

Relationship- Based Practice with Families



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Welcome...



We know that therapeutic, reflective, relationship-based practice is the best way to support vulnerable children and families to make positive, sustainable change.

It is our expectation that our senior leaders, practice leaders, managers and practitioners have a sound understanding of our philosophy and of our practice model, which is comprised of tools, methods and approaches that have been introduced for use in day-to-day practice to improve children's circumstances and outcomes.

I am very proud that this practice model has been produced collaboratively across the service. I hope you find it as inspiring and useful as I do. Through this model we will make a real and lasting difference to children's lives.

Heather Flinders

Strategic Director | People



Our practice model, shaped through collaboration across the directorate, emphasises relationship-based practice. This document underscores our shared responsibility to apply it in our interactions with children, families, and each other, making it central to our directorate's identity.

Recognising the crucial role of relationships in driving change, we aim to engage communities through understanding, respect, and trust. The same principles apply to our staff – getting to know them, treating them with respect, and providing a supportive environment ensures staff retention.

Inspired by the late Professor Andrew Cooper's work in relational social work, I look forward to sharing his insights with colleagues across the directorate.

Shaista Afzal

Principal Social Worker



This practice model is a reflection of how important we view working in partnership with the community and the families within it. Whether you work in the statutory or non statutory sector such as Early Help, this practice model unites us all in terms of the values we hold and the ways that we commit to working with the families of Waltham Forest.

Practitioners and leaders from both Children Social care and Early Help have come together to develop this model and for me it's been an absolute privilege to be part of this worthwhile process which seeks to ensure that the support that families receive from all of us is consistent, respectful of families and their individual needs and transformative.

Sade Alade

Interim Head of Early Help Delivery

Principles of our Relational Practice Model

We will ensure that the following principles underpin our interactions and engagement with families:

1.

Engage with families to understand their needs and use strengths-based conversations to co-produce outcome focused plans that draw on the strengths and capacity within the family

3.

Work holistically with families, ensuring that all members of the family are given the chance to be involved, including absent and wider family members where appropriate.

4.

Respond to needs at the earliest possible opportunity, always working in partnership with families to build independence and resilience.

2.

Work with families with dignity, respect, compassion and hope, acting as role models for behaviour change, helping to engage and motivate families to change behaviour that has a negative impact on themselves, other family members and their community.

5.

Be in tune with families that are struggling and ensure their welfare and safety is paramount by having honest conversations and gaining their consent to share information with relevant agencies that can support.

6.

Enable the voice of each family member, paying particular attention to the voice of the child/young person, to ensure there is a focus on their needs whilst supporting their family to achieve their full potential.

8.

Be self-aware, considering how our personal cultural values and beliefs impact our behaviours and emotional responses. Remember that families are the experts of their experience, so adopt a position of 'not knowing' and be ready to learn.

9.

Get to know and understand our families' cultural beliefs, making sure they are considered and respected throughout our work.

7.

Approach work with families that have suffered trauma, using a trauma informed approach, and working in partnership with allied agencies that can offer specialist support.

10.

Recognise that some families are 'not yet convinced' about whether we can support them and may find it hard to implement change



Our vision for children growing up in Waltham Forest

- Every child should have the **best start in life**.
- We are here to help all families **as and when they need us**.
- We are **ambitious** for our children and families.
- Children and families are **at the heart of everything the Council does**.
- Waltham Forest is the **best place to grow up in London**.



Our fixations

Six things we are absolutely committed to for our staff and the families they support:

- Our workforce will be valued as our **biggest asset**; they are **agile, resilient and skilled** and along with our leadership **reflect the diverse community** we serve.
- Our culture will **challenge oppression** and become proactive in **promoting equity at every opportunity**. Our behaviours, attitudes and policies will enable **effective, cross-cultural practice** and create the conditions to **receive and support more Black leaders**.
- **Striking the right balance between** protecting children and supporting families.
- Recognising that our children in care are **everyone's responsibility** and we must be the **best possible corporate parents** to them.
- **Strengths-based and relationship-led practice** will underpin our work with children, families and partners.
- **Co-production and participation** with children, parents and carers, colleagues and partners will be embedded everywhere.



Our core values

We know that relationships make the difference

Relational practice considers the relationship itself as the vehicle through which change can be achieved. We know our staff and the families we work with have hugely diverse lived experiences and many, if not most, will have experienced discrimination and oppression.

