental responsibility for the child, who is in a subsisting relationship with the birth parent'
- 'any adoptive parent'
- 'any parent by virtue of section 42 or section 43 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, whether or not they have parental responsibility for the child'

**Relative** - The Children Act 1989 (section 105) defines a relative as in relation to a child, meaning a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent. This guidance uses this definition and includes cousins when referring to relatives.

**Safeguarding** - Defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- protecting children from maltreatment, whether the risk of harm comes from within the child's family and/or outside (from the wider community), including online
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

**Safeguarding Partners** - A safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 as: (a) the local authority, (b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area, and (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area. The 3 safeguarding partners should agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning, including from serious child safeguarding incidents. To fulfil this role, the 3 safeguarding partners must set out how they will work together and with any relevant agencies as well as arrangements for conducting local reviews.

**Section 17** - section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of "children in need" in their area.

**Section 20** - Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 sets out when a Local Authority must provide accommodation for a child in need within their area if that child needs it, due to the child being lost/abandoned or there being no person with parental responsibility for that child.

**Section 31** - section 31 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the circumstances in which a court may order that a child who is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm be placed in the care, or under the supervision of a local authority.

**Section 47** - Where a child in a local authority's areas is subject to an emergency protection order, is in police custody or maybe suffering or likely to suffer significant harm) local authority social care services must make enquiries and decide if any action must be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. This will include multi-agency assessment, and where appropriate multi-agency strategy discussions, planning and review.

**Secure children's homes** - Secure children's homes are residential homes for vulnerable children aged between 10 and 20. These homes restrict children's liberty in order to ensure their safety. Secure children's homes are run by local authorities, voluntary organisations, or they are privately run.

**Working Together** - Working Together to Safeguard Children, is the statutory guidance that sets out expectations for the system that provides help, support and protection for children and their families, giving practitioners clarity about what is required of them individually and how they need to work in partnership with each other to deliver effective services. Working Together applies at every level from senior leaders to those in direct practice with families and across all agencies and organisations that come into contact with children.

**Young Carer** - A young carer is a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except generally where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work). Young adult carers are aged 16 to 25 and may have different support needs as they transition to adulthood.



Department  
for Education

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