

**TORBAY COUNCIL**

Children's Services

# Ways of Working



For further support, or to  
give feedback, please email:  
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# Introduction

from Nancy Meehan,  
Director of Children's Services



Our ambition is to create a prosperous and healthy Torbay with communities that thrive.

Protecting children and giving them the best start in life is a key area of focus and we will achieve this by listening and working alongside our children, young people and families. We are committed to continually improving outcomes by providing good quality Children's Services.

We have created our Ways of Working to encompass all children and young people who may need help and support from Children's Services in Torbay. We also have additional pledges which meet the needs specifically for young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability, which we refer to as SEND and children and young people who are cared for.

For our cared for and care experienced children and young people we have 'Our promise to you Pledge' which sets out our five key areas these children told us were important to them.

Our 'Working together with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) Pledge' explains our values and we've asked everyone who is involved to sign up to this pledge.

We have listened to what our children, young people and families have been telling us and in response to all the feedback we've received, we have produced six principles for our ways of working. These principles describe how we will work with children, young people and families who may need our support.

Our Ways of Working is at the heart of providing good quality services.

# Restorative Practice

Torbay Children's Services and Local Area is adopting a restorative practice approach in how we work with children, young people and families. Restorative Practice is a way in which we can build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and a way to resolve difficulties and repair harm.

We understand that life can sometimes be hard and what happens to us can affect how we think, feel, and behave. We know that how we work with children, young people and families to talk about this and the ways in which we support them are important.

We recognise that listening to children, young people and families and working 'with' rather than doing things 'for' or 'to' is the best way we can help support. It means our practitioners will focus on building positive relationships through respectful communication, collaboration and shared decision making to help create positive change.

The benefits of working restoratively include:

- R** Respectful conversations help to truly understand an individual's life events
- E** Encourages families to become more self-sufficient
- S** Shared decision making and co-planning leads to better outcomes for children and families
- T** Teamwork promotes successful multi agency working
- O** Open and honest conversations help to build relationships and manage expectations
- R** Reducing, preventing, and addressing harmful behaviour to keep everyone safe
- A** Addresses conflict and seeks to repair harm when things go wrong
- T** Trauma informed practice allow safe conversations to take place
- I** Inclusive practice promotes working together with children, young people, and families, so they feel respected, listened to, and heard
- V** Voices of children are key, so we hear their wishes and feelings and where possible act upon them
- E** Encourages the building, maintaining, and repairing of all relationships

# What Restorative Practice looks like to a young person

We asked a group of young people to tell us their ideas and suggestions on how professionals could build positive relationships with them. Here's what they told us:



# Our commitment

We asked children, young people, families and carers to provide feedback on what was important for us as professionals to consider when working with them. We heard that how we communicate impacts relationships in the following ways:

Arriving late without letting us know =  
*“you don’t care about us”*

Checking the time frequently =  
*“you don’t want to be here”*

Bringing lots of paperwork with you =  
*“you haven’t taken the time to learn about our story”*

Making notes or highlighting while we talk =  
*“your paperwork is more important than spending time with us”*

Asking lots and lots of questions =  
*“you do not trust what we are telling you”*

In response to this, and other feedback gathered, we have produced six principles that detail our ways of working. They describe how we will restoratively work with children, young people and families who may need help and support from Children Services in Torbay.

These principles are based on the notion that our staff:

- care about what they do and are passionate about achieving the best for children and families living in Torbay
- employ their professional judgement and expertise
- have a strong value base displaying care, compassion, openness, and respect
- want to work in collaboration with children, young people, parents and carers, and other professionals to achieve the right outcomes
- are natural advocates, who think, act, and empower others
- understand their responsibility to meet Social Work England Standards to ensure children, young people and families receive an effective service
- reflect, adapt, and change their practice when required
- strive to be the best and bring out the best in others.

These principles are designed to give clear guidance to all Children’s Services staff, including senior leaders, and managers in respect of their roles and responsibilities as professionals. If we are not working with you in these ways, then our practice needs to improve.

## Principle one

# Building positive relationships



### You told us:

*When social workers do not do what they say they will do, it “feels like I’m being lied to” and demolishes the trust not only between the child and their current social worker, but every social worker after that.*

### We promise to:

Work with you to build trusting and meaningful relationships, using kindness, understanding and empathy to get to know you so that we can listen and understand your life experiences.

