**BCP Children’s Services Practice Standards**

*Setting out our expectations for how we will work with children and*

*families through our Signs of Safety practice model.*

**Introduction**

Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole’s Children’s Services (BCPCS) uses Signs of Safety (SoS) as our practice model. The ethos behind SoS is a strength’s based and relationship approach to how we work with the children and families we support.

These practice standards is help make sure that no matter what part of the service a child and family is being supported by in our Children’s Services directorate, they will receive a consistent approach in how we speak with them, support them, and build relationships with them.

There has been some consultation across the workforce in contributing to the creation of this first version of our Signs of Safety practice standards. However, it is a living document that will evolve as our practice, experience, and understanding of the SoS approach does and it is anticipated that it will be revised with input from our direct practice experience with children and families.

The first part of this document outlines the overall practice expectations and bottom lines for all those who work within BCPCS, from front line workers to their senior managers in working through a SoS approach. The second part outlines the more detailed practice expectations and bottom lines specific to each service area within BCPCS, to ensure all service areas work with children and families in a manner consistent with our overall SoS practice expectations and bottom lines.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | These are the ways we aspire to work with children and families in order to build upon our minimum “bottom line” expectations for our practice. This is underpinned by the importance of building respectful relationships, being curious in our enquiries about children’s lived experiences, evidencing our decisions, balancing our assessments between the family’s strengths and worries, and to ultimately keep the children we support as safe and well cared for as possible.  |

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| **Our Bottom Lines** | These are a minimum set of expectations we set for how we will work with children and families. If we cannot meet these, then we recognise we will be unable to achieve the best desired outcomes for children. This is also the basis for which children and families can hold us accountable if we are not working with them according to our own bottom line expectations. Just as we set bottom line expectations for what we need to see achieved for children, we have the same expectations of ourselves in how we work. |

These practice standards have been written using as clear as language as possible so that children and families can reasonably understand and hold us to account, and that all workers and managers can understand and hold one another to account.

The term “child/ren” is used to represent any child under the age of 18 years old. Young people refer to those generally ages 12-17, and young adults for those 18 years and older who have left our care and living independently.

**Working Relationships**

**are Paramount**

We understand the importance of good working relationships to improved outcomes for children and families. We will work respectfully and be curious in understanding the child’s family life and experience.

**Think Critically**

We come from a position of curious appreciative enquiry where we listen carefully to the children, families, and professionals we work with, recognise successes made as well as any worries or dangers for the child. We are open to changing our views in light of new information.

**Clear Communication**

We aim to always be clearly understood by the children, families, and professionals we work with to avoid misunderstandings. We will be creative in how we share our information according to the learning and communication needs of those we work with, and avoid using professional jargon and acronyms.

**Risk Intelligent**

We seek to understand a child’s lived experience by assessing the evidence we gather along with our professional experience and research to help inform our assessment of the worries and dangers present for a child. We look for signs of safety and strength within the family along with professional support to help reduce risks and increase safety for children. Our aim is for children to remain with their families to the greatest extent possible and where it is safe enough.

**Our Fundamental Signs of Safety Principles**

We of course will use our practice standards alongside our statutory duties that is outlined by law, judicial rulings, statutory guidance, and professional regulations. These outline what we must do, but our practice standards outline the means by which we aim to deliver our responsibilities towards keeping children as safe and supported as possible through our SoS approach and ethos.

Laws (ie: Children Act 1989), Court Rulings, and Statutory Guidance (ie: Working Together) tell us what we must do.

Signs of Safety Practice Framework tells us how we deliver what is expected of us when we work with children and families.

This determines the quality of the relationships we build and the help we provide in supporting families to help us keep children safe.



