

## Children & Families Social Care

### Practice Standards

Our Practice Standards are underpinned by a relational and restorative approach, setting out our values and principles for working **with** children, families, and partners. We recognise that relationships are central to our work, and we are committed to treating families with respect, honesty, and empathy.

These Practice Standards are at the heart of our vision to deliver a high-quality service that improves outcomes for children, young people, and families in South Tyneside. By embracing restorative principles, we ensure that every interaction is guided by mutual respect and understanding.

We believe in **working WITH families**, fostering a collaborative environment where families are actively involved in decision-making and goal setting. This approach is supported by the **social discipline window** (the four ways of being), which balances high support with high challenge, enabling us to address needs effectively while empowering families to thrive.

Our agreed set of standards provides a shared understanding and language about what best practice looks like for children and families. These standards are the basis on which we monitor the quality of work undertaken and its impact, ensuring that all social care practitioners, line managers, and service managers are aligned in their efforts to deliver exceptional care, help and support.

In this guide you will find our 8 Practice Standards, alongside what adopting these standards will look like in practice. The guide also explains how our leadership utilise the standards to enable and support best practice to flourish.

By adhering to these principles, we create a safe learning environment where high support and high challenge drives continuous improvement and positive outcomes for the children and families we serve.



## **Our Practice Standards:**

### **Standard 1: Child & Family Centred**

Children and families are at the heart of everything we do, we enter their lives with respect and listen with care to their views and voices. We use tools to work directly with the child, help them express their views and so we can understand their lived experience. We support children and young people connect with others who can help them stay safe, and we work with families to build family and community networks. We help children understand their life story.

### **Standard 2: Purposeful Involvement**

Every visit, conversation, meeting and discussion is purposeful. We plan visits, meetings and family time in a range of settings, but with a priority on working in children's homes and understanding their lived experience. Children and families understand why we are working with them and the reasons for our involvement.

### **Standard 3: Purposeful Assessments**

Every child has an assessment of their individual needs which reflects how their life experiences, wishes, feelings and any risks to them, are known and understood. We challenge ourselves to be curious throughout the assessment process and take full account of a family's history and the views of parents, carers, the wider family network and the agencies involved. Assessments are analytical and use evidence-based reasoning to ensure that decisions made are in the best interests of the child. Assessments reflect the strengths and assets within the child and their family and community and balance this alongside risks and unmet or presenting needs. Assessments are updated within the child's timescale to consider changes to the child and their family and to help plan for their future.

### **Standard 4: Purposeful Planning**

All children's plans explain what needs to happen; by when; by whom and what outcomes we are all working towards together as a multi-agency team. We are clear what the contingency plan is, and this is shared with and understood by all involved. We set clear and achievable timescales within plans to keep things on track and make sure we are balanced, realistic and ambitious in ensuring progress is made for the child and family.

### **Standard 5: Purposeful Reviews**

We prioritise the timely review of children's plans. The views and needs of the child and family are always considered when arranging venues and times for meetings. Information to be shared within reviews is provided to families and relevant professionals in advance of the meeting, to make sure there are no surprises, and everyone has the time and space to think and reflect on what will be discussed. We recognise that plans are not set in stone, people and circumstances change, and we use reviews as an opportunity to consider what the best plan for a child and their family will look like. We hold ourselves and others accountable for timescales set within the plan, ensuring outcomes for children do not experience drift or delay.

### **Standard 6: High Support & High Challenge**

We do all we can to support families to keep their children safe, happy and well. We are open and clear about what we are worried about and what needs to change. We provide appropriate challenge and welcome challenge ourselves. When it is not safe for children to remain at home, we identify a caring and safe place for them to live, for as long as is needed. We value our parenting relationship with our care experienced young people, we celebrate their unique journeys and their new families.

### **Standard 7: Quality Recording**

All children's records are clear, analytical, timely and written with the child in mind. An up-to-date chronology ensures everyone can understand significant events both positive milestones and occasions as well as incidents of risk or concern. Written records clearly set out what the plan is; the purpose of actions, meetings and home visits; and what difference has been made for the child. Every child's file includes an up-to-date pen picture of the child and a brief care record summary which is updated every 3 months.

### **Standard 8: Management Oversight & Grip**

Practice with every child is challenged and supported by regular, timely management oversight. This includes managers directions and comments, reflective supervision; checking that work has been done to agreed standards; seeing what difference it is making; and what needs to happen next. Managers encourage a culture of creativity, learning and improvement and provide the appropriate balance of challenge and support.

## Standard 1: Child & Family Centred

Children and families are at the heart of everything we do, we enter their lives with respect and listen with care to their views and voices. We use tools to work directly with the child, help them express their views and so we can understand their lived experience. We support children and young people connect with others who can help them stay safe, and we work with families to build family and community networks. We help children understand their life story.

