

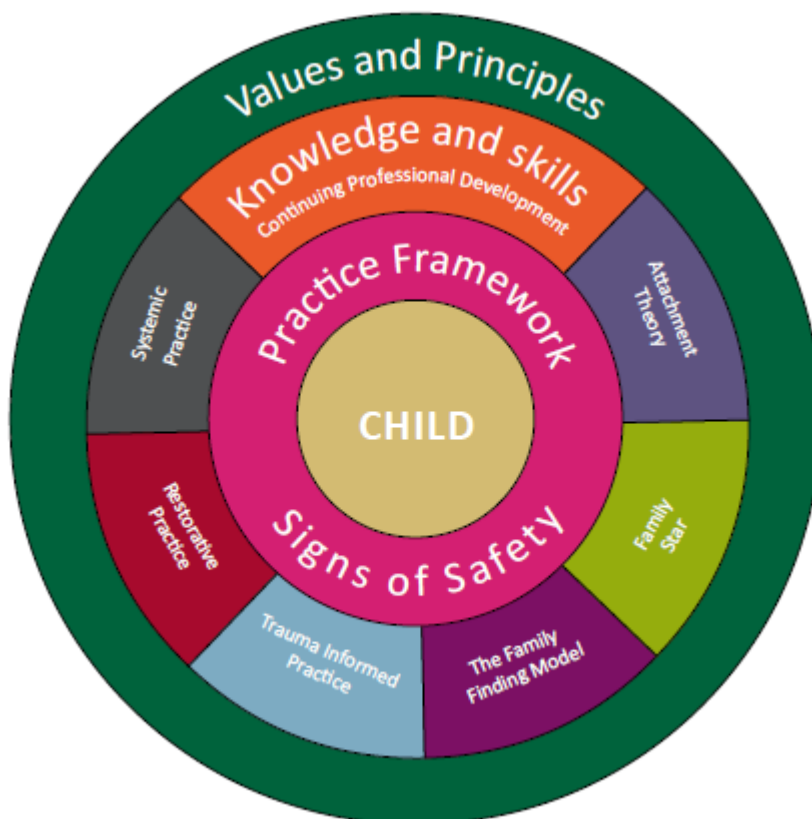
WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Wokingham's Practice Model for Children's Services

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Our vision:

Wokingham is a borough where all children and young people feel and are safe, are well cared for, emotionally healthy, resilient and achieving their potential, regardless of background.



Our values:

- Improving outcomes for children, young people and families is our priority
- We have high aspirations for every child
- We are responsive to need and performance information, managing resources effectively and efficiently
- We highly value and support our children's workforce across the partnership
- We work in partnership with professionals, children and young people and families to achieve our collective aims for children and young people

The principles on which the Signs of Safety Framework is based:

- **Respect service recipients as people worth doing business with** - Building effective relationships is key in effecting sustained change in a family. Maintaining the position that the family is capable of change can create a sense of hope and possibility.
- **Recognising that cooperation and partnership is possible even when differences exist** - Workers can build a relationship with family members without condoning the abuse in any way.
- **Recognise that all people have capacities and strengths** - All families have competencies and strengths. They keep their children safe, at least some, and usually most, of the time.
- **Maintain a focus on competency and cast a vision for excellence** - The focus of child protection work is always to increase safety. Maintain this orientation in thinking about the agency and the worker's role as well as the specific details and activities of the case work.
- **Learn what the other person needs and strives for** - Acknowledge the client's concerns and desires and use the service recipient's goals in creating a plan for action and motivating family members to change.
- **Remain curious and don't confuse case details with judgements** – Reserve judgement until as much information as possible has been gathered. Don't confuse these conclusions with the details of the case. Remember that others, particularly the family, will judge the details differently
- **Offer choices** - Avoid alienating service recipients with unnecessary coercion. Instead, offer choices about as many aspects of the casework as possible. This involves family members in the process and builds co-operation.
- **Practice from a stance of humility** - Eileen Munro commented "the major source of error in child protection is not being prepared to admit you may have it wrong". Child protection investigations need to take a questioning approach and remain open minded, they cannot be the formulation of a hypothesis and fitting the evidence to support that hypothesis.
- **Treat every engagement, call or meeting as an intervention and opportunity for growth** - View the interview as the intervention, and therefore recognise the interaction between the worker and the service recipients to be the key vehicle for change
- **Treat the practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions** - Continually aspire to implement the practice principles, but have the humility to recognise that even the most experienced worker will have to think and act carefully to implement them. Recognise that no-one gets it right all the time in child protection work

Signs of Safety Practice Framework:

Wokingham Children's Services and its partners have adopted the Signs of Safety approach as their overarching practice framework. This model represents the vision for the practice of all professionals working within Wokingham Children's Services and is closely aligned to the values and practice principles that underpin the Signs of Safety Practice framework. Signs of Safety is a way of working that supports families who need help raising their children and keeping them safe. Signs of Safety is about parents, their network of naturally connected support people and professionals working together to meet children and young people's needs in the best way possible.