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| **Our Overall Practice Expectations** | * Children need to be protected from the dangers of harm and neglect and be supported to achieve a good level of well-being. This is the most important part of our work.
* Our entire workforce, from frontline workers up to our most senior managers, will use their professional and statutory authority in a skilful, respectful and proportionate way. We maintain a close focus on the child’s wellbeing and life trajectory, and are clear to the adults responsible for the child that there are always ‘bottom lines’ that must be met if the child is to be considered safe enough from significant harm and what safety plans are needed to help reduce the impact of harm on children.
* We think carefully and critically when looking at any situation by balancing our worries about with the strengths that exist in any situation. We understand our work involves working with risks and accepting that achieving the best outcomes for children will require courage and foresight from workers and managers in how we can best manage and reduce risks and help create more safety for them.
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| **Our Overall Practice Expectations** | * Families are hugely important to children as they grow up. Only in exceptional circumstances should a child grow up outside their own family or close network. We will do our best to help keep children with their families when it is safe enough to do so.
* The prime responsibility for the child and their safety resides with the family, and the family must always be considered as part of the solution in reducing danger and risk of harm to their children. This includes the impact of emotional harm when children come into our care by involving parents to the greatest extent possible.
* We believe that providing help and support to families at the earliest possible opportunity is the best way of preventing harm happening to children.
* We will approach our work with humility and honesty. We will aim to build strong, effective, and respectful relationships with families by using clear language to describe our worries or concerns, helping to identify areas of strength and safety, and being clear about what needs to happen before everyone can be satisfied that the child is safe enough.
* Families will be clear about what action will be taken if a plan is not keeping a child safe enough and how they can be further involved in planning for the safety of their child.
* The child is our focus and any judgments and decisions we make about the child’s wellbeing must be taken from the standpoint of what is in their best interest. This includes genuinely listening to what they wish to see happen and understanding what life is like for them.
* We recognise and appreciate the diversity of the children and families we support. We are curious about difference and recognise that everyone has their own unique story. We celebrate this and seek to be equitable in how we provide our support and work with families. We will seek to educate ourselves about the families culture, religion, abilities, identity, and ethnicity and how we can work together in a way that honours their way of life.
* We respond to new information openly and, in the light of any new evidence, are ready to admit that we may need to change our thinking regarding a family and any plans we make for children we support.
* We work together with our partner agencies, sharing information and involving them in planning for children as we recognise their key role in supporting families to care for their children in the longer term.
* We are committed to achieving permanence and stability for children, whether it is with their own family or with one of ours. Our goal is to provide long term family environments that help keep children safe enough and maximises their future life potential and trajectory.
* We recognise a child’s record is about them and it is important to record information of the work we do and the information we receive in a timely, clear, and evidenced way. This helps others scrutinise our work, to understand what the child’s story is and how we are trying to help them and their family, and avoids the need for the family to repeat their story.
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| **Our Overall Practice Expectations** | * We will use our quality assurance framework in order to evaluate and better understand how well we deliver our service and work to our Signs of Safety principles. This will help identify what we do well and what we could do better in helping children and families.
* We are open to hearing feedback from others on our work or any complaints they may have. We will explore these thoroughly and look for ways we could improve on and learn from. When we make mistakes, we will be open about this and look for ways we can make things right again. We will share our learning with others so we can all benefit from shared learning experiences.
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| **Our Overall Bottom Lines** | * We always work alongside the child, their family, and their natural support network. By asking for their contributions, while treating them with humility and respect, we are more likely to gain an accurate and balanced picture of the child’s lived experience and create conditions for building an effective relationship that will improve their safety and well being.
* For every child they are responsible for, workers will be sure to create a genogram with the family to identify those who can help support the family and increase safety for the child.
* In all our work with children and families we will create chronologies of significant events of the child and family’s life, including worries and strengths, and what impact this has for the child. We will keep these updated regularly during our time working with the family.
* We slow our thinking down, giving situations careful consideration, especially when it matters most. We consider issues of danger and possible risk in a careful and analytical way, considering what this will mean for the child. We will use a variety tools, activities and methods, such as group supervision or case mapping, to help us make the best evidenced based decisions in these complex situations.
* Workers and managers will use curious and probing questions when working with families and others who know the child and family. This questioning approach when coupled with ‘slow thinking’ will allow others to tell their story freely so we can clearly understand and reduce the risk of rushed thinking and making assumptions not based in evidence.
* All child and family assessments will be done using the ‘Three Column, Seven Analysis” format in Signs of Safety. Key facts and information shared by the family will always be explored as part of the worker’s critical enquiry. We will check out and cross reference the information from the family with the views of others who know the family well. We will seek other forms of evidence to build the most complete picture of the child’s life in their family. We will use activities and tools, such as “Three Houses” to help children tell us what life is like for them and what they would like to see happen.
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| **Our Overall Bottom Lines** | * We will produce up to three danger or worry statements for each identified area of danger or concern we have for a child. These will be prioritised so that families and professionals helping them are clear about what the most concerning issues are for a child and where we need to focus our support on improving first. They will be written in a clear and jargon-free way so the family can best understand what our worries are for their child and how this will affect their child if nothing changes. Each danger statement will be matched to a safety goal of what we want to work together with the family to achieve for their child. We will use scaling questions to help us understand how we see each worry, what the next step toward making things better will look like, and what difference we expect for the child if achieved.
* We will ask the family and the their support network to formulate a safety and well-being plan that help reduce the impact of any danger/worry statements we have for a child. We will help the family own their child’s safety plan and that it clearly outlines our bottom lines for what dangers/worries we cannot allow a child to continue to experience. As part of the safety planning process a clear trajectory for the child (agreed timeline) must be established by us and the family so that everyone is clear and committed to what needs to happen and by when.
* We recognise that family owned safety plans can put pressure on families, and we are committed to providing the right level of support to assist them in putting the plan into action particularly at the start. The safety plan will be reviewed regularly and we will be open to changing it as the child and family’s circumstances change.
* We will support our workforce in providing learning and development opportunities and sharing good practice that help them increase their skills and confidence to continue to work in a way that is consistent with our Signs of Safety practice framework.
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**MASH – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the MASH service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will always treat referrers and family members with respect by listening carefully to what they tell us and using thoughtful questioning to make sure our understanding of a child’s situation is as clear as it can be. We always seek a balance in our understanding by asking questions about any signs of strength and safety that exists within the family’s support network that we can build upon.
* When recording information about a child, we will concentrate on giving clear descriptions of evidence or observed behaviour and avoid broad statements or making assumptions, which are open to interpretation.
* Before contacting a family member or other professional to seek clarity, we will think about what information we need and what questions we need to ask so we have the best understanding of the child’s lived experience, what our next steps should be in order to provide the right level of support and safety planning.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will always use thoughtful and curious questions that help us obtain clear evidence about the worries, strengths, and complicating factors that children and their families face so we know what the next best steps are in how we respond to referrals and enquiries about children.
