

Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Practice Standards



Safety



Trust



Relationships



Collaboration



Impact



**Northamptonshire
Children's Trust**

Introduction

*What we do today affects your tomorrow, we
promise to walk side by side with you*

These standards describe the minimum levels of practice that children, young people and families should be able to expect from us. They take into account legislation, national guidance, social work practice standards, research, the views and experience of practitioners and managers and feedback from children, young people and families. They help us to know what good looks like and provide us with a way of reflecting on the way we work with children and their families. They promote consistency in the quality of practice delivered across Children's Services.

A commitment to embedding best practice principles and standards is a core expectation of all Northampton Children's Trust (NCT) employees and working to these standards is mandatory for all workers.

Each standard describes the best practice we should be aiming towards (what we should do) and contains some 'bottom lines' (what we must do).



Northampton Children's Trust Children's Practice Principles

Our Practice Principles

Safety

The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount to all the work we do and all the decisions we make.

The physical, psychological and emotional safety of children, care leavers, families, carers and our workforce are prioritised by:

- Acknowledging those who have experienced trauma may feel a fundamental lack of safety or control over their lives, which causes difficulties in developing a felt sense of safety or trusting relationships.
- Providing a safe, supportive, welcoming, nurturing and accessible environment.
- People knowing that they are safe or by asking them what they need to feel safe.
- Reasonable freedom from threat or harm.
- Attempting to prevent re-traumatisation.
- Putting appropriate policies, practices and safeguarding arrangements in place.
- Supporting workforce wellbeing.



Trust

Transparency exists in communication and in the organisations policies and procedures, with the objective of building trust among our workforce, children, care leavers, families, carers and wider community by:

- Understanding trust has to be earned.
- Recognising impact of power imbalance.
- Explaining who you are, what you are doing and why.
- Doing what you say you will do (consistency, reliability and predictability).
- Creating clear expectations and not over-promising (e.g., healthy and respectful boundaries, confidentiality, data sharing, consent).
- Understand importance of continuity of care, or appropriately planning for and supporting transition points and endings.



Relationships

A relationship is the way that two or more people are connected, or the way that they behave towards each other. To create positive relationships:

- This needs to happen in the context of safety, trust and consistency.
- Looking beyond the behaviour; it means listening with curiosity and without judgement.
- Working in collaboration and treating people with kindness, dignity and respect.
- Empowering and strengths-based approach.
- Having courageous conversations with transparency, honesty and reflection.
- Moving past cultural stereotypes and biases; recognising and addressing inequality, oppression and exclusion.
- Ensuring that where there has been 'rupture' in relationships that this is repaired so that relationships can be strengthened.

The above applies to how we work with each other, partners and children and families.



Collaboration

Doing With, Not To...

The lived experiences of children, care leavers, families, carers and staff are recognised and valued in overcoming challenges and improving the system by:

- Asking children, care leavers, families, carers and staff what they need and collaboratively considering how these needs can be met.
- Building meaningful partnerships, working alongside and actively involving service users in the development and delivery of services.
- Enabling formal and informal peer support and self-help (e.g. group supervision, access to MHFA, coaching etc)



Impact

Are we making a positive difference?

We will know this by:

- Holding regular reviews and monitoring impact / change / outcome.
- Listening to feedback from children, young people, parents, carers and partners.
- Having robust management oversight and opportunities for regular reflective supervision; acknowledging we sometimes work in a high risk and uncertain context, where the weight of decision making needs to be shared.
- Through our quality assurance processes: sharing examples of good practice as well as learning from things we need to improve.
- Through our continual learning and development programme: providing appropriate opportunities to learn and refresh knowledge, skills, competency and confidence.
- Using data effectively.





Practice Standard 1:

Good Quality Management Oversight and Decision-Making

Good Quality Management Oversight and Decision-Making

In NCT Good quality management oversight and decision-making means:

- Our practice is shaped by our relational practice approach, this means we build meaningful, effective and supportive relationships with practitioners and we encourage them to do the same with the children, young people and families they are working with.
- Creating a culture of professional curiosity and offering practitioners high support and high challenge.
- Helping ensure children and young people are at the heart of everything we do – their voice, their felt and lived experience, their individual story, their needs.
- Having regular conversations about the progress and safety of children and young people in between formal supervision and recording them clearly.
- Creating a safe space to hold reflective conversations on race, culture, diversity and identity. This includes encouraging curiosity, and challenging unconscious bias and inequalities whilst celebrating diversity and difference.
- When we need to have courageous conversations or make difficult decisions, doing so timely with openness, honesty, transparency and respect.

Our bottom lines...

- We will record evidence of management oversight and decision-making on children and young people's records in a clear and timely way, so that in the future they can understand the rationale for our decisions and actions.
- We will hold formal supervision with practitioners every four weeks, with a minimum target of 10 supervisions across the year. Supervision will be recorded and evident on file.
- We will discuss each family at least every eight weeks.
- We will discuss some children more frequently, such as children with a child protection plan, children recently coming into our care, children before the court or for whom we are planning for their permanence, children living in unstable situations, children in illegal placements etc.
- Managers will record any decision to discuss families less frequently than eight weekly on the child/ young person's record with the rationale for this, and frequency will be reviewed after any significant events in the child/ young person's life.
- We will provide robust management oversight of high support and high challenge to ensure that we are consistently working towards positive outcomes for our children/young people.