We have a moral, ethical and legal responsibility to challenge inequality and disadvantage wherever we see it. Being a bystander is not enough so we support each other to become upstanders against aggression and oppression.

Establishing collaborative relationships are not easy nor always achieved, but we know that relationships founded on empathy, respect, trust and commitment, taking account of power imbalances and inequalities, are likely to be experienced as the most transformational.

We believe that a family is the best place for a child or young people to grow up and thrive.

We understand that 'families' come in all shapes and sizes and are not confined to those who live in the same home or those who are related to each other.

A family is a nurturing, loving social unit that provides a supportive environment for those included to thrive and meet their potential, especially children. Families are complex, so to help and support them in the best way we consider who families are, where they come from and where they are going or need to get to, so we can help them on their journey.

The relationships we build with families is central to the help we can offer and how they will experience and receive this.

This means that families need to be really heard. We focus on the relationships families have with each other, their local community and professionals so we can tailor our support to their needs, trying to ensure that every member of the family's voice is heard and respected. We consciously reach out to fathers so they are included in the family plan.

We understand that the solution to most difficulties can be found within families and their networks

Relational practice involves an appreciation not just of the individual but of their social context - their positioning within it, their interaction with it and their daily lived experience of it.

It supports families to engage with their networks to enhance their resilience and capacity to resolve difficulties. These networks can include family members, friends, teachers and any other significant people who have a contribution to make.

Sometimes it means helping families forge new networks or re-establishing old ones. Practice that concentrates on helping families move towards the future that they want and to learn what can be done differently by using their existing skills, strategies and ideas - rather than focusing on the problem, is most likely to result in sustained, positive change.

Relational practice: what does it mean for you?

Practitioners	Leaders
Practitioners spend time getting to know families and try not to rush meetings and interventions.	We minimise bureaucracy and give frontline staff the time and space they need to get to know the families they work with.
Practitioners understand that families and the individuals within it are experts of their experience . We adopt a position of ‘not knowing’ and ‘ready to learn’ from the outset.	Leaders understand that staff bring their own lived-experiences to their work and help staff to recognise how this influences their practice.
Practitioners are proactive in seeking out professional development opportunities and forums that promote cultural competence , diversity and inclusion.	Leaders actively promote culturally competent practice and ensure that issues related to race, ethnicity, culture and other aspects of diversity (including intersectionality) are addressed in supervision and team meetings.
Practitioners and leaders use language that is culturally aware ; they recognise how their use of language can redress or perpetuate power imbalances.	
We develop a culture which focuses upon positive relationships that inspire trust and confidence, using reflective group supervision to build trusting professional relationships.	
We take an appreciative stance when working with families and enable plans to be ‘family-led’.	
We understand the widespread impact of trauma and the potential paths for recovery . We recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma in families and others involved in our system. We respond by using our knowledge about trauma to inform practice and our responses to families and we are proactive in resisting re-traumatisation.	

Relational practice: what does it mean for you?