* We will always record information on children’s records that is clear and avoids using jargon or acronyms excessively. When they are used we will always explain what these mean. We recognise that how we write about children and families will impact on how others view them and will shape what the child’s experience will be as they journey through the system. It is also important for when they ask to see their records in the future.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * Where children journey onto the Assessment or to Early Help Services, we will always include a draft danger or worry statement as well as an outline safety plan based on the best information and evidence we have gathered at the time. This will have been shared with the parent/carer and with any child who has sufficient understanding as part of what we believe the next steps should be in order to provide the best level of support and safety for children. This will draw upon the family’s own support network to the greatest extent possible.
* We will always seek consent from the parents/carers of a child before we seek information from other professionals or people who support the family to help us with our assessments. Where our initial assessment determines that seeking consent may place the child at significant risk of harm, we will clearly record why we have not obtained consent first and will inform the parents/carers as soon as it is safe enough for the child to do so of who we spoke to and what we were told.
* We will always inform professionals who make referrals that we have received their referral. We will tell all referrers what our next steps are for the child and the family to the greatest extent that our consent allows, or where it is necessary in order to help keep a child safe from danger. Where we decide that we are not best placed to provide support to the child and family, we will explain our decisions with professionals and advise them on what they could do to help support them.
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**Assessment Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Assessment service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We seek to understand the family’s unique identity and experience by spending time to understand their beliefs, values, customs, religion, history and culture. We remain curious around how the child and family’s identity will be shaped by their experiences at home and in the wider community, explore ways we can improve our understanding, and seek the best available supports that can help support their identity to the greatest extent possible.
* We recognise that helping children and families develop their support networks is a crucial part of how we create the best ways to support them and help keep children as safe as possible. We will always consistently and respectfully ask children and families about who they have in their family and friends networks, help them to identify those who could also help where they may struggle, in order to see where professionals may need to offer additional support to provide the most comprehensive support needed to help support the child and keep them as safe as possible.
* We will facilitate Family Network Meetings to help bring the family’s support network together. We will prepare by familiarising ourselves with what we know about the child, family and friend’s attending so they do not have to keep repeating their story. We will explain the purpose of the meeting, what is expected of those who are participating, reviewing the danger/worry statement, creating safety goals for each of the worries identified, and help identify who will be responsible for each goal and how these will be reviewed. The worker will use their authority in a respectful and proportionate way that allows the meeting to keep focused on creating safer and better outcomes for the child and balancing this with allowing everyone attending to make a meaningful contribution. The worker will also outline bottom lines so there is clarity about what we cannot allow to happen to a child that may place them at significant risk of harm.
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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will seek to gain an understanding of the child’s lived experience, by using creative means to get their views, wishes and feelings through such tools as three houses, magic wand, or other creative activities. We will also observe them at home with their family and in the wider community. Where a child is unable to clearly express their views, we will use our skills, knowledge, and other sources of information about them in order to help identify what we believe would be in their best interest.
* When we pass responsibility for a child to another team or service, we will always explain to the child and the family why this is happening and what they can expect. We will take the time to introduce the new worker to the child and family, go through the danger/sorry statements and safety/success goals together, review the bottom lines, and invite the family to talk through their understanding of the goals and plans for their child.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will always carefully consider all the information provided to us by the MASH service together with additional information from any previous history of social care involvement, and that provided from other professionals involved with the family such as police, schools, and health.
* We will always develop a chronology of significant life events of the child (both strengths and worries), and how this has impacted on their lived experience. This chronology will help us, the family, and other involved professionals understand the child’s journey thus far, and what their likely future trajectory will be if things remain the same.
* We will always carefully prepare ourselves before approaching a family to continue our assessments of their child by reviewing all the known information we have so the family do not have to keep repeating their story. At minimum we will be clear about the known worries about the child, what are the existing strengths, who is available to help support them, and what the family and child’s views are. This will help inform the questions we ask and our analysis about the likely future trajectory is for the child if things remain the same. During our first visit we will also help the family complete a genogram and start mapping the child and family’s views on the dangers/worries and signs of strength/safety for the child.
* Where any of our visits to the family or enquires reveal there are ongoing concerns of significant harm for a child’s safety are evident, our next steps will always include convening a Family Network meeting within the next 15 working days. This may be in addition to, and help to inform, the need for convening a Child Protection Conference.
* We will always use a range of tools and resources to help the family identify and develop a naturally connected support network of people they can draw on to help provide additional support and safety for their child. Absent parents will always be considered as part of family finding unless there is a good reason not to. When this exists, it should be recorded.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * Any plans we create for children will always use clear language the family and children (of sufficient understanding) can understand, avoiding using our professional jargon or acronyms and always explaining clearly what these mean when we do need to use them. Plans will also clearly link each danger/worry statement for the child to an identified safety/well-being goal. Plans will also identify who in the family and professional network is responsible for each and a timescale for when they are expected to be completed and reviewed.
* We will use words and pictures diagrams to help us, professionals, family members, and the child best understand the progress they are making in implementing plans and what difference this is making for the child’s lived experience. If we have to start court proceedings to provide enough safety for a child, we will always submit the words and pictures work as part of the social worker’s statement.
* When we pass responsibility for a child onto another service, we will always include an updated safety/well-being plan that has been agreed with the family and the wider family support and professional network.
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**Children and Family First Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Children and Family First service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will facilitate Family Network Meetings to help bring the family’s support network together. We will prepare by familiarising ourselves with what we know about the child, family and friend’s attending so they do not have to keep repeating their story. We will explain the purpose of the meeting, what is expected of those who are participating, reviewing the danger/worry statement, creating safety goals for each of the worries identified, and help identify who will be responsible for each goal and how these will be reviewed. The worker will use their authority in a respectful and proportionate way that allows the meeting to keep focused on creating safer and better outcomes for the child and balancing this with allowing everyone attending to make a meaningful contribution. The worker will also outline bottom lines so there is clarity about what we cannot allow to happen to a child that may place them at significant risk of harm.
* When new information or new concerns come to light about a child, we will first explore this through our seven domains of case mapping to see how this affects the safety and well-being of the child to help inform what our next steps should be. We will further explore our understanding with the wider family and professional network to help inform our assessment and how we can work together to best support the child and keep them as safe as possible.
* We will help the family and involved professionals understand the importance of working with a ‘risk intelligent’ approach in how we explore, evidence, assess, and respond to managing dangers and worries for a child’s safety. We will advocate to the greatest extent possible that a child belongs with their family, unless it is too dangerous for them.
