

Skills framework

For developing effective relationships with vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for children and young people



as long as it takes

Context

Previous research and evaluations show that developing an effective professional relationship makes a real difference in improving outcomes for service users. No matter how programmes and funding may change, it is the human relationships that are ‘core to the delivery of effective services.’¹ Yet too often they are overlooked. The Munro review² also identifies the importance of forming relationships with families and the skills and experience of the social workers in being able to achieve this. Developments in other parts of the UK including a strategy for social work reform in Wales³

and the Children’s Hearings Act legislation in Scotland⁴ are underpinned by the importance of professional expertise and knowledge in improving outcomes for children and young people.

York Consulting were commissioned by Action for Children to undertake research to articulate how Action for Children professionals develop effective relationships with parents and how this makes a difference for children and young people. Three key outputs have been produced from the research:

Output	Purpose
Skills framework	A skills framework has been developed that identifies the key qualities and experience, skills and knowledge that are essential to developing effective professional relationships with vulnerable parents in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. This is across three broad stages of relationship development – building rapport with parents, identifying needs and meeting needs.
Organisational framework	The organisational framework identifies organisational qualities that support the development of effective relationships between practitioners and vulnerable parents. It also provides examples of how Action for Children services are delivering these organisational qualities.
Final study report	The final study report draws on the literature review and case-study evidence to outline the key aspects and competencies required by practitioners to deliver an effective relationship with vulnerable parents. It also provides examples of how Action for Children services are delivering effective relationships with vulnerable parents.

This document is the skills framework, the purpose of which is to define the key aspects of effective professional relationships and the competencies required to achieve them, in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. It has been developed across three broad stages of relationship development – building rapport with parents, identifying needs, and meeting needs. The framework is structured to identify: practitioner qualities and experience – ‘**being**’, practitioner skills – ‘**doing**’ and practitioner knowledge – ‘**knowing**’.

Developing the skills framework

The skills framework was developed drawing on the findings from existing literature and five case studies undertaken in Action for Children services across the UK. We also engaged an advisory panel involving experienced practitioners and researchers in the field, to provide feedback on the framework, supporting its development and refinement.

The in-depth case studies explored (across a range of service contexts) how Action for Children services deliver effective relationships with parents. Staff and managers provided feedback on the framework, highlighted

the most important features of the parent-practitioner relationship and gave detailed, illustrative examples at an **organisational** and **parent-practitioner** level of how they had developed effective relationships with vulnerable parents, using the qualities, skills and knowledge detailed in the framework. These practice examples have been included in the framework to illustrate how using these skills in everyday practice can help develop good relationships with parents and contribute to improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

Organisational qualities

The role of organisations in supporting the development of effective parent-practitioner relationships should not be underestimated. The literature review and case-study research identified a number of organisational qualities that support the development of good relationships.

An overview of these is provided in **Figure 1** overleaf. The separate organisational framework expands on the importance of these qualities and the role they play in supporting the development of effective parent-practitioner relationships.

Family and service context

We recognise that there are also external factors that may influence the relationship between parents and practitioners. In particular:

- ▶ the motivation of parents to enter into support services, associated professionals and expectations of outcomes
- ▶ parents' acknowledgement of issues, capacity to change
- ▶ conflicting motivations to change within the family
- ▶ parents' attitudes and beliefs about service context
- ▶ level of family need
- ▶ the stage of the relationship between parents and practitioners

Neither this skills framework nor the organisational framework are intended to comment on how these external factors might influence the type of qualities, skills and knowledge required by practitioners. The final study report does, however, explore how they can influence the relationship between parents and practitioners in more detail.

¹ Deep Value: A Literature Review, Kate Bell and Matthew Smerdon, Community Links, February 2011 ² The Munro review of Child Protection: Final Report A Child-Centred System, Professor Eileen Munro, May 2011 ³ Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action 2011 (Welsh Assembly Government) ⁴ Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Scottish Parliament)

Framework for developing effective relationships with vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for children and young people

Practitioner qualities and experience

Organisational qualities

Skills

Knowledge

Organisational qualities

Effective relationships with vulnerable parents

Outcomes for children and young people

Figure 1: framework overview

Qualities and experience

1. Child-focused
2. Warm, respectful and sensitive
3. Action-focused
4. Engage and build trust
5. Support and challenge

Skills

1. Empowering and enabling families
2. Communication skills
3. Planning skills
4. Decision-making and problem-solving skills
5. Providing a flexible and non-prescriptive approach to delivery
6. Engaging and working with other services
7. Self-awareness and self-reflection
8. Ability to interact positively with children and young people

