



**Northamptonshire
Children's Trust**



Our practice model

A note from our Practitioners' Board

We felt it would be helpful and beneficial to introduce you to our practice and the models we have adopted to ensure the children, young people and families in our communities benefit from our support. This document outlines our principles and values and provides information about our core approach and the other models we use to work with children, young people and families.

Our approach relies on every single one of us sharing the same understanding of our values, approaches and principles in the way we work together with children, young people and families.

We hope you find this useful and as we continue to develop our good practice together we will make a positive difference for the lives of children, young people, families and a positive difference for our staff.

Practitioners' Board



At Northamptonshire Children's Trust our vision is

“Children, young people and families at the heart of all we do - in every decision we make and every action we take.”

We are ambitious for all children, young people and families and we have a critical role to making a difference to their outcomes within Northamptonshire.

Our purpose is to relentlessly improve outcomes for children, young people and families through excellence in practice. We ask that our staff and stakeholders do the best job possible, every single day and because that is what children, young people in families deserve and have a right to expect.

Our Values are:

-  Be child focused and work with the whole family
-  Make difference with trust and integrity
-  Concentrate on the best solution
-  Act with respect, kindness and compassion
-  Communicate well
-  Do the best job of your life every single day

“Our ambition is to make a sustainable improvement to the lives of children, young people and families”

Practice Values

Where children and families do need to access support, services will be responsive, of a high quality and focused on achieving resilience.

We will recognise the strengths that are present in every family and help families to arrive at their own solutions to their own difficulties; we believe children are best raised within their birth family network and will do all we can to support this.

We will work with children and their families to ensure that they receive the support and services they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives.

We will work to ensure that positive opportunities and effective help are available at the earliest opportunity – enabling children and their families to make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve.

We will listen and observe attentively to children, young people and families, and respond to what they are telling us in order to inform how we improve the delivery of our services.

We will promote relationship-based practice and prioritise the continuity of relationship between practitioners and families.

We believe in recruiting and retaining a stable and resilient workforce which will empower and enable children, young people and families to achieve their full potential.

We will strengthen partnership working so that children and families experience consistent joined up approaches to assessing and meeting their needs.

The case for a model of practice in Northamptonshire

There are a number of factors that build the case for us to develop a Northamptonshire model of practice, the most significant ones being:

Signs of Safety is Northamptonshire's primary model. There is strong evidence that children's services benefit from a common theoretical approach to working with families. Three primary core approaches have become the most common ones adopted across the country, with the evidence showing that it does not matter so much which methodology is followed, rather that one is implemented rigorously and systematically. In Northamptonshire this is Signs of Safety. It is acknowledged that systemic and restorative practice compliment Signs of Safety. These approaches are also used in some parts of our service and we intend to include these on a wider format in the future.



There is evidence of successful improvement in other local authorities where they have explicitly developed a priority focus on the quality of practice, moving away from being overly focused on performance indicators.



Our ambition for Northamptonshire is to build on the foundations of effective performance management with an equal focus on relationship-based practice and how we can effectively support families to make changes.

Our aim is to ensure that wherever possible, children are cared for and fulfil their potential within their family's care. So we need to provide effective support at the earliest possible point. This focus on early help will be enhanced if there is a common and shared way of working with families both within Northamptonshire and across partner agencies.

Providing timely support is vital: early intervention in a child's or family's journey is fundamental in building strong foundations for families. Early intervention will mitigate the need for statutory intervention, reduce the risk and as a result there will be lower caseloads for social work services; which in turn will support intensive relationship-based practice.

A clear and well-presented practice model can be a tool for both recruitment and retention. Our staff turnover is improving, but we still have many practitioners coming into Northants bringing with them a range of practice models which they

have learnt elsewhere. Our approach will be to bring their skills and experience in line with the Northants model of practice. This will in turn provide a consistent and collective approach to supporting families and one that incorporates the principles of the Signs of Safety and relationship based practice.



How we will work with all our families

Children and Family Support practitioners, specialist practitioners, social workers and their supervisors in Northamptonshire will:

- Show professional curiosity, and be thoughtful and reflective in our practice, ensuring skilled work with families to enable change
- Always be respectful towards those we work with, and consider the diverse emotional, cultural and material needs of each child and their family
- Carry out direct work with families, using relationship-based practice to understand the wishes and feelings of children, young people and their parents/carers in order to achieve positive change in the best interests of children



- Support children to remain within their family wherever possible, building on strengths, so that parents and carers are able to provide good parenting, consistent boundaries and emotional warmth, allowing children to develop life skills and resilience
- Use a strengths-based approach to work purposefully, openly and compassionately with the whole family network
- Use a whole family approach that includes both parents/carers and extended family members in both assessments and planning
- Use reflective critical thinking and analysis to provide a good picture of the child and parent/carer. Evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence to create meaningful assessments and plans to determine the likelihood of providing good care
- Build skilful and influential working relationships with other professionals and agencies

- Make effective and emotionally intelligent use of supervision
- Demonstrate understanding and skill in working as a member of a team and organisation
- Understand our legal and statutory responsibilities and execute these in children's best interests
- Understand the expectations of us set out in our practice standards, and strive to meet those standards at all times
- Use simple language that is clear, understandable and jargon-free in all our communication and recording, and keeping our records up to date

Signs of Safety: our core approach



Signs of Safety is our core practice framework in Northamptonshire. There is an existing and growing evidence base of the impact of Signs of Safety as an effective practice model.