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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * When we must take steps to protect a child from danger and harm by initiating court care proceedings, will explain our reasons clearly and respectfully with the family as to why we are taking this step. We will refer to our danger/worry statements, our safety goals, our bottom lines, and the safety plan for the child so they can understand our reasons for doing so and why no other course of action would help keep their child safe enough at home.
* When a child first comes into our care, we will fully involve the Child in Care service in the period leading up to the second Looked After Child review meeting to help ensure they are aware of the child’s history and experience to date. This will help the child transition through the system in a way that avoids them and their family from having to repeat their story and to introduce them to the new worker and manager who will continue to support the child whilst in our care.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * When children journey from the Assessment service to us, we will always carefully review all the information provided to us, speak with the Assessment Team worker, and meet with the family so we are clear about their history and experience to date so they do not have to repeat their story. We will also explain how we will continue to work together and support the child and their family.
* We will always help the family identify who is part of their family support network through conversations and by using resources, such as family finding tools. This will help identify who amongst their network of family and friends can help contribute to the safety and support plans of the child, and that they are all clear about what the dangers/worries are that they are coming together to help address.
* We will make sure that safety/well-being plans for children outline a clear trajectory of what is expected to happen at each stage of progress, up to the point of when we can be expected to end our involvement with the family. Within this we will clarify how plans will be regularly reviewed, such as through family network meetings, supervision, core group meetings, and looked after child review meetings.
* We will regularly meet and spend time with children to help us understand the things they say are going well for them, the things they are worried about, and the things they want to be different. We will meet with children alone as much as possible and use creative ways to engage with them, such as activities, games, and tools like the three houses.
* We will use group supervision as a way of bringing together our collective best thinking to help support the child’s allocated worker in identifying different ways of seeing a child’s situation, exploring alternative ways of supporting the family, and in understanding the impact decisions may have on a child’s life trajectory.
* We will prepare for each meeting with a child, family or their support network by preparing questions and activities that are linked to the child’s safety/well-being plan and goals. This will include how we can prepare to have difficult conversations if things are not going according to the child’s plan and what may need to be done differently.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will always use words and pictures diagrams to help us, professionals, family members, and the child best understand the progress they are making in implementing plans and what difference this is making for the child’s lived experience. If we have to start court proceedings to provide enough safety for a child, we will always submit the words and pictures work as part of the social worker’s statement.
* We will always be clear with the family and their support network around what the bottom lines are and have a clear contingency plan in place that details what the family and wider network can expect to happen if the family are not able to carry out or sustain the child’s safety/well-being plan.
* We will always work on the basis that the best place for a child to grow up is with their family. Only when it has been shown that things are so unsafe that the child would be badly hurt, neglected, or abused within their family, and there is no realistic chance of the family network being able to overcome these dangers/worries, will we consider plans for who else will have to care for their child and how this is best achieved.
* When a child has been living in our care and the likely trajectory of them returning home does not seem likely after the first three months, then we must be clear about what the permanent care plan for the child will be going forward. This permanence plan will always involve the views and wishes of the child (subject to their age and understanding) and the family and will be communicated in a clear way that they can all best understand.
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**Children in Care Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Children in Care service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will write our reports for looked after child review meetings in a way that can be clearly understood by the child according to their age and ability to understand. Where they are very young, we will write our reports in a way that they could understand a little later as they get older and their understanding increases. We will include updates we make to their words and pictures story that began with their journey into BCP Children’s Services.
* We will always record any direct work activities that we do with our children and young people on their record so they can help understand their journey in care if they decide to see their record in the future.
* When we tell a child that we will do something then we will follow through on our commitments in a timely way. If this is not possible, we will tell them why and agree another way with them.
* We will always ask questions of the children in our care and of their carers to help us understand any worries that they may have and the things that are going well for the child. We will also include them and their ideas in what the best next steps should be to best support them and help keep them safe.
* We will make sure that a child’s care plan reflects any changes in their life and are reviewed regularly as agreed, or more frequently as needed.
* When there are worries about a child going missing, we will use network or multi-agency child exploitation meetings with all the key people that can help locate and support the child to discuss what the dangers/worries are for their safety. We will seek their ideas to develop a safety plan the child can understand that will help reduce the dangers/worries they are experiencing. When they return to our care we will make arrangements for them to speak with someone independent of us about why they were away and what we could do differently or better to help avoid them going missing again.
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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will treat our foster carers and others who care for our children with respect, recognising the important role they play in caring for our children. We will do this by always keeping our carers informed of any new information or developments about the child and their care plan, fully involve them in preparing for looked after child reviews, and seek their views about any changes to the child’s care plan.
* We will always consider whether it is safe enough for a child to leave our care and return to their family or naturally connected network. When it appears that it may be safe enough for the child to return home, we will assess this by exploring any dangers/worries as well as signs of safety/well-being to help inform any next steps in creating a plan to support how and when they can expect to return home. We will also convene a family network meeting to help the family bring together their support network to provide the greatest chance of stability and safety for the child when they return home.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will always carefully consider all the information provided to us by the previous service when children journey into our service. We will take part in discussions and preparations for the child’s second looked after review meeting of their care plan. We will meet the child, their family, and their carers along with the child’s current worker before we take responsibility for the child to allow everyone to get to know us and what they can expect from our support.
* We will prepare for our visits to our children by preparing what questions we want to ask, what activities we will be doing, and how this helps support the child’s care plan. We will listen to what the child tells us and what ways we can work together that will make them feel most comfortable. If we cannot meet a child’s wish because we believe it may not be in their best interest, we will explain our reasons why in a clear way they can best understand and make our best efforts to negotiate with them other solutions we can agree on.
* We will always listen to what families and children tell us so we can best understand things from each other’s point of view. We will be genuinely curious and actively listen to what the child and family tell us about their beliefs, values, identity, religion, family history and culture and what personal importance this has to each family member. We will always endeavour to work together and support the child and family in a way that best respects and support their overall identity.
* We will always support children in our care to develop their own sense of identity by understanding their journey in our care, what they value, their beliefs, religion, faith, sexuality and culture. We will also seek to improve our knowledge and understanding by seeking others within the family or wider community who can help us support the child in developing confidence in their own identity.
* We always recognise why it is important for children to have a sense of permanence in where they will live and who will care for them long term to helping them achieve a sense of love and belonging in their life. We will help achieve this by making sure their permanence plan is always kept up to date and that it reflects the child’s own wishes, feelings and aspirations for what they want to achieve in their life and to share this in their looked after review meetings.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We always believe in the potential of our children and want to help maximise their full potential. This means we need to provide them with reliable emotional and practical support in order to help them achieve their future life goals.