Knowledge

1. Technical and professional expertise
2. Awareness of equality and diversity issues
3. Understanding family context
4. Knowledge of support available

Organisational qualities

Organisational level:

1. Strong management commitment and ethos
2. Practitioner training and development
3. Effective supervision
4. Creating a welcoming environment

Delivery level:

1. Team development and support
2. Flexible delivery
3. Facilitating multi-agency services
4. Consistency in approach to working with parents

Family level:

1. Supporting service accountability
2. Strong assessment process
3. Making other services accountable

Practitioner qualities and experience

When working with vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for children and young people, **practitioners should always be:**



Child-focused

With a clear commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people:

- ▶ keeping a clear focus on the outcomes that parental support is aiming to achieve for children and young people
- ▶ having the ability to make difficult decisions to meet the needs of children and young people

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

Parents informed Action for Children staff that their son had a medical condition, admitting that they teased him excessively about it. An Action for Children practitioner told the parents that teasing their son and making threats was unacceptable, and that she would have to discuss the issue with their son and her manager.

The practitioner discussed with the father how he could better deal with his son's health condition in a sensitive manner. This included helping him understand the impact of the language he used on his son, encouraging him to use more appropriate language. The practitioner also worked with the young person to increase his knowledge of the condition and understand why he needed to take his medication.

As a result of the practitioner working intensively with the family, the father and son now communicate in a much more effective way and their relationship has improved considerably. The young person now feels that his father deals with his condition very well, with no name-calling or threats. The young person is now managing his condition more effectively and feels he is able to talk openly with his father about it.

Example

The young mother in this family was living with an older partner. There had been domestic abuse between the man and his previous partner and the children in the family were subject to a child protection plan because of this. There were some issues related to one of the children's development, the interaction between the mother and this child and the child's engagement in play activities.

The family support worker commented that she often sat on the floor to play with the child. At first the mother would not sit on the floor or join in, but eventually, following regular visits, the mother started to join in. The family support worker said this helped her develop a relationship with the child and the mother who was then encouraged to start attending the Action for Children service.

The domestic abuse resurfaced in the family. However, the support provided by the Action for Children service had provided the mother with the confidence to leave with the children and go to a refuge, ensuring that the children were safe. The family support worker did not feel the mother would have done that without the relationship they had developed.

When working with vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for children and young people, **practitioners should always be:**



Warm, respectful and sensitive

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The parent in this family moved into the service's residential block due to anti-social behaviour issues and all three of the parent's children had been placed in care. The practitioner was open and respectful to the parent which allowed her to develop a good relationship with her. The practitioner's approach when working with all parents was to say 'I will be completely honest with you and will strive to do anything I can to help you and ensure the right decisions are made for your children, but you have to help yourself.'

The practitioner kept the parent updated regularly, ensuring she was 'kept in the loop' regarding information pertinent to her and her children. The practitioner on occasions had to challenge the parent by explaining to her what the consequences would be if she did not comply with the support provided through the service. The practitioner always displayed sensitivity in her interactions with the parent: 'I really listened to her. I listened to her body language and mood. Other professionals would put her back up straightaway by the way they spoke to her and I had to say to her on many occasions 'don't lose your temper with them.'

The parent is now able to recognise that she needs to address her issues before there could be any consideration of whether her children might be best served by living with her again. The parent's confidence has grown and she has a new partner who was reported to be stable and a good influence on the parent by the practitioner.

Example

The family support worker welcomed a new parent with low self-esteem into a group that she was running at the service. She aimed to create a welcoming, warm environment within the group to enable the parent to feel she could approach her and talk about any issues that she wanted to raise.

The parent shared her concerns with the family support worker about her child in relation to his sleeping, eating and communication. She made sure that there were opportunities for the parent to ask her questions and then gave her honest answers and advice on parenting.

The mother fed back to the family support worker that she valued being listened to and being encouraged to share her thoughts. The relationship has continued to develop and the mother continues to ask the family support worker for advice and support on other issues. The issues initially raised by the mother have all shown signs of improvement as a result of support.

