**Practice Note for all Practitioners*,*** Managers **and Staff:**

 **‘The 3 Intervention Aids’**

Intervention Aids are visual tools developed in Sandwell to support practitioners to continuously reflect upon the way that we practice and work with our families. There are three Intervention Aids within our Practice Framework and Model which include: ‘the Light Bulb Principle’ (Element 7), ‘the Building Blocks’ (Element 8) and ‘the Scales’ (Element 9). Using these aids helps practitioners to think about the quality of our intervention, the processes we follow and how we have developed meaningful enabling relationships with families to deliver consistently good or outstanding practice that improves outcomes for children and young people. Reflective questions have also been developed for each of these aids to support our critical thinking and analysis.

Over the last few years, there have been several influential reports have been published which have identified the need for us to refocus our work in organisations to achieve a better balance between the processes and the procedures we need to follow (Munroe 2011, Munroe 2012; Trowler 2018). The key messages from these reports highlight:

* Putting children at the heart of our practice and understand what life is like for them daily and at different times of their lives.
* Strengthening the relationships at the heart of children’s lives to increase stability, create real change for birth families, and better support children and young people.
* Intervene in a way that will make a genuine, long lasting difference to children and families.

Using ‘the 3 Intervention Aids’ with the other parts of our Practice Framework and Model enables us to achieve this balance by ensuring that children are consistently at the heart of our practice. In doing so, at every stage of our involvement with families we are thinking about what difference our interventions are making for children and young people.

This practice note will give practitioners an understanding of what the intervention aids are and the importance of each one when working with families such as Kerry Williams. It will further explore why they are an important part of the practice framework and model and how they can be applied within and reflective supervision to contribute to meaningful impact and change for children. Finally, the practice note will offer some good practice points and further reading in this area.

**What are ‘the 3 Intervention Aids’?**

The Intervention Aids help practitioners to strengthen their practice by getting the balance right in offering and intervening with children and families that will have an impact on them in a meaningful, and long-lasting way. The next section provides an overview of each of the three intervention aids the Light Bulb Principle’ (Element 7), ‘the Building Blocks’ (Element 8) and ‘the Scales’ (Element 9).

**The Lightbulb Principle: are we making a difference?**

The Light Bulb principle (Element 7) works on the concept that as practitioners our role is to intervene with families to make a difference to children and young people to sustain change. It can be understood by using physics. For example, electricity is created when electrons move carrying electrical energy creating an electric current.

These travel inside a cable to supply electrical energy to the lightbulb, making it give off light. All the time that the lightbulb is switched on, energy is flowing through the cable. When the energy is switched off, the cable is still there but the lightbulb is unlit. **If the process/framework for working with families = cable and the intervention with families/impact = electric current/energy** then this aid helps us think about **how will Kerry’s lightbulb be lit?**

**Using the ‘Lightbulb Principle’ with Kerry aged 7 and her family whilst Updating her Plan’**

 We are currently involved with Kerry and her family due to being sexually abused by her Maternal Grandfather and now being subject to a Child Protection Plan. Her Maternal Grandfather is a Person Posing a risk to Children. If the process/framework for working with Kerry and her family is the cable, and the intervention with the family and impact is the electrical current, once there is an equal amount of each, Kerry’s light bulb can be lit. A lit lightbulb for Kerry represents the difference we are making in her life.

For Kerry, the energy is created by the quality of the interventions that we undertake with her and her family. It also means that we need to be clear about the difference between a process such as core group, home visit and our interventions within them such as work to understand what life is like at home for Kerry and safety work with her and her parents. This work will also include life work with parents to understand their childhood particularly their experience of being parented and relationship history.

Interventions are the help and support we provide which will be developed with Kerry and her family based upon a good understanding of their experience, culture, identity. For example, Ms William has learning needs and was also sexually abused as a child which will be considered to ensure we work in a trauma informed way and this will be reflected in the type of interventions and how they are used with her.

