

Restorative Devon Practice Framework

Our Core Principles and ways of working



Notes



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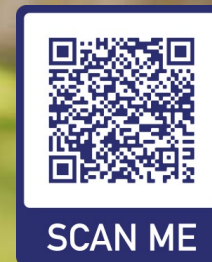
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Our vision for a child-friendly Devon

Devon County Council's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 outlines our commitment to being a child-friendly Devon, where all children and young people are safe, healthy, ambitious, and can fulfil their potential. This ambition is inherently collaborative and will rely on robust and effective partnership

working. Most importantly, we believe our vision for a child-friendly Devon is only possible through working restoratively with children and families right across Devon, in whatever interaction they have with us, and at any point in their journey through childhood and adolescence.



What is Restorative Practice?

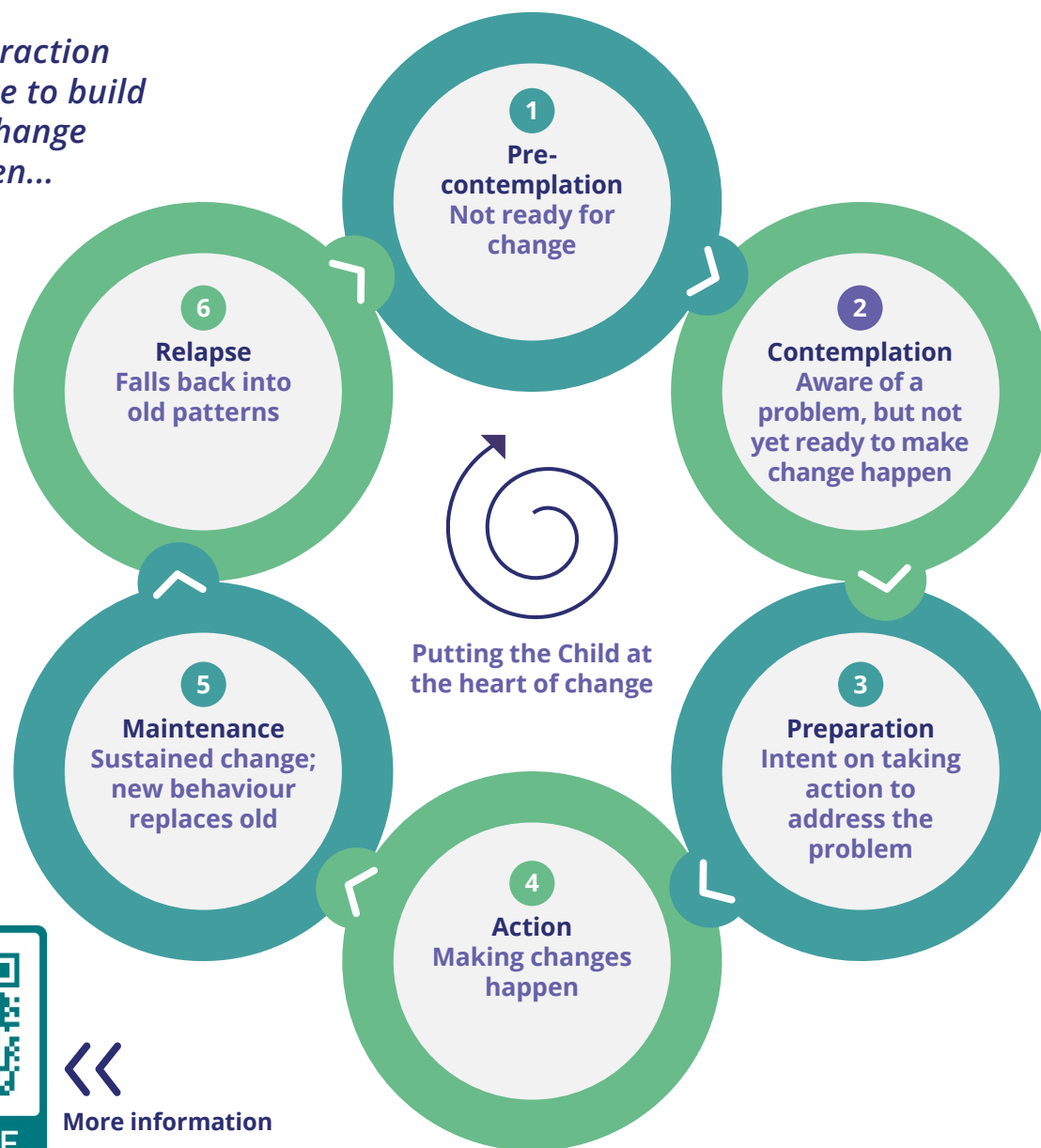
Restorative Practice is about putting strong, meaningful and trusting relationships at the heart of how we work with children and families.