Signs of Safety has undergone an extensive independent national evaluation across new implementation sites as part of the DfE's Innovation Programme and positive outcomes were reported.

The Signs of Safety model takes a whole system approach to its implementation, which will enhance how the service engages and works with partners in meeting the needs of children and families. The approach originated in child protection work, but can be adapted to early help work including with partner agencies (Signs of Wellbeing), and permanency work with our children in care and care leavers (Signs of Stability).

The approach brings a range of practice tools that support social workers and practitioners in their direct work with children across all ages and stages of child development.

Our Signs of Safety training and development programme ensures that all practitioners receive induction and core training, as well as opportunities to receive advanced training and become a practice champion.

The underpinning principle of this approach promotes and relies heavily on the voice of the child and families along with relationship based practice being fundamental to good and sustained outcomes for children. It provides an open approach that is designed to engage the family in the assessment process, support them to identify their own networks that can provide safety for the children and sustainable change within the family.

It also works on the premise that all those we work with receive a Signs of Safety approach and fundamentally the approach respects families' strengths and maintains belief in change which can create a sense of hope and possibility.

Signs of Safety guiding principles

- Working relationships are fundamental – honest and respectful relationships between the worker and families and between all professionals involved with a family to achieve a shared understanding of what needs to change and how this will be achieved
- Stance of critical inquiry – critical thinking to minimise error and create a culture of reflective practice, and support regular review of the balance of strengths and dangers so as to avoid drift, which may perpetuate and overly optimistic or pessimistic view of the family
- Where the experience of the child is at the centre and where families and front line professionals judge the effectiveness of practice

Additional Methods

Across Northamptonshire we use additional methods that complement our Signs of Safety approach. Further information about these can be seen in Appendix 1.

How will we support you?



We recognise that everything that our children, young people and families achieve is supported by the skills, knowledge and commitment of our staff. So we will maintain a core focus on supporting our social workers and practitioners and our supervisors and managers who guide, support and direct their work in a range of ways and develop their expertise.

Continuing professional development

We are proud of our CPD programme and the formal training offer that supports all our staff across Northamptonshire Children's Trust to develop their knowledge and skills. This support is mapped against the Knowledge and Skills Statements and equips our Social Work Qualified practitioners to ensure their Social Work England CPD is evidenced and prepares individuals for accreditation if required.

More information and access is available on the [Learning Hub on our Intranet](#) – our one stop shop for continuing professional development.

Comprehensive workforce development programme - our staff give us great feedback about the range and quality of the training that they can take up from our comprehensive programme. This covers a range of practice themes, and ensures that we support practitioners to develop both their knowledge and skills

Social Work Academy – works with our Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) delivering the ASYE programme and supports practitioners and managers in the wider workforce through induction and bespoke training which enhances practice.

Induction Practice Programme – to ensure that all practitioners understand the Northamptonshire practice model upon appointment and starting work with us, reinforcing a common core set of skills and how we will help develop them.

Mentoring and Coaching – All staff have the opportunity to access mentoring and coaching from experienced practitioners and our L&D team.

Signs of Safety programme – investment in all our staff to understand and implement Signs of Safety at the core of our practice model, with all receiving foundation training and opportunities to receive advanced training and become one of our practice champions. Staff will be supported within the workplace to embed Signs of Safety through group supervision and 1-1 support.

Practice support – there are Signs of Safety Practice Champions across the organisation. Their role is to offer guidance and advice on the model and how to implement in different teams or services. Our Advanced Practitioners and management team also provide support within this area.

Leadership development programme – investment in empowering all our managers to empower each other, those they manage, and children and families.

Apprenticeships - An apprenticeship is a way of studying a formal qualification aligned to your job while working. There are many apprenticeships available to our staff at a range of levels, with the cost being met by our Apprenticeship Levy fund.

Research in Practice – With an NCTrust email address you have automatic membership of Research in Practice (RiP). RiP provides a vast range of resources and learning opportunities based on academic research, practice expertise and evidence from service users. Resources are sent at regular intervals over the year alongside all resources being available to download for your use.