Practice standard 2:
Good Recording

Good Recording

In NCT good recording means:

- Keeping children and young people's records up to date and reflecting their current circumstances.
- Remembering that we are the holders of children and young people's stories and making sure that children and young people are visible in all recordings. This includes recording evidence of direct work as well as demonstrating how their views have informed decisions made about their lives so they can understand their histories when they are older.
- Recording the rationale for the decisions we take about children and young people. Again, so that they and others can understand why we have made decisions.
- Recording children and young people's unique identity in terms of language, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability.
- Making it clear if the child/young person or family have any specific communication needs due to language, disability or learning needs etc.
- Taking care to ensure that we record children/young people's names correctly.
- Recording respectfully, so that when the child, young person or their parents read what is on their records they will know they are valued and listened to.
- Using language in recordings that clearly describes the events in children and young people's lives and the things that they are going through and avoiding using professional 'jargon' and acronyms.¹
- Evidencing management oversight through recordings of reflective discussions, authorisations and decisions.
- For children and young people in our care, evidencing oversight from their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and the impact of their wishes and feelings in their reviews.
- Letting children and young people know that they can ask to see recordings about them and providing them with information on how to do it.
- Evidencing in recordings the difference our involvement is making to children, young people and their families.
- We will write directly to children/young people in our case recordings, this will support us with being child-centred, inclusive and respectful using language that could be understood by children/young people.
- We will use of culturagrams to understand the impact of children/young people's culture on their lived experiences and support with delivering culturally competent practice.

¹The TACT publication 'Language That Cares' was co-produced with young people and suggests alternatives to professional 'jargon' https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf

Good Recording

Our bottom lines...

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- We will hold formal supervision with practitioners every four weeks, with a minimum target of 10 supervisions across the year. Supervision will be recorded and evident on file.
- We will discuss each family at least every eight weeks.
- We will discuss some children more frequently, such as children with a child protection plan, children recently coming into our care, children before the court or for whom we are planning for their permanence, children living in unstable situations, children in illegal placements etc.
- Managers will record any decision to discuss families less frequently than eight weekly on the child/ young person's record with the rationale for this, and frequency will be reviewed after any significant events in the child/ young person's life.
- We will provide robust management oversight of high support and high challenge to ensure that we are consistently working towards positive outcomes for our children/young people.



Practice standard 3:
Making Good Quality Home Visits

Making Good Quality Home Visits

In NCT making good quality home visits means:

- Planning enough time for visits to have meaningful conversations with children/young people and their caregivers and build good working relationships with them.
- Where possible, arranging visits that fit in with family routines (this may not be possible where e.g., child protection or care plans require unannounced visits).
- Arriving on time for home visits and contacting families to let them know if we are unavoidably delayed.
- Respecting people's homes and family cultures and practices, for example removing shoes when entering or avoiding days or times which clash with religious or cultural events.
- Preparing well before visits so we are clear about what we want to achieve from the visit and can explain the purpose of our visit to families – remembering that each home visit should be an intervention, make a difference for the child/ young person, and be linked to the aims of their plan.
- Asking families about their culture and belief systems, recognising that they are experts in their own lived experiences, and exploring with them what this means for the way they function as a family and care for their children.
- Using direct work tools to help children and young people express their wishes and feelings, and to assess whether our support and plans are reducing risk and improving their lives.
- Observing and recording children/young people's daily lived experience, how well their needs are being met, and interaction and attachment between them and their caregivers.
- Assessing home conditions in line with agreed plans, including checking kitchens, toilets, bathrooms and children/young people's bedrooms, especially where neglect is an issue.
- Addressing any issues with caregivers so that there is a shared understanding about acceptable standards for the child/young person.
- Having open and honest conversations with all/each (include fathers/partners involved in children's care or who spend time in household etc...) caregivers, acknowledging progress being made and addressing with them any areas of concern in terms of lack of progress. This is to help them understand our concerns and work together to reduce risks and improve outcomes for their child/ren.
- Using professional curiosity to assess and understand any changes in the family's living circumstances, for example significant events, new adults or previous partners of concern living in the family home.
- Recognising any immediate risks or additional concerns for the safety of children/young people and taking appropriate action.
- Recording visits in a respectful way, distinguishing between fact and observation, and with clear actions agreed with the family.

Making Good Quality Home Visits

Our bottom lines...

- We will always see children/young people alone on visits unless there is a specific reason not to and will record whether they were seen alone or not, and why.
- The frequency of our visits will be informed by the needs of individual children, young people, agreed plans and management guidance. However, minimum frequencies for the following children/young people are:
 - DAAT assessment – initial visit within 5 working days
 - Children in Need (CiN) Plan – at least once every four weeks.
 - Children with a Child Protection Plan – at least once every fortnight.
 - Children in Care – at least once every six weeks (or in line with statutory guidance)
 - Care leavers – at least once every eight weeks.
- We will record our visits within three working days.



Practice standard 4:
Good Quality Assessments

Good Quality Assessments

In NCT making good quality assessments means:

- Building open, honest and respectful relationships with children, young people and their parents/caregivers from the beginning, to start developing trust.
- Helping children, young people and their parents/caregivers understand why an assessment is needed, what we will be doing, why, and the potential outcomes.
- Taking decisive action to protect children that need it.
- Providing help and support to improve children's situations whilst we are completing our assessment.
- Completing a genogram/ eco map with the child/ young person and their family, so they can tell us about the relatives, friends and neighbours who are important to them and who could contribute to the assessment and offer them help and support.
- Including and speaking to all relevant people, such as household members, absent and estranged parents or others that who spend significant periods in the home or have child-care responsibilities supporting the family.
- Making sure we can effectively communicate with children, young people and their parents/caregivers. Planning and putting in place any additional help needed, e.g. arranging interpreters.
- Consulting other agencies involved with the family, gathering and analysing their information.
- Making sure assessments are holistic, and include and fully consider risks, needs, strengths, the historical context, significant events and the context to the child/ young person's current situation and events leading to the assessment.
- Considering the child/ young person's and their parents/caregiver's ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, sexuality, nationality, any specific cultural issues and learning or communication needs.
- Recording the source of information used in the assessment, and distinguishing facts from observations.
- Drawing together an effective analysis of the information gathered that
- Demonstrates an awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children, young people and adults.
- Explores present behaviours and difficulties in the context of past trauma. This will help us to work in a relational and strength-based way and avoid us re-traumatising family members.
- Considers the actual or likely impact of any parenting difficulties on the child/ young person's health and development.
- Considers protective factors and the parent/s ability and commitment to change.
- Effectively uses research to help us reach our conclusions.
- Discussing the completed assessment with children/ young people and their parents, clearly recording any areas of disagreement or queries around factual accuracy.
- Managers supporting practitioners to make decisions based on observations, evidence, research and analysis and clearly recording management oversight and decisions.