It is about seeing families as experts of their own experience, and using restorative approaches to repair relationships.

Working **with** children and families means offering supportive relationships, combined with clear goals focussed on the needs of children. It also places an emphasis on family led decision making approaches to solving problems.

Restorative practice also starts with building an organisational culture based on respect and accountability, where we value our professional relationships and take care of each other, but also challenge each other to get the best for children and families in Devon.

Every interaction is a chance to build positive change for children...



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More information
and helpful resources

devon.cc/restorative-devon-resources

What is Restorative Practice?

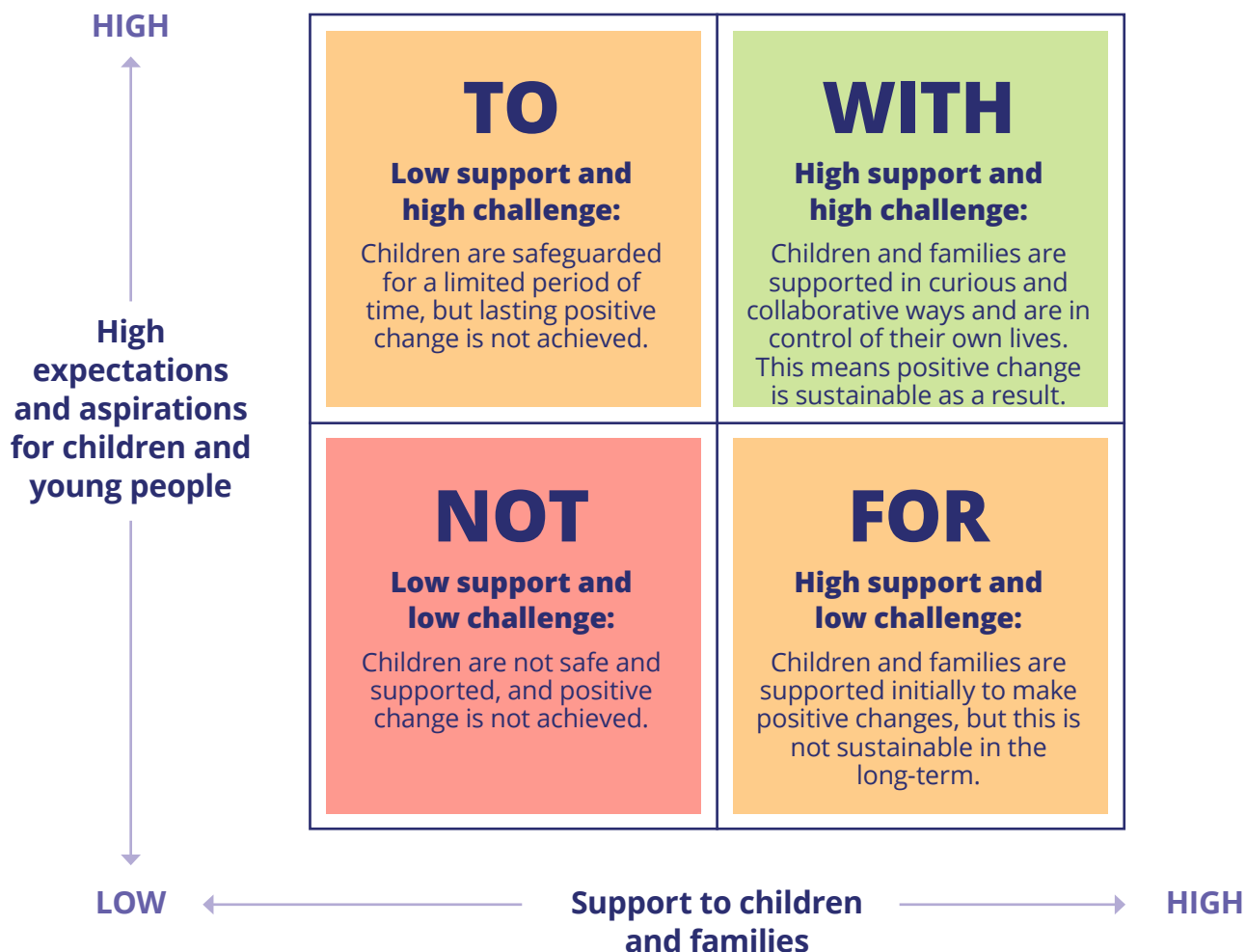
Relationships are the key to achieving transformative change

