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| **Relational Approaches to Working with Children and their Families.****Developing confident practice in ‘De-escalation’***Working with families through high challenge and high support, rather than doing things to them or for them builds resilience, enhances problem-solving skills and fosters compassion over aggression.*(Leeds Relational Practice Centre 2021) |

**This guidance supports:**

* Our increasing focus on relational and systemically informed practice and the importance of staff wellbeing and safety, building on and improving existing guidance to create more openness and dialogue about our responses to anxiety, hostility, fear and anger when working closely with families.
* The provision of dignified, individualised services and a collaborative and relational focus to professional contacts with all children and families involved with Children’s Services and professional colleagues involved with them.
* The participation of children, young people, their families and carers.
* The protection of children involved with our services including those in residential and foster care.
* The protection of staff working with children and their families and carers in Gloucestershire Children’s Services.
* Attention where necessary to agreed and acceptable guidelines and expectations regarding ‘de-escalation’ of volatile and violent responses, directed by current law and national guidance.
* Confirmation that in any circumstances physical intervention will only be used as a last resort to prevent injury to self or others, or to prevent serious damage to property or any person including the child.
* The expectations below support existing policy and procedure relating to children in foster care and residential care and children who have a disability and are intended to inform and enhance discussion and improving practice for all the children we are involved with.

**This guidance will be developed further to include:**

* Wider guidance and information on de-escalation techniques in response to verbal and physical aggression, hostility and avoidance.
* Practice examples and discussion points from practitioners across the service to share experiences and to provide learning and discussion points for use in teams and individual development. This will be developed during 2022 via a de-escalation working group including Practitioners, Ambassadors and CYPS partners.
* Multi Agency guidance and practice examples to support development of a consistent systemically informed approach to and language for positive relationships with children and their families across services.

**Key Themes:**

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|  | 1. Positive behaviours and improved outcomes across all our professional involvements are more likely to be maintained where children and young people are involved as far as possible in decision making about their care and the decisions made on their behalf, and where carers and involved professionals across agencies maintain positive, open and accepting relationships with them.
2. It is important for all staff to respect, encourage and support children and young people to participate, be consulted, make informed choices and to agree boundaries where necessary.
3. Key messages from Ambassadors, including Practitioners / Ambassador video discussion and practice examples will be incorporated into this guidance during 2022.
4. These themes are supported by the principles of Language that Cares

promoted by our Ambassadors. A link to these materials can be found here: <https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/gloucestershirecs/resource-library/#collapse1_3> |
|  | 1. Such positive relationships between children, young people and their carers offer the security and stability from which they can explore and mature and are the key factors in promoting inclusion, fair process and opportunity. Positive relationships are those which are characterised by: *consistency and unconditional positive regard for the child on the part of the carer; and where the carer acknowledges the importance of understanding and responding to the child’s lived experience of care. Positive, stable relationships help the child to feel secure and cared about and for.*
2. Children’s Services staff have a crucial role in ensuring that these inclusive approaches are promoted throughout our involvement in the lives of children and their families and are shared effectively with our multi agency partners.

Further information and guidance for all professional involvements with children and their families can be found here:  [Good Practice Supporting the Voice of the Child (proceduresonline.com)](https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/gloucestershire/p_voice_of_ch.html?zoom_highlight=Good+Practice+Supporting+the+Voice+of+the+Child)1. Relationship building can’t occur in isolation, and practitioners need reflective and reflexive space to consider, hypothesise and share their observations and feelings about presenting issues, concerns and opportunities to enable individualised approaches and outcome focussed work. This is all the more important in the context of continued virtual / remote working due to ongoing Covid 19 challenges, the consequent increase in professional and personal isolation and the additional economic and emotional impacts on children and families within communities.
2. To this end our supervision, team meetings and Advanced Practitioner reflective forums will include and develop dialogue about both the barriers and opportunities to positive relationships, de- briefing on volatile situations and highlighting learning points, effective practice and consequences for wider sharing and consideration across the service.

*The current Children Services Supervision policy can be accessed here:*[Supervision Policy (proceduresonline.com)](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_supervision.html?zoom_highlight=supervision) |
| .  ..  | 1. This developing approach and expectation links directly to all the following *Post Qualifying Standards* for Children and Family Social Work Practitioners:

Relationships and effective direct workCommunicationChild developmentAdult mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disabilityAbuse and neglect of childrenChild and family assessmentAnalysis, decision-making, planning and reviewThe law and the family and youth justice systemsThe role of supervisionOrganisational context1. Further detail on the standards is in link below:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708704/Post-qualifying_standard-KSS_for_child_and_family_practitioners.pdf>1. Expectations also connect to the Social Work England Professional Standards:

Promote the rights, strengths and wellbeing of people, families and communities Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of people Being accountable for the quality of my practice and the decisions I make Maintaining continuing professional development Act safely, respectfully and with professional integrity Promote ethical practice and report concerns1. Further detail on these standards is in link below:

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/professional-standards/>1. A deliberate emphasis is made on the opportunity and agency of all practitioners, with relevant and active manager and service guidance and support to build and maintain the conditions for positive relational practice with children and their families and carers – whilst attention to *‘de-escalation’* and safe and proportionate responses to potentially dangerous situations are crucial, it’s of equal importance to recognise and address the antecedents of behaviours and responses and to create opportunity for change.
2. It is important to recognise the positive effects of praise and encouragement and the power of positive reinforcement. The identification and creation of opportunities for children and young people (and their families) to experience success and to receive praise and encouragement for their achievements, however small, is important in forming purposeful trusting relationships. Research evidence demonstrates that a “high warmth - low criticism” relationship between adults and children and young people, promotes positive social interactions.