Practitioner qualities and experience

When working with vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for children and young people, **practitioners should always be:**



Action-focused

With a realistic but persistent and ‘can-do’ attitude to resolving issues:

- ▶ clearly focused on addressing needs and achieving outcomes for children, young people and families
- ▶ keeps up the momentum of support
- ▶ quickly addresses practical or pertinent issues hindering family engagement in support

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The mother in this family has two children and had previously suffered from post-natal depression. She had some confidence issues and rarely left the house. The mother was also suffering from a severe back condition, which was having a negative effect on her ability to interact and play with her children.

The family support worker worked with the mother to identify appropriate support for her and her children. She provided ongoing encouragement to the mother that she could address issues and move forward. She encouraged the mother to recognise and seek treatment for her back condition, which she had previously been reluctant to do; helped her complete forms to claim disability benefits; and encouraged her to attend a programme, which aimed to get her back into employment, education or training.

Listening and providing reassurance was an important aspect of the relationship the family support worker developed with the mother, particularly where the mother displayed anger

about her situation and health condition. In these situations, the family support worker gave her the time and space she needed and made sure the mother knew she was there for her if she needed her.

There have been positive benefits for the children through the support provided by the Action for Children service. The mother is now able to take a more active role with her children as she is receiving treatment for her back. Furthermore, through her involvement in the nurturing and relaxation courses, she learnt useful techniques, which she has been able to put into practice in her own approach to parenting.

Both the family support worker and the mother were positive about the outcomes achieved through the support provided by the service and the positive relationship they had established: ‘She’s given me more faith in people. She’s built my confidence to move forward, to take action – especially about my back and housing.’ (Mother)

To develop an effective relationship with vulnerable parents, practitioners need to:



Engage and build trust

With parents and families:

- ▶ engage on a person-to-person level, be down to earth
- ▶ demonstrate a genuine interest in the parents and children
- ▶ empathise in a realistic way, avoid patronising responses
- ▶ be reliable – do what you say you will do

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

This family were mistrustful of support agencies that had previously worked with them as they felt that their son was getting the blame for behaviour that they did not feel he was responsible for. The family were initially suspicious of Action for Children practitioners and were reluctant to engage in support.

After informal discussions between the family and the practitioner, they began to understand that the service was there to support them and to help them make positive changes for their children. Not only did the practitioner show an interest in the young person involved with the Action for Children service, they also provided support and guidance for his sibling.

The practitioner felt that providing support to the whole family helped develop a trusting relationship, which showed that there was a desire to improve outcomes for all family members. The mother in the family identified the practitioner's 'down-to-earth approach' as being central to building a positive relationship. As a result of this, the family engaged in the support on offer and were receptive to the suggestions the practitioner provided to improve outcomes for the children.

Example

The mother in this family had no friends, lacked confidence and experienced panic attacks. Due to these issues, her son did not have opportunities to interact with children his own age. The family support worker was open with the mother from the outset of their relationship and told her that there were concerns that her child was not meeting his developmental milestones due to his relative isolation. She listened to the mother's views and gave her time to talk about her life and to share the information that she felt able to provide.

After a number of meetings, the family support worker was able to encourage the mother to attend the Action for Children service to look at the nursery as a potential opportunity for her child. This was the first time that the mother had been out of the house in a long time. The mother visited the nursery and expressed satisfaction with the facilities and a nursery place has been booked for her child. The staff will continue to support the parent, encouraging her to attend services.

Practitioner qualities and experience

To develop an effective relationship with vulnerable parents, practitioners need to:



Support and challenge

Parents, children and young people to resolve issues, improve outcomes and move forward:

- ▶ help parents understand, recognise and take ownership of issues and solutions
- ▶ make clear assessments about child protection concerns
- ▶ be direct about concerns and the consequences of safeguarding disclosures
- ▶ offer ideas and solutions
- ▶ be realistic about what can be achieved, clear about what support is on offer
- ▶ be assertive and consistent
- ▶ challenge parental resistance to positive solutions and ideas
- ▶ recognise positive achievements, build confidence

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The mother in this family has three children and issues with drug misuse. All children were placed in care due to the mother's exposing the children to risky situations.

The practitioner had to both support and challenge the mother to try to make her understand that her behaviour meant that currently the best thing for her children was that they were in care and she therefore needed to change her behaviour and accept support for this, before there could be any consideration of whether her children might be best served in the

future by living with her again. The practitioner worked with the mother to try to get her to realise that her children should be the priority in her life. She reported that she was firm and fair with the mother.