Signs of Safety is a relationship based way of working that puts the child, their parents and connected people at the centre and gives them every opportunity to come up with their own

ideas and solutions. The Signs of Safety approach brings together a problem and solution focus within its practice framework by utilising a comprehensive approach to risk that:



- Is forensic as it explores harm and danger while at the same time finding strengths and safety
- Brings forward clearly articulated professional knowledge while also equally eliciting and drawing upon family knowledge and wisdom
- Is naturally holistic since it brings everyone (both professional and family member) to the assessment table

Signs of Safety can be adapted to Signs of Wellbeing (Child In Need and Early Help) or Signs of Success (Children In Care) and encourages the wider involvement of family and support networks to work together to achieve positive and long term change for children and young people.

Signs of Safety is an approach built on working relationships between families and professionals that uses **solution focussed and systemic questions** to identify what families and professionals might be worried about and to balance this with strengths to help think about and build child safety. Children, young people, parents and the wider family and friend networks are supported to find solutions and build **viable**, family owned, long term safety plans that focus on the **everyday lived experiences and care of children**. As part of the process social workers will work with children, young people and families to help them find naturally connected adults who will be involved in developing, refining and monitoring safety plans for the children.

Signs of Safety is a way of working, an approach, it is **how** we will practice; it is not just training, or using specific tools. Therefore a full implementation of Signs of Safety require a cultural shift in how we practice and how we think about practice. It affects all aspects of the organisation and requires a whole system implementation ensuring that we have the right policies, procedures, structures, support and tools in place to promote best practice.

Practitioners require and will need to continue to develop a range of skills in order to implement the Signs of safety approach in their assessment, planning and intervention with children and families. The skilful use of statutory authority and the ability to form good working relationships with children and families are essential skills and are central to the effective application of the Signs of Safety approach. The Signs of Safety approach incorporates a range of tools and strategies which require specialist knowledge and training including the use of mapping, children's tools, dealing with denied child abuse, using the Words and Pictures storyboard, deepening safety planning and identifying and developing safety networks.

Knowledge and Skill Base and Continuing Professional Development

All practitioners are responsible for continually updating their knowledge and skills by accessing the training and development opportunities that are available. The need to keep up to date with and understand the significance of new research is integral to good social work practice. Individual development needs can be identified via supervision and appraisals as well as a range of quality assurance activities. The Practice Model provides scope for social workers to evidence their learning and development within the KSS (Knowledge and Skills Statement) professional framework.

Relationships and effective direct work

Working within the Practice Model provides social workers with an opportunity to build strong and supportive professional relationships with families with the primary focus being on the safety of the child. The KSS describes relationships as being the *'bedrock of all support and child protection responses'*.

Communication

The Practice Model promotes good communication with social workers using skills through rapport building and the use of plain and jargon free language. This aligns with the KSS which also emphasises the need for open and honest communication, making sure that families are well informed.

Child development

Social work assessment within the Practice Model will draw on a social worker's knowledge of child development through observations and direct work with children. The KSS also advocates that social workers' knowledge of child development should inform effective direct work and help social workers to *'understand the emotional and physical world in which the child lives'*.

Adult mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability

The practice framework is a holistic assessment framework drawing on all factors which can impact on parental capacity. This aligns with the KSS which advocates for the need for social workers to *'synthesise multi- disciplinary judgements and use a range of strategies to help families facing these difficulties.'*

Abuse and neglect of children.

The Practice Model strongly promotes working in partnership with families to increase safety and reduce risk for children. The Signs of Safety *'Harm Matrix'* facilitates careful decision making and application of thresholds in cases of abuse and neglect. The KSS requires that social workers *'make robust assessments of risks and triangulate evidence'* to inform professional judgement.

Child and family assessment

The Practice Model provides a clear assessment framework and tools with a focus on a child's safety. This fits with the KSS which also states the need for workers to produce holistic assessments and use tools to support this work.

Analysis, decision-making, planning and review

The Practice Model is based upon evidence based practice which informs professional judgement and provides a range of tools to help practitioners with analysis and decision making and setting timescales for change (trajectories). This fits with the KSS which asserts that social workers use *'evidence and professional judgement to reach timely conclusions'*.

The role of supervision

The Practice Model promotes the use of group supervision which is designed to progress cases through group learning and reflection. The KSS advises on the need for social workers to extend their thinking beyond personal supervision to seek guidance *'from other sources'*.

Organisational context

The Practice Model is a whole service model which builds shared understanding and consistency in relation to working with families and professional networks to provide safety for their children. The KSS advocates for social workers *'to build effective working relationships to establish their professional credibility.'*

Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety has been developed from Solution Focussed Brief Therapies and Strength based interview techniques and it has a strong basis in systemic thinking. The use of solution focused questions are a key part of the Signs of Safety approach and it is therefore one of the key skills required by practitioners. Signs of Safety is underpinned and enhanced by knowledge and understanding of Attachment Theory, Systems Theory, Restorative Practice, Trauma Informed Practice, the Family Finding Model and use of the Family Star. These complement and deepen our ability to use the Signs of Safety approach and enhance outcomes for children.