The Children’s Services Resource Library provides a variety of accessible direct work and life-story resources to support relationship building: <https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/gloucestershirecs/resource-library/#collapse1><https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/gloucestershirecs/resource-library/#collapse1_1>1. Specific direct work practice examples linked to relational practice and de-escalation will be added to this guidance during 2022.
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|  | 1. We know that some parents, children and young people will be unused to or may resist forming positive relationships with involved professionals. This could result in children and young people presenting behaviours that may challenge staff and lead to patterns of responses, misinterpretations and assumptions that limit effective communication, collaboration or progress:

 ‘*Behaviour is a means of communication and has a cause and a purpose. Behaviour that challenges may signal a need for support and it is essential to understand its underlying causes. It may, for example, be the result of a medical condition or sensory impairment, previous trauma or neglect, or be exacerbated by an unmet need or undiagnosed medical condition. It may reflect the challenges of communication, or the frustrations faced by children and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health difficulties, who may also have little choice and control over their lives. These factors may result in behaviours that are challenging. Behaviours that challenge may reflect the impact on a child or young person of being exposed to challenging environments which they do not understand or where positive social interactions are lacking or personal choices are limited.*(DfE A Positive and Proactive Approach to Behaviour in Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention June 2019)1. Examples could include – children in care who may find it difficult to develop such relationships because the impact of abuse, trauma, separation, multiple placement moves and low self-esteem prevents this, Children living at home where social work involvement is feared, mistrusted and unwelcomed by adults, and mental ill health or disability, which may cause barriers to effective communication may also contribute to risk of conflict.
2. Relevant practitioner practice examples and video / podcast discussions from the de-escalation working group will be added to this guidance during 2022.
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| . | 1. Children and young people need opportunity to recognise and see benefit to the boundaries of safe behaviours of themselves and carers. Communicating boundaries is an integral part of caring and of creating a safe living environment for all children, which may lead to potential additional conflict when professional views and recommendations are disputed, challenged or avoided by parents, carers or children. This also creates a key area for practitioners in all settings to identify and create opportunities for alternatives to be identified, voiced, explored and achieved. There is a need for diversion, reassurance, clear limits, choices and learning from positive outcomes.
2. All ‘challenging’ behaviour can be seen as a form of communication - and this may be more apparent with children and young people with physical or learning disabilities. All our learning opportunities and resources will maintain a primary focus on how we effectively work ‘with’ children and their families and will promote awareness of how ‘doing to or ‘for’ reduces opportunity and fair process.
3. All Staff are expected to promote and role model calm and professional understanding and respond appropriately to what a child is trying to express through their behaviour. To this end, the importance of Supervision and safe reflective space to explore feelings and perceptions of every child’s story and experiences will be directly encouraged and expected.
4. Developing your own emotional intelligence and understanding behaviour is central to being able to respond appropriately to a child’s behaviour. emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to:

Be aware of your own emotionsManage your own emotionsExpress emotions appropriately and effectivelyUnderstand other people’s emotionsManage emotional interactions with others effectively.Debrief is an important tool to ensure staff understand and manage feelings and responses to behaviour.1. Encouraging positive behaviours through praise and reward is vital to a child’s sense of emotional wellbeing and developing their understanding of socially acceptable behaviours. Being clear of what is expected of them is therefore an essential component of supporting and managing a child’s behaviour.
2. A deliberate emphasis on relational approaches to developing trust, inclusion and strengths focus aims to promote collaboration and progress with all children and their families across all social care settings – this overarching ethos and approach is part of a wider cultural change emphasis within our service.
3. **Existing local guidance:**

This is the current guidance on Tri- X regarding physical intervention and behaviour management mainly linked to foster care and residential care: [https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p\_phys\_int.html#](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_phys_int.html)[https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p\_behav\_man.html#](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_behav_man.html)Further review may incorporate additional detail and advice for Foster Carers and residential staff as noted in the guidance below: [https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p\_physical\_restraint.html#](https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p_physical_restraint.html)<https://qualitystandards.proceduresonline.com/homes/p_quality_standards.html#positive><https://leedschildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_beh_supp.html>1. **Further relevant reading and advice includes:**

HM Gov guidance - Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention for children and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health difficulties in health and social care services and special education settings: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812435/reducing-the-need-for-restraint-and-restrictive-intervention.pdf> Ofsted: Positive environments where children can flourish - A guide for inspectors about physical intervention and restrictions of liberty: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693446/Environments_where_children_can_flourish.pdf> Coram BAAF Practice Note**-** Restraint and physical intervention in foster care: <https://corambaaf.org.uk/sites/default/files/Members%20Area/Resources/Practice%20Notes/PN63.pdf>This initial guidance represents intention by Children’s Services to develop a confident and inclusive approach to developing productive and positive relationships between professionals, children, their families and carers. Within this there is a need for active and locally informed guidance about de-escalation of volatile or dangerous situations by practitioners. This will be achieved through participation in further discussion and development of informed practice guidance by practitioners, Ambassadors and partner agencies informed where necessary by expert support. This guidance will be reviewed and revised throughout 2022. |

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