



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Keeping Families Together Policy and Procedures

Children's Social Care, People Group

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Keeping Families Together Policy and Procedures

1. Policy

Darlington Borough Council believes that children are best placed in the communities and families in which they are familiar. The aim of the department is to maintain as many children at home in a safe environment.

However, it recognises that children may on occasion require placement outside of their family to ensure their short or long term safety and in that they are allowed to develop in an holistic manner.

Research has indicated that children/young people and their families have the best possible outcomes when intervention is targeted early, before they reach specialist levels of intervention. It has been demonstrated that those children and young people who live with their parents or birth families achieve better outcomes in comparison to those in the care system. Thus, our policy focuses on keeping children/young people at home wherever and whenever possible and to exhaust all other family and friends options prior to considering bringing a child/young person into care. We are focusing our actions on early identification of those whose outcomes are not improving at home to enable appropriate and timely intervention.

For the purpose of this document Darlington Borough Council's Edge of Care Service will be referred to as **Keeping Families Together service.**

2. What is the Keeping Families Together Service and what do they do:

The aims are:

- To allow children and young people to remain within their family unit and to flourish and be allowed the opportunities to develop with all of their needs met.
- To work with families to recognise and manage risk within the family unit and community.
- To work with families to assist them in providing stability when young people are in difficulty and without support may need to become looked after.
- To support children and young people to return home from care, where there is a plan and timescales agreed.
- To support children and young people to experience consistency and stability within their home life during times of crisis.

Keeping Families Together service will work with families in the following circumstances:

- Before entering care, where the child or young person has been identified as being at imminent risk of needing care.
- Children who have been placed in an emergency or using police protection powers.
- Where a plan is agreed for children and young people to return to their family from care.
- Where there is a risk of a young person or child being unable to remain in their longer term placement.
- Where there is a risk of a newborn baby entering care or not able to stay within their family.

- Where families are supported under the Public Law Outline process and sufficient progress has not been made with alternative strategies and support provided.

Keeping Families Together will work with families/young people and offer direct intensive support.

The team seek to adopt a whole family approach:

- To listen to all members of the family, non-judgementally, respecting the views of the child/young person.
- To provide a prompt, intensive and flexible approach.
- Build on the family strengths, as well as providing support to improve resilience in areas of difficulty.
- Work with and assist young people in helping them cope with situations which they find stressful.
- Work with parents and carers to develop skills in response to behaviours they may find challenging.
- Identify support networks and explore Family Group Conference.

3. Edge of care definition and eligibility criteria

Children 'on the edge of care' are those whose safety and well-being are of sufficient concern and risk for the authority to consider removing them from their current situation for their own protection or the protection of others.

To ensure clarity and effective managerial oversight, the following criteria is applied:

- Child/children aged between 0-16 years working on a whole family approach
- A Service Manager believes the child(ren) will need to enter care within days or weeks, as current levels of support are insufficient to safeguard them; the family's needs are escalating and/or family relationships or other issues are worsening.
- Families in the early stages of court proceedings who are being assessed by Social Workers to determine whether sufficient change is possible in the child's timeframe to remain at home safely
- Children returning home/to their families after a period in care.
- Children in the care of the Local Authority who are long term placed and at risk of relationships breaking down with carer, leading to potential imminent placement move.

4. Model of intervention:

Keeping Families Together service will incorporate a family recovery model of intervention supported by collaboration of partner agencies.

The Keeping Families Together service will consist of a multi-agency team that intervenes and support families at risk of losing their children, home or liberty. The Keeping Families Together service will work alongside a multitude of multiagency staff who will deliver coordinated services, covering, Adult Mental Health, Anti-Social Behaviour, Youth Justice Service, Safe Families for Children, Welfare Benefit advice and support, Domestic Violence, Education, Health Visiting, Housing, Police, Children's Social Work, Substance Misuse, access to training and work providers.

Families who are considered to be on the "edge of care" will continue to receive support from an Assessment and Safeguarding Social Worker as well as the Keeping Families Together Service. The role of the Assessment and Safeguarding Social Worker is to complete their statutory assessment (Child and Families Assessment or S.47 Assessment), carry out statutory visits as required and complete any relevant paperwork pertaining to the child's legal status, i.e. looked after reports, child protection reports and any relevant court reports. Referrals and requests for respite/ short breaks remain the responsibility of the allocated social worker. The Keeping Families Together service will assist the social workers assessment by delivering specific family work and create a joint plan of intervention.

The Keeping Families Together Family Workers will not undertake any roles or responsibilities of the allocated Social Worker.

Some staff within the Keeping Families Together service will not be social work qualified; it is proposed that work outside of normal working hours will be undertaken only with cases open to the Keeping Families Together service. It is not the intention that the Keeping Families Together service will replace the function and role of the Emergency Duty Team.

4.1 Operating hours and base

The Keeping Families Together service will offer support to children and families seven days per week, working 7:00am – 9:00 pm (excluding Bank Holidays), within the family home but will not offer residential respite. This allows professional oversight of family routines.

