Croydon Early Help and Children’s Social Care Practice Framework

Delivering for Croydon

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Our Vision

We expect children and families in Croydon to receive outstanding services from our social work staff and practitioners. We are committed to achieving an ‘outstanding’ rating from Ofsted in 2021. We want our staff to have high expectations and high challenge of their practice and each other. We know that families are complex and as such we need to be able to be responsive to their needs, in a manner that honours multiple perspectives and curiosity. Our values that guide our practice has a strong emphasis on health, education and social development. We will privilege relationships, as a means in which change can take place. We want to hear what children and families say about the help they need and let this be a driving force for how we practice. We want to understand children and families in their contextual relationships; understanding that these contexts are reciprocal in influencing their identity, actions and values. We believe amplifying strengths and not having a ‘single story’ about families that is pathologising. Our social workers and practitioners should be confident in their practice and supported to manage the emotional demands of their role. We want to apply complex thinking in simple ways.

We contend that having a practice framework will enable a shared language, orientation and value base from which to work creatively with children and families. All children and families in Croydon deserve an outstanding level of practice, no matter where they are located within our service.

Nana Bonsu
Systemic Practice Service Lead
August 2019

“We contend that having a practice framework will enable a shared language, orientation and value base from which to work creatively with children and families.”
Rationale

Our systemic practice framework is a comprehensive theoretical and research based tool for social workers and practitioners working with families in Early Help and Children’s Social Care, in Croydon. The aim of the model is to provide staff with a framework to draw from to inform their practice. The purpose of this document is to give clarity regarding what the practice framework is, how it will be delivered and what we hope to see with regards to practice sustainability. We are keen to avoid ‘transformation traps’, whereby changes to practice are transient and not embedded as a way of being.

Our core premise is that a family is the best place for a child to thrive, develop and meet their potentials. We recognise that families come in many guises, not just confined to those who live in the same home. We understand that family does not just constitute individuals who are related to each other. With this in mind, we appreciate that human behaviour is complex. Our work requires us to be able to support families at times of distress, harm, adversity and trauma. As such, we are aware that day-to-day life can feel really hard at times and stresses can pile up. Factoring in additional stresses such as substance misuse, mental health, poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism, domestic abuse/violence and additional needs, can take a toll on families and impact their capacity to hold each other in mind and function day-to-day.

We know that families are not like this all the time and we need to be curious about these exceptions. This requires professionals who can be supported to be honest about the impact of the work on them as individuals, enabling reflexivity. Our capacity to think about our actions and its impact on those we serve, will create a reflexive practice culture. We know in moments when children and families are at their most vulnerable they require help that is thoughtful, respectful and where necessary challenging. We are of the view that relationships are fundamental to all of the work that we do, as such our practice framework predicates this. We cannot be effective in our practice if we do not have strong relationships with our children and families, each other as colleagues and with our partnership agencies.

Children and families and the communities that they live in can have good ideas about what would be helpful in times of worry. We are keen to ensure that we do not lose sight of these potentials and fall into a pattern of believing that only professionals have the answers. We know that in order to be of good use to the families we serve, we need to use techniques and skills that are rooted in evidence. We want social workers and practitioners to be robust and confident in their practice, as a result of the practice framework.

Systemic practice will be our overarching foundation, alongside a number of relationship based techniques. This includes strengthening families, restorative practice and motivational interviewing. Families are resourceful and we want to support their capacity to change without creating an overdependence on our services. We are aware that when statutory services become involved with families there is a risk that we replace family interactions, leading to a loss in confidence in identities, such as being a parent, which can be deskilling.

We are very clear that our practice framework is not about collusive practice, or minimising risks. We expect practice to be challenging and take decisive action when required, to minimise the harm and drift children can experience. We do not believe that safeguarding children, requires an approach that is dehumanising and lacking in respect. We are aware that Croydon children’s services has had a relationship with systemic practice previously, whereby staff were trained up to the foundation level. This was not a whole system approach and sadly was not sustained. The staff who undertook this previous training will be invited to use their training to support the embedding of a systemic culture across the service.
The Learning and Development Board will oversee the implementation of the practice framework and the way in which the practice transformation is managed. Decisions will be made at this forum following consultation with heads of service, with respect to permanent members of staff undertaking training dependent on service needs and priorities.

