**Practice Guidance:   
What we would expect to see of a worker who is practising systemically**

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The worker should demonstrate constant curiosity; A constant questioning of things as they are or appear to be. Always considering “what else?” or “how else” something could be interpreted. They would be able to see things differently – they would have an ability to see through a wider lens, not just the one presented to them. This ability to “zoom in and zoom out” to information will help them place information gained into context. They will be able to reframe information positively, and challenge dominant narratives held either by other professionals or the families themselves.



It would be expected that before, during and after each visit, they would have an idea of questions they would like to ask, areas they would like to explore with the family, ways of testing out hypotheses they have constructed. They would view these hypotheses as more or less helpful, constantly re-evaluating them and putting pieces of the puzzle together, trying to make meaning out of information and understanding the family as they are. In this regard, this would be reflected in their language and communication, asking questions tentatively, using phrases such as “I wonder if…” or “I’m really curious about…”

A systemically trained worker will engage in direct work with families which is intentional and purposeful. Tools such as the cultural genogram, family timelines, circularity diagrams which track patterns and thought maps will all be regularly used tools. They will have the skills to notice patterns of behaviour, identify repeated scripts within families but also know how to use this knowledge to encourage awareness and subsequent change. Within this they will be able to evaluate the structure of the family, identifying who oversees the care of the children, who has which roles and responsibilities, where the power lies etc. They will be able to use this knowledge to reflect on the family’s normal operating level, their boundaries and rules. Any problems will be identified, and an intervention will be applied.



They would have an increased awareness of themselves as a practitioner. They know what they bring to the relationship and instead of working from an ‘us and them’ perspective, will be able to see things with a “what are we making together” standpoint. There is an emphasis on building good relationships.



The social GRACES will constantly be at the forefront of their thinking and practice. They will recognise that certain GRACES are more visible than others, some are unvoiced, some will have more influence over a person than others. They will ask questions about a person’s social GRACES so that they are understanding these influences. They will show recognition about how a different perspective can be found by looking at a case through a different ‘lens’.



They will be very aware and constantly reflecting on the power that their role beholds and how this is interpreted and reacted to by the families who they encounter. Being aware of this enables them to step aside from the ‘expert’ position and become more of a collaborative explorer with the family. They should seek to facilitate and encourage change. This encourages a joint responsibility with the family, for the family. However, this should not excuse them from having challenging conversations with families. When this is called for, they will approach the subject with more empathy, balancing power, and with a sense of wanting to understand rather than dictate what is going to happen next. Linked to this is a move away from linear thinking, of blame and shame, and a more holistic view of problems not being situated in an individual but being created and maintained by the system. They will adopt the view that the problem is the problem, not the person.

Instead of jumping straight in with solutions and what they think is the ‘best thing to do’ based on practice wisdom and “what worked well previously with family X” they should treat the family as the experts - asking what they have tried already, noticing strengths, coping strategies and resilience as a family unit.

In relation to risk, the professional will have an awareness of when they are striving for certainty in decision making, whether they are being defensive in their risk management or being collaborative with the families. This will be evidenced through them drafting up safety plans and written agreements with the family. They will be mindful of the Cycle of Change and where families/individuals are presently as to what intervention they are going to provide at that time to get the best outcomes. If families are resistance or hard to engage, language used to describe them will not be judgemental, but reflection will be sought to seek an understanding about why they may function in this way.

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**KEY POINTERS - What we would expect to see of a worker who is practising   
systemically**

Ensure the   
family are aware of where change is needed and are part of how this will be achieved

*Work from a joint responsibility,   
collaborative   
position*

Look for patterns;

be mindful of   
context &   
function of behaviours

Help families to   
reflect on their lives and develop  
awareness

Lots of   
curiosity

Formulate  
 hypotheses & keep testing them out; use them to inform work

*Ask questions in a thoughtful way: explore new possibilities &   
create difference in thinking*

Be strength based as well as risk focused

Ask “How can I be helpful?”

Recognise that there are multiple versions and   
perspective on a story/event

Use tools as   
interventions such as genograms, life maps and ecomaps

The family will be  
 recognised as the   
experts of their own lives

*Acknowledge the power differences*

*Seek to   
facilitate and   
encourage change by building on strengths*