Good Quality Assessments

Our bottom lines...

- Keeping children and young people and their family's voices at the heart of assessments, while using our professional curiosity to fully understand their lived experiences. We need to consider the individual needs of children/young people; particularly if they have a disability or additional needs, we need to demonstrate creativity in obtaining their voice if they are unable to provide this directly to us through observations and from people in their network.
- Keeping children and young people and their family's voices at the heart of assessments, while using our professional curiosity to fully understand their lived experiences.
- We will make sure we have consent for the assessment from parents and/or young people (depending on their age and level of understanding). If in exceptional circumstances this is not appropriate, we will record this decision and explain our rationale to the family.
- We will include all children and adults in the household as part of family assessments.
- We will see children and young people alone and use direct work to help them express their wishes, feelings, what is going well and worries. If we cannot see them, or see them alone, we will record the reason for this.
- We will see all the children in a family within 5 days from DAAT section 17 and as agreed if S.47 often same day if required.
- We will complete our assessments in timescales that are appropriate and proportionate to the child and family circumstances but not longer than 45 working days.
- We will write our assessments in jargon free language that can be understood by children/young people and their parents/caregivers.
- We will write our assessments in jargon free language that can be understood by children/young people and their parents/caregivers.
- We will share our assessment with the child/ young person and their parent/s and record their views of the analysis and recommendations. We will give them a copy of the completed assessment and make sure they know what the next steps will be.
- We will inform relevant professionals and agencies of the outcome of the assessment and next steps.
- We will keep assessments up to date and review them whenever there are significant changes in the child/ young person's life.
- When we are working with parents of unborn children, we will begin pre-birth assessments as soon as possible and aim to complete them by week 20 of the pregnancy whenever possible.



Practice standard 5:

Developing Good Quality Plans

Developing Good Quality Plans

In NCT developing good quality plans means:

- Keeping children and young people at the heart of plans, including their wishes and feelings, their individual and cultural needs and their hopes for the future.
- Being aware of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children, young people and adults, and planning in ways that acknowledge present behaviours and difficulties in the context of past trauma. This will help us to work in a relational and strength-based way and avoid us re-traumatising family members.
- Involving families fully in co-producing plans, including agreeing actions for caregivers and children/young people as well as professionals.
- Basing plans on comprehensive, holistic assessments of children/ young people and their family's needs and including strengths as well as risks.
- Considering whether a family meeting or Family Group Decision Making would be helpful in order to involve families' wider social network of relatives, friends and community groups in developing plans.
- Making sure plans are clear, detailed and 'SMART', stating clearly what needs to be achieved, what needs to happen, who is responsible for actions and when they need to be completed. This means writing plans in plain language that everyone can understand, including children and young people.
- Making sure that if multiple recommendations are made the sequence and priority of actions is clear.
- Making sure actions in plans are achievable within a reasonable timescale, and that everyone responsible for an action understands what it is they need to do and what difference it will make to the child/ young person.
- Keeping plans proportionate and appropriate to strengths, risks and levels of need, in line with 'Right Help Right Time' threshold guidance and findings of assessments.
- Agreeing realistic contingency plans within child in need and child protection plans.
- Developing and progressing parallel plans for children and young people in care to achieve permanence to avoid drift and delay.
- Being explicit about when children need a separate written safety plan, for example, where we are addressing non-familial risk or a specific risk and making sure the child's main plan links with and references the safety plan.
- Involving care leavers in developing their pathway plans at an early stage, based around how they want their future to be.
- Everyone involved with plans at whatever level making sure they complete their actions between meetings and reviews.
- Reviewing, evaluating and refreshing plans regularly, based on changes in family situations, progress on actions and the impact of plans on children and young people's outcomes.
- Evidencing appropriate management oversight of plans and reviews.

Developing Good Quality Plans

Our bottom lines...

- Wherever possible children will have one plan that incorporates all aspects of their safety and wellbeing. This will usually be a, Early help Team around the Family Plan, Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan or Care Plan (the latter will include the Placement Plan, Health Plan and Personal Education Plan).
- Where children require an additional safety plan to address a specific risk or non-familial abuse, we will link this to the child's main plan.
- We will always include a contingency plan to be followed if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action.
- We will write up plans clearly without the use of jargon, noting any areas of disagreement, and share copies with everyone who will be contributing towards the plan in a timely way to ensure actions are completed.
- We will ensure that plans clearly outline how we will meet the cultural, identity and heritage needs of children/young people ensuring that any assessed needs are addressed within the plan.
- We will update a child/ young person's plan after every early help, Child in Need, Core Group, Child Protection Review Conference, Care Planning Meeting or Review.
- We will review children's plans at frequencies commensurate with their needs/presenting risk.
- Minimum expectations are:
 - Children in need every three months
 - Core groups every six weeks or after a critical incident
 - Care plans within 20 working days of coming into our care, three months after that and then every six months



Practice standard 6:
Good Support for Children in Need

Good Support for Children in Need

In NCT providing good support for Children in Need means:

- Basing the help and support we provide to children, young people and their families on good quality holistic multi-agency assessments.
- Working with children, young people and their families to find their own solutions and make positive changes, either on their own or with help from us or others.
- Coordinating timely and effective help and support services to the family to build on their strengths and make the changes identified within the assessment.
- Co-producing the written Child in Need Plan with the family.
- Making sure the written Child in Need Plan is SMART, easy to understand and clear about each person's responsibility around the support or actions to be taken.
- Making sure the Plan is clear about how we will know when things are improving for the child/ young person and next steps.
- Making sure that the Plan is clear about what will happen if things do not improve for the child/young person.
- Regularly reviewing progress and impact of the plan – ask ourselves are we making a positive difference for the child/young person and if not what else should we be doing?
- Recognising when progress has been made and ending our intervention 'well' i.e. agreeing with the family and partner agencies what level of support and from who, needs to continue.
- Using the final child in need review meeting to develop the ongoing support plan / safety plan so that everyone is clear who will be doing what.
- When a child or young person has been supported by a child protection plan and risks reduce, considering with the family and multi-agency group whether ongoing support services through a child in need plan is required to sustain positive changes made.
- Arranging meetings at a time that is convenient for the family and considering any communication needs.
- Holding meetings in an environment that is accessible to the family and the child or young person, and where they feel comfortable. This could be, for example, the family home, school or a children's centre.
- Making sure that parents/carers know they can bring a relative, friend or advocate to meetings to support them and help them express their views, ideas, wishes and feelings.

Good Support for Children in Need

Our bottom lines...

- If we assess that a child/ young person needs a package of support as a Child in Need, we will hold a meeting within 10 days to co-produce a plan with the family and their support network.
- We will visit children and young people who are being supported by a Child in Need Plan according to their needs and at a frequency agreed by team managers. This will be at least every four weeks.
- We will make sure our visits are purposeful and include direct work with children and young people and a focus on progressing the plan and any emerging issues.
- If support to a child or young person changes from child protection to Child in Need planning, the child protection conference chair will ensure that an outline Child in Need Plan is agreed, including which professionals will be supporting the family and what their roles and responsibilities are. They will also agree a first Child in Need meeting within 10 days of the conference.
- We will record clear notes from meetings and updated plans on the child/ young person's record, and make sure that everyone involved in the Child in Need meeting receives a copy of them within 10 working days.
- We will review the plan at frequencies commensurate with assessed need/presenting risk. The minimum frequency will be within three months of the plan starting, and continue on a three-monthly basis, depending on the complexity of needs and progress against the actions and outcomes.
- If satisfactory progress is not being made, and there is reasonable cause to suspect the child/young person is at risk of significant harm, we will discuss with our team manager whether a strategy discussion should be arranged.
- Team managers will discuss the progress of Child in Need Plans with social workers in supervision.
- If while supporting one child or young person in a family we become aware of another child in the wider family who would benefit from a separate assessment of needs, we will make a referral to MASH. This will help to make sure their needs are assessed, and they are offered the right help.
- When a family is moving to live in a different area, we will obtain consent from parents and notify the local authority for the area the family are moving to and share appropriate information either before they move or within five working days of them moving. This will help make sure they continue to receive support.
- We will continue to support the family in their new home while the receiving local authority completes an assessment with the family, which they should complete within one calendar month.



Practice standard 7:
Good Quality Child protection enquiries

Good Quality Child protection enquiries

In NCT completing good quality child protection enquiries means:

- Basing the help and support we provide to children, young people and their families on good quality holistic multi-agency assessments.
- Working with children, young people and their families to find their own solutions and make positive changes, either on their own or with help from us or others.
- Coordinating timely and effective help and support services to the family to build on their strengths and make the changes identified within the assessment.
- Co-producing the written Child in Need Plan with the family.
- Making sure the written Child in Need Plan is SMART, easy to understand and clear about each person's responsibility around the support or actions to be taken.
- Making sure the Plan is clear about how we will know when things are improving for the child/ young person and next steps.
- Making sure that the Plan is clear about what will happen if things do not improve for the child/young person.
- Regularly reviewing progress and impact of the plan – ask ourselves are we making a positive difference for the child/young person and if not what else should we be doing?
- Recognising when progress has been made and ending our intervention 'well' i.e. agreeing with the family and partner agencies what level of support and from who, needs to continue.
- Using the final child in need review meeting to develop the ongoing support plan / safety plan so that everyone is clear who will be doing what.
- When a child or young person has been supported by a child protection plan and risks reduce, considering with the family and multi-agency group whether ongoing support services through a child in need plan is required to sustain positive changes made.
- Arranging meetings at a time that is convenient for the family and considering any communication needs.
- Holding meetings in an environment that is accessible to the family and the child or young person, and where they feel comfortable. This could be, for example, the family home, school or a children's centre.
- Making sure that parents/carers know they can bring a relative, friend or advocate to meetings to support them and help them express their views, ideas, wishes and feelings.

Good Quality Child protection enquiries

Our bottom lines...

- We will follow Northampton Safeguarding Children Procedures for S47 enquiries.
- We will hold strategy discussions as soon as possible, always within 24 hours of referral unless in exceptional circumstances
- Where a strategy discussion decides a s47 enquiry should take place we will see the child within 24 hours and speak with them alone during the enquiry
- Where a strategy discussion requires immediate action to protect a child we will plan and enact this.
- Any non-mobile infant with unexplained bruising should be referred to Legal Gateway
- We will agree and record the interim safety plan for the child at the strategy discussion.
- We will ensure s47 assessments include a clear analysis of risks and strengths, and a recommendation regarding whether to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference and any other actions to be taken.