The board will be a decision making board, agreeing development activity to be undertaken, their prioritisation and whether these can be offered in-house, using internal resources or whether commissioning is required.

The learning and development board activity will link back to the Learning Loops meeting, a new group devised to collate and understand the learning and development opportunities identified from audits, practice Week(s) and monitoring visits.

Our ambition is to eventually train all staff up to the foundation level. In the interim staff from different parts of the service will be able to attend briefings with regards to the techniques outlined in the practice framework. We recognise that there are a significant number of agency staff in the organisation. Agency staff will be encouraged to attend lunch n learn workshops, briefings, appreciative enquiry sessions and action learning sets, as forums to support their understanding of the practice framework.

All permanent staff who have been trained in specific techniques, will be required to cascade their learning to their colleagues, in the form of action learning sets etc. ‘Champions’ in specific techniques will be identified, their role will be ensuring practice diligence, application of technique to practice, offering consultations and being a point of contact with regards to their expertise. As the practice techniques becomes more embedded, the need for champions will lessen, as our practice framework will be a way of being, moving from that of learning. Those members of staff who had previous systemic training with Morning Lane Associates, will also be invited to be champions, as a means of honouring their learning.

We are of the view that the training implementation of this practice framework for all staff will be over a 2-3 year timeframe. We feel that the training should be staggered and rotated across the service, mindful of the pitfalls of overwhelming staff with too much training at once, this not conducive to learning. The first year will be prioritising the whole system implementation of systemic training to all permanent social work staff. We are of the view that the cross fertilisation of training across the service, will by osmosis enable a workforce that is energised, passionate and creative about their practice.
Our practice framework

Systemic practice
Our overarching framework under which different relationship based approaches sit...

Strengthening Families
Restorative practice
Motivational interviewing

What this means in practice...

Relationship-based
Developing strong relationships between practitioners and families to make change

Evidence-based
Using evidence based interventions to support change

Strengths-based
Doing more of what works and less of what doesn’t, building on strengths

Self-reflective
Thinking about our own beliefs and values and how they influence our work

Confidently holding risk
Whilst working with families to minimise risk through change

Supervision
Using supervision to generate ideas about how to make change
Systemic Practice

Systemic practice will enable practitioners to understand that children and families are in contextual relationships that shape their identity. Systemic practice posits that there is no single truth and that there are multiple ways of knowing the world. What this means in practice is that we will favour complexity over linearity in our understanding of children and families. Being open to challenge and enabling invitations to collaborate will be the default position at all times. The newly established clinical service will be the main driver for the embedment of systemic practice within the service. The terms of reference for this service can be found within the clinical service plan.

Delivery

All heads of service are currently undertaking a Systemic Leadership and Management course provided by the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT), covering 8 days. Service managers are currently undertaking a Diploma in Systemic Supervision, covering 15 days also from IFT. Newly recruited service managers, team managers and assistant team managers will also undertake a Diploma in Systemic Supervision. All permanent frontline social workers who have not yet undertaken a foundation in family and systemic psychotherapy, will be trained to this level. Two social workers who have undertaken training up to a systemic practice level, will be supported to complete their MSc in family and systemic psychotherapy in September 2020. It is hoped that the cost savings of the clinical service will enable more staff to undertake this training.

Our children’s systems strategic lead, responsible for the children and families system, will also be trained at foundation level. This is to ensure that the database that social workers and practitioners use, is conducive to our practice framework. All of this training is accredited by the Association of Family Therapy (AFT). The principle of ‘growing our own’ will be managed by the newly established clinical service, co-facilitating accredited training. This will enable ongoing training for future cohorts, being resource minded and reduce costs for external provision.