### What this looks like in practice:

- **Child first:** The safety and needs of the children come first. This means understanding, evidencing, and recording what life is like for the child now and how to make a positive difference for them.
- **Children are seen:** Children are seen and seen alone when appropriate. We understand and record their wishes and feelings, ensuring we meet statutory timescales.
- **Children are heard:** We listen to children, providing opportunities to hear their stories. Records and plans capture the child's voice, views, and lived experiences. A range of age-appropriate tools are used to support direct work.
- **Families are involved and included:** We are committed to ensuring all parents, carers, wider family members and their networks are supported and encouraged to work WITH us. This means we take the time to speak to, visit and build relationships with all the relevant people in a child's life. We communicate with family members consistently and without bias in a timely manner. We challenge ourselves and each other to remain curious about families and their networks, recognising relationships and circumstances change.

### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Support to children and families:** You will have access to services and interventions that meet the needs of the children and families you are supporting.
- **Professional curiosity:** We will support you to be curious about the children and families you are working with, fostering an environment where you feel comfortable discussing your work openly, asking questions, and exploring different perspectives without fear of judgment.
- **A listening culture:** We will encourage and welcome your advice and ideas to inform service development. We will listen and learn from the experiences of children, families, and the people that work with them.

## Standard 2: Purposeful Involvement

Every visit, conversation, meeting and discussion is purposeful. We plan visits, meetings and family time in a range of settings, but with a priority on working in children's homes and understanding their lived experience. Children and families understand why we are working with them and the reasons for our involvement.

### What this looks like in practice:

- **Our practice with families is open and transparent:** Families and children understand WHY we are involved in their lives and are supported to build meaningful and effective working relationships with us. We recognise it is our responsibility to engage families and work tenaciously, creatively and with respect for each family's uniqueness to achieve this.
- **Reflective Preparation:** We take time to reflect on WHY we are involved with a child and WHAT we are hoping to achieve as part of all interactions. This supports us to ensure that our involvement is meaningful and not tokenistic, valuing everyone's time and engagement.

### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Visible and accessible managers:** Practice Managers and Senior Managers all operate an 'open door' policy, meaning they are available to all staff to talk about children, young people and their families.
- **Reflective Support:** We will offer you challenge, to help you reflect on and develop how you are engaging with and supporting the families you work with – and also provide you with a lot of support, such as reflective supervision, tailored and bespoke training and co-working opportunities.

### Standard 3: Purposeful Assessments

Every child has an assessment of their individual needs which reflects how their life experiences, wishes, feelings and any risks to them, are known and understood. We challenge ourselves to be curious throughout the assessment process and take full account of a family's history and the views of parents, carers, the wider family network and the agencies involved. Assessments are analytical and use evidence-based reasoning to ensure that decisions made are in the best interests of the child. Assessments reflect the strengths and assets within the child and their family and community and balance this alongside risks and unmet or presenting needs. Assessments are updated within the child's timescale to consider changes to the child and their family and to help plan for their future.

#### What this looks like in practice:

- **Assessments are written with care:** Assessments are written using plain language, they are jargon – free and always written with the child in mind. Assessments use non-blaming language and avoid value judgements, ensuring that they are easy to read and understand.
- **Assessments are timely:** Assessments are completed within timescale to ensure that our assessment of risk and need is prompt and responsive for children and young people.
- **Assessments are tailored, relevant, and analytical:** The purpose of an assessment is always clear. Assessments include all relevant information and plainly identify the strengths, risks, and needs. They carefully examine all available information, identifying patterns and relationships, to understand the family's needs and dynamics, ensuring that decisions made are balanced, informed and proportionate.

#### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Quality assurance and performance framework that supports service delivery:** Managers will analyse performance data and manage your workload with you. You will receive feedback on your work and will be involved in reflective/collaborative audits.
- **Professional curiosity:** Assessments will be read and reviewed by your manager, this will include high support and high challenge to make sure we remain curious about what we know, how we know it and how that is reflected in the assessments we write.

## **Standard 4: Purposeful Planning**

All children's plans explain what needs to happen; by when; by whom and what outcomes we are all working towards together as a multi-agency team. We are clear what the contingency plan is, and this is shared with and understood by all involved. We set clear and achievable timescales within plans to keep things on track and make sure we are balanced, realistic and ambitious in ensuring progress is made for the child and family.

### **What this looks like in practice:**

- **Planning is based on assessment of needs and agreed with the child and family:** Care planning and interventions are timely and effectively address the risks and needs identified and the desired outcomes. Planning is based on thorough analysis, includes partnership working, and builds on strengths. Plans are monitored and regularly reviewed.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Planning is done WITH families. We involve children, young people and their family networks in developing plans – rooted in the understanding that families know themselves best and will be able, with support to build a plan that is bespoke, realistic and achievable.

### **How our leadership support this practice:**

- **Practical support and tools for the job:** We will continue to develop the tools and resources you need to deliver high-quality, effective practice.