* We will always advocate for our children to have the best learning experience that helps them achieve their future career and education goals. We will do this by listening to their views, working with their school or education provider, and involve our virtual school to provide them with the best learning experience possible.
* We will ensure that all children in our care have savings kept according to our savings policy. We recognise that any shortfalls are not the child’s responsibility and we will advocate to make sure this is made right as soon as possible, so the child has the right amount of savings that helps support their future independence. We will be open with our children about their savings and how they can access it when they leave our care.
* We will work hard to make sure children in our care maintain their connection with their family to the greatest extent possible so long as it does not pose a risk to their safety and well-being. We recognise that any difficulties we may have with family members does not always mean it will be a risk for the child and will think creatively about how we can maintain respectful relationships with the family by keeping the focus on what is in the best interest of the child.
* We recognise the importance of the Independent Reviewing Officer’s (IRO) role in reviewing and, where necessary, challenging the care plans we create for our children; and we welcome this. We expect they will thoroughly check that everything possible is being done to ensure that our children have updated, aspirational, and clear plans for how we will look after them and support their needs. They will want to make sure these plans provide our children with a sense of long-term permanence in where they will live and who will care for them. Where our care plans for children are likely to change, we will always let the IRO know and seek their view.
* We will use group supervision as a way of bringing together our collective best thinking to help support the child’s allocated worker in identifying different ways of seeing a child’s situation, exploring alternative ways of supporting them, and in understanding the impact decisions may have on a child’s life trajectory.
* We understand the importance of being available and reliable to children and young people in our care and how our relationships with them impact on their personal and emotional well-being. When we leave, we will say “goodbye” to them and help introduce them to their new worker. When we go on holiday, we will let them know when we will be back and who to speak to while we are away.
* We will make sure that all children in our care have a care plan that is kept up to date and is written clearly for them to understand (either now or in the near future), that is aspirational, and has a clear trajectory for what we hope to achieve for them later in life. When we have to make different decisions in their best interest, we will explain this in a way that they can best understand given their age and level of understanding at any given time of their life.
* We recognise that looked after review meetings are about and for the child. As such, we will always encourage and support our children to take a full part in their reviews. When they are willing and ready, we will work together with their IRO to help them chair or facilitate their review meetings.
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**Care Experienced Young People’s Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Care Experienced Young People’s service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We understand that young people living in our care will have likely experienced trauma from their previous experience of neglect and/or abuse. For this reason we will remain steadfast in our non-judgmental and ongoing support to help them overcome any impact this still has and in seeking the right level of support for them. We will always look to praise and celebrate their successes and achievements along the way, no matter how big or small. We will understand that their past aggressive or unwelcome behaviour and actions is often a result of their past trauma and experiences in care and avoid labelling or treating them as though they are the sum of their difficulties. We will also encourage others who work and support our young people to do the same, and respectfully challenge them if they do so to help them have the same understanding as we do.
* We will express and model our high aspirations for each young person and always encourage them to be the best they can be. We will equally support them in making sure their pathways plans are equally aspirational and reflect the unique identity and desires our young people aim to achieve in their lives.
* We will work with all our young people to help them understand their life journey both before and while they were in our care. This will include supporting them when they request to see their records and identifying any support they may need to do this and the emotional impact this could have. We will assist them in developing their life story in a way they can best understand, including adding to or amending their words and picture version.
* We recognise there will come a time when our young adults will no longer receive support from us. We will always do our best, respecting the wishes of the young adult, to help them develop safe, healthy, and encouraging support networks of their own well in advance so they have the best possibility of becoming responsible and successful adults in whatever it is they wish to do in their lives.
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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will recognise that some young adults may tell us they no longer wish to receive our help and support. Whatever their reasons are for this, we understand that just as a good parent never gives up on their child neither will we. We will always find creative and respectful ways of letting them know they can always get back in touch with us and ask for our support (up to the age of 25) and we will never turn them away. We will also let them know we would like to keep in touch and make our best efforts to negotiate with them how we can best do this whilst respecting their wishes and right to decide. We will always let them know we are interested in knowing how they are, share in their achievements, and support them any way we can.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will always carefully consider all the information provided to us by the previous service when young people journey into our service. We will meet the young person, and with their consent any family members and carers important to them so we can get to know the young person and discuss how we can best support them into a life of independence. We will also take part in discussions and preparations for their pathway plan to understand the needs, aspirations, and goals the young person wants to achieve as a young adult.
* We will prepare for our visits to young people by asking them what they wish to talk about, what they would like support with, and where and how they would like to meet with us. We will always meet where the young person feels most comfortable, unless there is a good reason why we cannot. Where this is the case, we will make our best efforts to discuss and negotiate a way we can agree to meet and speak to each other.
* We will work with our young people to ensure they have the best chances for a life of stability and success through helping them find a place to live, access to good education and work opportunities, and how they can budget their money and access financial support.
* We will ensure that all our young people know about the savings that we have put away for their future life of impendence and how they can access this once they have left our care.
* We will make sure that as our young people mature and grow in their knowledge and understanding, we will support them taking an increasing lead in how they can create and shape their pathway plans and that these are written in a way they can best understand and follow at each stage of their life journey into adulthood.
* We will understand and respect that young people have the right to make choices about the way they live their life. We will persistently give our best advice to help young people avoid making harmful mistakes, learn from their experiences, and make safer or better choices. We fully understand that our young people may face lots of difficulties and at times may not wish to speak with or meet with us. However, we are professional and experienced enough to know to not take this personally and to never give up on them.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We understand that risk-taking is an inherent part of growing-up. We will use a “risk intelligent approach”, which means we will balance our need to help our young people be as safe as possible whilst respecting it is their right to live their life as they desire and learn from the consequences of their mistakes. Where we have serious worries about the dangers they may expose themselves or others to, we will always share our worries with them and, if necessary, explain why we have to take steps against their wishes (such as contacting emergency services) where we may be required to by law or policy.
* We will support our young people to develop their identity by understanding their journey in care, their beliefs, religion, faith, sexuality, culture, interests, and anything else that is important to how they identify themselves and place in society.
* We will discuss with our young people the purpose of family network meetings and how they can be helpful in bringing together their own support network of family and friends who will help them now and in the future. Where they agree to this we will support them by helping identify who they would like to be involved and in facilitating the meeting.
* We understand the importance of being available and reliable to our young people we support and how our relationships with them impact on their personal and emotional well-being. When we leave, we will say “goodbye” to them and help introduce them to their new worker. When we go on holiday, we will let them know when we will be back and who to speak to while we are away.
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These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Children who are Disabled service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