Attachment Theory

The understanding of Attachment Theory is essential to social work practice; the understanding of human relationships and therefore the behaviours we display in all areas of our lives. The understanding of the emotional and internal makeup of both parents and children who have suffered separation, trauma or loss is key in being able to work with children and families to create and sustain change. It underpins all practice and informs the way in which we use strength based techniques to build relationships, conduct assessments and complete direct work with children and families.

Systemic Practice

Systemic Theory is aligned to the values and methodology of Signs of Safety. Systemic practice approaches problems practically, seeking to identify stagnant patterns of behaviour addressing those patterns directly, irrespective of analysis of cause. It focuses on relationships and communicating and the positive functioning in human systems, looking to bring out, share, and respect everyone's views and stories, integrating a way forward with the family. Emphasis in our approach to working with vulnerable children and families,

needs to remain focused on relationships and the complex context of families. This in turn helps to change patterns of thinking and behaviour, with sustained positive outcomes. In focusing attention on all the systems contributing to an individual's situation, we can look to practice in a more holistic and strength based way.

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is about building and maintaining relationships which is at the heart of Signs of Safety. It is about working **with** people at every opportunity and in doing so:

- Providing positive challenge and setting clear bottom lines i.e. holding people to account in a meaningful and constructive way and agreeing clear boundaries to work within. This is called *high challenge*.
- Providing the right support and encouragement to enable others to reach agreed goals. This is called *high support*.

Restorative practice is a way to be, not a process to follow or a thing to do at certain times. It is a term used to describe principles, behaviours and approaches which build and maintain healthy relationships and a sense of community and can resolve difficulties and repair harm where there had been conflict. It is a way of being with people, essentially to work with and alongside others to create sustainable change.

Trauma informed practice

Trauma informed practice is a way of working which recognises the prevalence of early adversity in the lives of children and families. It focuses on the understanding of how early trauma shapes a person's fundamental beliefs about the world and affects his or her psychosocial functioning across their life span. Practitioners need a clear understanding of trauma in order to respond to children and families in ways that convey respect and compassion, promote self-determination, trust and enable the rebuilding of healthy interpersonal skills and coping strategies. Trauma informed practice moves the emphasis away from 'what's wrong with you?' to 'what happened to you?' which aligns with the core principles and values of Signs of Safety.

Family Star

Family Star Plus is a practitioner based tool which enables conversation and family plans to be developed whereby workers and families agree on a scale of between 1 and 10 against ten key domains at regular intervals to determine where families' progress is. The ten key domains of Family Star Plus are:

1. Positive experiences with Home and Money
2. Keeping Children Safe
3. Positive Boundaries and Behaviours
4. Positive Family Routines
5. Good or improved Physical Health
6. Positive Adult Wellbeing
7. Positive and supportive Social Networks
8. Meeting Children's Emotional Needs
9. Positive and appropriate Education and Learning
10. Achieving Progress to Work

Service users engage with the Family Star, which gives them ownership of the change process. The Family Star clearly fits with the Signs of Safety values and practice to ensure the work is family-focused, service user-led, holistic and highlights the organisation's commitment to working in partnership with service users and the value of co-production.

The Family Finding Model

The work of Kevin Campbell enhances social worker's ability to facilitate the finding and building of meaningful, life-long connections to a family and community of support. Signs of Safety and the Family Finding Model are very closely aligned and both place a strong emphasis on the importance of identifying, forming and sustaining a network of naturally connected people to the children we work with. Research acknowledges that a permanent, meaningful connection to family and caring adults, helps children and young people to develop a sense of belonging and hope and is closely associated with positive outcomes for children and young people.

UNCLASSIFIED

Version / Date	Author	Date Of the Next Review	Lead
V1.0 December 2019	Jannie Goussard, Signs of Safety Practice Consultant Francesca Smith, Signs of Safety Practice Consultant Rachel Bedford, Principal Social Worker Emma Hovell, Signs of Safety Project Manager	December 2020* moved to October 2021	Rachel Oakley, Assistant Director - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards

*It was agreed by the Practice Model Steering Group to extend the deadline for this review to October 2021. The process will encompass reviewing the model against the Children's Strategy 2021-2024, reviewing whether the current elements of the practice model should remain, which new elements might be added and clearly articulating how each element of the model works with the Signs of Safety Practice Framework.

Version Control

Version	Date	Amendments	Circulation list
V0.1	25.11.19	First Draft	Practice Framework Steering Group
V0.2	29.11.19	Align Values to Wokingham's Values	Jannie Goussard Francesca Smith
V0.3	05.12.19	Amend Model to include Family Star, Restorative Practice and move Continuing Professional Development to Knowledge and Skills Segment. Rewrite Trauma Informed Practice section	Jannie Goussard Francesca Smith Rachel Bedford

V0.4	09.12.19	Align Knowledge and Skills to Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS)	Jannie Goussard
V0.5	09.12.19	Amend KSS	Rachel Oakley
V0.6	09.12.19	Minor amendments to Knowledge and Skills Section	Carol Cammiss Rachel Oakley
V0.7	09.12.19	Minor amendments by Carol Cammiss	Carol Cammiss
V1.0 FINAL	10.12.19	One final amendment	Carol Cammiss