'Language that Cares'

Relational Language & Recording Policy

TORBAY COUNCIL

Contents

Introduction and Purpose

[1]Research shows that children's voices are rarely or briefly reflected in their own records (The MIRRA (Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access) 2019. This system information is much more than just data… it is the child's story, and as such we owe it to them to write it with them in mind, affording them the due diligence and respect they deserve.

This policy provides a set of principles and framework guidance to support Children Services to embed restorative and trauma informed language and participatory recording into their practice, recognising that every time we record on a child / young person's file, this contributes to their life story. It is important that our recording is aligned with our restorative and trauma informed model of practice to support a 'One Children's Services' approach bringing together both social care and education recording.

This policy has been informed by a restorative recording pilot which took place across the service between January to March 2023. This policy guidance has been created in line with our restorative and trauma informed model of practice, feedback gathered throughout the piloting period and informed by the Research in Practice guidance '[2]Good practice in recording and access to records'.

This policy will be regularly reviewed and updated in accordance with service need, children, young people, family and staff feedback, quality assurance activity and local and national practice developments.

Restorative Practice

Torbay Children's Services and Local Area is adopting a restorative practice approach in how we work with children, young people, and families. Restorative Practice is a way in which we can build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and a way to resolve difficulties and repair harm.

We understand that life can sometimes be hard and what happens to us can affect how we think, feel, and behave. We know that how we work with children, young people, and families to talk about this and the ways in which we support them are important.

We recognise that listening to children, young people and families and working 'with' rather than doing things 'for' or 'to' is the best way we can help support. It means our practitioners will focus on building positive relationships through respectful communication, collaboration and shared decision making to help create positive change.

Trauma Informed Practice

According to [3]Office for Health Improvement & Disparities trauma informed practice aims to increase practitioner's awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on individuals and communities, and their ability to feel safe or develop trusting relationships with health and care services and their staff.

Trauma informed practice acknowledges the need to see beyond an individual's presenting behaviours and to ask 'What does this person need? Rather than 'What is wrong with this person?'.

Trauma informed practice is centred on 6 core principles. These include:

- Safety – creating physical and emotional safety.
- Trustworthiness – providing clear and consistent information.
- Collaboration – making decisions with the individual and sharing power.
- Choice – individuals have choice and control.
- Empowerment - building upon a person's strengths and experiences.
- Cultural consideration – actively moving past stereotypes and biases, offering inclusive services.

It is important that within our recording and use of language we follow these principles so we can:

- fully recognise and understand the widespread impact of trauma and potential pathways for recovery.
- we recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma in the children, young people, and families we support.
- we respond in a trauma informed way which brings hope and empowerment.
- we provide support that is not re-traumatising.

Our Ways of Working

We asked children, young people, families, and carers to provide feedback on what was important for us as professionals to consider when working with them. We heard that how we communicate impacts relationships in the following ways:

- Arriving late without letting us know = "you don't care about us"
- Checking the time frequently = "you don't want to be here"
- Bringing lots of paperwork with you = "you haven't taken the time to learn about our story"
- Making notes or highlighting while we talk = "your paperwork is more important than spending time with us"
- Asking lots and lots of questions = "you do not trust what we are telling you"

In response to this, and other feedback gathered, we have produced six principles that detail our ways of working[4]. They describe how we will use relationship-based practice to restoratively work with children, young people and families who may need help and support from Children Services in Torbay.

Principle 1 'Building positive relationships' and principle 3 'Your wishes and feelings' refer specifically to the use of language we will use in our recording.

It states we will:

- Record and share information clearly and in an age-appropriate way, using language that shows we care.
- Use creative methods and observations to capture your wishes, feelings, and experience of family life, even if you are non-verbal.
- We will use the words you use to describe how you are thinking and feeling about what is happening in your life and record these in the reports, assessments and records we write.

Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) Pledge

Our SEND [5]pledge is at the heart of providing high-quality services across our local area. This document has been created to describe the values and behaviours that our children, young people and families wish to experience in the delivery of SEND services and support across our local area. Regardless of role, employer or organisation, our pledge asks for everyone within the local area to work in the way that is important to our children, young people, and families, turning this into the lived experience that we all deserve.

