

## Shifting Mindsets: starting premises when approaching parents and carers











This particular resource focuses on the Practice Principle of 'approaching parents and carers as partners, wherever possible'.

It is designed to be used by professionals both individually and within teams to support reflection on their approach to working with parents and carers.

The resource sets out eight 'new starting premises' and explores what this mindset could allow professionals to do in their work with parents and carers as safeguarding partners.

## Why is this resource needed?

Approaching parents and carers as safeguarding partners can be a powerful way to shape more effective safeguarding actions.

Recognising the expertise of parents and carers offers valuable potential gains for safeguarding partnerships, enhancing agencies' abilities to support and protect individual children, young people and whole communities.

Parents and carers can hold invaluable information about their child and the contexts of their lives, and they can also hold important information about exploiters, safe and unsafe places, and community strengths and challenges.

This approach does not mean applying a 'one size fits all' solution; it requires a nuanced understanding and recognition that circumstances will differ between families, including acknowledging that exploitation and harm can occur within the family context. This requires professionals to respond to parents and carers sensitively and respectfully, recognising that there are circumstances which may make it difficult for some parents and carers to act protectively.







Approach
parents and parents and / or carers as partners wherever possible, assuming they are doing their best to protect their child from harm. They want to work with you to enhance this protection.

• Rethink responses, support pathways and services where risk outside the home is the main concern.

This creates space to: Build on any strengths we notice and offer targeted help where needed.

Cease looking for parent or carer-related 'causation' of harm outside the home; reshape the language, questions and informationgathering approach.

- Reflect on, and challenge, thinking that drives any assumption that parents and carers are not doing their best.
- Adopt a both / and position, i.e. that parents and carers are both doing their best and that an offer of targeted support could help them strengthen their protective actions.

 Refocus exploration of causation on external and contextual factors, thereby broadening and strengthening partnerships and disruptive action.

My other children were under child protection as well, because my son was being groomed, and it went on for two and a half years. I had the neglect label even though they agreed that it was extra-familial abuse. The first time I heard it, I just thought, 'That's unbelievable!' I never, never once neglected my children. I was just spot-on with everything. I went to every meeting, I did the whole police thing, I went to all the support groups they asked me to do. They just said that they didn't have a category. 1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The quotes throughout this document are composite, drawn from many interviews the TCE Programme team completed with parents and carers across England. Composite quotes enable the presentation of complex ideas in an accessible form, while preserving the anonymity of interviewees. We have preserved the ideas and intent of all interviewees in the process of composing the auotes.





STARTING PREMICE

Parents and / or carers are likely to be scared, overwhelmed and feeling powerless when faced with child exploitation and/or extra-familial harm.

- Become more conscious of the power imbalance inherent in interactions with parents and carers.
- Be honest and transparent with parents and carers about the complexity inherent in child exploitation and extrafamilial harm, and the challenges of ensuring whole-system responses.

This creates space to:

- Slow down to more effectively build relationships, using trauma-informed approaches that prioritise the creation of trust and transparency and offer choices wherever possible.
- Relate to parents and carers as equals, to build trusting relationships.
- Recognise parent

   and carers fears and
   explore the tensions
   inherent for them,
   while noting child and
   family strengths and
   other positive factors
   to build on.

I didn't know it was happening. It wasn't until the police and social care knocked at my door. But there's nobody on this earth more worried about my child than me.

 Reach out to families, with collaborative opportunities for discussion and information-sharing while validating their experience and responses.





## Parents and/

Parents and/
or carers may need
support to develop
an understanding of
the dynamics of child
exploitation or
safeguarding
systems.

space to:

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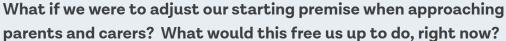
 Start from the same point as the parent or carer; ask them what they're noticing and experiencing.

- Explain safeguarding systems and processes at each step; help parents and carers navigate pathways.
- Share factual information about exploitation and/ or extra-familial harm to help parents and carers make more sense of what they're experiencing and / or witnessing.

 Work together to understand what could be happening to their child and family.