### How we will do this

- ✓ Ensure all Children’s Services staff attend Restorative Practice training.
- ✓ Make sure the visits we undertake are timely, see our visiting timescales table, and have a clear purpose that help to improve outcomes.
- ✓ We will take the time to get to know you and talk with you alone in a place where you feel safe.
- ✓ We will be honest about what we can and cannot do for you and your family.
- ✓ We will use a ‘Working Together Agreement’ to clearly explain who we are, the purpose for visiting and plan how best we can work together.
- ✓ We will let you know when we must change a worker and the reasons why and, where possible, organise a planned introduction to the new worker.
- ✓ Record and share information clearly and in an age-appropriate way, using language that shows we care.
- ✓ We will respect and consider diversity and make changes if any specific needs arise from you or your family’s ethnicity, culture, heritage, age, disability, gender, faith, and sexuality.

## Principle two

# Child and family assessments



### You told us:

*“Sometimes, we do have questions about what has happened to us, and why certain decisions were made. We do not always know who we can ask about this; it’s not the kind of question you always feel like asking during a visit with your social worker.”*

### We promise to:

Use our professional skills and experience to write a detailed evidence-based report, called an early help or single assessment, about the different areas in your life such as how you feel about your school, home, friends and family and what activities you like to do.

### How we will do this

- ✓ Create a family diagram, called a genogram or chronology, for each child in the family to help us understand your family history.
- ✓ We will talk to you, your family, carers, and others who work with you to assess what is working well and what actions might need to be taken to keep you safe.
- ✓ We will explain and give clear information about the reason for the assessment and outline the next steps.
- ✓ We will ask you about the strengths and positive aspects of what is working well in your life.
- ✓ We will assess how family members and where you live impacts on your opportunities and development.
- ✓ We will share assessments and reports with you, where appropriate, your parents / carers as we complete them, seeking your views at every stage and discussing with you the outcomes.
- ✓ Once a written assessment or report is completed, we will share this with you, where appropriate, and your parents / carers within five working days.
- ✓ Regularly review and update your assessment when a significant event or change happens to keep your assessment up to date.

## Principle three

# Your wishes and feelings



### You told us:

*"It's not enough to ask us what we think and feel like you are giving us a voice; you need to hear what we say and do something about it."*

### We promise to:

Listen to your wishes and feelings in relation to what is happening in your life and record these carefully, so your voice is always heard and understood.

### How we will do this

- ✓ Use creative methods and observations to capture your wishes, feelings, and experience of family life, even if you are non-verbal.
- ✓ We will use the words you use to describe how you are thinking and feeling about what is happening in your life and record these in the reports, assessments and records we write.
- ✓ We will plan together when making decisions and consider with you if these are working.
- ✓ We will clearly explain any decisions so you can ask questions and know what is happening and the reasons why.
- ✓ We will listen to your concerns, to make sure that you are safe. If you are not, we will take immediate action to protect you and keep you safe from harm.
- ✓ We will celebrate your successes and achievements to enable your aspirations to become a reality.
- ✓ We will give clear information and explain how you can make a complaint, challenge decisions, and give feedback when you feel we have done something well, let you down or got things wrong.



## Principle four

# Planning and review



### You told us:

*“The experience of becoming cared for can feel “threatening” and can be as traumatic as previous adverse experiences, or more so. Therefore, this needs VERY careful planning and consideration.”*

### We promise to:

Work together to create a plan which is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART), so you and those who support you feel included and know what needs to change to help make things better and keep you safe.

### How we will do this

- ✓ We will make sure the plans we write have clear goals and outcomes and you are given a copy, where appropriate.
- ✓ Recognise your strengths and ask you what support you think may help.
- ✓ We will ask you who you think will be best to invite to your meetings so we can work together to meet your needs in a shared and supportive way.
- ✓ Hold regular reviews and work together with everyone who supports you so we can check we are making positive progress, and there is no drift and delay.
- ✓ We will include you and those that support you in the decision-making process so that we can work together to create a plan that works for you.
- ✓ We will be open and honest with you when decisions need to be made to keep you safe, so you can ask questions to understand the reasons why.
- ✓ We will let you know when we cannot achieve planned outcomes or keep to timescales and the reasons why.
- ✓ Make sure the support you receive is right for you and we will discuss together when it feels like a right time for the support to end.