## Standard 5: Purposeful Reviews

We prioritise the timely review of children's plans. The views and needs of the child and family are always considered when arranging venues and times for meetings. Information to be shared within reviews is provided to families and relevant professionals in advance of the meeting, to make sure there are no surprises, and everyone has the time and space to think and reflect on what will be discussed. We recognise that plans are not set in stone, people and circumstances change, and we use reviews as an opportunity to consider what the best plan for a child and their family will look like. We hold ourselves and others accountable for timescales set within the plan, ensuring outcomes for children do not experience drift or delay.

### What this looks like in practice:

- **Reflective Preparation:** We share reports in a timely manner to ensure everyone has the time and space to think and reflect on the information to be discussed within reviews.
- **Flexible Planning:** We recognise that plans are adaptable and can change based on evolving circumstances and needs.
- **Accountability:** We hold ourselves and others accountable for adhering to timescales set within the plan to prevent drift or delay in outcomes for children.
- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Reviews are used as opportunities to collaboratively determine the best plan for the child and their family. We are open to challenge and support and offer challenge and support to others in pursuit of this goal.

### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Provide Resources:** Managers will ensure that adequate resources (time, venues, materials) are available to support effective reviews.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** We have established feedback mechanisms to continuously improve the review process based on input from children, families, and professionals.
- **Provide Training:** We offer training sessions to ensure you understand the importance of purposeful reviews and how to conduct them effectively.
- **Monitor Performance:** We regularly monitor and audit the adherence to review schedules and the quality of the reviews conducted.

## **Standard 6: High Support & High Challenge**

We do all we can to support families to keep their children safe, happy and well. We are open and clear about what we are worried about and what needs to change. We provide appropriate challenge and welcome challenge ourselves. When it is not safe for children to remain at home, we identify a caring and safe place for them to live, for as long as is needed. We value our parenting relationship with our care experienced young people, we celebrate their unique journeys and their new families.

### **What this looks like in practice:**

- **Children are safe:** Thresholds of need are considered and applied proportionally to ensure professionals can make the right decisions at the right time.
- **We are open to challenge and confident to challenge on behalf of children:** Staff at all levels of the service are supported and empowered to offer high challenge and high support. To children, families, professionals and colleagues.

### **How our leadership support this practice:**

- **An honest and transparent culture:** We will support a no-blame culture, based on honesty and openness, so that you feel safe to discuss ways to improve practice. We will work together to ensure the workplace provides a safe and learning environment.
- **Caseloads and workload that are manageable:** We will ensure your caseload and workload is regularly reviewed to ensure it is manageable. We will invest in our workforce to ensure we have the capability and capacity to meet the needs of children and will forward plan effectively.

## Standard 7: Quality Recording

All children's records are clear, analytical, timely and written with the child in mind. An up-to-date chronology ensures everyone can understand significant events both positive milestones and occasions as well as incidents of risk or concern. Written records clearly set out what the plan is; the purpose of actions, meetings and home visits; and what difference has been made for the child. Every child's file includes an up-to-date pen picture of the child and a brief care record summary which is updated every 3 months.

### What this looks like in practice:

- **Written with the child in mind:** Records are written with the child in mind. This means that when we are writing about a child or their family members, we do this thinking about the child, how they would understand what we are writing, and how it would make them feel.
- **Language that cares:** Respectful, non-blaming and jargon-free language is used in all written records.
- **Care Record Summaries:** Care Record Summaries provide a good introduction to the child and identify risk and harm as well as known safety. They include details of all key people in and involved with the family. They are updated every 3 months.
- **Chronologies are up to date:** They consider children's experiences and history, are used to assess strengths and risks in families, and are up to date for all children open to our service.
- **Children's records reflect their voice and are up to date:** All information important for a child's wellbeing is recorded. The record provides robust analysis and focused, purposeful, and timely planning.

### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Reflection & Review:** We will provide you with challenge and support in relation to the quality of written records. We routinely audit, dip sample and reflect on the quality of recording and provide feedback. Our quality assurance work supports us to inform individualised as well as service wide opportunities for training and development. We provide all practitioners with access to online research and evidence of best practice.

## Standard 8: Management Oversight & Grip

Practice with every child is challenged and supported by regular, timely management oversight. This includes managers directions and comments, reflective supervision; checking that work has been done to agreed standards; seeing what difference it is making; and what needs to happen next. Managers encourage a culture of creativity, learning and improvement and provide the appropriate balance of challenge and support.

### What this looks like in practice:

- **Management oversight and supervision is regular and focused:** It supports practitioners and confirms work is being carried out to good standards. It helps critically evaluate practice, ensures clear identification of the level of risk and needs, and enables workers to feel supported. Actions are identified with timescales and reviewed at the next supervision.

### How our leadership support this practice:

- **Professional Leadership:** We will be open and honest, collaborative, and lead by example. We will model expected behaviours, set high standards and clear expectations, and enable a supportive learning culture.
- **Management oversight and supervision:** You will receive consistent and effective management oversight in a timely way that will be clearly recorded and will focus on both the quality and volume of work. Managers will be accessible, make decisions alongside you, and follow up with you to ensure actions are recorded and completed, focusing on improving outcomes for children. We will support reflective and group supervision and provide challenge in a constructive way.