Through the support received from the Action for Children service and the relationship developed between the practitioner and the mother there have been major changes in the parent's confidence and the practitioner felt that the parent was making the right changes in her behaviour.

Practitioner skills

1. Empowering and enabling families
2. Communication skills
3. Planning skills
4. Decision-making and problem-solving skills
5. Providing a flexible and non-prescriptive approach to delivery
6. Engaging and working with other services
7. Self-awareness and self-reflection
8. Ability to interact positively with children and young people

1

Empowering and enabling families

Working in partnership with parents, children and young people to address and take ownership of their issues



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ focus on increasing families' independence and self-reliance
- ▶ help parents, children and young people define the outcomes that they want to achieve
- ▶ work with parents, children and young people to build skills and resilience, supporting them to overcome challenges
- ▶ provide opportunities and support for parents, children and young people to practice new skills or behaviour
- ▶ be clear about expectations of parents – seek commitment

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The mother in this family lacked confidence and self-esteem, her children were subject to a child protection plan and she would not engage with the parenting group offered by the Action for Children service. The Action for Children support worker played a key role in building the parent's confidence and independence. The parent accepted the support worker's offer to attend the first parenting group with her. Through this support the mother's confidence increased, her interaction with

others improved and she got to know the other mothers at the group.

The support has had a positive impact on the children through the parent putting in place morning routines and the children's attendance at school improved. The mother also began to address the children's poor behaviour, and continued to attend the mother and toddler group. Through the help the family received from the Action for Children service, the children are no longer subject to a child protection plan.

Practitioner skills

2

Communication skills

Conveying information in a way that parents, children and young people understand

Listening and questioning skills



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ concentrate completely on what the parent is saying – engage in active listening
- ▶ study parents' non-verbal communication
- ▶ avoid interrupting
- ▶ ask open questions
- ▶ prompt, explore and summarise
- ▶ use body language and gestures to show attention
- ▶ value what the parent is saying without necessarily believing everything they say
- ▶ clarify information to make sure there is mutual understanding

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The father in this family was misusing alcohol and when intoxicated he would argue with his son. Initially, the father did not connect his drinking with the arguments he had with his son.

The Action for Children practitioner spent time questioning the father about his behaviour and drinking: 'so you argued? Had you had a drink? Oh that's interesting, that happened last time'. It took the father a few weeks to recognise

the link between his misuse of alcohol and the arguments with his son. The practitioner used questioning skills to help the father acknowledge the problem, rather than just presenting him with the problem; and saying 'this is your problem'.

There has been an improvement in the relationship between the father and his son, with a reduction in arguments.

3

Planning skills

Working with parents, children and young people to identify and assess needs

a. Assessment skills



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ make sure assessments are child/young person centred
- ▶ focus on strengths of families as well as weaknesses
- ▶ deal with personal information in a sensitive manner
- ▶ recognise families' existing skills/knowledge
- ▶ use observation and experience to pick up more subtle messages from families – read, understand and analyse situations
- ▶ get behind the labels, eg 'bad parents'
- ▶ avoid making hasty judgements about families – acknowledge when initial judgements and decisions are wrong

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The family support worker was working with a young mother who was having trouble in adapting to her role as a new mother. She wanted to mix with other young women in the same position but lacked the confidence to approach them and did not know where she could meet them.

The family support worker helped the mother to feel at ease on her first visit to the Action for Children service through meeting her at the front gate and making her feel welcome. During

this initial meeting, the family support worker talked to the mother about her role and the activities available at the centre.

The mother is now engaging in activities at the centre and her child attends the crèche during the mother's visits. This has expanded the mother and child's opportunities for socialising and encourages them to learn new skills and make new friends. The child has become much more confident and her language skills are developing.