## Principle five

# Reflection, supervision and management overview



### You told us:

*“Explain your decisions to us to help us understand why we can and cannot do certain things.”*

### We promise to:

Reflect on how well we are working with you to make sure that we are making the correct decisions and working together to provide good quality and consistent professional care.

### How we will do this

- ✓ We will provide child and family reflective supervision which will help us to develop our practice, skills and wisdom and ultimately keep children safe.
- ✓ We will provide our staff with personal supervision so that we can support their wellbeing and in turn, they can support yours.
- ✓ We will make sure that managers record and take action to recognise good practice, and challenge and improve poor practice.
- ✓ We will provide regular training and development for our staff and managers so that they are qualified and skilled within their role.
- ✓ Ask our partners to challenge us when we are not providing high standards of support so we can improve.
- ✓ If you are not safe or need additional support, we will make sure we respectfully challenge parents, carers, and professionals to explore how we can work together to best meet your needs.
- ✓ We will regularly review these principles, our cared for and Special Educational Needs and Disability pledge to provide good quality services.
- ✓ We will listen and take responsibility when we get things wrong and learn from our mistakes to improve and develop our practice.

## Principle six

# Your right to information



### You told us:

*“I contacted professionals and didn’t get a response; I was left waiting and when information arrived it contained lots of inaccuracies. This made me feel there was a lack of respect and care.”*

### We promise to:

Protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will clearly explain to you about your information rights with regards to the information we collect, store, and share about you.

### How we will do this

- ✓ Ask for consent (permission) to seek and share information whenever possible, except in circumstances where safeguarding concerns place you or others at risk of harm.
- ✓ We will explain and provide you and your family/carers with information about your rights.
- ✓ We will support you to request, access or change personal information about you.
- ✓ We will process your personal information lawfully, fairly, and clearly in accordance with data protection law.
- ✓ We will keep your personal information secure in both paper and electronic records.
- ✓ We will make sure that staff are trained and regularly reminded about their responsibilities in handling personal information under data protection law.

# Visiting timescales at a glance

Children, young people and families told us it was important we worked with them in a timely way and that they understood the different timescales we work to in social care practice.

Therefore, we have produced a helpful table below to outline some of the minimum expectations of national and legal timescales you can expect to see in social work practice:

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## Visiting Children

Timescales for visiting children are driven by the child's plan, urgency of their situation or level of concern. Decisions about when/how often practitioners visit are taken in supervision, with these decisions recorded on the child's record and in the child's plan.

### Who is responsible?

Manager

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## Early Help

The frequency of visits is set out in the child's early help plan (minimum expectation, child is visited every 20 working days), enough to enable assessment and intervention to be effective and to allow for a strong review of the child's progress.

Intervention work should aim to be completed within a 12–16-week period.

### Who is responsible

Family and Professionals

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## Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The decision about the type of response the child needs and suggestions / feedback to the referrer is made within two working days of a contact being received by the MASH team.

If a serious child protection concern is raised (section 47), the child is visited within one working day.

### Who is responsible

Social Worker

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## Single Assessment Timescales

Single assessments are carried out within a maximum of 63 (45 working) days.

The Manager will review the progress of the single assessment within 10 working days (deciding whether no further action is required, and the assessment can be closed, or whether further work is needed; again at 20 working days; and signed off with appropriate comment / action to meet good standards by 45 working days.

The single assessment should be updated:

- As a minimum once every 12 months.
- Prior to a child becoming cared for.

- When any significant change or incident requires updated assessment and planning.
- Prior to a young person's Pathway Plan being started.
- Where there is a proposed significant change to a care plan.
- Where progress is not seen to be made.
- When a manager with clear reasoning considers it necessary.

### Who is responsible

Manager  
Social Worker

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### Child In Need (section 17)

As set out in the Child In Need Plan (agreed with a manager).  
Child is visited at least every 4 weeks (20 working days).

### Who is responsible

Social Worker

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### Child subject to a Child Protection Plan (section 47)

Child is visited within a maximum of 48 hours, thereafter, as set by the initial Child Protection Conference & Core Group.