Practice standard 8:

Managing Good Quality Child Protection Conferences

Managing Good Quality Child Protection Conferences

In NCT managing good quality child protection conferences means:

- Recognising that child protection conferences can be stressful and emotive and can create significant anxiety for families.
- Helping parents and young people prepare for the conference by helping them understand the reasons for the conference. Proactively supporting them to be able to attend and participate and making sure they know they can bring a supporter or advocate to the conference.
- Planning for any communication or accessibility needs of people attending and making arrangements for interpreters if needed.
- Making sure a good quality social work report is available which summarises strengths, worries, risks and protective factors and their impact on the child/ young person and makes clear recommendations about next steps.
- Making sure that the social work report is shared with the family in advance of the conference and they have had chance to consider and comment on the report.
- Partner agencies preparing reports which consider strengths, worries, risks and protective factors and their impact on the child/ young person and sharing them with the family before the conference.
- Considering whether the child or young person should attend for at least part of the conference. If they are not attending the conference, then encouraging them to contribute in an age-appropriate way with their views recorded in the social work report.
- The conference chair meeting with the parents and child/ young person before the conference to explain what will happen at the meeting and that they will have the opportunity to contribute to discussions.
- The conference chairing the meeting in an inclusive and sensitive way, so that parents, young people and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute information and their views.
- The conference chair making sure that there is a comprehensive discussion of family strengths and protective factors as well as difficulties, risks and their impact on the child/young person.
- The conference chair enabling all participants to share their views about the need for a child protection plan.
- The conference chair making sure the conference concludes with a well-reasoned decision about the need for a child protection plan that is based on sound application of the threshold criteria and professional judgement i.e., whether or not each child/ young person is suffering or is likely to continue to suffer significant harm.
- Agreeing an outline plan, where appropriate, that is proportionate, SMART, addresses what needs to change to protect the child or young person and clearly identifies who is responsible for agreed actions and when they will be completed.
- Making sure that plans make clear to parents what they need to change, what the plan is to achieve change, how change will be measured, how they will be helped to achieve change and what will happen if this change is not achieved.
- If a child/young person does not need a child protection plan, agreeing whether they need help and support and how this will be coordinated e.g., via a Child in Need Plan or early help family plan.

Managing Good Quality Child Protection Conferences

Our bottom lines...

- We will hold Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) within 15 working days of the strategy meeting where the decision was made to initiate a child protection enquiry.
- We will hold the first Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) within three months of the child/young person being made subject to child protection planning, and then at least every six months thereafter.
- Where a pre-birth assessment indicates that a baby will be at risk of suffering significant harm when it is born, we will hold an ICPC at 24 weeks gestation and an RCPC within one month of the child's birth or within three months of the date of the pre-birth conference, whichever is sooner.
- Managers will authorise social worker reports for conferences before they are shared.
- We will share social worker reports with families and chairs at least two working days before ICPCs and at least five working days before RCPCs.
- Conference chairs will agree the date of the next conference and the date of the first core group (within 10 days of ICPC) with the people in attendance.
- We will send a decision letter and outline child protection plan out within one working day, and the record of the conference out within 20 working days.



Practice standard 9:
Managing Core Groups Well

Managing Core Groups Well

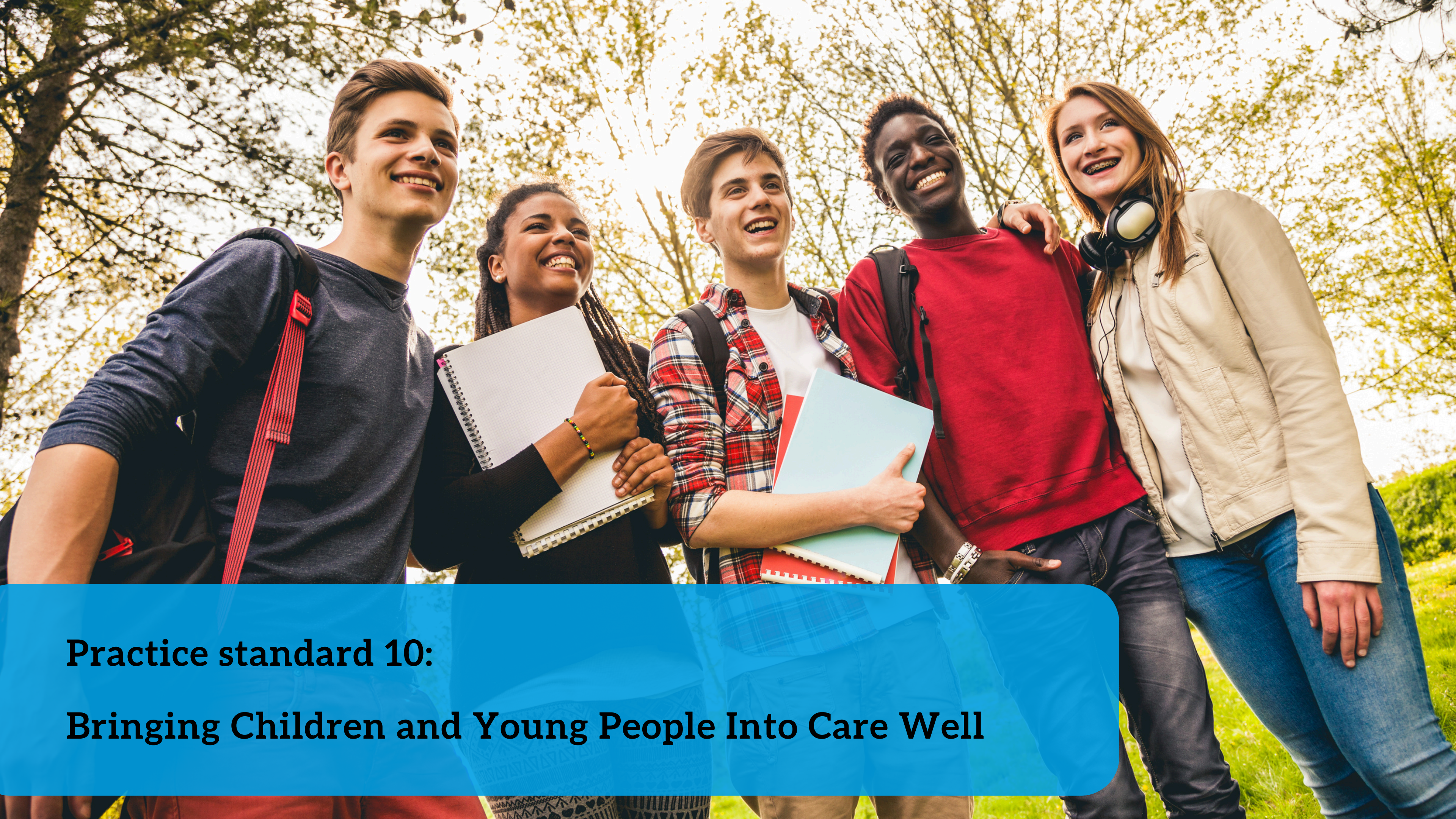
In NCT managing core groups well means:

- Recognising that core group meetings can be stressful and emotive and can create significant anxiety for families for families.
- Helping parents and young people prepare for the core group by helping them understand its purpose. Proactively supporting them to be able to attend and participate and making sure they know they can bring a supporter or advocate to the meeting.
- Making sure the right people are members of the group – the child/ young person (if appropriate), their parents, advocates, wider family members and the professionals who are involved in supporting the family.
- Helping the family to attend by considering where the core groups will be held and any communication, accessibility and cultural needs of the family. This includes using interpreters where appropriate.
- The chair (usually the lead social worker or their manager) helping the family to feel comfortable and able to fully participate in developing the child protection plan in partnership with the professionals.
- Making sure at the first core group that children/young people and their family understand the plan and what it means for them. This will help parents to understand what changes need to be made by them and when, and what help and support will be offered to them, by who and when.
- Maintaining a focus on reviewing progress of the child protection plan and the impact on the child/ young person, making amendments to the plan in line with changing needs and risks.
- Further developing the outline child protection plan
- The chair encouraging core group members to take a strengths-based approach. This means acknowledging family strengths and improvements made while also ensuring professional curiosity and providing authoritative challenge where the family or professionals have not progressed agreed tasks within the plan.
- Where the plan is not effective in reducing risk, or risks intensify, considering further action with the core group.
- The social worker discussing intensifying safety concerns from the core group with a manager and agreeing action to be taken. This could include increasing or adjusting the support being provided or considering legal planning.
- At each core group prior to a review child protection conference, agreeing a summary of progress against the plan and impact on the child/ young person, and a clear recommendation for the review conference about whether the child protection plan needs to continue.
- Encouraging professional members of the core group to contribute fully to supporting the child/ young person and their family and keeping them safe. Informing team managers about any professionals who are not attending and/or progressing their actions, so they can follow agreed escalation procedures.

Managing Core Groups Well

Our bottom lines...

- We will agree arrangements for the first core group at the Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) and it will be held within 10 working days of the conference.
- We will discuss the outline child protection plan agreed at ICPC in detail at the first core group and develop it into the full plan.
- Following from the first core group, we will hold core groups at least every six weeks to review the progress of the plan, changing risks (decreasing and increasing) and impact on the child/ young person. Core groups may need to be held more often according to the individual needs and circumstances of the child/ young person, and always after a critical incident or when considering initiating removal.
- We will use an approach of 'high support: high challenge' to address any drift or delay on agreed actions.
- We will produce a clear, easy to understand record of the core group and share it with the family and professionals involved within five working days.
- We will share social worker reports with families and conference chairs at least five working days before review child protection conferences.



Practice standard 10:

Bringing Children and Young People Into Care Well

Bringing Children and Young People Into Care Well

Fundamentally in NCT we believe that children should be cared for within their families wherever it is safe to do so, where it is not safe to do so...

In NCT bringing children and young people into care well means:

- Exploring all potential alternatives to children and young people coming into care, including friends and family who could look after them, at a family meeting or family group decision making.
- Making sure decisions about providing children and young people with alternative care, and how we look after them, are based on comprehensive assessments of strengths, needs and risks, involving the other professionals involved with their families.
- Being aware of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children, young people and adults, and intervening in ways that acknowledge present behaviours and difficulties in the context of past trauma. This will help us to work in a relational and strength-based way when bringing children and young people into care, so the experience for them and their parents is as least traumatic as possible.
- Making sure parents and children/ young people are supported to understand the reasons for alternative care and what the next steps will be and are given copies of all paperwork. (This includes using interpreters and advocates where needed)
- Recognising that coming into care can be a stressful and frightening time for children and young people and ensuring that they are emotionally supported by familiar adults where possible. This includes making sure the child or young person's social worker or someone they know well takes them to their alternative home.
- Considering in assessments whether it is in the child or young person's best interest to live with their brothers and sisters, and if so keeping them together whenever possible.
- If brothers and sisters are living apart, making sure they have regular family time where this has been assessed as being in their best interests.
- Discussing the child/ young person's needs in relation to race, ethnicity, language, disability, communication, gender, sexuality, identity and culture and considering them within the assessment, care plan and alternative home.
- Considering any contextual safeguarding issues, and if there are concerns around child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, completing a risk assessment and linking in with the right support.
- Appropriate placement and matching in line with the care plan

Bringing Children and Young People Into Care Well

Our bottom lines...