In sections 2, 3 and 5 of the pledge we make a promise regarding the use of language we will use in our recording which states:

Pledge 2 – **Show you we care** - we will use language that shows we care.

Pledge 3 – **Be thoughtful** - we will use communication methods that are appropriate for you and your family.

Pledge 5 – **Be Kind** - we will use your views to build the best ways to support you.

The Research into Plans: Skilled Team with Ambition, Rights and Strength (RIP: STARS) quality and Rights-Based [6]framework provides helpful guidance for a person-centred approach to what Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) should and could look like.

Some of the key messaging around recording and language includes:

- Having access to someone who understands their communication method.
- Be able to express their views in any way they choose.
- Share information about disabled young people with them and in accessible ways.
- Reading the EHCPs before attending meetings about the child / young person.
- Not talk about disabled young people but should talk to them.
- Respect disabled children and young people's rights.
- Listen to disabled children and young people and involve them in decisions about their plan and the support they need.
- Be polite.
- Value us equally.

The RIP STARS [7]Defining quality and rights-based Education, Health and Care Plans for disabled children and young people' 2018 report provides further helpful advice following research conducted by disabled young people to define what "quality" should be in EHCPs.

The SEN code of practice 2015 [8] also states that an EHCP should be person-centred and where possible adhere to the wishes and feelings of children and young people.

The SEND team have also produced a helpful [9]guide to alternative phrases for use within documents such as Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), reviews and annual reviews that support more relational and trauma informed language.

Our Promise to You Pledge

This pledge was created by Torbay cared for and cared experienced children and young people it outlines the principles for Torbay Council and partners to follow as a corporate parent. It is

important within our recording and language we pay due regard particularly to the following sections:

'Being In Care' young people said, "explain things to us in a way that we can understand". Our pledge promised:

- Your views will come first, but we will be honest about what we can do.
- We will explain your rights using language that is easily understood.
- Use Language that Cares.

'Our Support and Learning' you said, "we have our own history, but it may or may not define us". Our pledge promised:

- We will always listen and take your views into account.

Our Restorative Language Framework[10] produced by Torbay Cared for and Care experienced children and young people provides alternative restorative phrases for commonly used social care language. It is based on the national Language that Cares – [11]TACT Fostering and Adoption guidance.

Good recording

Good recording is an integral and important part of our practice. It will enhance practice and the support we can provide people if we can make good recording a central part of our work.

Research[12] by Ofsted inspectors found that common weaknesses in recording included:

- are not up to date (including assessments and plans following changes in circumstances), have gaps or lack analysis.
- only focus on the very negative things that happen to children, rather than their lives as a whole
- are not bespoke to each child or use too much professional jargon.
- show a lack of care and attention or are just poorly written.
- lack parents' views or the level of their engagement.
- do not show clear decision-making.
- are not age appropriate.
- mix up recording about brothers or sisters.
- show little purpose for visits to children and families and do not influence the plan or the next steps.
- fail to capture disabled children's views.

Areas for good practice recording include:

- Person Centred.
- Participatory.
- Language Aware.
- Purposeful.
- Clear.

- Analytical.
- Includes strengths and concerns.

Below you will find a summary of each principle which will form our 'language that cares' principles and should be applied in the recordings and documents you write and language you use about children, young people, and their families.

Person Centred

The most important person to bear in mind when you are writing records is the person you are writing about. They may wish to see their records at any point. You may have recorded on hundreds of records and on everyone, you may be pushed for time. However, this is likely to be that person's one and only social care and / or education record, and as such it has the potential to significantly shape the services and support that person receives.

Please see below for a handy ten top tips developed by ([13]BASW, 2020) for person-centred recording:

1. Include the child throughout the recording.
2. Write records as if writing to the child or family member.
3. Make records purposeful and analytical.
4. Include memory objects (e.g. photos) sensitively and critically.
5. Make sure the records reflect the whole of the child's story.
6. Chart the child's journey with a chronology supported by a genogram.
7. Include different views and opinions (even if you disagree with what is being said).
8. Make records easy to access.
9. Make sure recording is balanced and meaningful.
10. Avoid jargon, vague language, and unfounded assumptions. You do not need to record every piece of communication.