Practitioner skills

3

Planning skills

Working with parents, children and young people to identify and assess needs

b. Goal and target setting, monitoring and reviewing progress



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ work with families to identify realistic goals/targets
- ▶ ensure that improving child outcomes are central to all goals/targets set
- ▶ set clear timescales for achieving goals/targets
- ▶ regularly review family progress against goals/targets
- ▶ introduce new goals/targets if needed
- ▶ discuss unresolved family issues via supervision/line management
- ▶ measure and evidence the outcomes achieved for children, young people and families

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The child in this family was attending playgroup hungry and still in their pyjamas. The Action for Children practitioner negotiated and discussed with the child's mother what they could do and what she could do to resolve these issues. Playgroup staff agreed to give the child breakfast if the mother made sure the child was washed and changed in the morning. Staff intervention made sure that the child was not going hungry and had a nutritional start to the day. They also encouraged the mother to ensure that the child was appropriately dressed and ready to access activities.

c. Planning for the end of support



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ consider the potential risks and implications of ending support
- ▶ consider the need for ongoing support to meet outstanding family issues – drawing in support from other services where needed
- ▶ agree an exit strategy, making sure families are prepared for the support to end
- ▶ celebrate successes and outcomes achieved with families

4

Decision-making and problem-solving skills

Working through problems with parents, children and young people and making the right decisions (in sometimes difficult and challenging circumstances) in order to meet family needs and improve outcomes



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ work with families to prioritise and generate options for dealing with issues
- ▶ work with families to make joint decisions (where appropriate and possible)
- ▶ recognise when safeguarding action is needed and work with others to
- ▶ implement effective arrangements to keep children and young people safe
- ▶ provide new information or a different way of looking at situations to help families move forward
- ▶ resolve conflicts

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

In this family, the Action for Children practitioner worked with the mother to help her develop a more positive relationship with her social worker.

The mother often wanted the practitioner to pass on information to her social worker. The practitioner was keen not to take over this responsibility because she was aware of the family's previously negative experiences of working with other professionals.

She therefore encouraged and supported the mother to do this herself.

The mother developed a much more positive relationship with her social worker and she began to realise that the social worker was also there to support her family. As a result of the work, the children and mother stopped being frightened of the social worker and were more receptive to the support she provided.

Practitioner skills

5

Providing a flexible and non-prescriptive approach to delivery

Tailoring support for parents, children and young people to make sure that individual needs are met, engagement in support is sustained and outcomes for children and young people are achieved



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ have the time to develop relationships with parents
- ▶ identify suitable support to meet families' needs
- ▶ provide support that puts parents, children and young people at the centre, with a clear understanding of how support will lead to improved outcomes
- ▶ promptly respond to emerging issues and tailor support accordingly
- ▶ be flexible in the location and timings for support, considering families' needs and circumstances
- ▶ set timescales for support, but with in-built flexibility
- ▶ have high expectations of families and other services and practitioners

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The child in this family was presenting challenging, attention seeking behaviour that her grandmother struggled to manage (her mother was in prison). It was a challenge to get the grandmother to attend the parenting group provided by Action for Children, but the parenting worker succeeded using a number of strategies:

- ▶ overcoming barriers: organising transport and providing solutions to all other barriers presented until the grandmother eventually agreed to attend
- ▶ persistence: letters, phone calls etc
- ▶ spending time, asking how things were for her
- ▶ using knowledge of the child to draw the grandmother into conversations in the group

- ▶ building up a relationship with the grandmother and creating a link with her as a person, not an organisation: 'We're expecting you to come, we will be disappointed if you don't...'
- ▶ seeking information to understand what might cause the grandmother stress within the group setting, eg ability to read handouts at parenting groups

The support provided by the service and the relationships developed helped build the grandmother's confidence and identified strategies to deal with difficult behaviour. This has led to an improved relationship between the grandmother and the child.

6

Engaging and working with other services

Drawing in support from other services to meet parents, children and young people's needs



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ work in partnership and co-ordinate support across services
- ▶ recognise professional and service boundaries
- ▶ share appropriate information on families
- ▶ appropriately signpost and refer families to other services
- ▶ support families in accessing other services, advocating where necessary
- ▶ keep up the momentum of support through ongoing liaison with other services

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The mother in this family had a poor relationship with her child's school. The practitioner worked with the teachers, the school principal and other support staff in the school to re-establish and maintain their relationship with the mother, which in turn resulted in improved outcomes for the child.

The practitioner liaised closely with school staff and the parent to achieve a positive outcome. This included regular meetings, reports and more frequent communication between both parties.

The child's well-being and engagement in education has improved as he is now attending school regularly. The parent's confidence is also restored in her child's school.