When thinking about the interventions, we need to ask ourselves; ‘is the intervention we are undertaking with Kerry making a difference to her life?’ and reflect on the quality of the work completed. If it is not, we need to try something different. If Kerry’s lightbulb remains unlit by the time our intervention ends, the help and support will not have resulted in sustained changes and child(ren) may face risk or harm again resulting in further professional involvement.

Regularly using the Light Bulb Principle helps us to reflect on the effectiveness of our intervention, the impact we are having and if we are making the right difference for the child, young person like Kerry and family. It also helps us identify any barriers to lighting the light bulb which can happen despite the right balance of cable and energy being in place. These barriers might include: ‘a wall of denial’, disguised compliance by parents/carers, lack of triangulation of information with professionals, over optimism and lack of professional curiosity. It is important that we recognise and address these.



**The Relationship Based Building Blocks**

These building blocks help us to focus on how we build effective relationships with children, young people, their families and professionals. These help us to think about our intervention by breaking down the relationship and the type of work we are doing with the family and their network into three stages. These include building relationships, maintaining and sustaining them and future proofing them for children. When working with families and partner agencies we need to think about the three different stages and what we are doing with the family to know whether we are providing the right help and support at the right time.

**Building Block 1: Building Relationships**

The ‘**building relationships’** stage occurs when we first contact our families and professionals when a referral is made, or the case has been allocated to us as Practitioner. This stage of the relationship is important as it can (although not always) impact on the quality of the next two stages.

**What does Stage 1: Building Relationships look like in practice**?

When initially meeting the child and their family, this stage involves spending time with them to get to know them by actively listening, showing empathy and discussing the reasons for your involvement. By doing this, you develop a shared understanding about the worries, how the family feel, your role, responsibilities and the process. By being open, honest and respectful enables you to begin to build trust and a rapport. You can use the diagram of the child’s journey to support the discussion about where their child is in the service and where we hope to get to.

Being clear with the child and their family about their rights in the process, what they can expect from you, the support and make them aware of the complaints process is important. Talking to the family about how you will focus on their strengths, relationship-based and trauma informed is important. Supporting child/ren to participate by thinking about how you will apply the 4 x I’s (Inform, Involve, Invest, Influence) throughout your involvement. Use tools like cultural genograms, life work and impact chronologies as a way of developing your relationship, understanding their culture, family traditions, identity and their experience. Using these tools as part of your intervention might also reduce the intensity of some of these sessions as you are co-producing something together.

Being mindful of the language used helps families to understand what you need to do together and what terms like an ‘assessment’ or child protection enquiries mean.

**What does Stage 1: Building Relationships look like in practice**?

At the same time, building relationships with partner agencies is important as you begin to know who is involved, what work they are doing and the quality of the relationship that they have developed with the family.

Depending on the individual needs of the child and their family, this stage might require more time or visits for example if an interpreter is required or there are additional needs to consider. Taking this into account additional support or adjustments are put in place to enable the family to meaningfully engage. Plan with the family and professionals what needs to be done, discuss initial safety planning, reflect on your approach and the quality of the relationship developed to see whether you are ready to move onto the next stage

It is natural for families to feel and show a range of responses in relation to your involvement. If it has been difficult to develop the relationship, reflect on this yourself and with your manager so that you are not ‘stuck’ at this stage. Families will observe whether ‘you do what you say’ and will also be undertaking their own assessment of whether you put all the things you have said like being respectful into practice. Build upon other feelings that might be present like hope and change and your common goal to make things better for their children also helps to move to the next stage.

**Building Block 2: Maintaining and Sustaining Relationships**

The next stage focuses on how we ‘**maintain and strengthen the relationship’** that has already developed with the family and professionals. Moving onto this stage is an important step as this is the stage when most of the help and support will be provided. If time has not been spent at stage 1 building the relationship, it will be difficult to progress to this stage and work with the family and partner agencies to provide the help and support needed.