The workers will undertake intensive intervention to provide direct support to very small caseloads. This will include the provision of practical support: for example, improving the home environment, getting young people to school as well as advocacy. We will liaise with CEDARS, short break and emergency care where appropriate.

Where agreed in panel or as felt necessary if there is a significant change to circumstances/increased risk during support, Keeping Families Together can visit family's on a weekend (excluding Bank Holidays). This would be to ensure the welfare of the child/young person and would be undertaken by the duty worker.

The Team Manager and Advanced Practitioner will provide management oversight to all cases and will sit on the Keeping Families Together panel to provide a coordinated whole family package of support.

The service will be based in Darlington Borough Council premises.

Support will be offered to children within their family/carer's home and community.

4.2 Service delivery

Keeping Families Together service will offer intensive support for a period of up to 12 weeks with the option to extend by a maximum of 4 weeks if required. Support will phase out from weeks 6 to 8 to avoid overloading the family with too much information and change at any one time. A gradual reduction in support ensures families are not over reliant on this level of support and allows families to evidence and implement interventions and advice offered.

If during support, Keeping Families Together support is no longer needed, there will be a 2 week exit phase to ensure a smooth ending.

A referral to the Family Group Conference team is to be discussed within the 10 days of Keeping Families Together support if the family are not already receiving support from Family Group Conference service. The aim of the Family Group Conference is to support families to find their own solutions to problems, the family members will become decision-makers rather than professionals.

4.3 Services to support children on the edge of care

Safely identifying which children should enter care and which, with the right support, can stay at home is a difficult and uncertain task. A key factor in this decision is the quality of services available to support families and help them to make changes that will allow the child to live at home safely.

Darlington Borough Council has the following services to support young people and their families who are on the edge of care in addition to social work: Confirmation of services

- Building Stronger Families
- Youth Justice Service
- Family Group Conference
- Families Together Programme (Troubled families)
- Evidenced based programmes: Theraplay, Parent Factor
- Vulnerable Adults Floating support and Access Point (Daily drop in support for support around accommodation and independent living needs)
- Harbour Domestic Abuse Floating support service (including community based support, the
 - Freedom Programme and Children's support)
- Home care and support for families with children (families who need 1;1 community based support to help them meet their child's/children's needs appropriately)
- Young Carers Support Service
- Young Persons Drop in support via the YMCA Hub
- Safe Families for Children
- NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)
- We are With You (Young Persons and adult substance and Alcohol Service)
- Addaction (Adult substance and Alcohol Services)
- C: The Box
- St Theresa Counselling Service
- Humankind (previously DISC)

5. Service request

There is a clear process once a family has been identified as requiring support from the Keeping Families Together Service.

Step 1: Notification request

Following discussion with their Team Manager, the allocated Assessment and Safeguarding Social Worker emails Keeping Families Together Advanced Practitioner and Team Manager, including the family's liquid logic number, to request a panel to discuss support. Prior to making the request, the Social Worker must ensure the child/young person meets the service referral criteria (see s.3), and have discussed Keeping Families Together support with the family and gained consent.

Step 2: Panel

The Keeping Families Together panel will consist of both the Keeping Families Together Manager and Advanced Practitioner where possible and the allocated Social Worker requesting support. When a request is received the KFT Team Manager or Advanced Practitioner will contact the Social Worker within 4 hours of receiving the contact and arrange a panel within 1 working day. The request will be discussed in the panel and, if accepted, one/two named Keeping Families Together Family Worker will be allocated to the family within 1 working day. Where there are two family workers identified, one will be lead worker with responsibility for plans and reviews.

Step 3. Family Visit

The Keeping Families Together Family worker will arrange an initial introductory home visit within 1 working day of panel.

The Keeping Families Together Worker will identify relevant friends and family to support a request to Family Group Conference as appropriate.

Step 4: Support

The Keeping Families Together Worker will complete a Keeping Families Together Plan within 10 working days of allocation detailing what is working well, what needs to happen, who will complete tasks and timescales set.

The Keeping Families Together Worker will coordinate delivery of the plan and oversee support.

Step 5: Regular Review

The Keeping Families Together plan will identify timescales for agreed actions and include regular checkpoints to review the families' progress. Where delays or obstacles occur these must be acted on and the plan must be reviewed if any circumstances change for the child.

Reviews will take place every 3 weeks from the initial 10 day plan and will evaluate if interventions have been successful and if Keeping Families Together support is still required.

Exit plans of 2 weeks will be agreed at the point support is no longer felt needed.

6. Families Together core offer

Phase 1 – Crisis Intervention (up to 24 hours / immediate response)

The service will respond within 24 hours of receipt of referral.

This will be offered to a young person and their family who are experiencing a crises and who, without immediate intervention, are at risk of family breakdown and entering care.

This will be delivered in the family home.

Phase 2 – Rapid Response (up to 3 days)

Intensive support will be offered to families who are experiencing family breakdown and may have been or at risk of the young person being removed from their family home. This will include conflict resolution and may result in a family network meeting to identify any support from within the extended family and wider support network.

Phase 3 – Engagement and identification (up to 4 weeks)

A period of intensive engagement will be offered using a number of approaches including Signs of Safety, Graded Care Profile, Solution Focused practice, Crisis Intervention and Restorative practice.