Child is visited at least every 2 weeks (10 working days).

### Who is responsible

Social Worker

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### Cared for Child

On the day that the child is placed, then within 1 week of the beginning of the placement.<sup>1</sup>

Post new placement visiting should take place on a weekly basis for the first four weeks or until the first cared for review (whichever is sooner).

A child should then be seen every six weeks during the first year of any placement.

During subsequent years a child should be visited every six weeks unless permanent matching of that placement has been formally agreed at this point visiting frequency will reduce to 12 weekly.

A child or foster carer regardless of placement status can be asked to be visited as and when required.

Where the child has a series of short breaks, they are seen as a minimum twice a year in that setting (at least one is unannounced).

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<sup>1</sup> We understand the word placement is a term cited in national government publications and guidance. We know through research that children have told us the use of this word can be negative to their experience of care. We therefore support the exploration of using a term that best supports the language used by a child/young person to describe where they live when working with them.

Immediately on the day if a complaint is received from the child or from another person relating to the child concerning the standard of care they are receiving; or if there is any safeguarding concern.

These are minimum requirements and the cared for review or a child's needs may recommend more frequent visits than stated above.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children with disabilities**

Timescales for visiting children with disabilities is completed every four weeks (20 working days).

Children open to the disabilities team (held within the non-statutory pathway) are visited every 12 weeks.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children and young people who are placed in a series of short breaks (short break care arrangements, or short stays with relatives)**

Within the first seven placement days then within 3 months of the first placement day.

Intervals of no less than six months after the first visit.

Unannounced at least once a year if placements interval is more than six months.

At least annually the child's sleeping arrangements will be seen.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children placed in adoptive placements**

Within the first week of the placement and weekly thereafter until the first review.

Thereafter, the frequency of visits is determined at the child's Adoption Review or, if not specified, every six weeks for the first year and after this, three-monthly.

Additional visits are arranged where there are any concerns.

Social worker visits as per Placement Plan, until Adoption Order made, or placement ended.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children who are privately fostered**

Within 9 days (7 working days) from the date of notification to the local authority.

Intervals of not more than six weeks during the first twelve months.

Intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any 2nd or subsequent year.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children with temporarily approved foster carers or parents under Interim Care Order**

Weekly until the first review.

Every four weeks thereafter until the carer is approved or final hearing completed.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children subject to a Care Order and placed at home with parents**

Within the first week

The child should be visited weekly until the first review or the first four weeks which ever is sooner. Intervals of no more than six weeks thereafter.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children who are reported as missing**

The 'Torbay children missing from home or care' procedures are followed – on the Torbay Safeguarding Children Board and Southwest Child Protection Procedures website.

Return Home conversations expected within 72 hours of the child's return, referring to the above procedures.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Children in more than one placement – residential school and foster care or residential home**

Visited in each living situation, at least every 12 weeks.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

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### **Cared Experienced young people aged 18-25**

At least every 2 months by their personal advisor.

In addition, keeping in touch by phone, text or email based on the Young Person's preference.

Frequency and type of communication agreed with the Young Person and set out in their Pathway Plan.

### **Who is responsible**

Social Worker

# Glossary

## Word

## Meaning

Age Appropriate

This means we will consider the ways in which we work with you in line with your age, so they make sense to you.

Assessments

This is a document that is produced by a professional who gathers information about you and your life to explore what is happening, worries and concerns and what is working well.

GDPR

A law that tells us how we should gather, use, and manage personal data we collect about a person.

Lawfully

Allowed by law.

MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)

The purpose of a MASH is to bring together different agencies in a shared space to enable fast information sharing with the purpose of making effective and quick decisions to safeguard vulnerable children.

Pathway Plan

Every young person aged 16-25 that is in care, or is care experienced, has a pathway plan. It will set out your needs, views, and future goals to support you living independently.

Procedures

Are company guidelines they usually include lists of what is allowed, what is not, and what should be done in certain scenarios.

Prosperous

Successful.

SMART

When setting goals to achieve better results it's important that they are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

SEND

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Self-sufficient

Independent.

Supervision

Is a process that involves a manager meeting regularly and interacting with staff to review their work and provide support.

Working Together Agreement

This is an agreement you and your worker will complete to explore how best you can work together.

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