- The exploitation information helped me understand what was happening to my daughter better and it helped our relationship. I hadn't really seen her as a victim before.
- Connect with parents and carers with humility; be mindful of the power imbalance inherent in the interaction (for example, due to professional knowledge and experience).





STARTING PREMICE extra-familial harm and related trauma have likely adversely impacted on relationships in the family home or placement, as well as trust in the community.

 Maintain empathy and curiosity with all family and community members to better understand drivers influencing tensions, conflict,

This

creates

space to:

 Reshape the offer to families of children and young people being exploited to include the option of relationshipstrengthening and whole-family help wherever needed.

Wherever possible, validate experiences, note and highlight strengths and positives to build on, to forge a constructive partnership.

behaviours and actions.

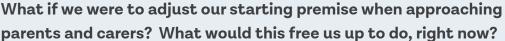
 Offer support to siblings to address their wellbeing (this may help minimise their risk of exploitation).

Work on helping build or repair communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills within the family and/or community.

66 I have no family unit now; my mother won't speak to me. I have no one apart from my partner and his mum, and I just feel we got destroyed because of this... and it wasn't our fault.

Support parents and carers to access peer and community support, facilitating networks and activity where helpful.





STARTING PREMISE

Child exploitation and/or extra-familial harm may be one of many challenges the family is facing and may need help with.

- Be curious about challenges families may be facing, such as poverty, housing problems, a child's educational needs and / or a family's physical and emotional health.
- Explore other sources of help and make referrals to address unmet needs, including support for siblings.

This creates space to:

- Adopt a welfare premise during all contact and as part of all processes with parents and carers.
- Recognise where
   discrimination and
   inequalities are
   impacting the family and
   challenge these where
   you find them, including
   negative stereotypes.
- Consider how a welfare lens may offer ideas for rethinking and redesigning internal processes.

I have to try my very best to switch off from it all because I am a nervous wreck. I refuse to take medication though. And then, because I'm being threatened by adults exploiting my child, they're asking me, 'Would you like to move?' Why should I?

••••







I was raped as a teenager by someone I trusted and it made it really hard to trust professionals when I found out my son was being exploited. The feeling of being responsible... of being blamed, was the same as back then.



## N STARTING PREMICE

Parents and/or carers
have important insights
about their child and
community and are likely to
have information and ideas
that can contribute to
safeguarding.

- Develop a deeper understanding of children and young people, their circumstances, and challenges for the wider community in the local area; share this knowledge with multi-agency partners, with due respect to confidentiality.
- Motivate and inspire parents and carers to become more involved in safety planning and influencing professional actions.

This creates space to:

- Balance power; admit we can't, and don't, know everything about children and young people or the risks present in the places and spaces they visit.
- Spend more time meaningfully including parents and carers in meetings about safety planning and disruption (whilst also building trust and learning).
- Develop links to engage the wider community on risks they face in their local area.

Parents have lots of the information that professionals need, but they don't always listen to us. So, for them to listen to parents - it's so important from day one.





STARTING PREMISE

The circumstances, needs and context for each family will be different and unique and will require a tailored response.

- Identify and challenge practice approaches and processes that are exclusionary, in order to understand and engage more meaningfully with families from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.
- Redesign services to enable more inclusive, flexible and culturally sensitive support.

This creates space to:

- Approach each family with a welfare-oriented lens, tailoring support (and levering in additional resources) to meet the family's specific needs.
  - Create safety plans
     which recognise both
     the individual family's
     needs and take into
     consideration the
     context of wider
     challenges and
     difficulties, including
     trauma stemming from
     shared experiences.
  - Look for opportunities to improve the coordination of support between agencies.

Support must be bespoke. Not all children with extra needs are the same and their families certainly aren't.

I was referred to a parenting course; they refer everyone.

I felt like I was wasting my time. Some families clearly needed a lot more help than I did, and I didn't get the practical help I needed.

We would like to thank staff at Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE), The Children's Society (TCS), Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) network and National Working Group (NWG) for their generous feedback and contributions to this resource. Huge gratitude to the thirty-nine parents and carers we spoke to through our consultation sessions for sharing their experiences and ideas on what needs to change.

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