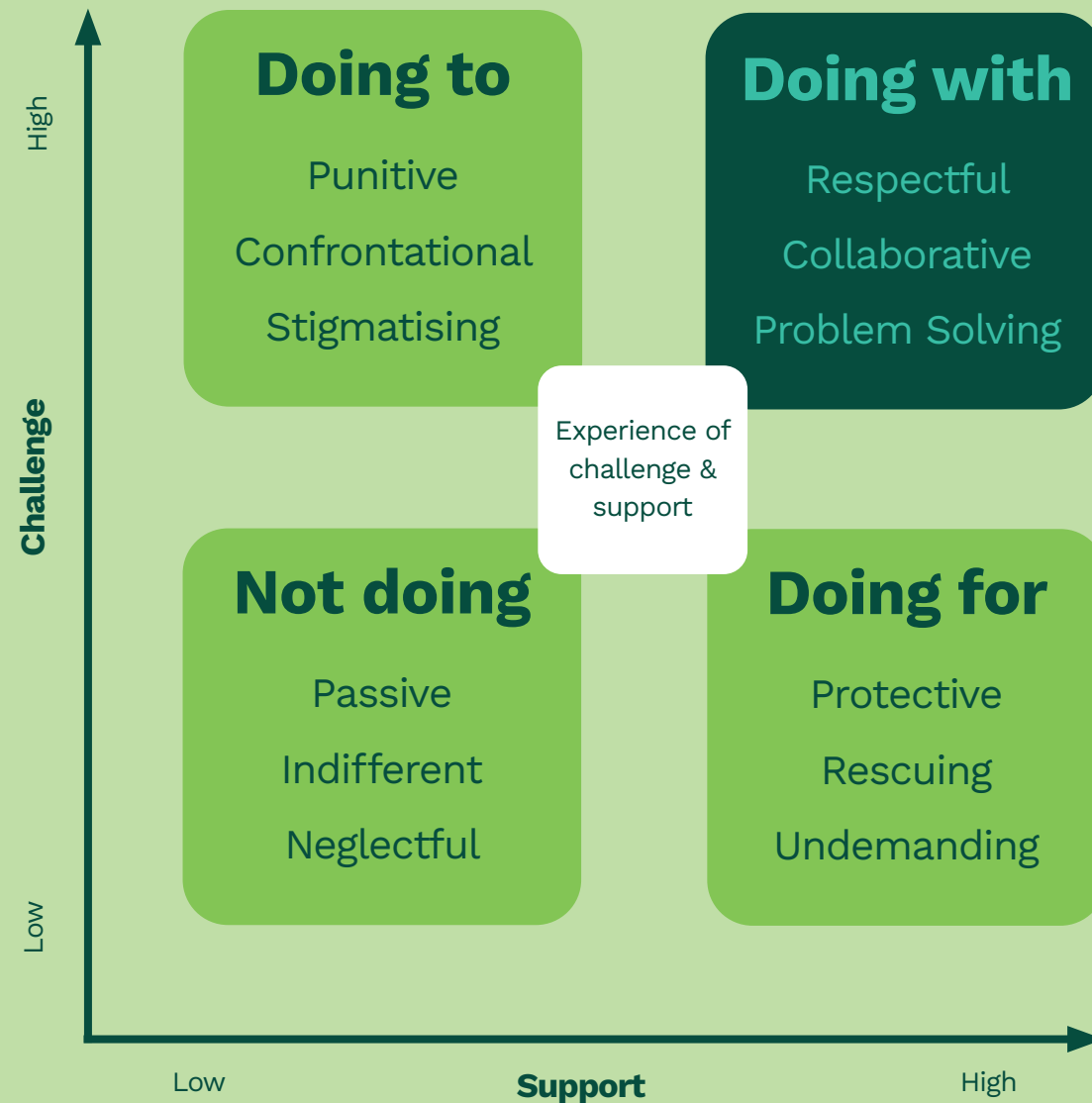
Practitioners	Leaders
<p>Practitioners initiate reflective discussions with their professional network, particularly at key moments i.e. when work with a family feels 'stuck' or following a significant event.</p>	<p>Leaders provide a trusting and supportive environment for staff to feel a sense of shared responsibility and camaraderie. Staff are encouraged to share their experiences and seek support from their peers.</p>
<p>Practitioners use supervision to reflect on their relationships with families through the lens of privilege, power, and intersectionality. Practitioners consider social structural context and inequalities in assessments, planning and review.</p>	<p>Leaders adapt their supervision style to be cognizant of the supervisee's cultural orientation, background and values. Supervision helps practitioners analyse their work through the lens of privilege, power and intersectionality. Leaders aim to be self-aware, recognising how cultural values can influence team dynamics and hierarchical relationships.</p>
<p>We engage in respectful professional challenge across the hierarchy, appreciating that leaders will sometimes make decisions that others disagree with.</p>	<p>We take time to explain the context for decisions to colleagues, especially when there are differing views on the direction of work.</p>
<p>We ask people what they think of the services and supports they receive, rather than being reactive and waiting for a complaint.</p>	
<p>We remain appreciative and curious around barriers and challenges to practice and to audit. After a significant event, take time to evaluate what we could have done differently.</p>	

High support, high challenge

A high challenge, high support environment means 'doing with' each other and the families we support - not 'doing to', 'doing for' or not doing at all.

Providing challenge includes asking tough questions, giving honest feedback and having high expectations; providing support means acting with compassion, empathy and care.

Some parts of our service use the Family Partnership Model as a tool to provide high support and high challenge, helping to shape practice away from 'hand holding' and supporting families to use their existing skills to build capacity. When a practitioner identifies a strength, we support the family to recognise it.





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