

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership



LEARNING HUB CYCLE – FOCUS ON CHILD NEGLECT

Multi-Agency Practitioner Events (February and March 2020)

Practitioners from a wide range of agencies working directly with children and families joined together to focus on successful strategies and tips for 'what works' with families where there are concerns about child neglect (from pre-natal through to adolescence).

Thank you to this incredibly resourceful group of practitioners for sharing all the good practice below that has been proven to work in various family scenarios.

Building relationships with trust

- Be as **honest** as you can with families to gain trust.
- Be 'human' and show empathy and understanding of the family's challenges and perspectives.
- Be willing and able to explain why things are important for the children – find language they understand without patronising.
- Be confident in your skills and in the work you are doing with families – believe in it, and if you don't, seek supervision or management guidance to explore whether the expectation is not right or whether there is something in the work which is triggering something personal for you.
- Be realistic about the standards you are assessing families against – what is going to help the child?

- Work with families to understand their history and how it is impacting on their ability to cope as well as they want to. E.g. a Mum who was resisting a move for her child to a specialist school because of her own experience of being labelled and bullied.
- Try to avoid 'surprises' – bringing along another team member / manager without explaining why.
- As concerns reduce, have a clear plan about how services will step away, what support remains and what the family should do if they 'wobble'. Can check in points be created by services one month / three months on perhaps by text or a scheduled phone call?
- Don't assume what people have the experience / skills / ability to do – some people will not have had experiences in life that might be expected e.g. wrapping a birthday present. Always be open to the fact that the barrier might be an uncertainty of how to do what is asked of them.
- Understand who in the family might have less trust in services and reach out to engage them and show you value and respect their engagement, even if just small steps.

Creating motivation within families

- Children's experiences and wishes can be a motivator for parents. Hearing about what worries their children and what difference their child would like to see can be used as a motivator but needs to be used carefully so as not to create blame or division.
- Work to create hope with families of **SMALL STEPS** towards a bigger goal. Keep plans to a few achievable goals which might be reviewed and built on every few weeks. Having long plans with multiple actions can be overwhelming.
- Build on success – to do this the steps need to be easy and achievable to start with – ask what would it take to be one step closer to your goal?
- Use the families' histories to support you in planning – what has worked in the past?
- Role model with families so that they can see the results and that it's 'OK' to behave in different ways – explain what you are doing so that they can understand as well as copy. E.g. getting into a den with a child is not 'silly / embarrassing'.
- Keep up regular, encouraging contact – use text messages / emails / phone calls / write a letter or a card – other mediums. Tell them what is going well, remind them of their goals and the steps they have committed to.
- Encourage them to **BELIEVE** in themselves and model that you believe in them – encourage other family networks to provide this support – it will mean more from someone really valued by the person.

- Find positives at every opportunity, whilst being realistic about the areas still needing improvement.
- Keep it fun when you can.
- Is there a reward that the family can give themselves when they have achieved something?
- Make no judgement when things slip or dip, revisit the plans, adjust them and re-start.
- Listen out for opportunities to encourage families – e.g. ‘did you hear that the housing officer said you should go and meet with letting agents as you make a good impression on people’, ‘that was such a kind thing to do – you are such a nice person’ ‘these kids really love you’, ‘you deserve this’.
- Be careful not to rush – whilst the children’s timescales are very important, if you can achieve success with small steady steps that will be better than having to start again.
- Helping families to integrate into the community will support them to see other styles of parenting and to hear the common challenges faced by parents which can help them not to feel so alone and build a network of support.
- Explore ‘motivational interviewing’ to help you think about the approaches you already use and what more you could do.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iBPezjuYU>
- If others working with the family are not doing what they have committed to do, be an advocate and use appropriate challenge that doesn’t undermine your colleague but reminds them of their commitment and that if this can’t be achieved it is respectful for that to be shared with the family and an alternative agreed. You don’t need to undermine the professional with the family, just recognise that everyone has a part to play and we all need to do our best.
- Explain things that help and protect children and why, help families understand the harm that worries you in a way that it can be their worry too. This can help to motivate them to do things differently for the children they love. E.g. sharing learning about the ‘baby brain’ or the ‘adolescent brain’.

Demonstrating active listening skills

- Be prepared to listen and hear what the family are telling you. Understand their ‘normal’ (ask questions to gain a better understanding). Sometimes careful questions give the family a better understanding of their ‘gut reactions’ as well as you. E.g. ‘what makes you say that....?’
- Use reflection with families to check that you have a clear understanding.
- Be curious in a kind way – have a conversation rather than bombarding them with questions.
- Refresh your knowledge of active listening techniques <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2z9mdX1j4A> and think about the skills you have. Use calm responses, use silences...

- Listen out for indicators that families are not able to understand the message being given – there are many ways in which communication is impacted, including learning difficulties, brain injury, attention difficulties and avoidance. Be aware and be prepared to use different ways to communicate and develop shared understanding.
- Consider whether the family has cultural expectations that are different to your own. Ask questions to understand people's background and their own upbringing, it may provide clues as to their current parenting skills.
- If the family's first language is not English, keep checking out understanding. Keep language very simple and be prepared to explain terms like neglect, emotional harm, hoarding etc.
- Colleagues from the health visitor service commended the 'Solihull approach', which is also applicable to early years practitioners. Here's where you can find more information on this approach:
https://www.google.com/search?q=solihull+model&rlz=1C1GCEA_enGB867GB867&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=ZxskNGdvw8DmgM%253A%252CAglwKRNcUCMwXM%252C_&vet=1&usq=AI4_-kTAplu100KyHSDy70qcRzT1M7N-Qw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjIh-Hp0KboAhVoUhUIHdWCAhgQ9QEwDnoECAoQlw#imgsrc=IsshNZKnO9SrjM

Understand the cycle of change

Understand that in creating change there are known steps which include 'relapse' and this should inform the approach taken with families. Helping families anticipate relapse and make back up plans will make the achievements more realistic.



Create visual aids with families

- Taking a picture of home conditions when they are improved can provide a guide to families of what they can achieve, what is 'good enough' and provide a sense of pride.
- Having family photos around of doing fun activities – playing a board game, being at the park, cooking together with smiles can create a more positive atmosphere in the home.
- A trip to a furniture store with a volunteer/practitioner to check out storage options, room layouts can create motivation as well as showing an investment of time and care for them.
- Help the family to create checklists of small steps which can be 'ticked off' – creating a sense of satisfaction.
- Use whiteboards or charts for visual reminders and positive reinforcement.
- Would the family benefit from a folder to keep things such as contacts details or leaflets in or a notebook for people to write in to record their goals and plans and review these? Or would use of a mobile phone 'notes/calendar' work better for this family?

Being tenacious and persistent

- This is about caring, showing you won't give up on them and their children, that you have hope for them and will be there even when rejected.
- Be able to explain simply why you need to do things like seeing the child's room or the food cupboards – don't just use power and authority. Be assertive, in a caring way.
- Show compassion and anticipate that it is hard for families to accept involvement of childcare agencies.
- Get to know the history and whether previous bad experience might be influencing their willingness to work with you – talk about these with the families 'what made you cross then?', 'how do you want me to be different?'
- Try to avoid changes of workers for families – but be open to sometimes a particular style (and we all have one) will not work for a family and a change might be the best way forward.
- When there is no answer at the door, call their number and leave a message saying why you are there and offer some reassurance. E.g. 'I'm just dropping off the leaflets – I don't need to come in', 'maybe you are in the shower and haven't heard my knock?'
- Show the respect everyone deserves – do what you say you will do, if you can't do it let them know why and see if there is a different approach, don't overcommit and be consistent (both as an individual and as a group of practitioners). Be on time for

visits and don't rush them. When you can't make it, try to make a call to explain and give them a few minutes of time to talk – remember, they may have been mentally preparing for your visit and have worries or things they want to tell you.

- Sometime families will find one of the people working with them the most acceptable – agree between the group how to maximise this link without leaving one person carrying too much responsibility.
- If you are working in a time-limited service be clear about this with the family and set achievable goals that fit within this timeframe. Create a positive that they won't need you once the goal is achieved.
- Is there someone who is more acceptable / less threatening that the family can identify to work with and achieve improvement with.
- Find ways to diffuse tensions – as you get to know families you will establish a rapport and some shared humour that can be used sensitively.
- Get to know the child to be able to understand the difference between the behaviours they show and the impact of their harmful experiences.
- Be aware when it is professional systems that get in the way e.g. hospital appointment booking systems that can be inflexible. Think about whether the parent bringing the child to appointments is made as easy as possible, in their particular circumstances.
- Share concerns about the impact of school isolation, exclusion and unauthorised absence, tease out the reasons behind these and seek creative solutions or compromises that could be agreed.

Find practical support

- Identify with the family what the barriers are and what practical support they need – trips to the tip, accompanying them to appointments / community groups, getting out of the house for a chat, physically helping with tidying and sorting, finding someone who can fix a washing machine, using on line 'buy and sell' sites to find free goods and localised Facebook support groups. Agree some small steps that could make the difference they feel is important and explain how these 1% steps will gradually add up to big changes.
- Support the family in thinking about who would be acceptable to approach for this help – family members, friends, voluntary sector as well as sometimes mucking in to help yourself. Offer to sit down with others to talk through what is needed and create a joint plan as to who can help with what.
- Bring the family together to understand what needs to change and who is going to do what and how to build on what is going well.

- Work with the family to ensure financial issues are understood and addressed. Think about outgoings that may indicate deep-rooted problems, e.g. gambling (be aware of the very easy access to slot machine and online casino games on people's phones), alcohol, drugs. A financial assessment could be drawn up together to compare income/outgoings.
- Suggest keeping a diary / chart / folder of reminders / information etc can help a family. This needs to be something that they can use – they might want to have something on a wall, in a drawer or on their phone. This is their longer-term solution, but it can be helpful to think through what already helps them and to remember things.
- When there are lots of people involved, having an 'all in one place' list of who they are, which agency they work for, contact details and what they are helping with can support a family to explain their team to others and help with links between those working with the family.
- Bring activities for the children when you visit – role modelling distraction and how to engage the children will help the family and also create some calm for discussions that might be needed.
- Think about who can support outside of work hours, which might often be a time when families need additional inputs, getting up for school, bedtime routines, flare ups over the weekend.
- When there are barriers, who might be able to help? For example, another parent lending a spare bike to allow a child to join in cycle safety group with peers or creating a Facebook request for help.

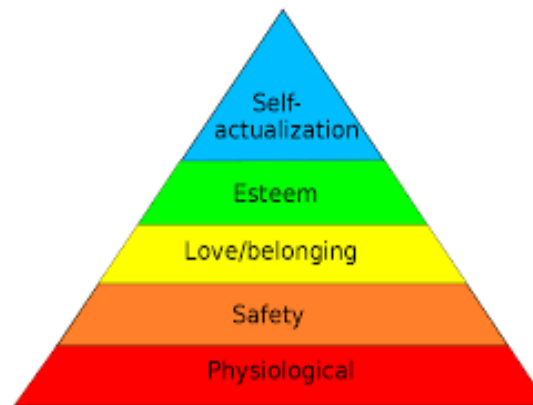
Know the family's local area resources

- Get to know your local area and what's available– talk to people who know the 'patch' (family networks, health visitors, children's centres, faith group leaders, nursery managers, youth workers etc.) and use the Family Information Service to look up with families what is available locally –if you do this **with** families you are equipping them with a skill for the future.
<https://www.fid.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/kb5/poole/fis/home.page>
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/get-help-for-your-family/family-information-service.aspx>
- Help identify activities for families and children available locally? What after school activities are on offer? Where are the local free places to go?
- Examples given included – Home Start, Safer Families, Rylands Farm horse course, parent and toddler groups, addiction support (Including gambling).

Help with finding family network support

- Understand some of the reasons for isolation.
- Support families to agree to reaching out to others e.g. absent parents / grandparents / adult siblings and support them to be helpful. E.g. an estranged sister was thought to be overpowering when she tried to help. Some discussions which helped both sisters understand the dynamic between them and the best way to help was negotiated.

Understand Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often shown as levels within a pyramid.

The theory proposes that needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up. For example, an individual may not be able to experience feelings of love/belonging or esteem if they are in a situation where they are struggling to feed themselves/their family or feeling unsafe in their living arrangements.

Working with children

- Don't underestimate or overlook the children's understanding of their parents' needs – the children are the ones living with this day in, day out and will be well aware – even if they can't always make sense of it.
- Use creative ways to hear children's views – three houses, making stories, role play with characters...

- Prepare young people for next steps, e.g. having an informal conversation about sexual health and what to expect from the appointment before accompanying them to a clinic.
- Who else can support the child? Is there a trusted relative, neighbour or teacher that they could talk about any worries with?
- Who could a young person contact if things deteriorate – a trusted friend or practitioner or youth centre?

Avoid 'start again' approach

- By keeping good records, you will be able to show what has motivated people, what change has been created and what has created a negative reaction or a dip in progress. This will support you or the next practitioner working with the family. They will be able to use prompts with the family, 'do you remember the way you improved', 'do you think that this has made things bad again?'
- A closure summary on a family's record should show what has been achieved by the family, what has helped them achieve this. Sharing this with the other people involved with the family is an expectation so that they can see this and use it if they need to remind the family or support them after a dip in progress (which must be expected – it's human).
- Understanding a person's history can help you to understand better what motivates them, what challenges they are facing and the impact of adverse childhood (or adult) experiences. This will help you to understand areas of vulnerability, how resilient they have been. You can use this to create hope and motivation, but also to provide empathy. You might want to use it **to** encourage them to link it to their children's experience. Keeping a record of family background will help you to spot repeating cycles, particular vulnerabilities and what works.
- If you are starting to work with the family take time to read what the previous workers have written and ask amongst the professional group who know the family about approaches they find work with the family.

When you get stuck

- When progress for children is not happening, don't be afraid to acknowledge this. Meet with others involved, revisit the plan, think again about what has worked previously, make steps smaller, check out whether you have real engagement or disguised compliance. Check out with family what they think is blocking progress. Meet as a professional group to think again about the approach. Go back and try another route. Watch out for the length of time a child has experienced harm and whether this is acceptable.

- Use the Pan Dorset Multi Agency Procedures/Guidance on Engaging Families
https://pandorsetscb.proceduresonline.com/p_hard_engage_fam.html?zoom_highlight=engaging+families

Working with the 'team around a family' (TAF)

- Remember, despite having specialisms, some of the team will have longer involvement and know the situation well. Schools have children for at least 6 hours every day so, respect that they know the child and probably the family. Community workers may have spent more informal time with the family and in the home and they could have a 'true' picture of what it's like, extended family will see the situation in different contexts and see changes over time.
- As practitioners, find ways to keep in touch with each other, share what you have been doing with the family, so the next person meeting with the family can keep up the progress. Think of yourselves as a tag team for the family and everyone has a part to play. It will help with consistency for the family which can be a major hurdle for them.
- When there are changes in services – stepping across to other lead professionals / transition between school provide good quality communication about the situation, progress made, what works and what are the indicators of downward spiral.
- Work out how you can create easier communication between each other that doesn't overwhelm you all.

Trauma informed practice

- Read more about what this means in the Young Minds Guide <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3091/adversity-and-trauma-informed-practice-guide-for-professionals.pdf>

Use tools

- Assessment tools in different agencies and community networks will help to identify what the worries are for a child and what is working well for the family. Look out for combinations of parental need which are known to create significant challenge e.g. domestic abuse, substance misuse and learning difficulties.
- Specific tools around home safety, graded care profile, clutter ratings will help the family and those working with them to be working from similar standards and can be good opportunities to talk about concerns in an objective way.
- Plans will be in different formats, but can be used to identify specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely ('SMART') steps to make improvements. Creating family-led plans is essential to engagement and workers will use their skills to influence and motivate and explore what these plans might be.
- What tools do families use – calendars, phone reminders, lists – how can they be used in the families' current situation?

Understand hoarding

- Use information available about hoarding to gain a better understanding as the family's support network of some of the emotional needs that are being met when people hoard.
https://pandorsetscb.proceduresonline.com/zoom/search.php?zoom_sort=0&zoom_query=Hoarding&zoom_per_page=10&zoom_and=0
- Explore with families what the possessions mean to them.
- Don't expect to be able to make rapid progress in clearing homes without investing in the person's emotional needs – the situation is most likely to worsen again.
- Understand the risk and impact posed and work with this rather than personal standards.
- Use the local authorities' Adult Services Hoarding Panel to meet with other partners who deal with these issues on a regular basis and link in to advice, signposting and new ideas.
- Dorset Fire & Rescue Service provides guidance around home safety, including the dangers associated with hoarding
<https://www.dsfire.gov.uk/YourSafety/SafetyInTheHome/Hoarding.cfm?SiteCategoryId=4&T1ID=35&T2ID=393>
- Another helpful website to better understand hoarding is <https://www.helpforhoarders.co.uk/>

Stay safe yourself

- Use management and supervision to understand the impact on you.
- Use lone working guidance and information from colleagues to ensure you are kept physically safe.
- Be aware of your own triggers and vulnerability to know when to ask for help.

Pan-Dorset Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Policies relevant to this area of work:

Links to policies e.g. Hard to Engage – Engaging with Families

https://pandorsetscb.proceduresonline.com/p_hard_engage_fam.html?zoom_highlight=engaging+families

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Multi Agency Neglect Strategy/Toolkit



The Neglect Strategy and Toolkit (downloadable resources) can be accessed here: <https://pdscp.co.uk/resource-library/pan-dorset-resources/>

Further information

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2015/realising-potential-tackling-child-neglect-universal-services/>