We aim to work with children and families to strengthen relationships and support positive improvement in people's lives that are sustainable. Working with families means listening to people's experience, appreciating their strengths and using restorative inquiries to understand how people have been affected and what they need. Providing challenge means being kind but clear about things that need to happen for children to feel safe and happy.

We use the relationship window to think intentionally and reflectively about our practice. Supporting change for children may mean we practice in different parts of the relationship window at times, yet always keeping a focus on working with families in a collaborative way wherever possible. Working with people in this way helps them move forward in the cycle of change.

Where a child or young person comes into our care, the same focus on strong and trusted relationships remains. As corporate parents we want care-experienced children and young people to have a strong sense of safety, belonging and feeling loved. We understand the importance of relationships in supporting healing from past trauma, being healthy and fulfilling their potential as they get older, as well as preserving networks and relationships that are meaningful for life.

Relationship Window Practitioner-Family Relationship



What is Restorative Devon?

Restorative Devon is our vision for restorative practice to underpin every interaction with children and families. It is about creating a shared language and culture, where we focus on building relationships which support good outcomes for children. All practitioners will be able to explore restorative ways of working, benefit from evidence-based approaches, and feel supported by their managers to put this into practice. We want this to become our way of being, and to think, act and be restorative every day. Restorative Devon is a key part of our commitment to being a child-friendly Devon that is inclusive and anti-racist.

Across the life-journey

Restorative Devon is a life journey and whole-system approach. At each step of the child's experience, the way we offer support is shaped by common language and a culture of practice across teams, services, and organisations. Children and families should experience consistent support that they can rely on. This builds their confidence to reach out for help when they need to.

Supporting vulnerable children and families is a highly rewarding vocation. In Devon, practitioners have the permission, skills, and resources to work restoratively. We all take responsibility for introducing restorative practice to new practitioners at interview, through their induction, in supervision and by modelling this way of being every day.



In Devon,
we believe
that:

- Children are best brought up in families and communities where they will have relationships that enable them to thrive
- We support families to find their own solutions and offer Family Group Conferences and network meetings to support this.
- Children and families will receive the help, support, and protection they need at the earliest opportunity

An evidence-based approach

Our approach to restorative practice is rooted in the evidence of what works. Practitioners will be offered training in Motivational Interviewing as a tool for motivating change in a framework that balances strengths and risks with equal rigour. Practitioners are working with families across a wide spectrum of need, and therefore require a range of tools, guides and other resources to do this skillfully. These are outlined in our Restorative Practice toolkit.

An important ingredient for working restoratively is being able to stand back and reflect on the complex nature of our practice, to make effective decisions and plans. To underpin this, a core part of our approach is reflective group supervision - enabling practitioners to draw on the collective knowledge of their peers to support best practice.