Practitioner skills

7

Self-awareness and self-reflection

An awareness of how a practitioner's own experience, feelings and behaviours may influence relationships with families



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ accept own strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ constantly learn, evaluate and refine practice with families
- ▶ reflect on own beliefs and attitudes and how these might impact on relationships with families
- ▶ undertake ongoing self-reflection of the power balance between practitioners and families
- ▶ be aware of factors that may influence the parent-practitioner relationship (eg ethnicity, socio-economic background, how parents present themselves)

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The practitioners within the service share experiences and have opportunities to reflect as a team, which adds to the more formal supervision discussions. The parenting team works well together, they have 'gelled and trust each other' which creates an ethos where they can reflect and share with each other in an informal way.

This team has evolved over time and the service manager has supported its development by always being clear about what they want to achieve and the focus on outcomes for children; and engendering an environment where team members feel they can bring ideas, with others being open to what they think/feel.

8

Ability to interact positively with children and young people

To understand the impacts of support on children and young people



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ engage positively with children and young people when working with parents
- ▶ use experience and knowledge of child development to interact with children and young people
- ▶ observe and evidence the outcomes of parental support on children and young people

Practitioner knowledge

1. Technical and professional expertise
2. Awareness of equality and diversity issues
3. Understanding family context
4. Knowledge of support available

1

Technical and professional expertise

The knowledge and understanding required by professionals to perform effectively in their role



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ understand relevant law and policy areas relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and how it is applied in the organisation
- ▶ understand what is meant by safeguarding and the different ways children and young people may be harmed
- ▶ understand their own role in safeguarding and when information can be shared
- ▶ understand child development
- ▶ understand the child or young person's position in a family and the importance of parental engagement in achieving outcomes
- ▶ have the appropriate technical knowledge for the professional role and strive to develop and enhance this knowledge on an ongoing basis

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

There were issues with the mother in the family having relationships with partners who might place her children at risk. The Action for Children practitioner listened and took account of the mother's needs, her age and her experiences of being parented, while maintaining a clear focus on the welfare of the children. The practitioner supported the mother to be honest with social services, and from

this was able to support her to understand the potential safeguarding issues for her children.

The practitioner cited high-profile examples from the media where a mother's vulnerability had placed her child in risky situations. This encouraged the mother to reflect on her own actions and what she needed to do to ensure that her children remained safe.

Practitioner knowledge

2

Awareness of equality and diversity issues

Understanding of how issues of equality and diversity may influence support



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ be able to identify and reflect on diversity issues
- ▶ understand parents in their wider family and cultural context
- ▶ reflect on own stereotypes and attitudes to ensure that this does not have a negative impact on support
- ▶ consider how the gender and cultural background of professionals may influence family engagement

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The service recognises that practitioners' ability to respond appropriately to cultural issues in order to provide accessible support is crucial. This may involve appropriately matching practitioners to parents. This is to ensure that practitioners understand parents in their cultural context.

The service considered how they matched practitioners to parents in terms of experience, background and personality. This was felt to maximise their ability to build positive relationships with parents and the outcomes to be achieved for children, young people and families.

3

Understanding of family context and needs

Understanding of how different family needs and context may influence engagement and the type of support provided



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ use knowledge of family needs and context to tailor support accordingly
- ▶ recognise that the relationship with families will be influenced by a number of factors – nature of problems, culture, historical experience, personal qualities, interpersonal skills, socio-economic circumstances and willingness to engage

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

This family had a history of working with statutory agencies and there had been issues with staff turnover (ie they had worked with multiple practitioners within the same agency). This meant that they were repeatedly asked to outline the issues they faced, which the mother in the family found particularly distressing.

The practitioner was able to offer the family the reassurance that she would be the key worker from Action for Children who would be involved with the family. This assurance of a key worker and the consistent team approach helped allay the family's fears and meant they were more receptive to working with the service and achieving outcomes for their children.

Practitioner knowledge

4

Knowledge of support available

Knowledge of other services that are available to support parents, children and young people



Practitioners need to:

- ▶ have a sound awareness of local services available to support families
- ▶ understand how the roles, remits and type of support offered by other professionals may assist own practice
- ▶ actively seek opportunities to build knowledge of other services

Action for Children case-study evidence

Example

The administrator is often the first point of contact for parents particularly if they are phoning the service. It is therefore important that the administrator is clear about the support available or the key contacts for a family if their Action for Children

practitioner is unavailable. Having a list of contacts and services that can provide support means that service users can access support quickly, without having to wait for their worker to get back to them.



Want to know more?

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Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

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