**What does Stage 2: Maintaining and Sustaining look like in practice**?

During the early part of this stage, continuing to work with children and families by continuing to be respectful, open and fair is important. By developing cultural genograms and supporting them to access Family Group Conference are ways in which we can empower families by developing a deeper understanding of the resources as well as risks within their network. Safety planning with the family helps them to see that even if there are setbacks that how they respond to them is often equally as important as the issue itself.

Maintaining and sustaining the relationship through working with the family and professionals, good communication, being realistic and clear about the help and support being provided and what behaviours need to change over what period is important. This stage is also about building confidence, self-esteem, encouraging the family whilst being clear about the worries, reducing risks and seeing what difference has been made for their children. Modelling responses such as being soloution focused when issues emerge as well as acessing help and support is also important.

Within this stage of the relationship, most of the sensitive, difficult and sometimes challenging conversations take place whilst the plan is progressed with the family and professionals. Barriers to moving onto this stage of the relationship are promptly addressed. There will also be opportunities to work together with other professionals to provide practical support, to nurture change with the child/young person and their families.

**What does Stage 2: Maintaining and Sustaining look like in practice**?

Continuing to work with the family in a way so that they feel motivated and not overwhelmed is important as this stage is likely to feel quite intense for the family as the pace of the work needs to be informed by the child’s timescales for change. Relationships developed with professionals are also crucial at this stage as you will have an understanding together about how to support the family, work together and be clear about each other’s contribution to the family’s plan. Working in this way means that professionals and the family are clear about their contribution to the plan and any issues will be addressed. Both the family and professionals will be able to see how you model your practice by being strengths based, relationship- based and trauma informed with both the family and professionals even if some challenge might be required. Using supervision to reflect on this progress, address any barriers and the difference made for the children and important.

Supporting the family to develop and use their own safety plan is a key part of this stage and is important for the ‘future proofing’. Empowering the family and professionals to think about the plan when you are not involved is important to reduce professional reliance. Continuing to actively update and review the progression of plan with the child, their family and their network including professionals by encouraging them to identify what they feel is helping to support them to reduce the risk of further/ future interventions helps to sustain relationships.

Through continued engagement with the child/young person, their family and professionals the practitioner should use this opportunity to not only maintain the relationship, they should be thinking ahead to the final ending stage. As part of this stage, actively planning what it will look like for the family and professionals when you are no longer involve will help move to the next stage providing a smooth transition for everyone involved. This will involve maintaining your professional relationships with supporting agencies and partners who will play a prominent role in progressing the plan for the child and or young person.

**Building Block 3: Future Proofing for Children**

Although this is the final stage, our planning for this stage began at the beginning of our involvement as we have always considered with the family and professionals how long the support might be needed. Throughout our work with children and families, we will have worked with them to determine whether sustained changes have or can be made to provide stability and permanence for their children. When we have done this, we will have worked in such a way to ‘future proof’ the support provided to reduce the likelihood that they will return to the service.

**What does Stage 3: Future Proofing look like in practice**?

Valuing endings as much as how we begin, maintain and sustain our relationships with families and professionals is an important part of this stage. As things improve and the difference made for their child/ren can be clearly evidenced continuing to support the family and partner agencies to be planning for when you will no longer be involved is crucial. As well as evidencing the progression of the plan, the family’s safety plan will have been tried and tested over time to ensure that the child/young person’s safety is ‘future proofed’

The safety plan will be used by the family and their network including partner agencies when there will no longer be any statutory involvement and will include a contingency. In doing so, it can also be used if their child’s case is being stepped down to Targeted Support or a partner agency such as Education or Health.

**What does Stage 3: Future Proofing look like in practice**?

If another professional/agency will be the lead, using a relational approach will mean the family we will be part of the introductions and handover visit by supporting them to start the beginning of their relationship (Stage 1).