More info on training and development, including our Restorative Practice toolkit, can be found here >>



What is Restorative Devon?

Inclusive practice: the social and economic context of vulnerability and exclusion

Most families who need extra support also experience economic deprivation that negatively affects their health, daily-life, and self-confidence. One in eight children in Devon is living in poverty. This economic disadvantage increases the likelihood of isolation, trauma, abuse, discrimination, adverse childhood experiences, unmet learning needs or mental well-being challenges. Others may face discrimination due to race, gender, or sexual identity. Negative experiences like this can lead to feelings of disempowerment, social exclusion, or symptoms of distress such as addictions. Sometimes families feel that they cannot trust or expect real help from professionals in positions of authority, because when they have asked for help it has made things worse.

As restorative practitioners, managers, and leaders, we choose to challenge social disempowerment, through strengths based, trauma-informed and anti-oppressive approaches to practice. We let families know that we are on their side, even when things need to change. We value the person and challenge the problem. We know that family life is where children do best, and we stand alongside parents to help them face challenges.

Restorative practice is transformative because it builds confidence in a person's own problem-solving ability and boosts a sense of self efficacy and esteem.

Restorative Practice skills for helping families

- Check in questions to build rapport
- Restorative Inquiries
- Restorative Circles

Responsive and authoritative practice, not reactive process

Practice not process is what makes a difference for families who need help. Working restoratively is not about having less authority. Instead, it is about being open and honest about the way we work to keep children safe, without unintentionally disempowering the families who care for them. Authoritative practitioners advocate for children by offering knowledge and guidance to uphold their needs, rights, and long-term outcomes. Authoritative practitioners have clear expectations for children, but apply this with flexibility, compassion, and kindness. They take a pragmatic approach because they recognise the social context of vulnerability and exclusion, but also communicate clear expectations when things need to change for a child to be safe and happy.

This is quite different to being authoritarian which is a rules-based approach and does not acknowledge the impact of structural power imbalances. It instead focuses on narrow issues in a reactive, rigid, and risk-averse way, due to little or no attention being paid to the strengths which all families have. This style of practice is overly concerned with the exercise of statutory powers and following process, without reflecting on what can truly make a difference.

Creating positive and lasting change starts with understanding the child's world

The most impactful thing a practitioner can do to promote change is to be able to articulate what needs to happen from the child or young person's point of view. Change is rarely a linear process but can happen through incremental small steps, moving from 'first order' changes which can improve stability for a child, to 'second order change' where real lasting transformation takes place. Understanding and explaining the child's experience is incredibly powerful when preventing or repairing harm in a relationship.

What is Restorative Devon?

Working with children and families in restorative ways has a transformative impact. These are the key outcomes of working restoratively:

- Children and young people live safely with their families and in their communities
- Children and families are empowered to be in control of their own lives
- Children and young people have their views, interests, and experiences at the heart of decision-making and practice, and their sense of self-efficacy grows
- Children, young people, and their families feel respected and valued for who they are as individuals and together as a family
- Planning and decision-making is participatory, balanced, and sustainable
- Wider support networks in the family and community are valued and drawn upon for the long-term benefit of the child and family
- Practitioners are equipped and enabled to apply their skills, knowledge and experience effectively, confidently and creatively



Our Restorative Practice Framework – the 5 Rs

The 'Five Rs' are the core principles which make up our Restorative Practice framework and describe the key elements of what it means to work restoratively. This idea was developed by our practitioners in Devon to simply explain and share the common principles which underpin our work. Our framework also provides a toolkit of evidence-based techniques to help put restorative principles into practice. Taken together, the principles and toolkit support practitioners to apply their skills, knowledge and experience and do what they came into their profession to do. The people who work with children and families are the foundation of a Restorative Devon.



