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**Bringing Children into Care Practice Guidance**

1. **Our Approach**

The Trust’s overarching practice model is “relationship-based and trauma informed practice” through the use of a strengths based and systemic approach in working with children, young people and their families.

Relationships for children in care are often complex, fragile and fragmented. The right intervention at the right time can strengthen relationships for children and young people and minimise the likelihood, and the impact, of trauma. The Trust recognises that coming into care can be traumatic for children and young people.

This guidance is to support practitioners and their managers in ensuring that coming into care is managed in a trauma responsive way, for our children and young people.

1. **Fundamental principles**

Wherever possible we seek to support families to stay together because this is usually in the long term best interests of children and young people. Where a young person is aged 12-18 years, intervention from the Trust’s [Families Together Plus (FT+) Service](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/10350/families-together-plus-140120.pdf) should be considered in order to provide the young person with the greatest opportunity to remain living safely with their parents.

When it is in the best interests of the child or young person to come into the Trust’s care, we will work with them, their family and involved professionals to ensure that a sensitive and child centred approach is taken to our work.

We will always explore the possibility of children and young people being cared for by their family members (where this has been assessed as safe) before considering foster care or residential care as a placement provision.

We recognise that strong relationships with children, young people, their families and involved professionals will help us to know our children well, and knowing our children and young people well will mean that if we bring them into care, we will be able to do this in the best way possible.

1. **How we “be”**

How we “be” refers to the way in which we behave. When bringing children into care, we will:

* do this at the child or young person’s pace, giving them time to process information and to prepare for the change, balancing this with the need to ensure their safe and appropriate care in a timely way
* start and end discussions with the child or young person in ways which provide them with emotional safety
* spend time prior to explain, age appropriately, to children and young people, in simple, clear language:
	+ Why they are coming into care
	+ Who they will live with and where they will live
	+ Information about their foster family or care provider
	+ What they can expect to happen, when and how
* seek the views, wishes and feelings of the child/young person and prioritise them wherever possible. We will remember to use creative methods of ascertaining wishes and feelings, including through drawing, poetry, music, direct work tools and according to our knowledge of how the child or young person is best able to share their feelings
* ask the child or young person what would make the transition easier or more comfortable for them
* encourage the child or young person to ask any questions they have and provide honest, age appropriate responses, communicating openly and transparently at all times
* understand that children and young people may communicate their feelings to us through their behaviour. Our relationship with the child or young person will enable us to see the person behind the behaviour and to respond in a sensitive, understanding and reassuring way
* reassure children and young people that we will support them to enjoy family time with their siblings (where appropriate); parents and other people that are important to them, according to their wishes and feelings. [Family Time with Parents/Adults and Siblings Procedures](https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p_contact_parents.html). [Contact Practice Guidance](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/2657/contact-practice-guidance-with-appendix-25-october-2018-3.pdf)
* make sure that the child or young person’s professional support network is informed of the changes and prepared to provide support. Tell the child or young person this so that they feel safe to talk to those people
* talk to the child or young person about ways in which they will be able to maintain their school placement and any hobbies, activities and friendships they enjoy. Where this is not going to be possible, explain the reason and what support will be offered
* discuss with the child or young person matters of identity, culture, diversity, disability and how their needs in these areas will be met in their placement
* arrange for the child or young person to visit their placement and to meet their carers before being placed, where timescales support this
* consistency and continuity help children and young people to feel safe, so we will ensure that the child or young person’s allocated Social Worker, or the Social Worker with whom they have the strongest relationship, accompanies them to their placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances why this cannot happen, in which case, this will be explained to the child or young person
* think about the multi-sensory experiences of the child or young person and whether any comforting belongings, stress toys, music, aromas or food during the transition would make the experience easier for them
* ensure the child or young person knows that they can have an advocate [Advocacy and Independent Visitors](https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p_advocacy.html)
* no child should carry their life in a bin bag; our children will have their belongings packed in a travel bag or suitcase when moving to their placement. Click this link to get a free travel bag for a child in care [Request A Bag – Madlug](https://www.madlug.com/pages/request-a-bag)
1. **Behaviour is communication**

Many of the children and young people who come into care have experienced unresolved trauma and loss. They may find difficulty in using verbal communication to explain how they feel. We understand that behaviour is communication and that we need to see the person behind the behaviour. When people feel unsafe or afraid, they may demonstrate fight, flight, freeze or frame behaviours, some of which are:

- physical or verbal attack or resistance

- anger; a mask emotion linked to fear and sadness

- reactive, defensive, spiky

- to retreat, physically and emotionally; the safest place seeming to be in oneself

- to be quiet and still

- to disconnect, dissociate, feel numb; this shields oneself

- to physically freeze, paralysis

- to freeze in mind, unable to think, concentrate or make decisions, feeling stuck

- running away

- mania, hard to be still, mind whirling

- rigidity of thought; helps to respond to uncertainty

- to smile or laugh; connecting to difficult feelings is painful

1. **Preparing the carer**

Children and young people are more likely to thrive when offered a sense of security, stability, commitment and identity. We recognise the significance and importance upon a child’s future of placing them with carefully chosen care providers. We will support this by:

* ensuring that our carers and placement providers know the children they are caring for well. Giving them information which enables them to understand the child or young person’s individual personality, likes, dislikes, what makes them happy, what makes them sad, what comforts them, everything which makes them the very special child that they are
* helping our carers and placement providers understand and recognise the unresolved loss and trauma that the child or young person has experienced, how this impacts upon them and how best they can support the child or young person
* telling our carers and placement providers about the child or young person’s culture, identity, faith, disability, hobbies and interests and what they are expected to do to ensure the child or young person’s needs are met
1. **Procedures / Useful links**

[Practice Standard 9: Bringing Children and Young People into Care Well](https://intranet.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/info/20166/practice_hub/1067/practice_standards/9)

Before a child enters care, a completed Accommodation Request Form is required and appropriate approval from the Area Resource Panel or from the Head of Service or AD in an emergency. Please refer to these two links: [Decision to Look After and Care Planning](https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p_dec_look_aft.html) and [Guidance for Requesting Placements for Children in Care (October 2017)](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/3591/placement-processes-practice-guide-04-10-17-ct-050318-eclipse-161019.pdf)

It is good practice for the below interventions to be undertaken prior to a child or young person coming into care. Where this is not possible, the table shows the timescales for completion.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Placement Plan | 5 working days post placement |
| Care Plan | 10 working days post placement |
| Initial Health Assessment | Prior to first Child in Care review |
| Personal Education Plan (PEP) | 10 working days post placement |

Within 2 working days of a child being placed, the Safeguarding service must be informed and allocate an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who will chair a Child in Care review within 20 working days.

A visit to the child or young person in placement, by the Social Worker, should take place within one week of the child being placed and no less often than 6 weekly thereafter. It is likely that more frequent visits will initially be required until the child or young person is settled in placement. See Tri.x main chapter [Social Worker Visits to Children in Care](https://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/p_sw_visits.html) and [Quick Reference Guide: Visits to the Children and Young People We Care For](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/11971/visits-to-the-children-young-people-we-care-for-quick-reference-guide-v10-200122.pdf)

Cafcass direct work resources are available via this link:

[Cafcass resources for professionals](https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/professionals/resources-for-professionals/)

Cafcass information for young people experiencing care proceedings via this link:

[A young person's guide to care proceedings](https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/young-people/young-persons-guide-care-proceedings/)

Worksheet by Dr Karen Treisman about how we may behave when we feel unsafe:

[Feeling safe & p](http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/feeling-safe-putting-up-defenses.pdf)utting up defenses