With the help and support provided to the family, they will feel more confident to implement their safety plan without our involvement. There will be ongoing reflection and evaluation with the family and their network including professionals about what has worked well, strengths for the future and coping strategies, signposting to other services for further support. Ensuring that we do not create professional reliance is important as our relationship was formed for a purpose, to help the child, young person, young adult and family achieve positive change. Ending the relationship evidences the changes made and supporting the family and professionals to continue without your involvement is an important part of this stage. As you have discussed endings as part of the previous stage, they are aware of this.

Families will feel a range of emotions about your involvement coming to an end and continuing to be sensitive to this is important. Over the course of several months, we will have spent time with them at some of the most challenging points of their lives. At this stage of the relationship, clear timescales should be discussed with the family and professionals so that they are aware of when the last review, interventions and visit will occur. It also needs to be followed up by a letter. By showing the family and professionals that you have taken account of the time that they have invested in a relationship with you will help them prepare for the ending and continue to maintain the progress and make a difference to the experiences of the children that has already been evidenced over a period of time.

**Building Blocks: Is it clear what stage of the relationship the intervention is at with the child and family?**

The Building Blocks (Element 8) help us to focus on how we build effective relationships with children, young people and their families. These help us to think about our intervention by breaking down the relationship and the type of work we are doing with the family into three stages. These include building relationships, maintaining and sustaining them and future proofing them for children. When working with Kerry and her family we need to think about the three different stages and what we are doing with the family to know whether we are providing the right help and support at the right time. Whilst we will be aware of these stages, it is good practice to refresh our understanding of what this looks like.

**Scales: Is there an equal balance between ‘process’ and ‘intervention’ with the child and family?**

Simply put, ‘the Scales’ (Element 9) are a visual aid to remind us to keep our practice balanced between process and intervention. Whilst this intervention aid has some similarities to ‘the Light Bulb Principle’ which refers to the process and interventions, this aid is also linked to thinking about how we have evidenced the use of a Strengths based approach with our families when following processes and providing interventions.

In doing so, it ensures that we give families every with the opportunity to change, that they can see the difference that has been made by the intervention, balanced with the process. With Kerry Williams and her family, it helps us to consider our work at the different stages of our involvement particularly when updating and reviewing the plan. Using the scales, we can think about whether we can evidence that for every piece of ‘process’ whether an ‘intervention’ has also been undertaken and being clear about the difference between them.

Identifying with the family, their network including partner agencies enables us to be clear about whether the scales are balanced for Kerry and her family with equal amounts of process and intervention. Using this aid help us to continuously work in a transparent more evidence-based way which can be used in different environments such as reviews. The Scales are also an aid that can be used for our own self reflection as a practitioner and within reflective spaces like supervision.

Using ‘the Scales’ can help us think not only about what has been provided, the impact of our support particularly for Kerry but also the next steps. For example, this can be linked to threshold decisions about stepping down from a plan or ceasing professional involvement. This can help evidence this decision within Kerry’s CP Review in a structured, evidence-based way.

However, if the changes cannot be made in Kerry’s timescale, her parents will know as part of our work with them what other plan/s might need to be considered to secure permanence for her. In Kerry’s circumstances, if we have evidenced that we have tried everything with the family including the support and care that can be provided in their network and she continues to be exposed to significant harm, consideration needs to be given to what other action is needed to keep her safe. In this case, it might require using the evidence to request to the Service Manager that a Legal Planning Meeting might be required.

Intervention aids are visual tools that support you to reflect upon the way in which we practice and work with children, families and professionals in a range of settings. When we are building, maintaining and future proofing relationships (as outlined within the building blocks), the relationship we develop with children and their families is equally as important as the relationship we build with professionals. this collaborative approach to partnership working supports the progression of the child’s plan within the agreed timescales.

