



Restorative strength- based conferences

A guide for professionals

What is restorative practice:

Dorset Children's services are working with children and families in a Restorative and strength-based approach as part of the Dorset Children Thrive Practice Framework. The Framework will set out how they provide interventions and support to children and families by emphasising the importance of high support and challenge, placing relationships at the heart of what they do.

What does this mean for conferences?

A restorative strength-based approach means avoiding blame and judgements whilst having high expectations of what can be achieved and everyone's contributions to making things better. This will mean understanding the strengths in the system (in and around the family) whilst honestly and openly exploring the challenges – so as to support each other to deliver change. It is key the family are supported to lead the meeting by identifying what needs to change and how they feel about the concerns that need to be addressed.

We want to reduce process including any reports being shared in conference so it avoids taking valuable time that can be used to support the family and provide solutions to reducing risk. How children and families are progressing with health, school and other areas are important and will be expected to be fully captured in the reports and will not necessarily be discussed in the meeting unless pertinent to do so.

What will a restorative strength-based conference look like:

The Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer chairs the meeting and will be key to facilitating how harm is discussed and the impact, ensuring this remains child focused.

The chair will conduct the conference with the following in mind and an expectation of what is required from professionals:

1. This is the families meeting and must focus on improving outcomes for the child/unborn/children/young person and everyone's responsibility to facilitate this
2. That everyone in the meeting holds the children at the heart of their discussions. The family will first describe the children and how things are for them from the parents/carers perspective
3. Children's direct views and contributions will be shared either directly or through an advocate, so we address what is important for them. Chairs will also consider unborn babies and how we recognise what is important for babies
4. What the issues/harm is that the conference needs to address and professionals to challenge in a supportive way of other areas the parents may not have considered
5. An understanding of the impact on the children so it is understood what needs to change/improve.
6. The family will have an opportunity to reflect how they feel about what they have heard and be supported by the chair to identify what strengths could be used to address the issues/harm or action required. Enabling an understanding of what better would look like.
7. And finally, what support the family requires from those in the meeting and what contributions everyone can make.

How I can contribute:

1. By ensuring reports are submitted at least 2 days prior to conference will enable a more focused discussion on the day to address the risk and needs rather than providing full updates in the meeting.
2. Consider the use of language and how you might frame a discussion about harm. Our approach is to support and empower the family, not to do to them or for them.

For example:

Instead of saying	Consider	What impact does this have
I am really concerned you haven't been taking Rosie to school every day and this is having a huge impact on her education.	<p>Tell us what has caused you not to be able to bring Rosie to School on a regular basis ?</p> <p>What help do you need to ensure Rosie attends every day or what do you think needs to happen to change this?</p>	By removing the blame and providing the family an opportunity to explain the challenges it enables them to tell professionals what needs to change and how they can do this or what support they need.
I am worried your lack of engagement means the children will continue to be at risk	What could you do that would reduce professionals' concerns to evidence you want things to be better?	Ensuring responsibility without criticising the family and avoiding antagonistic debate

3. Act as a facilitator, enable the family to identify solutions and respectfully challenge areas of risk or need that the family may not have considered, and in a strengths-based approach as suggested above.
4. Contribute to SMART planning that is outcome focused for the child, ensuring actions have purpose and impact that will reduce the risk and concerns identified. Be clear about what you can offer to the family in your role.
5. And finally, be clear about the level of risk and need, and your decisions about whether a Child Protection plan or Child In Need plan is required.

All professionals are key in supporting a restorative approach and further support or guidance can be accessed through Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers (QARO's) within Dorset Children's Services. Guides for Social workers will be detailed in the Children's Practice Framework on Tri-X documents

This document has been produced in collaboration with partners.