**Children who are Disabled Service**

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We understand that every child and every family is unique, and that people have different abilities in being able to cope with stress and difficulties. We will listen carefully to the family and respond to each situation in a way that reflects their unique situation.
* We recognise that we cannot always meet a family’s request for support. We will always explain why we cannot offer support in an honest and open way, whilst helping them to identify who in their own support network may be able to help and what other services may be available to them in the community.
* We will facilitate Family Network Meetings to help bring the family’s support network together. We will prepare by familiarising ourselves with what we know about the child, family and friend’s attending so they do not have to keep repeating their story. We will explain the purpose of the meeting, what is expected of those who are participating, reviewing the danger/worry statement, creating safety goals for each of the worries identified, and help identify who will be responsible for each goal and how these will be reviewed. We will use our authority in a respectful and proportionate way that allows the meeting to keep focused on creating safer and better outcomes for the child and balancing this with allowing everyone attending to make a meaningful contribution. We will also outline bottom lines so there is clarity about what we cannot allow to happen to a child that may place them at significant risk of harm.
* We will ensure that when new information comes to light about a child and their family, we will use our mapping tool to explore what this information means, along with the family network, to help us all understand what impact this may have for the child.
* We will help the family and involved professionals understand the importance of working with a ‘risk intelligent’ approach in how we explore, evidence, assess, and respond to managing dangers and worries to a child’s safety. We will advocate to the greatest extent possible that a child belongs with their family, unless it is too dangerous for them.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We recognise that some children will need ongoing support through part of all of their childhood due to the significant nature of their physical, mental, and/or emotional needs. Both they and their parents/carers will require additional specialist support in order to provide these children with the best opportunities for promoting their ongoing health, development, and future life needs. We recognise the challenges that children and their parents/carers that we work with face and are sensitive to their situation and need for help.
* We will always carefully consider all the information provided to us by the previous service when children journey into our service. We will explore this understanding with the information that is provided by other professionals helping to support the child and family and confirm what the family’s view and understanding is of the information we have. We will meet the child, their family, and their carers along with the child’s current worker before we take responsibility for the child to allow everyone to get to know us and what they can expect from our support.
* We will make sure every child we support has a chronology of significant events of their life and that it is kept up to date. This chronology will help us, the family, and involved professionals understand the child’s life trajectory based on what has already happened in their life, both the worries and things that have gone well for them.
* We will prepare carefully before approaching a family to agree with them how we will carry out our assessments of their child and family. This includes being clear about what we are worried about, what is going well, and what we need to ask to seek clarity so our assessments are as accurate, timely, and evidenced based as possible. From our first visit with the family, we will ask information to help complete a genogram and start to map the information we gather with them regarding the worries/dangers and signs of strength/safety for their child.
* Where our first visit with the family and the information we have at the time indicate we have serious worries about a child’s safety and well-being, we will inform the family about the need for convening a family network meeting within the next 15 working days. We will explain what the purpose of this is and ask who they would like to attend that can help to support them and their child.
* We will use a range of tools and resources to help the family identify and develop a naturally connected support network who can help them with the care of their child. Any parent or person who has parental responsibility for a child will always be considered, even if they are not always involved in the child’s life, unless we have good reasons not to. Where this happens, we will record the reasons for this and what efforts we made to identify and contact them.
* We will create clear and jargon free plans for children that are connected to the worry/danger statements and wellbeing/safety goals that are identified for the child. The plans will be clear enough for the family to understand what needs to be done on a day-to-day basis to help keep their children safe and well cared for. It will also be clear about what additional support other involved professionals will be providing and what the timescales are for how often they will be provided and when they can be expected to end. These plans will be informed by the evidence gathered in our assessment of the child and family.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will do our very best to provide a copy of the child’s plan in a way that can be best understood by the child and their family. This may include us using a words and pictures version or other tools and activities.
* We will spend time with the children we support and seek to understand the things they feel are going well, the things they are worried about, and the things they want to be different. Where they cannot always communicate this verbally, we will use other communication means, such as visual activities or Makaton, as well as our observation skills to best understand the child’s life experience and what they would like to see happen.
* We will prepare for each meeting with a child, their family and/or network to ensure that every visit and activity is working towards meeting the goals outlined in the child’s support plan. We will also be curious and prepare questions that will help identify what work has been done, what has worked well, what we may need to do differently, and what areas of work still need to happen.
* Where a child’s assessment shows they need more significant support, we will provide this through such options as short breaks or direct payments to the parents/carers to help provide the added support the child and their family require. We will look to the established network whenever possible to make support arrangements with someone who is known to the child. We recognise that children are best cared for within their family network, unless it is too unsafe for them. When it is too unsafe and children have to be cared for by someone else, we will seek out support arrangements for the child with those who can best understand and support their unique individual needs.
* We will use group supervision as a way of bringing together our collective best thinking to help support the child’s allocated worker in identifying different ways of seeing a child’s situation, exploring alternative ways of supporting them, and in understanding the impact decisions may have on a child’s life trajectory.
* We will always work on the basis that the best place for a child to grow up is with their family and with the support of their family’s network. If this is not safe enough, then we will always consider who else in the family’s network could care for the child long term. Only where neither of these options are safe enough for the child will we consider other options for who else could care for them long term.
* When we decide we need to seek court care proceedings to explore alternatives for where a child will live, we will always help the family understand our reasons for this by clearly explaining the danger/worry statements and our safety/well-being goals and why we believe this is the best outcome for their child. We will also explore other ways of helping to explain this clearly, such as using the child’s words and pictures, to show how we could not achieve enough safety for them living with their family. We will submit this as part of our statement to the court.
* When a child has been living in our care and the likely trajectory of them returning home does not seem likely after the first three months, then we must be clear about what the permanent care plan for the child will be going forward. This permanence plan will always involve the views and wishes of the child (subject to their age and understanding) and the family and will be communicated in a clear way that they can all best understand.
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**Out of Hours Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Out of Hours service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We recognise that the child’s voice is central to any safe planning and next steps we do to help support them and keep them as safe as possible.
* We will make decisions on when and how we can support the children that are referred to our service based on an assessment of the information we have on the danger/worries and safety/strengths to prioritise who may need our help first.
* We will seek agreement of the child’s allocated worker and their manager so that our intervention is in line with the thoughtful planning of those most familiar with the child and their family situation.
* We will show curiosity to understand the trajectory the child’s allocated workers is trying to achieve for them so that our support and intervention is as consistent as possible with those plans.
* We will manage the worries of the emergency services sensitively and assertively so that the need to keep a child safe from danger is carefully balanced against the rights and responsibilities of children and their families.
* We will be clear in our communication with the child’s allocated worker when explaining what work and support we provided out of hours to the child and their family.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will use thoughtful and curious questions to respond to referrals and enquiries we receive about children. This will help us to better understand what the evidence is telling us about the dangers/worries a child is experiencing as well as any signs of strength/safety to build upon.
* We will always seek consent from the child’s family before we continue any enquiries into their family situation from other professionals involved with them, unless doing so would put the child at risk of more danger/harm.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will read important information on the child’s record, such as the most recent assessments, chronology, and summaries before making decisions about what the best next steps should be.
* We will always look to the family and their support network for ways they can help contribute to their child’s safety plan to the greatest extent possible.
* We will write information on a child’s record in a clear and jargon free way, and explain any jargon or acronyms when we have to use them. Our views will be evidenced based and balance the worries/dangers with the strengths/safety and how this has informed our next steps and decisions we make. We recognise how this is important for a child to understand what happened at that time in their journey if they ask to see their record in the future.
* We will always inform professionals who make referrals that we have received their referral. We will tell all referrers what our next steps are for the child and the family to the greatest extent that our consent allows, or where it is necessary in order to help keep a child safe from danger.
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**Fostering Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that practitioners and managers in the Fostering Service work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will honour and respect our carers. We will arrange events and opportunities to celebrate their achievements and to praise their ongoing efforts in caring for our children in their care.
* We will make sure we focus our recruiting efforts on obtaining and retaining foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences to help us provide the most appropriate family homes to match with the children we care for.
* We will ensure that all foster carers have access to a broad range of training opportunities that helps them provide a high quality of care for children from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. All of our foster carers will be trained with an understanding of attachment theory and how this applies to the children they care for and the quality of care, love, and understanding they are given.
* We will provide a welcome book to the child’s social worker, which provides them with information and pictures about the foster carers, their home, and their family to help prepare a new child who will come to live with them.
* We will always make sure that there is a planning meeting when a child is newly placed in the home of any foster carer. Our aim is that this is to always happen before the child moves in, or at the latest during the visit where the child first comes to live with their new foster family.
* We will work alongside the child’s social worker and our foster carers to make sure that everyone knows and understands the child’s care plan and works to achieve their tasks in that plan.
* We will make sure that we understand what the care experience is like for each child in a foster home. This means being professionally curious and asking questions to get a sense of the child’s lived experience with our foster carers. This will include such things as making sure they have enough properly fitting clothes and attending school or nursery regularly.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will recruit foster carers who can provide stable, caring, healing environments for the children and young people we look after. We will help them develop their skills to increase their ability to provide a sense of belonging for our children.
* We will provide homes and places where children can be best matched to carers who have the skills, lifestyle and family structure required to meet the unique needs of each child we place in their care.
* We will recruit and support foster carers who can care for children within their own communities and support the networks that are important to them. We believe that it is important that children do not have to change schools and are matched to carers who can support their cultural needs, help them to feel safe and loved, learn and achieve. We want our foster children to experience joy. We want sibling groups to be placed together.