During this period of support, workers will work in collaboration with young people and their families to identify solutions to problems and promote family strengths.

Children and families will be allocated a dedicated worker who will offer “hands on support” to the family. This will include:

Dedicated parenting programmes which are flexible, family-focused and develop positive parenting skills
Practical support to children and families to support to medical appointments, school meetings and any other identified tasks.

Support to all family members during key times of tension, including meal times, night and morning routines.

The Keeping Families Together worker will identify and share with children and families areas of family life which are working well and areas which require support. In addition the worker will identify clear exit plans and share this with the children and families.

The Social Worker will always consider a referral into Family Group Conference Service.

Phase 4 (4 – 12 weeks, can be extended up to a maximum of 16 weeks)

A programme of evidence based interventions will be delivered from a pick and mix menu available to meet the needs of the individual young person and their family / carers. This will also include “supported referrals and attendance” to any specialist or therapeutic service identified as part of the family plan. This may include substance misuse, CAMHS, Youth Justice, Mental Health service, medical appointments etc.

Planned short care opportunities can be considered via CEDARS.

7. Glossary of interventions

Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention involves defusing the immediate and precipitating crisis within the home that leads to the referral, with support workers engaging the young people and their family, liaising with other agencies, assessing the problems, developing specific, measurable, short term goals and helping everyone in the family to acquire the skills to achieve them.

Research suggests that crisis intervention models are most successful with families where problems are acute rather than chronic, and that their effectiveness depends to a significant degree on the extent to which they are linked into other local services, to provide young people and families with continuing support after the crisis is over.

DYADIC DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOTHERAPY (DDP)

DDP is an attachment-focused therapy. It is often used to support children who have experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect as an intervention for children who have experienced emotional trauma as a result of chronic early maltreatment within the caregiving relationship.

The primary goal of DDP is to support these children in developing the ability to maintain attachment based relationships with parents and caregivers. The approach is grounded in various theories, including attachment theory and the work of John Bowlby and Daniel Stern.

DDP holds the parent-child relationship in high regard and uses this “dyad” as the platform for healing. During treatment, parents are taught a specialized, trauma-informed parenting approach while children learn emotional regulation and interpersonal relationship skills. DDP addresses both of these processes simultaneously in order to facilitate a trusting and secure relationship between parent and child

Family Group Conference

It is recognised that FGCs are most effective at the early onset of familial contact with services and thus, this service will eventually be targeted at the initial stages of intervention. However, because of the significant numbers of children/young people that are in the care of the Council and the high numbers subject to Child Protection Plans, the FGC service is focused on these children, young people and their families to ensure effective and efficient use of resources. It also facilitates the best possible outcomes for these children, young people and their families.

The use of Family Group Conferences is shown to:

- Increase positive outcomes for children and young people
- Enable families to plan and take control of their lives and thus reducing the involvement of statutory services
- Give the child/young person a ‘voice’
- Provide a solution focused approach to family intervention
- Place emphasis on the strengths of the family
- Make more use of family and community resources than statutory plans developed at meetings which are dominated by agencies

- Enthuse practitioners to highlight its effectiveness with the children/young people and their families to achieve and maintain significant changes
- Provides a cost effective approach that benefits and strengthens the whole family

Graded Care Profile

Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) helps professionals measure the quality of care being given to a child. It's an assessment tool that helps them to spot anything that's putting that child at risk of harm.

It's important we find children who are at risk of harm as early as possible so we can get them the right help.

GCP2 shows:

- strengths
- weaknesses
- what needs to change.

By working out what parents can do better, it's easier for those working with a family to get them the right support to improve the life of their child.

Signs of Safety

To strengthen our assessment and planning for children and young people, Darlington Borough Council utilises the 'Signs of Safety' model as our framework for assessment, planning and communication for children, young people and their families. 'Signs of Safety' is a solution-focused and safety orientated approach to casework.

It is a comprehensive risk assessment framework that involves everyone in the assessment process (families and professionals). It incorporates harm/danger, existing strengths/safety and future safety in reference to assessment and planning.

Utilising this approach will improve the quality of assessments/analysis/intervention delivered to families; improve engagement of families; and improve risk management of vulnerable children/young people as a result of rigorous assessment and safety planning.

Signs of Safety enables professionals to be very clear with families regarding risks, as well as clearly stating what safety will look like for that family.

Solution Focussed Practice

Solution-focused practice concentrates on helping people move towards the future that they want and to learn what can be done differently by using their existing skills, strategies and ideas – rather than focusing on the problem. This approach treats the child or young person as the expert on their own life.

Practitioners ask questions to help the young person begin moving towards the future they want and help them make positive changes in their lives. This toolkit is for practitioners who already have some training in solution-focused practice and are looking for resources to use when working with children and young.

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is a term used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict.

CEDARS

The purpose of CEDARS is to provide a quality service consisting of out-reach, in-reach and short break residential care, and emergency short breaks.

Cedars has the capacity to offer short breaks to 3 children, which includes provision for emergency residential short breaks. Cedars will also offer outreach consisting of group work and 1:1 sessions with young people where appropriate.