- When children and young people must move from home into our care, we will make sure their belongings are packed carefully and appropriately and will never use bin liners.
- Where children and young people are going to stay with family or friends, we will complete appropriate checks and assessments timely (e.g., Reg 24 viability assessment) to make sure they will be safe and well looked after.
- If the child or young person is accommodated under S20 of the Children Act 1989, we will obtain written consent from the parent/s who has/have parental responsibility and make sure they have sufficient capacity and information to make an informed decision.
- Wherever possible, we will arrange a care planning meeting before a child/ young person comes into our care.
- Otherwise, we will meet within 10 days and again before the first review.
- We will arrange a placement planning meeting before the child/ young person comes into our care to agree how their needs will be met. If this is not possible because of the urgency of the situation we will hold one within 72 hours of them moving in.
- We will complete a Placement Plan and a Care Plan before the child/young person comes into our care. If this is not possible, we will complete a Placement Plan within five working days and a Care Plan within 10 working days of them moving in.
- Refer for IHA prior to admission to care or within 5 days
- We will give carers all the information they need to care for children and young people as soon as they go to stay with them (including family history, medical needs, risks, vulnerabilities, likes and dislikes, strengths, and protective factors)
- The child/ young person's allocated worker will visit within three working days of them coming into our care, or any changes in where they live. After that they will visit them every week until their first Child in Care Review.
- Children and young people will live in regulated/ registered provision.¹

¹ Where this is not possible the unregulated provision policy [_hyperlink](#) must be initiated.



Practice standard 11:

Good Support for Children and Young People who we care for

Good Support for Children and Young People who we care for

We are ambitious for all our children and young people

In NCT good support for children and young people who we care for means:

- Acknowledging that the children and young people that we care for may have experienced significant adversity, attachment disruption and/ or developmental trauma and this may result in additional support needs. This may require a multi-disciplinary or multi-agency response and we will work with partner organisations to make sure their needs are appropriately met.
- Getting to know children and young people and talking with them about their wishes and feelings, taking their views into account when making plans or decisions that affect their lives.
- Helping children and young people to understand why they have come into our care and doing our best to answer any questions or concerns they tell us about.
- Where appropriate and in the best interests of children / young people, encouraging parents/connected people to stay involved in their lives, and where possible supporting them to make changes to enable their children to return to live safely at home.
- Knowing who is important to individual children and young people and helping them to sustain their relationship by arranging friends and family time with them where appropriate.
- If children and young people have to move out of their alternative home, making sure that the experience is as positive as possible. This includes us recording a summary of their time there based on their lived experience. This will help ensure that learning is used to inform future planning for them, and that they have a record of their story while living in that home.
- Making sure that children and young people have opportunities for relational repair (as appropriate) when relationships have been ruptured.
- Helping the children/ young people's caregivers understand the impact of early adversity and trauma on children and young people's development and functioning, and the potential emotional impact on them of parenting/ caring for children and young people who have experienced significant adversity, attachment disruption and/or developmental trauma.
- Supporting carers to provide children and young people with a safe, supportive and nurturing relationship and environment in accordance with trauma-informed, attachment-focused and relationship-based principles.

Good Support for Children and Young People who we care for

We are ambitious for all our children and young people

In NCT good support for children and young people who we care for means:

- Promoting the child/ young person's sense of self and identity through 'life work' and ensuring they have access to personal possessions, information, photos, memorabilia and other reminders of their family where appropriate.
- Supporting the child/ young person's cultural and religious identity and making sure they have access to culturally appropriate food, activities and education.
- Celebrating and recording children and young people's achievements, to let them know we are proud of them and why.
- Being aware of children and young people's changing needs through regular and good quality assessments, providing them with additional support if needed. This could be support with emotional health and well-being, developmental needs, physical health, education, leisure activities, keeping safe or building support networks.
- Making sure we use the recommendations from specialist assessments (e.g. psychological assessments, parenting assessments) into account when making plans for children and young people.
- Visiting children and young people as often as they need us to, or when their carer thinks a visit would be purposeful for the child/young person.
- Helping children/ young people live as 'normal' a life as possible, with carers and parents having appropriate authority to make decisions about their day to day lives.
- Making sure children and young people know about their rights and entitlements, advocacy and participation opportunities, and about how they can complain if they are not happy with the way they are being cared for.

Good Support for Children and Young People who we care for

Our bottom lines...

- Every child and young person who is cared for by us will have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and an allocated social worker.
- We will give children and young people who we work with our contact details so that they know how to get in touch if they need to. This will include their social worker and IRO's mobile numbers, the duty number, the customer service number and email address.
- We will give children and young people a 'coming into care pack' including information and contact details for advocacy, and details of the Mind of My Own (MOMO) App, as soon as possible and no later than the first visit which is within three days of coming into our care. We will go through the pack with them to make sure they understand the information.
- We will let the other professionals involved with the child/ young person know they are being cared for by us within five days, so they can provide them with the right help and support.
- We will arrange for children and young people to have health assessments before we begin caring for them, or if this is not possible this will be done within 20 working days. After that, we will arrange six-monthly health and dental assessments for children under five and annual assessments for those who are five and over. We will discuss health assessments with young people, encourage them to participate, respect their wishes if they choose not to and find alternative ways of providing them with health information and support.
- When children and young people have to move home, we will make sure their belongings are packed carefully and appropriately and will never use bin liners.
- If a child/young person has to move home unexpectedly we will arrange a Review to make sure the new plan and living arrangements will meet their needs.
- We will visit children and young people in their alternative home within three days of them moving in, and weekly until their first CiC Review. After that we will visit at least every six weeks until the home is agreed as the child/ young person's long-term alternative home, then visits will be at least every three months.
- If a child/ young person is settled in their long-term home and wants to have less contact with their social worker, we will discuss at their Review and consider reducing visits to every six months.