You may find it helpful to write directly to the child / young person (if you do we suggest using age-appropriate language as if they were accessing this as a young adult or at the age, they are now if sharing the report, assessment, or plan), it may help to strengthen your restorative writing skills. Children and families may also enjoy reading documentation written in this way as it develops an empathetic and deeper connection to building positive relationships. It will also help you to develop your analytical skills to collect and analyse information, problem solve and make decisions.

Participatory recording

'Good practice in recording and access to records[2] produced by Research in Practice, outline that participatory recording means building the active involvement of children, young people, carers, and family members into recording practice throughout the period of their involvement with children's social care, using age-appropriate approaches and activities. Participatory practices give children and young people greater control of what is included in their records.

The voice of the child

The aim is for the voice, opinions and needs of every child and young person to be included in their records, in their own words and on their own terms. It is not enough for the child's presence

to be reported only via comments and reflections on the child's behaviour by social workers and other professionals. Apps have been developed that give young people direct control over a digital space. These can sit alongside the formal care file enabling young people to talk about how they are feeling, ask for support and record things that are important to them.

It is important to consider how we evidence and record participatory involvement with a child or young person who is [14]non-verbal or struggles to communicate. Rather than record the child is non-verbal or too young to participate the question we need to ask ourselves is what is the communication behind the behaviour?

Try to understand what they are trying to communicate to you through:

- Understanding behavioural cues.
- Building a good relationship with the parent / carer.
- Observation.

Consider non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, eye and head movements, ways of talking e.g., pauses, screams. Speak to the person who is in the best place to interpret sounds, gestures, and behaviours that the child or young person may make.

Other non-verbal children may wish to communicate with you using objects. Others may use visual symbols such as sign language, Makaton, widget, flashcards, or photographs to indicate their wishes and feelings. It is important that you explore different methods of communicating and record your observations referring to any direct work tools you have used to aid your understanding and involvement of the child or young person.

Our **Point of You** feedback service (I'm a young person - Family Hub (torbayfamilyhub.org.uk) is an additional aid to gaining the voice of the child / young person to include in your recordings. It's a service that exists to support the voice of the child / young person so they can give us feedback about anything that matters to them, what we do well, or could do differently. It's important that children and young people are made aware of this service.

Family members and others close to the child

Records should also accommodate voices other than those of the child and young person and should represent the perspectives, beliefs and opinions of the different people closely involved in the child's life. Where there are tensions and disagreements, these should be fully represented in the record without attempting to establish a single, agreed narrative. Records should reflect the family and other settings that play an important role in the child or young person's life. Practice in recording personal relationships between a child or young person's family members tends to vary widely. It may not always be appropriate to share information about parents with the child or to ask family members to contribute to the child's records; but where possible, it is worth considering how interacting with their child's record could help parents to understand the situation.

Language Aware

Given the focus on relationships, it is important that the way in which we write about our children and families is informed by the principles of restorative trauma informed practice. When recording we ask you reflect on how you would speak if the person was in the room / if it were you or a

family member being spoken about. It's especially important to be aware of non-verbal, whole-body communication.

Our language aware principles are informed by [15]Dr Karen Treisman 'Safe Hands, thinking Minds' which encourages us to reflect on language, storytelling, and words by:

- Use first person language – see the person behind the behaviour/label/crisis/problem.
- Name the behaviour not the person. "The problem is the problem, not the person" (White,1990)
- Use rich descriptions and examples rather than vague statements.
- Be interested & collaborative, remember with instead of 'to' or 'for'.
- Check understanding and where possible give choice.
- Use the words used by the person to inform your recordings.
- Consider the meaning and usefulness of acronyms i.e., CIN, NEET, SW, SEND
- Avoid jargon and distancing language.
- Consider speech and language, learning and cognitive difficulties, is English a second language?
- Use and communicate in a child friendly and accessible way.
- Be mindful of problem-saturated language and integrate strengths and hope based language.
- Avoid definitive and restrictive terms e.g., always / never.
- Consider contextual factors around language (e.g. age, culture, ability, power, privilege, access etc).
- State and be mindful about the difference between a fact and an opinion. Avoid judgemental and victim blaming language.
- Use more than just words (e.g., visuals, genograms, props, visual voice, gestures, expressions etc) in your communication.
- Pay attention to words which may be triggering, hotspots and trauma inducing.