	Relational	Respect	Responsibility	Resilience	Reflective
We are... <i>We will...</i>	Trustworthy <i>Build trust and confidence by being transparent and consistent</i>	Participatory <i>Put the views and interests of children and families at the heart of all levels of decision-making</i>	Empowering <i>Build on existing strengths and enable families, children and young people, to have control, freedom, and responsibility over their own lives so that positive change is lasting</i>	Trauma-informed <i>Be trauma and shame-informed and person centred</i>	Flexible <i>Use professional judgement, in a context of 'safe uncertainty' and 'authoritative doubt'</i>
We are... <i>We will...</i>	Caring <i>Use language that cares, and everyone understands</i>	Honest <i>Communicate clearly and openly</i>	Informed <i>Make sure decision-making and planning is evidence-informed and timely</i>	Curious <i>Ask curious questions about risk, need and strengths with equal balance</i>	Responsive <i>Thinking together about what needs to happen next</i>
We are... <i>We will...</i>	Collaborative <i>Work together to create shared solutions</i>	Inclusive <i>Respect the characteristics and backgrounds of children and young people</i>	Risk-aware <i>Safety planning and risk management that is based in the reality of family life</i>	Patient <i>Understand that sustainable change takes time</i>	Outcomes-focused <i>Be clear about what good outcomes for children will be</i>

Strong and meaningful relationships are the foundation of restorative practice. Working in a relational way places value on building connections with people to offer help and support. Relational practice also recognises that both problems and solutions exist in the connections between people. This understanding opens the way to exploring multiple perspectives on what needs to happen next to make sure the child or young person is safe and happy.



*Taking a **relational approach** to working with children and families means:*

✓ **Building trust and a sense of safety**

Practitioners take steps to build trust with children, young people, and their families. We use check in questions and restorative circles as techniques to build connections and to enable families to share their experiences. Exploring the child's experience of what needs to change builds trust because families notice that we are child centred in a balanced way that does not make them feel judged. With this sense of safety and security, families feel more able to talk about what needs to change and their ideas on how it can happen.

✓ **Strengths-based language that cares**

Relational practice requires us to pay specific attention to communication. We are asking families to explore their own difficulties and experiences, and to consider changes that may be painful or difficult. We understand that stress affects communication, and that the responsibility is on us as professionals to be patient and check back that everything makes sense.

✓ **Working together to create shared solutions**

Children and families are experts in their own experiences. Once there is a foundation of trust, restorative helping relationships are about being collaborative, remaining constructive and staying focused on working together towards shared child focussed goals with clear outcomes. This applies whether the relationship is within a family, between a professional and a family, between professionals within a service or between multi-agency professionals.

**We know
our practice is
relational
when...**

- Children, young people, and families know who their practitioner is, how to contact them, how often they will see them, and what the purpose of the visits are because they are involved in making the plan.
- We use Restorative Circles, Inquiries, Family Group Conferences and evidence-informed approaches to support change together with children and families.
- We use clear, simple and plain language that is grounded in the experience of the child, so information is clearly understood. We avoid the use of acronyms, or professional jargon that describes generic concerns which are outside of family vocabulary.
- We value feedback and take action based on it, so we are sure that we are providing the right support. If there is a complaint we respond to this feedback with a restorative approach.
- We work collaboratively across teams, services and partner agencies to support children and families in flexible, creative and outcomes-focused ways. We evidence effective multi-agency working and information-sharing in assessments, plans and decision-making processes.

**Strategies
for relational
practice**

To move to a position of working WITH, families need an opportunity to

- Tell their side of the story – the opportunity to express thoughts and feelings about their family life, parenting and what their children need to grow up safely and happily
- An opportunity to understand the perspective of others, and the impact of what is happening for the child concerned now or in the future
- The opportunity to take responsibility for meeting the needs of the child, with support
- The space to think about how to prevent harm from happening, or from happening again
- The chance to come up with a plan to meet the child's needs and move forward in a positive way

Working restoratively means showing respect throughout our practice, from how we communicate and interact, to the decisions we make and actions we take. We put the child at the centre of our practice but show respect to the families who care for them. We value the contribution that family networks, communities and partners play in getting good outcomes for children. We treat each other with respect too and recognise that practitioners need to feel safe and happy at work in order to be able to help people effectively.