* We will recruit foster carers who understand the value of parents and other family members to children and feel confident that they can manage the demands of child’s family time.
* We will recognise the importance of the fostering assessment process in preparing carers for the task ahead of the meeting, whether they are local authority foster carers or family network foster carers. We will use a strengths-based approach that allows the potential carers to tell us who they are, what they are good at, what they are proud of and have achieved, as well as telling us about what worries them and what misjudgements they have made in life and how they might have learned from these.
* We will always plan for our assessments and work out our questions in advance, so we make the best use of the session with the potential carers. We always have a clear timeframe and trajectory for when assessments should be completed.
* We will always explore the potential foster carer’s support network during an assessment. When we assess family network foster carers, we will always hold a family network meeting bringing together the key individuals for potential carers so we can explore and understand who will support them going forward.
* We will always use critical thinking and enquiry when checking the skills and history given by potential foster carers. We will observe carers with their own children, use the information from training, obtain references and triangulate information so that we know that we have done everything we can to help recruit the best foster carers are suited to caring for BCP’s children.
* We will always use chronologies, firstly to understand the prospective foster carers background and motivation for fostering. After approval, we will continue to keep foster carer’s chronologies updated with significant events (both successes and concerns), such as changes to their approval, when placements come to an end and why, training needs and learning developments, and any allegations made and outcome of enquiries.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will visit our foster carers regularly and will prepare questions to ensure visits are purposeful and are linked to the support needs of our carers and the children they care for. This will help give us the assurance that our foster carers are fulfilling their responsibilities and are properly supported. We will be curious about what is working well and what any worries are of both our foster carers and ourselves. We will use scaling questions to help seek clarity of how well things are working and to gauge our progress of how well our support is working and the impact this makes on the children we care for.
* When we are worried that a placement is not working well and there is a feeling that the placement may end in an unplanned way, we will always hold a placement stability meeting, which will include the most important people to the child and their carers, including involved professionals and, where appropriate, the child. We will use mapping and relevant scaling questions as tools that will help everyone understand what the worries are, what is or has worked well, in order to identify the next best steps in how we support our carer and child in how we can support the stability of the child’s current home.
* We will recognise that foster carers are doing an incredibly important job and must be respected as professionals. We will make sure that foster carers are included in the team around the child meetings and are offered a timely and responsive service to any queries.
* We will always follow up complaints made about our foster carers standards of care in a timely way, being open minded in our enquiries to seek an understanding of what we may be able to do better and how we can best support this. We recognise the important and challenging job our foster carers provide in caring for our children and will always be mindful of this in how we respond to any complaints or concerns raised. We will balance this view carefully with the importance of ensuring we do not tolerate unacceptable behaviour or those that do not meet the standards we have for those caring for our children.
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**Child Protection Chairs**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that Child Protection Chairs and their manager will work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will ask all conference attendees to arrive 30 minutes before the conference to read the reports prepared by everyone involved with the child and family. We recognise that conferences are stressful events for family members and will endeavour to ensure that they start on time.
* We will ensure that the conference is recognised as a confidential meeting and run fairly with everyone having a chance to put their point of view forward, whilst keeping the focus on the child.
* We will ensure that the child’s safety plan is reviewed regularly by convening and chairing conferences within required timescales, or sooner if we believe necessary to achieve enough safety and stability for the child in a timely way*.*
* During a child protection conference, we will use questions that we have thought about and prepared beforehand to gain an understanding of the danger or worries faced by the child, as well as what is working well for them now or in the past.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will consult with the child’s social worker and/or their manager prior to every child protection conference. We will use this consultation to check that there are up-to-date danger statement/s and matching safety goals and that these have been shared with the family and the wider family network before the conference. We will use this consultation to discuss how to make attendance for the family, the network and child (if attending) as positive an experience as we can.
* We will respectfully challenge the worker and manager if our professional view is that further work should be completed before the danger statements and safety goals can be shared in the conference. We will particularly challenge if we cannot see evidence that the child’s voice and lived experience is at the centre of the mapping and analysis.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will meet independently with the family, the network and the child, (if attending) prior to the conference. This is so that they know what is going to happen in the meeting and we agree how they can best have their say and participate.
* We will ensure thatthat the child’s voice and lived experience is at the heart of the conference, either through encouraging their attendance, through sharing the direct work that has been done with the child (such as three houses), or by making sure the child is supported through an advocate.
* We will ensure that the meeting follows the SoS framework using the agreed agenda. We will ensure that the conference uses the danger statements and safety goals to move the situation on from where we are now to where we all want to get to for the child. We will actively seek examples of positive actions and progress and rigorously balance the things that are going well against the possible harm or abuse experienced by the child.
* We will ensure that there is a very clear focus on what steps must be taken, who will be taking action and within what timescales to ensure that safety is increased and that the risk of harm is effectively reduced. We will ask questions and amend the child’s safety plan until everyone is satisfied that it has the best chance of success, especially at trigger times/ stress points. Contingency plans will be created to explore “what if” things do not happen and be linked to our bottom lines.
* We will ensure that every child has a safety goal that addresses all of the worries and requirements of the danger statement and that both family members and practitioners from across all involved support agencies are clear about how they will contribute to the child’s protection plan and how this contributes to increasing the safety and well-being of the child.
* We will ensure that scaling is used effectively in order to clarify how worried everyone involved in the child’s care are, to identify the next steps in moving towards increased safety and well-being for the child, and when we know things have improved enough for the child for our involvement to be reduced and to eventually end.
* If in-between child protection conferences we become aware that things are too unsafe for a child or there has been a significant change in their circumstances, we will consider whether we need to bring forward the next conference to an early date to review what the next steps should be.
* We will ensure that the next steps in a child’s plan always include how and what tools or activities will be used to share the safety plan with the child in a way they can best understand.
* When we become aware that a child’s protection plan is not progressing in a timely or effective way, we will use our position and authority to question and respectfully challenge this with a view to make sure these are actioned more quickly in any new plan made. If difficulties remain or are anticipated, then the chair may raise these through the escalation process with their line manager.
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**Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their manager will work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will make sure that child in care reviews are held within required timescales as a minimum. They will also take place before any change in a child’s care plan, such as moving homes, or as soon as possible after the change has occurred.
* We will maintain an interest and commitment to each child and respond to them when they ask to speak to their IRO. When we tell a child we will do something and by when, we follow through on our commitments. When we have not been able to do what we said we would, we will explain this to the child and try and agree a different approach.
* We will use questions that we have thought about and prepared before any child in care review to seek an understanding of what is going well for the child and any danger or worries they may face.
* We will treat foster carers and others who care for our children with the utmost respect understanding the important role they play in providing the day to day care for the children we look after.
* We will ensure that alerts are raised with managers when there are system issues that mean that children’s needs are not being adequately met in a timely way. All alerts will be recorded on a child’s record with the outcome.
* We will make sure that the child is offered an advocate or Independent visitor whenever they ask for one or when it is believed to be in their best interest.
* We recognise the importance of the child in care reviewing process to be child focused and support their long term need for permanence. This may mean looking at reducing the frequency of reviews so as to reduce the impact such procedures may have on giving a child a more natural lived experience. Any agreement to reduce the frequency of meetings will be agreed and recorded and a “virtual” review will still be conducted.
* We recognise our significant role in the lives of our children in care and will ensure that we always say “goodbye” when we end our involvement, whatever the reason.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will ensure that all child in care meetings review a child’s care plan focused on their needs for safety, stability, and well-being. They will consider a child and family’s views and next steps recommended will clearly identify timescales and who will be responsible for achieving them.
* We will ensure that every child in care review will also consider the child’s plan for permanence, their personal education plan (PEP), their words and picture story of their journey in care, and any health and care plan (EHCP). Each review will be recorded in a way that is clear and jargon free so that the child can understand now or in the near future and is clear to their family and others to understand.
* We will ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, a child is able to keep connections with their natural family network through regular visits and contact ways (ie: video calls or letters).
* We will consult with the social worker and their manager prior to each child in care review to understand what progress has been made on the child’s care plan since the last review. If this is the child’s first review, we will want to understand what assessment and safety planning work has been done with the child and the family network prior to the review. We will want to understand what the child’s plans for permanence are, including what needs to happen for them to be able to return to their family.
* We will be flexible about how we manage the review process, which can either be a series of small meetings, or one larger meeting, dependant on the child’s wishes and their circumstances. Whatever the process, the review will take no longer than 20 working days to complete.
* We will contact the child independently and ensure that they know how to contact us in between reviews should they want to. We will always have contact with the child prior to a review so that we can support them to contribute to the review in the best way possible. We will explain the complaints procedure to a child when needed. The review is the child’s meeting; they are the most important person at the meeting and hearing what they have to say is central to the review. Older or more confident children will be invited to chair or facilitate their own review and will be actively supported to do this.
* We will be responsible for ensuring that all relevant people, including the child and parents, understand the purpose of the review and how they will have opportunities to contribute and express their views.
* We will ensure that recommendations and actions from the review are sent to the social worker within five working days of the review for consideration. The final record of the review, including the agreed recommendations, will be sent to all those invited within 20 working days of the meeting.
* We will monitor the progress of a child’s care plan in between reviews and respectfully challenge when necessary if plans are not progressing as intended. We will meet with our most vulnerable children in between their reviews, or more frequently if they request this.
* We will respectfully challenge where it appears that work to progress the child’s care plan has fallen short of expectations and require this work to be completed as close to the review date as possible. We will escalate concerns regarding the safety of a child or concerns with their care plan using our authority as IROs through agreed escalation procedures. The focus of any escalation will be on achieving the best and most timely outcome for the child.
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**Parenting Assessment Service**