**Why are Intervention Aids an important part of our Practice Framework and Model?**

* Intervention Aids support stronger child and family focused practice, gain a deeper understanding of their circumstances and lead to better decision making and more appropriate, interventions and outcomes.
* Without meaningful interventions, practice is process driven and there is limited progress and change for families. In some circumstances, this result in continuing vulnerabilities for children and repeat involvement.
* Developing enabling relationships with families is key to quality and the impact of our interventions and the role of practitioners is important.
* As practitioners we are ‘Interventionists’, ‘Agents of change’ working with the family and their network to make a difference. Using the Intervention Aids to help us think about this strengthens our work with families and outcomes for children.
* Where engagement issues are identified, using them enables us to recognise them, understand the impact on the child and put strategies in place. This reduces drift and delay and outcomes for children and young people.
* Working in a way with families that is clear and transparent about the interventions provided within their child’s timescales strengthens our relationships and provides them with every chance possible to make the changes.
* Applying the Intervention Aids to shape our work and structure our thinking about the quality of the intervention and impact can increase our confidence in talking about the work we have undertaken. This enables us to talk about our work in an evidence-based way in different environments such as Supervision, Group Supervision, Child Protection, Looked After and Child In Need Reviews, Legal Planning Meeting and Director Resource Panels.

**How can the ‘3 Intervention Aids’ be used in supervision and other reflective spaces?**

Applying our ‘Intervention aids’ before, during and towards the end of our work with families is important. Using these aids as prompts with the linked reflective questions our Practice Framework and Booklet (pages 50-51) helps practitioners to reflect upon what effect their interventions are having on children like Kerry and her family. This enables us to undertake an appreciative enquiry of our work, strengthen our critical thinking and analysis individually as practitioners and within supervision with our managers.

Within supervision and group supervision, for example when applying ‘the scales’ and thinking reflective questions such as those below can be used?

* Do we understand both the process and the intervention needed with children/young people/young adults and their sibling/s?
* How have we ensured that we have a good and equal balance (scales) between process and intervention?
* If there is a need to rebalance, how will this be achieved?
* How is this clearly recorded on the file?
* Are we clear about what intervention and direct work will be undertaken with the child/young person/young adult to understand the impact of the risks and concerns and be an ‘agent of change’ to support improvements and make a difference to the life of the child/young person/young adult.

When these have been considered, it can support our decision making about the next steps in terms of our involvement such as when we are considering stepping down.

**How can I evidence this work on the child/young person/young adults file?**

* Making specific reference to the Intervention aids in your case notes and what it means for the children, young person and family.
* Using the ‘energy’ questions as part of the direct work with children and families to see how you can ‘light the child’s lightbulb’.
* Refer to the different stages of your relationship with children, young people and their families and the work that your will be undertaking with them.
* Where you have enabled a relationship, be clear about how these have been created but also be proactive where barriers have been identified to prevent drift and delay.
* Adopting a relational approach to working with children, families and professionals will enable you to be reflective, thinking about their responses when faced with particular challenges. Having these reflective discussions with your manager will help to overcome potential barriers and can be evidenced through supervision and within your work completed with the family that can be viewed within forms, documents and attachments within case notes.

**Good Practice points**

* Think about the Intervention Aids and how this informs your work with families. For example, you can use the building blocks to consider your work with different child’s voice and relationships with family.
* In supervision, use the reflective questions linked to the intervention aids to think about the quality of your intervention and the difference made to the child/ren.
* Identify and address of possible barriers to you ‘lighting the lightbulb’ of children such as Kerry to work with the family and network to think about the creation of constructive solutions to address these.

**Further information and reading**

* The Practice Framework and Model Booklet and with reflective questions linked to the Intervention Aids can be found on pages 50-51.
* Practice notes on the Practice Framework and Model and other parts such as the Child’s Journey’, Children’ Participation Relationship, the ‘3 Basics of Practice’ and the Heart of Practice. These are located on the Learning and Development Pages.
* Workshop on the Introduction to the Practice Framework and Model.
* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624949/TheMunroReview-Part_one.pdf>
* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf>
* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624946/DFE-00010-2011.pdf>
* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf>
* Care Proceedings in England: The case for Clear Blue Water by Isabelle Trowler (2018)

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**Authorised by:** Beyond Auditing Practice and Development Team: Pauline Dunkwu and Faye Walker