Research in Practice provides Northamptonshire Children’s Trust staff with:
Support with evidence-informed decision making
Access to key research messages in various formats
Provides evidence for continuous professional development
Cutting edge training from expert facilitators
Represents organisational commitment to supporting evidence-informed practice

Making Research Count (MRC) is a unique collaboration between leading British Universities and organisations, such as ourselves, that are involved in services for adults or children. It makes the latest research available to practitioners and managers through seminars/webinars, conferences and other events. Its unique focus is on bringing researchers and practitioners into direct contact – and, by doing so, bringing cutting-edge research to life.

All of our practitioners can join MRC events and have access to their resources.

iLearn – iLearn is the place to find all the training provided by Learning and Development and where you can find a Record of Learning with all the L&D courses you have completed. You can access your iLearn through the Learning Hub.

Practice Educators - in Northamptonshire Children’s Trust we offer a variety of student placements for our local university and other universities regionally. We also work with Step up to Social Work and support these students through our Practice Educators. We offer funded places each year for Social Work practitioners to undertake the PEP 1&2 training if they are interested in becoming a Practice Educator. For our non-social work qualified staff who also want to work with students, we deliver in house training to enable them to undertake the onsite supervisor roles.

Good Practice Examples – want to know what good looks like? We’ve collected some good practice examples on the Learning Hub, including danger statements and safety goals, assessments, plans and supervision.



Conditions for success

We know that we need to keep a rigorous focus on the core issues that support retention: when we get these right, they form the key conditions for great practice to flourish. Our conditions for success have been identified by our workforce and developed further by our Equalities Group and Practitioners Group.



There are a number of key features that we have sought to embed in our culture to support good practice:

- Team-based/group reflective case discussions –as a way of joint learning and modelling around how we think, feel, act, learn and analyse our work with our families.
- Termly Practice Weeks –led by senior leaders who together with managers and practitioners will spend a week alongside practitioners to connect with practice and engage in observation and reflective discussion. Practice weeks give us the opportunity to understand the quality of our work and the impact it has and to share and celebrate good practice. They identify areas for continuous improvement and learning and development, with the aim of making a positive difference for children and improving their outcomes.
- Quality assurance and audits – embedding a model of collaborative auditing with, practitioners so that there is a rewarding professional and reflective discussion about work with a particular family.
- Quality assurance culture – working in a way that offers support, constructive challenge and advice that helps us to all learn and grow – through smart use of the findings from audits, key performance data, learning reviews and from the feedback of our children, young people and families.

- Culture of learning – taking learning and implementing this into practice from our quality assurance processes, Rapid Reviews, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and national reviews which ‘closes the loop’ in practice.
- Celebrating success! As a strengths-based organisation, we seek to celebrate success in a range of ways as an approach to learning so that we can do more of what we do well.

Our career pathways

We are committed to developing our staff and Northamptonshire as a great place to make a career, whether this be to learn your professional craft at the start of your career, to flourish in your role and for opportunities to develop practice leadership and management skills and experience.

We have a variety of routes into qualified social work roles, including apprenticeships.



We are proud of the development of our ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programme and the positive feedback that our Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) give us about the support offered to them in their crucial first year in practice from our Social Work Academy. We are equally proud of the quality of our NQSWs, and it is an explicit objective for us to retain social workers as they

move beyond their first year. For this reason, we have introduced a framework for a supported second year of practice in order to provide a further structured programme of development building on the NQSWs continued development.

We aim for a high rate of internal promotions that will demonstrate our commitment to the career paths that are open in Northamptonshire, and for a workforce and management team that reflects the diversity of our communities and employees.

We want to ensure that staff can work their way up from non-social work qualified positions, early help practitioners or social workers to become the team managers, service managers and directors of the future. However, for us, career progression is not just about ‘moving up’ and into management, but also continuous development to improve and develop better practice skills with families. For this reason, we have introduced our Senior Social Worker roles and we are considering further options to support those who wish to remain in practice and are able to demonstrate that their practice is of the highest level of skill.

We also have many non-social work qualified practitioners from Children and Family Support Service through to statutory services and we promote development and career options for all practitioners.

Appendix 1

Examples of some of our Additional models

Kolb Cycle of reflection	Reflective models and tools
DIEP model of reflection	Johari Window
McClellan's Head, Hands and Feet	New Belongings
Framework of Assessment of Need	Critical Race Theory
Graded Care Profile	Trauma and Attachments informed Model
Conflict Theory	The Weather Model
Outcome Star	De Bono's Hats
Motivational interviewing	Eco Maps
Care and Control	Self-Harm Checklist
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model	Theraplay
Systemic Practice	Cultural Competence
Munro's Decision Tree	Good Lives Model
Dimensions of Power	Target Support Operational Model
ASSET+	Strengthening Families/Strengthening Practice
Child Sexual Exploitation checklist	Restorative Practice
Cycle of Change	Desistance Theory