



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Wokingham's Practice Model for Children's Services

January 2024

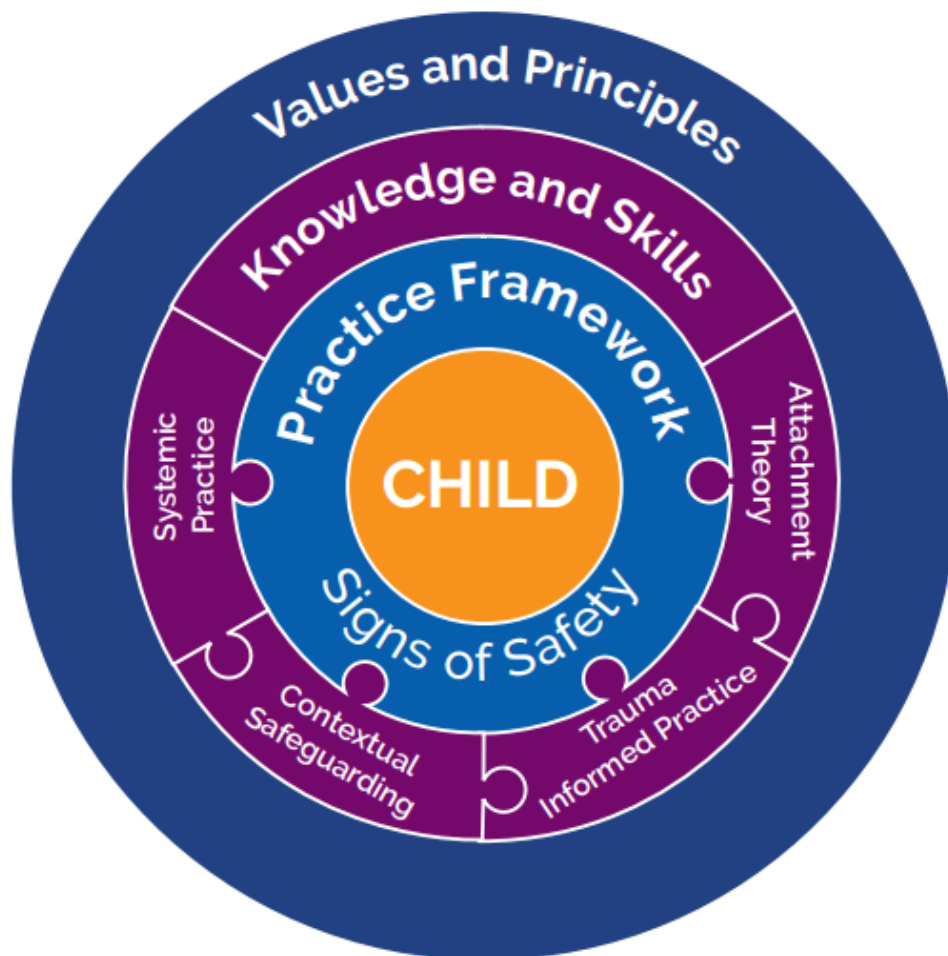


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Introduction

In this document, we set out our Practice Model and the context in which it fits with the wider Children's Services strategy.

Our vision is that Wokingham is a borough where all children and young people are safe and cared for, achieve their potential, are healthy and resilient, and feel happy, hopeful and loved.

Our values to support this are:

- **We focus on making a difference.** We support children, young people and families on their journey and measure our success in terms of impact on outcomes.
- **We aim high.** We have high aspirations for every child and young person. We are ambitious for our services, and strive for excellence in everything we do.
- **We are strategic, efficient and effective.** We manage all our resources efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of our children, young people and families.
- **We value our people.** We highly value and support our children's workforce. We support our people to excel, grow, and love their work.
- **We drive partnership, collaboration and coproduction.** We work in strategic partnership with professionals, children, young people and families to achieve our shared goal to improve outcomes.

Since its inception, the Practice Model continues to evolve and be refined recognising that we need to be adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of the families we work with. The foundation of our model is the Signs of Safety Practice Framework, complimented by aligned strengths-based, relationship-based approaches to enrich our practice across children's services. This document outlines the approaches that are applicable across *all* areas of the service.

Governance

The Practice Model Steering Group is responsible for setting and delivering against the strategy. It meets quarterly and is chaired by the Director of Children's Services. The work of this group is closely aligned to the Quality Assurance Steering Group, also chaired by the Director of Children's Services.

The work is supported by the Principal Social Worker and Practice Consultants in conjunction with the Practice Leaders. In addition to this document, we have produced a comprehensive Practice Model Practitioner's Guide for staff.