These practice standards build on the universal practice standards that apply to the whole of BCP Children’s Services. They describe the ways that the Parenting Assessment Service and their manager will work with each other, our children, families, and other professionals in accordance with our Signs of Safety practice framework. Doing so helps us work in a way that builds respectful working relationships, balances our worries with what is working well for children, is evidenced based, and brings out the best and safest outcomes for the children and young people we support.

We recognise this is a journey for us and as a learning organisation we aim to continually challenge one another in respectful ways to consistently work together in a manner that is consistent with our Signs of Safety ethos, whilst sharing our learning and good practice so that our practice standards can evolve as our experience and practice does.

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| **Our Practice Expectations** | * We will be curious and listen to families openly to help us understand what their family life is like and what is unique to their family situation. We will spend time getting to know them to understand their beliefs, values, identity, religion, family history and culture and what importance this plays in how they raise their children.
* We will write our parenting assessment in clear language, avoiding professional jargon or acronyms or explaining them when we have to use them, so the family’s can best understand them. We will also sit with the family to go through our assessments with them so we can be sure they clearly understand what it says and how we came to our conclusions.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will have a planning meeting with the social worker when they ask us to complete a parenting assessment with a family. This will help us gain a good understanding of what is happening for the child and family, including what the dangers statements and the safety goal are for the child and how our assessment will take place alongside other aspects of the safety plan. We will seek to understand how the timescales for our work will affect the overall trajectory of a child’s life.
* We will always introduce ourselves and explain how we will be working together with them, what areas will be covered in the assessment, and what the purpose is. We will use clear language and help explain professional jargon and acronyms to help the family clearly understand the process.
* We will always ask parents if they have any difficulties reading, writing, or in their ability to communicate and work together on ways we can best work together that helps them have the best understanding of the process and chance of making the outcome a success.
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| **Our Bottom Lines** | * We will explore with the family their areas of strength and what is going well, as well as any worries or concerns they have around their parenting and family life. We will keenly look for any past or present signs of success that the family can be used to build upon.
* We will work flexibly and understand that family life is not a nine to five job. We will be open to meeting with parents in the mornings, evenings, and weekends, if this is needed.
* We will always give feedback to parents throughout our assessment process so that there will never be any surprises when they receive our final assessment. We will always tell parents face-to-face if there are things that we are worried about and we will be honest in all our conversations with parents about the work we do.
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