The team of staff who manage the children and families system will also have a briefing, outlining the principles of systemic therapy, to again enhance their understanding. They will also be expected to attend action learning sets with a view to making necessary adaptations to the database used by social workers and practitioners, if doing so enables better practice outcomes.

Reflective peer group supervision will be the expectation of practice across all service areas; in addition to existing supervision practices. Service, team and assistant managers who have/undertaking their systemic training will be expected to take a lead in these peer supervision groups. These learning opportunities will provide managers, social workers and practitioners a forum to learn from each other. We are keen to have a culture of promoting mutual respect and not locating expertise in others, but recognising that we all have resources that can be of use. Collectively we are capable of being a force for change. Clinical therapists will also support the embedment of this approach.

Systemic consultations will be available to all staff. Social work with children looked after and care leavers, currently have consultations provided by CAMHS.
Related Techniques:

### Strengthening Families

Strengthening families is a model that recognises that while families face challenges they also embody strengths. The principles of this approach are outlined below:

- supports collaborative working with families and professionals to identify risk
- emphasises the importance of social workers’ relationships with clients
- seeks to achieve positive outcomes by developing relationships and ensuring that families are listened to, respected and actively involved
- is specific about concerns
- identifies what resources are available to the family and what needs to change to reduce the level of risk to the child
- is characterised by critical reflection on issues; quality practice decision-making and interventions; engagement with families; and responsiveness to their needs, while maintaining a child protection focus

### Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is a term that is used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which seek to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and resolve challenges where there has been conflict. The approach covers formal and informal processes that enable effective communication. The aim is to remove barriers and imbue a sense of community, understanding, shared responsibility and accountability.

### Delivery

Currently social work staff and practitioners have been trained in this approach. Ongoing training is available through Croydon’s children’s social care academy. Our conferences and assessment tools have been adapted to reflect this approach, ensuring a cohesiveness from theory to practice.

At this time the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) have started learning the principles of this approach in house. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO’s) and Child Protection Chairs (CP’s) have been able to apply the learning to their work contexts and have found it to be useful. Commissioning for further external training is under review, with regards to the scope. We would privilege the IRO’s and CP’s undertaking the external training, alongside the youth offending service and Early Help.
Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a client-centered approach to strengthen individuals’ own motivation to change and support them in making changes. The theory and practices of motivational interviewing are underpinned and complimented by the concept of mentalisation.

Delivery

The Tavistock has been identified to undertake this training with our social workers and practitioners in October 2019, the first cohort of 15 will receive 2 days training. The second cohort will receive their training in March 2020. In the first instance this will be social workers from across the division, who are yet to undertake their foundation training in systemic practice. Further cohorts will be identified.
Children and Families

We want our social workers and practitioners to share our practice framework with children and families as a means of being clear about our vision, enabling transparency and feedback. Children and families will be given opportunities to join our action learning sets, again as a means of honouring their expertise and moving to a culture of mutual respect. Children and families must play a role in shaping our services and being ‘true’ collaborators. At the end of our interventions, we will routinely give children and families a questionnaire to help shape our services ongoing. This will be managed by the quality assurance unit (QAU).

Agencies

We recognise the importance of our partners understanding our vision, to ensure a cohesive approach for the children and families we all serve in Croydon. We believe that having connections with others enables a greater force for impact with regards to change. The newly launched safeguarding partnership will take place in November 2019 and this will be an opportunity to discuss our vision at a strategic level. Prior to this, briefings will take place in the community at an operational level with schools, health, police, probation and the voluntary sector. Going forward service managers and team managers who will be locality based, will act as links for the partnership agencies in their localities. They will be responsible for keeping our partners abreast of our practice framework at an operational level. We would encourage collaborative action learning sets with our partners, so that we continue to use each other as a resource for learning. We believe that opportunities to learn across services, with our partners is resource minded, enables greater intelligence sharing at a local level and allows for unique opportunities to develop collaborative practice.
CROYDON EARLY HELP AND CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

be the change
for children and young people in croydon
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