Values and Principles of the Practice Model

Our values describe our beliefs whilst our principles govern the way in which we provide our services to children and families; they convey how we want families to perceive and experience us. Our values and principles inform our choice of the theories, knowledge and skills that underpin our Practice Model, and these are aligned to and reflect the values of the wider Children’s Services strategy.

We acknowledge the terminology we use for family is interchangeable and this will include a child’s care givers and significant connected people.

Values	Principles
Nothing about you without you – Relationship based practice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe that good practice only happens when we can build open, honest and strong relationships with the children, young people and families we are trying to help. • We believe that we can build a working relationship with family members even where differences exist and without condoning abuse in any way. • We believe that families have a right to be involved in the decisions we make, to be listened to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will always be careful to balance the authority we have with empathy and respect for everyone whom we work with. • We aim to help families understand that problems exist within relationships rather than individuals and by looking at things this way help them change their perception of themselves and others in order to create and sustain change. • We will work from a stance of curiosity and remain open minded. • We always use plain, non-judgemental language and make sure the children, young people and families we are working with understand what we are saying, what we are doing and why we are doing it. • We will work collaboratively with professionals, children and young people, families and communities to inform decisions about safety • We will give parents, children and their naturally connected network every opportunity to find their own ideas and solutions before the professionals offer theirs.
Children at the heart of all we do	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe that a healthy strong attachment is one of the strongest protective factors in a child's life and the foundation of life-long wellbeing. • We believe that every child has a right to and deserves to grow up in a warm loving family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure that the child should be at the centre of all our assessments, plans and interventions. Where a child is old enough, they will be involved in their own plan. • We are committed to supporting families to stay together, whenever it is feasible to do so.
Healing and staying connected	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe that all individuals should feel physically and emotionally safe, are noticed and listened to, and are given a voice. • We believe that every child needs lifelong meaningful relationships to increase their sense of belonging, purpose, happiness, self-worth, and confidence so they can thrive and grow up to lead healthy lives and fulfil their potential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are committed to work in a way that promotes the healing from trauma. • We will keep clear records and a detailed history for those children and young people who we work with and look after so that can understand their lives, their own stories and the decisions that have been made to keep them safe and happy. • We will be mindful of the power we hold and use our statutory authority with care, offering choices about as many aspects of the casework as possible. • We will involve and work with families and their naturally connected networks, (whether the child lives with or outside their biological family) to support them to identify their strengths and find sustainable solutions within their own networks that support the safety and wellbeing of their children. • We will do everything in our power to ensure that children can sustain lifelong connections with their family, culture and community of origin throughout all our involvement.
Building on strengths	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe every family has strengths, which we will notice when we are working together. We will help people to identify solutions to their own difficulties, making the best use of the good and safe things that already exist in their own network of family, friends and community • We believe that we have a shared responsibility to help families to change so that children and young people can live safely with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work with families to make a clear plan about what needs to change, and we will clearly describe the help we can offer. Our plans will also clearly explain what will happen if things do not change.
Respecting equality and diversity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe that every child must have access to equal opportunities, no matter who they are or where they come from. so that they can feel safe and thrive within their family and wider community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are committed to working with children and families in a fair way. We will make sure that we do not discriminate against people because of their age, any impairment, ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, social class, gender, sexual orientation, or for any other characteristic. • We will promote fair access and engagement to our services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will practice in a culturally sensitive way, considering identity and how oppression may influence the experience of the families we work with. • We will actively challenge behaviour which is discriminatory or racist
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Knowledge and skills:

This includes the theories, concepts and approaches that we believe are **integral** to underpinning our understanding of the complexities within relationships, human behaviour, social interactions and safeguarding. We draw on aspects of the framework of each of these theories, concepts and approaches to inform our practice.

All practitioners are responsible for continually updating their knowledge and skills by accessing the training and development opportunities that are available. The need to keep up to date with and understand the significance of new research is integral to good practice.

A short explanation for each component of our Practice Model is listed below:

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is ‘a theory of personality development in the context of close relationships’. It argues that children begin to develop mental representations of their own worth in the form of ‘internal working models’ that are based on the availability of other people, and their ability and willingness to provide care.

“In order to develop normally... *somebody has to be crazy about that kid*” - Dan Hughes

Having a healthy attachment to the primary caregiver as a young child profoundly influences the child’s overall emotional health. Most literature on childhood trauma cites healthy, **strong attachments** as being a huge factor in a child’s ability to heal from trauma.

The understanding of the internal makeup of both parents and children who have suffered separation, trauma or loss is key in being able to work with children and families to create and sustain change.

Attachment can have a significant impact on all stages of a child’s development, therefore understanding attachment theory is an essential area of knowledge for practitioners. Firstly, it gives us a framework for assessing the quality of a child’s relationships with others. It also informs how best we can work with the child and their caregivers to build relationships, conduct assessments and complete direct work.

Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma-Informed Practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It looks to create opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and to feel safe; physically, psychologically and emotionally.

We do not have to be trauma specialists to work in a trauma informed way. It is sometimes the simple, everyday things we can bring into our practice that could make a difference such as giving a listening ear, conveying respect and compassion. By building safety and developing sustainable networks around children and families we will promote healing and counter the effects of adversity and possible trauma. Trauma is individually defined, what is traumatic for one individual will not feel like trauma for another and we need to be sensitive to this.

Practitioners need a clear understanding of trauma to respond to children and families in ways that promote self-determination, trust, and enable the rebuilding of healthy interpersonal skills and coping strategies. Trauma informed practice moves the emphasis away from 'what's wrong with you?' to 'what happened to you?'. Whatever interaction we have with our families it should be trauma informed as every interaction can be an intervention.

Systemic Practice

Systemic practice seeks to make sense of the world through relationships, focusing on the whole family system rather than only an individual. With a systemic approach, change can be achieved by exploring relationship patterns and understanding how families function. A systemic approach relies on challenging some of our more traditional thinking. It encourages us to view the difficulties facing families within the context of relationships. In doing so we are challenged to consider interpersonal and intergenerational patterns, scripts and habits that form, leading to problematic behaviour.

Systemic practice looks at change being created by helping the family and professional network to become curious and develop a shared understanding of the difficulties. In focusing attention on all the systems, we can look to practice in a more holistic and strength-based way.

Systemic practice promotes the belief that families have the capacity to change. What we want to do as practitioners is to look at individuals, what surrounds them, their family, community, and wider society. This allows us to gain a better understanding of what makes someone who they are, and what makes them unique to their own situation. An underlying principle behind systemic practice is the ability for practitioners to build transparent and strong relationships with families. This creates a level of trust which will help families to create real and sustainable change.

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach developed by Carlene Firmin to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of harm beyond their families and home. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers can often have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial pressures can also undermine parent-child relationships. In light of this, the Contextual Safeguarding approach recognises that children's practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over (or within) extra-familial contexts, and that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces or locations are a critical part of safeguarding practices.

Wokingham Borough Council has developed a multi-agency approach to working with young people within the harm outside the home (HOTH) context - where traditional safeguarding approaches may not fit, but where risk of harm to the young person still exists.

Under this approach, although children at risk will continue to be managed within existing Child in Need, Child Protection and Child in Care frameworks, flexibility is provided to ensure that the multi-agency response fits the context and individual needs of the young people involved.

Practice Framework: Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety is the overarching practice framework used within Wokingham Children's Services. It provides the scaffolding that enables practitioners to put all the different theories and approaches within the model into practice.



The Signs of Safety model focusses on identifying and utilising the family's own resources and strengths that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child's and family's situation. The Signs of Safety risk assessment process integrates professional knowledge with local family and cultural knowledge and balances a rigorous exploration of danger/harm alongside indicators of strengths and safety. Signs of Safety is about parents, their network of naturally connected support people and professionals working together to meet children and young people's needs in the best way possible.

Signs of Safety has established a close partnership with the Family Finding model created by Kevin Campbell and these are considered sister approaches and as such plays an important part of how we practice in Wokingham. The Family Finding model provides practitioners with a range of tools and strategies to identify and then mobilise the child's naturally connected network. Signs of Safety is a relationship-based way of working that puts the child, their parents and connected people at the centre and gives them every opportunity to come up with their own ideas and solutions to show everyone that the children are safe and well now and in the future, no matter what.

Signs of Safety can be adapted to Signs of Wellbeing (Child In Need and Early Help), Signs of Success (Children In Care) and Signs of Good Learning (education settings).

Signs of Safety is a way of working, an approach, it is **how** we will practice; it is not just training or using specific tools. It affects all aspects of the organisation and requires a whole system implementation ensuring that we have the right policies, procedures, structures, support and tools in place to promote best practice.

UNCLASSIFIED

Version / Date	Author	Date Of the Next Review	Lead
V1.0 December 2019	Jannie Goussard, Signs of Safety Practice Consultant Francesca Smith, Signs of Safety Practice Consultant Rachel Bedford, Principal Social Worker Emma Hovell, Signs of Safety Project Manager	December 2020* moved to October 2021	Rachel Oakley, Assistant Director - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards
V2.0 November 2021	Jannie Goussard, Practice Consultant Francesca Smith, Practice Consultant Emma Hovell, Practice Model Project Manager	November 2023* Moved to January 2024	Rachel Oakley, Assistant Director - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards
V3.0 January 2024	Jannie Goussard, Practice Consultant Francesca Smith, Practice Consultant Emma Hovell, Practice Model Project Manager	January 2026	Mark Douglas, Interim Assistant Director - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards