

**Changing the narrative**

**Guidance for our staff about bringing children into care**

1. **Purpose of guidance**

This guidance is to be used by our managers to frame the conversation in supervision and team meetings, and by staff as a guide for their discussions with families.

1. **Things to think about**
* The Trust believes children should live with their families whenever it is safe enough for them to do so; we will provide services to support this and support you in managing the risks.
* Coming into the care of the Trust is not a choice (for a child or parent); it is the outcome of last resort when all other alternatives have been exhausted.
* The impact on children coming into care can be devastating and lifelong. This needs to be balanced against the risks **to the child** of them staying with their family or someone with whom they have a relationship.
* Older children coming into care have statistically worse outcomes, and there is a lack of appropriate care placements for this age group (we must ask the question will the available placement actually be safer and better for them?). We also know teenagers tend to gravitate home as they get older.
* Parents’ refusal/reluctance to engage with us via Family Group Conference, Families Together Plus or other services must be challenged and their expectations of what we will and won’t do must be managed.
* Every child has the right to expect all the adults around them - parents, carers, family, friends, and professionals - to have considered, assessed, and explored every alternative to coming into the care of the Trust.
1. **How we ensure the right children come into the care of the Trust at the right time**

This may be in a planned way through legal application to Court following child protection and/ or pre-proceedings work with the family or as a result of crisis in a family resulting in Police Protection Orders or placement breakdown.

We will only consider bringing a child into our care when:

The child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm (the legal threshold). A clear recorded description of the significant harm the child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, is required. Why does this child need to come into the care of the Trust now?

**and**

A thorough assessment has been undertaken, all alternatives have been considered and tested and we have accessed and delivered support from services in our Stronger Families programme, including Family Together Plus, Family Group Conference service, Edge of Care, and services provided by our partners. We have a statutory responsibility to identify family or someone with whom the child has a relationship before we consider bringing a child into our care. Barriers to accessing the necessary support interventions should be escalated. Detail of the interventions delivered, and the impact of those interventions, to support the child at home or with other family members or friends, should be recorded

**and**

We have identified and engaged the child’s wider family and friends’ network to support the child and their family. Barriers to understanding, identifying, or contacting the child’s wider family and friends’ network should be challenged.

1. **The Management Decision**

All Trust employees and partners are expected to do everything they can to support children to remain in the care of their family where it is safe to do so before the HoS speaks to the AD about their recommendation for the child to come into care.

When this agreement has been given Heads of Service must use the management decision form to record thedecision to bring a child into the care of the Trust, including what has been done to prevent this and a plan for permanence from the outset.

The Team Manager will convene a meeting at the 10 day point, inviting all relevant parties to ensure a robust conversation about the decision, reflection on the options and ensure the right plan for the child. Decisions to admit children and young people into the Trust’s care are not ‘once and done’ decisions: family circumstances change, and we have a responsibility to review our decisions and, where possible, to reunite children with their families and to continue to seek family members as potential carers.