*Taking a **respectful approach** to working with children and families means:*

Putting the views and interests of children and young people at the heart of what we do

Direct work with children, young people and families is a key component of working with them as equal partners and ensuring their rights are fully upheld.

Communicating openly, honestly, and transparently

When we describe worries about what could happen for a child, we make sure this is grounded in real life examples and avoid professional jargon which describes processes.

Understanding, acknowledging, and respecting individual backgrounds, characteristics, and circumstances

Equality, diversity and inclusion are acknowledged, understood and delivered through all we do. We pay attention to the impact of power imbalances that can result from Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class/caste, Education, Employment, Ethnicity, Spirituality, Sexuality, Sexual orientation, (Social Graces) for families and for our practitioners too.



In their own words...

Children and young people in Devon have told us what respectful practice looks like and what they expect from us.

TOP
TEN TIPS
FROM FAMILIES

- Make sure I understand what's happening and involve me in decisions. I won't speak up if I don't understand what's going on.
- Work with me and for me, not about me! Listen to what I have to say.
- Get to know me and respect me. I will need time to trust you and get to know you too.
- Use language that cares. And no social work jargon.
- Do what you say you're going to do. Turn up on time prepared, don't make promises you can't keep.
- Keep in touch regularly and make time for me. In a way that works for me and make sure I know how to get hold of you.
- Make sure I am comfortable in meetings.
- Respect my confidentiality. Make sure I know who my information will be shared with so I can decide what I want to say.
- Don't give up on me. I need to know that I can trust you to keep fighting for me.
- Be human.

Restorative Practice is about supporting people to take responsibility for building and repairing relationships, and harm.

When there is professional involvement in family life, there is a real risk of reinforcing social disempowerment, so that families feel even less in control and are less likely to make positive change or be open about what life is really like.

Restorative approaches aim to support families to be responsible for, and in control of, their own lives and outcomes. Restorative practice emphasises **challenge, responsibility** and **accountability**, which is empowering and solutions focused. This is effective because when people feel valued, they are more receptive to challenge, and because it is more effective to build on existing strengths that try to introduce new ways of being.



3 step restorative conversation?

- What happened?
- Who has been affected and how?
- What needs to happen next?

*Taking a **responsibility-focused approach** to working with children and families means:*

Focusing on strengths and empowering families to have control, and responsibility in their lives

Typically, we become involved with a family because of an identified problem, and this can create an unintentional bias on risk and deficits. Assessing the impact of problems is a core part of our work, but research tells us that families often feel criticised yet don't know what they need to do to move forward.

As a result, it can seem as though the professionals are responsible for problem solving and creating change, when the **changes that need to happen are within family life**, day to day interactions that shape the experience of children. People need to take ownership and feel responsible for change to stick.

Every family has strengths, networks, experiences, and skills they can bring to create positive change. By harnessing these and addressing problems collaboratively and early on, we can increase accountability and responsibility in a way that supports good parenting. In our practice framework, practitioners explore the strengths of family life with equal curiosity to the risks and concerns that we hold. Moving between concerns and strengths brings a sense of balance to the family experience and is motivational.

Making sure decision-making and planning is well-informed, evidence-based, and timely

Decision-making and planning should be set within clear timeframes and include relevant information about the child and their family, including events, history, context, environment, and relationships to understand 'the family way' (Jan Horwath, 2016). Planning and decision-making is collaborative with partner agencies, as well as the wider family and community networks. Plans set out next steps with a clear goal.

Managing risk and safety planning

Managing risk is a core part of our work, but we know that the elimination of risk is not the same as the creation of safety. Safety plans that make a difference for children are based in a realistic understanding of individual family life and involve families as partners in making the plan.

Providing families with a list of rules or actions is unlikely to translate into changes that last. A restorative approach to safety planning requires the practitioner to lead the family and network on a clear path that builds family understanding and a plan that they will own and can make work.

We know
our practice is
responsible
when...

- Plans for children are made with families, build on their strengths, and include goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, reviewed and timebound. Plans are realistic because they set out the next step in family language.
- Children, young people and families are supported to participate in meetings through timely discussion, sharing of documents and with full consideration as to whether an advocate is required. An advocate may be someone already connected to the child or young person such as someone who knows them best.
- When circumstances change, we re-evaluate the risk and revise our plans, and record our rationale for this through management oversight, clear decision making and contingency planning. Safety plans are developed with children and families, including potential perpetrators where appropriate, so that they are realistic and meaningful.
- We model a culture of accountability through our Quality Assurance Framework, which includes the voice and experience of families and young people. Where concerns are raised about the quality of practice, management oversight will follow these actions to ensure progress has been made.
- All practitioners and managers uphold their professional responsibility to be accountable for their own conduct, development and delivery of a high-quality service. This includes being accountable within our roles and responsibilities, supporting and holding each other to account, and seeking appropriate assistance when needed.

Restorative practice is transformative and sustainable because it supports families to develop their own solutions. Working restoratively means supporting families to develop resilience to the risks, challenges, and vulnerabilities they face in life. Practitioners model resilience too – we are tenacious and stick with families when children and young people need help and don't give up on them.

Building resilience to working with children and families means:

Navigating the impact of trauma and shame and repairing harm

Trauma affects people's ability to trust other people. When we experience fear and distrust, stress hormones have a direct impact on our ability to focus, process and retain information. Working in a trauma informed way means taking care not to use language that makes people feel shamed or blamed for what has happened to them. Supervision is an opportunity to reflect on this and to use practice concepts such as the Compass of Shame (Nathanson, 1992) to recognise how feelings or trauma and shame can lead to patterns of behaviour.

Being professionally curious and getting to the root of issues

Professional curiosity is the capacity and skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family, without making assumptions or accepting things at face value. Restorative listening means we avoid asking directly why something has happened - often families need support to process those kinds of connections. Instead, we use curious questions and minimal encouragers to explore what is happening, such as 'tell me more'.

We can explore strengths, networks, and resources by asking the right questions. Curious, exception and amplification questions can be used as tools to work with families to draw on their wider family, community, and multi-agency networks, making sure support comes from trusted people in

trusted places wherever possible. Our shared aim is to move toward a plan of sustainable change that does not require statutory intervention in family life.

Being patient because real change takes time

Creating real change takes time. We take a 'growth mindset' and support families who are heading in the right direction even if there are setbacks. As an organisation, practitioners are resilient too because they feel supported by managers who understand and appreciate the complex nature of the work we do.

- We are curious about family strengths to validate their sense of self-efficacy and build on this in plans for children
- We are patient to see positive change materialise, and stay focused on making gradual progress, together with families over time and celebrate success and achievement
- Genograms and/or ecomaps are used to give consideration of what support is available from close family members, connected persons and key professionals
- We offer families the chance to find their own solutions wherever possible through Family Group Conferences and network meetings.
- Practitioners feel safe and supported by managers and this enables them to be creative and tenacious in their work

**We know
our practice
builds
resilience
when...**



More info
on needs
and risks

Reflection is about taking the time to ensure our practice and the child's or young person's plan is responsive to their needs and risks. It is also about the time to consider different perspectives, discuss a hypothesis and consider how our work might be approached differently to achieve the result we are aiming for. As part of the reflective process, restorative practice makes clear the importance of recognising and understanding the impact of our professional power, status, and other social characteristics. This can happen in reflective individual or group supervision.

*Taking a **reflective approach** to working with children and families means:*

Being flexible, having humility and practicing 'Safe Uncertainty' and 'Authoritative Doubt'

Working with vulnerable children and families often requires us to manage risk to children in a context that is highly uncertain and provokes anxiety. In a professional context, this may lead to rigid perspectives on what needs to change for a child to be safe, or a pre-occupation with process, escalation, and monitoring, at the expense of reaching out to offer help. Another example is when we bring a child into care, without pausing to consider the risk of becoming cared for, because of the pressure to ensure safety.