Practice standard 12:

Managing Good Child and Young Person in Care Review Meetings

Managing Good Child and Young Person in Care Review Meetings

In NCT managing good child/young person in care review meetings means:

- Acknowledging that review meetings with lots of professionals involved can be anxiety-provoking for some children, young people and families and taking proactive steps to make sure they are well supported.
- Being aware of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children, young people and adults, and managing the meeting in a trauma-informed way, exploring any present behaviours and difficulties in the context of past trauma. This will help us to encourage discussions that are relational and strength-based way and help ensure meetings are as positive as possible for children and young people and their parents and alternative carers.
- Speaking with the child/ young person before their review to help them understand what the meeting is about and agreeing with them where the meeting should be held and at what time, who they want to be invited and what they want to be discussed. Making sure they know they can be accompanied by a relative, close friend or advocate help them to take part.
- Encouraging the child or young person to take part in their review meeting either directly, or by other means (e.g., facetime, written submission etc).
- Supporting the child/ young person to chair their own review if they want to.
- Sharing the social worker's report with the child or young person before the meeting.
- Speaking and consulting with the child/ young person's parents before the meeting and sharing the social worker's report with them.
- Ensuring the right people are there, in line with the child's wishes and feelings – the child/ young person, their social worker, parents, the person who looks after them and other professionals who work with them.
- Making sure the child/ young person is kept at the centre of discussions during the meeting.
- Making sure the child/young person's parent(s) and carers are helped to take part in the meeting and their views taken into account.
- Making sure that all relevant areas are discussed in the review – e.g. the child/young person's lived experience, health (social, emotional, physical and developmental), school, interests and activities, identity needs, family time, pocket money, long term plans and whether an independent visitor would be helpful for them.
- Agreeing clear actions at the meeting, focused on the needs, wishes and feelings of the child/ young person, when they will be completed and who by. This will help to make sure that there is no drift or delay in progressing children and young people's care plans.

Managing Good Child and Young Person in Care Review Meetings

Our bottom lines...

- We will hold a review within 20 working days of starting to care for a child/ young person. Then we will hold the next review within three months, and after that every six months.
- If a child/young person has to move home unexpectedly we will arrange a review timescale to make sure the new plan and living arrangements will meet their needs.
- The child/ young person's independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will bring forward reviews if there are any significant events affecting them, or if there is a need to change the plan for how they will be cared for.
- The child/ young person's social worker will share and discuss their report with them and their parents at least five days before the review.
- The child/ young person's IRO will speak to them alone before every review.
- We will make sure the child/ young person's wishes and feelings are kept at the centre of reviews, whether they are able to attend or whether they contribute in a different way.
- The child/ young person's IRO will send the social worker's team manager recommendations and decisions made at the review within five working days and complete the record of the review within 15 days.
- The child/ young person's social worker will update the plan for their care within 10 days of receiving the recommendations and decisions made at the review from the IRO.
- The child/ young person's IRO will keep track of actions agreed at the review to make sure they are completed on time and will act if there is any delay.



Practice standard 13:

Good Pathway Planning

Good Pathway Planning

In NCT good pathway planning means means:

- Helping care experienced young people to achieve independence at a pace which is right for them, and being there for them when they need us.
- Building good working relationships with care experienced young people, taking a trauma-informed approach in understanding their lived experience and having conversations with them which are strength-based and solution-focused.
- Working with young people to assess their needs and help them identify what they want for their future, including their strengths, vulnerabilities and hopes.
- Based on assessment, working together with young people to develop their Pathway Plan, which sets out their goals and how we will help them to meet them.
- Making sure Pathway Plans address all the important things like identity, relationships, education, employment, where they will live, legal issues, physical and emotional health, money and life skills.
- For our care experienced young people who will need support from adult services, contacting the adult social care team when they are 17 years old to help good joint decision making and a smooth transition.
- Making sure that Pathway Plans for separated children address any additional needs arising from their immigration issues.
- Doing as much as we can to keep in contact with our care experienced young people until they are 25, even if they decide they do not want to stay in touch with us. This will help maintain a route back for them if they need our support in the future.
- Respecting care experienced young people's heritage and identity and using appropriate and sensitive methods of communication with them.
- Helping care experienced young people to stay on with their foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements whenever possible, discussing this at the first review once they are 16, or before then if that is right for them.
- Celebrating with young people their achievements and significant milestones, letting them know we are proud of them and why.
- Supporting care experienced young people in custody through their period of detention, planning for their release and post-release and ensuring good support and a smooth transition.
- Using genograms and ecomaps to help care experienced young people to build lasting support networks, as well as rebuilding relationships and reconnecting with important people in their lives, be this with current or former carers and/or family members.
- Writing records in a clear way that young people can understand if they access them.
- Making sure that recordings tell young people's stories, evidence reasons for decision-making and show we care about them.
- Encouraging care experienced young people to take part in the NCT forums for young people to form supportive networks as well as help shape and improve services and support.

Good Pathway Planning

Our bottom lines...

- We will make sure care experienced young people have personal advisers (PAs) at a time that is right for them, usually by the time they are 17 years old, and until they are 25, if they want this support.
- We will begin pathway needs assessments with care experienced young people at a time that is right for them, usually when they are 15.5 years old, and complete them within three months of them reaching 16.
- We will complete a pathway plan with young people within three months of them reaching 16.
- If a young person has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan then their transition planning will start when they are 14.
- We will review the young person's pathway plan every six months until they are 21.
- The young person's social worker or PA will visit them at least every eight weeks, depending on their needs, wishes and feelings. Whenever the young person moves home, we will visit them at their new home within seven days.



Safety



Trust



Relationships



Collaboration



Impact



**Northamptonshire
Children's Trust**