We ask that you be intentional, deliberate, and reflective around the language you are using in all documentation.

Purposeful

Lots of things happen in a child's and young person's life. Of course, not all of them must be recorded in full. But the most significant events – for example, a placement move – should always be captured, so that the record properly reflects a child's experiences and progress.

Our systems must provide a full, thorough, and accurate view of our work with children and families that is fit-for-purpose otherwise we cannot evidence the work, assess its quality, or analyse its impact on outcomes for children and families.

Clear

A good record will show children's wishes and feelings and their understanding of what is happening in their life. Even though young children and those without verbal communication cannot talk about their feelings, recording observations of them is still very important.
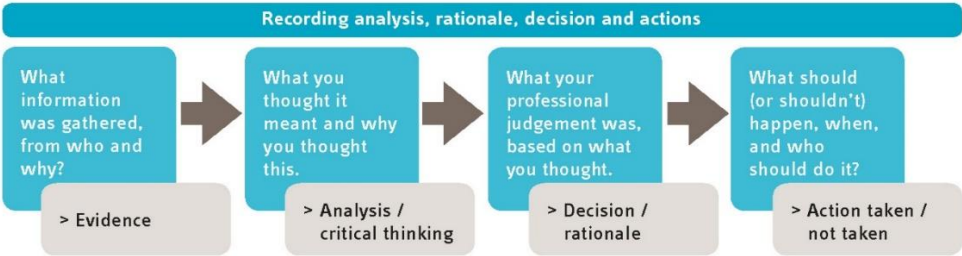
The record should clearly and succinctly explain what has happened to and for the child. On one hand, this informs the support provided to the child today. But children one day become adults. Good records help them to understand what decisions were made during their childhood and why.

It's useful and important to clearly capture creative ways of direct work being undertaken such as uploading flip charts, worksheets, pictures etc to evidence relational practice and the use of direct work tools. Reference in your recordings clearly the use of direct work tools where these have been used.

Analytical

Practitioners who support children need to think about the purpose of each piece of recording. For example, when recording a visit to the child, the record is about the reason for the visit itself as well as its contribution to the whole assessment. The importance of not just what happened or was said, but what that means for the child. Questioning is important. Think about using the 5 Anchor principles[16]:

- What is the assessment for?
- What is the story?
- What does the story mean?
- What needs to happen?
- How will we know we are making progress?

A good recording analysis, should be guided by the below principles:

Recording analysis, rationale, decision and actions

What information was gathered, from who and why?	What you thought it meant and why you thought this.	What your professional judgement was, based on what you thought.	What should (or shouldn't) happen, when, and who should do it?
> Evidence	> Analysis / critical thinking	> Decision / rationale	> Action taken / not taken

We often see repetition across the recording system, from assessment, to plan, to the child's record. We see users cutting and pasting within records rather than adding their professional analysis. A child's record should demonstrate a continuous story, added to and analysed each time we record.

Includes strengths as well as concerns

Really high-quality recording lets the quality of the relationship between the practitioner and child, and the practitioners' aspirations for that child, shine through. How important that must be to any person looking at their childhood records in later adulthood.

A well-crafted child's record should be able to show what's happening for a child at any given time.

Relational practice should include strength and hope based language recognising the importance of abilities, knowledge, and capabilities rather than deficits. This approach recognises that children, young people, and families are resilient and capable of growth, learning and change.

Sharing of assessments, plans and reports

It is important that we ensure that our assessments, plans and reports our shared with children, young people, and families to demonstrate transparency and trust within our practice. We know shared decision making and co-planning leads to better outcomes for children and families.

This is in line with our Ways of Working Principle 2 'Child and family assessments' which states that:

- We will share assessments and reports with you, where appropriate, your parents / carers as we complete them, seeking your views at every stage and discussing with you the outcomes.
- Once a written assessment or report is completed, we will share this with you, where appropriate, and your parents / carers within **five working days.**

and Principle 4 'Planning and review':

- We will make sure the plans we write have clear goals and outcomes and you are given a copy, where appropriate.
- We will include you and those that support you in the decision-making process so that we can work together to create a plan that works for you.

It is likely that the age at which you share documents with the child / young person will vary. It might be adulthood when the young person might want to request and read their files. Therefore, we should write in a style which is age appropriate and aimed at the age they are when reading / sharing the documents. We should therefore refrain from writing in a style that might be read by a very young child.

Genograms, Chronologies & Ecomaps

A genogram[17] is a visual tool that shows a family tree and is used to give a pictorial representation of a family system.

The [18]benefits of which include:

1. It can help you identify themes or patterns within a family that may be influencing or driving a person's current behaviour.
2. It can help social workers absorb at a glance, key information with a high level of accuracy.
3. It can be used in assessment, interventions, and meetings.
4. Genograms show a graphical representation of family relationships showing the quality and proximity of relationships and patterns across generations.
5. Genograms can be used as a visual tool to encourage young people to talk about their family.
6. It allows a person to tell their story at their own pace.
7. Information gathered can help a worker to be more sensitive and empathetically respond to elements of the story presented.

A [19]chronology is a record of all significant events, referrals and observations concerning the child, their family, or the service(s) they are receiving. Information contained in chronologies will support practitioners to build relationships with families and explore the world from their perspective.

Sharing and exploring chronologies can support people to understand what has happened in their lives, to appreciate and validate the family's position and what the family think might help.

An [20]eco-map is a visual representation of a person's relationship with people, groups, and organisations in their ecosystem. It provides a graphical representation that shows all the systems at play in an individual's life.

Applying in practice

In our 'ways of working' principle two 'child and family assessments' we make a commitment to:

- Create a family diagram, called a genogram or chronology, for each child in the family to help us understand your family history.

Ensure you are routinely creating or updating a genogram, chronology and/or ecomap for each child and young person you are supporting in the family. They are useful visual aids which should be used in assessments and various child-focused meetings such as Team around Family, Child Protection, Child in Need, education, and health meetings to explore family history and relationships. They can also be used to consider the wider support network.

Best practice examples

To support practice development in this area, best practice restorative examples of various commonly used social care and education documentation can be found here:

Best Practice Examples

Training and support

You may find it helpful to read some national guidance in this area. You can find some helpful guides here:

Guides

To support development of recording and language skills you can attend a Restorative Language in person course which can be accessed via ilearn here:

Course: Restorative Language Workshop (learningpool.com)

Further reflective one-to-one support can be accessed via the Learning Academy by emailing Learning&DevelopmentHub@torbay.gov.uk

Quality Assurance

Audit and dip sampling activity will help support the regular monitoring of how well we are embedding restorative and trauma informed language and practice within our children and family documentation and recording. This will also involve gathering feedback directly from our children and families. Monitoring of how well we are sharing reports, plans and assessments in a timely way will also be monitored.

To support practice development, audit learning action points may include the recommendation for practitioners to undertake specific training or receive reflective coaching support to help guide their practice in this area.

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[15] A Treasure Box for Creating Trauma-Informed Organizations: A Ready-to-Use Resource for Trauma, Adversity and Culturally Informed, Infused and Responsive Systems, Dr Karen Treisman, 2021

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Further Reading:

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Version control

Date	Revision No	Originator of change	Change description
09.08.23	1	Bexs Rushton	Original draft document considered by social care SLT. Amendments to voice of child and genograms sections following comments made by Ellie Clarke, Shaun Evans & Lisa Pitcher.
09.08.23	2	Bexs Rushton	To be presented to Education SLT for sign off. Shared with Rachael Williams.
11.10.23	2	Bexs Rushton	Signed off by Dan Hamer and Emma Kerridge
19.03.24	2	Bexs Rushton	Shared with Hannah Baker for sign off. Added SEN code of practice to SEND section and included as an appendix. Sign off agreed.
09.04.24	3	Bexs Rushton	Added five anchor principles to analytical section and included as appendix.