These are complex trade-offs and balances to make, and there's not always a right answer. What is in our gift, as professionals, is the approach we take to complexity and risk. Mason (1993) suggests a more helpful way to explore issues of risk and certainty in supporting children and families is to move away from trying to find the "true way", while keeping central the safety of the child. He developed the concept of 'safe uncertainty' to help practitioners within frontline child protection to purposefully reflect on what they are doing, and develop confidence towards taking a position of 'authoritative doubt'.

A position of safe uncertainty allows for calculated risk taking, and a dynamic and responsive approach to practice, and allows room for the real complexity of child protection Social Work where often we are working with information that is not always complete, clear or may have multiple dimensions.

To [find out more about Safe Uncertainty](#), a range of resources and tools from Research in Practice can be accessed here



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Being responsive in understanding, and acting on what is and isn't working

This is about pausing and reflecting on the impact our work is having for this child. We should always pause and reflect at key transition points in a child's journey, such as when a decision to bring a child into care is under consideration, or to move to a different level of need. Children also require practitioners to pause and explore difficult scenarios and 'think the unthinkable' to make sure they are safe from harm.



Focusing on outcomes, being clear about what 'making a difference' means for children and families, and pausing to ask questions about impact

Reflective questions to pause and consider

- What needs to happen to build trust with this family?
- Is this plan leading to positive changes in this child or young person's daily life that will last?
- Who else is in this network that might be able to help?
- How will we know we are making a difference for this child and family?
- This child or young person is in our care, would this be good enough for my child?

We know our practice is reflective when...

- Practitioners have regular supervision that is reflective, analytical and leads to good outcomes for children. The frequency of case supervision is outlined in the supervision policy. Supervision provides space for reflection, reviews the impact of our work and supports the practitioner to work effectively with complex situations and to manage risk
- Practitioners and managers receive a training and development offer that supports their understanding of best practice, research, and evidence informed approaches to practice, and this is reflected in supervision records.
- Practitioners feel safe to say they are stuck or need help because there isn't a clear answer.
- Complaints are responded to restoratively and seen as an opportunity to repair relationships and learn about how we can improve services.
- At an organisational level, we value a learning culture and reflect on the impact of our practice as an organisation to continuously develop and improve.

Find out more about Restorative Practice in Devon

You can find out more about Restorative Practice, as well as access evidence-based guides, training sessions and practice tools available on our Restorative Practice SharePoint site.

At the link above, you can also find out how you can get in touch with one of our Restorative Practice Advisors or Coaches across Children's Services. They represent the Social Work Academy, the Youth Offending Service, Adopt Southwest, Children and Families social work teams, Early Help teams, Social Workers in Schools team, Permanency and Transition & Fostering.



Finally, keep up to date with all things Restorative Practice in Devon by following us on Twitter (@RP_Devon).

Restorative Practice eLearning is now available



SCAN ME

devon.cc/rd-del



Recommended Reading on all things Restorative Practice

- Calder, Risk in Child Protection: 2016
- Featherstone, Protecting Children a Social Model: 2018
- Ferguson, Child Protection Practice: 2011
- Finnis. M, Independent Thinking on Restorative Practice: Building Relationships, Improving Behaviour and Creating Stronger Communities: 2021
- Forrester. D, et al., Motivational Interviewing for working with Children & Families: 2021
- Howarth. J, Tackling Child Neglect: Research, Policy and Evidence Based practice: 2016
- Lombard, Violence against Women: 2013
- Munro.E, Effective Child Protection: 2019 (3rd edition)
- Milner. J, Creative Ideas for Solution Focused Practice: 2017
- Milner. J, Assessment in Social Work: 2020 (5th Edition)
- Nathanson. D, The Many Faces of Shame: 1992
- Ruch. G, et al., Relationship based Social Work: 2018
- Wonacott. J, Mastering Social Work Supervision: 2012



Restorative Devon

