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The Importance of Family Networking in Safeguarding Practice



Date: 16 November 2026

Welcome to this Practice Week session

Please be considerate to others - we want this to be a safe, open and reflective space to learn and share thoughts and ideas.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

Please be aware that some of these sessions are being recorded. Your presenter will let you know at the start of the session. If you do not wish to appear on the recording, just keep your camera off.

Thank you!



Families First Partnership Programme: Rebalancing support, help and protection

The Families First Partnership Programme asks us to see family networks as part of the solution, not simply part of the assessment. It places family-led planning at the heart of safeguarding practice, recognising that lasting safety and wellbeing are most often achieved through the people who will remain in a child's life long after professional involvement has ended

The ambition is simple:

- Start with strengths, relationships and naturally connected people.
- Involve wider family and trusted adults earlier.
- Create plans with families, not for families.
- Build sustainable safety through networks that remain when services step back.
- Keep children safe, connected and rooted in family and community wherever possible.

This approach asks us to think differently about who holds the answers. Alongside professional expertise, it encourages us to recognise the strengths, relationships and resources that already exist around children and families, and to create the conditions for those networks to be actively involved in planning and decision-making

From Professional Plans to Family-Led Plans

What does this look like in practice?

Families First strengthens approaches such as:

- Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)
- Family Network Meetings
- Family Network Support Packages
- Earlier engagement of relatives, friends and other trusted adults in planning and decision-making.

When networks are meaningfully involved:

- Families often identify solutions that professionals alone would not find.
- Children experience greater belonging, stability and continuity.
- Support is shared across a wider group rather than resting on one caregiver.
- Plans are more likely to be owned by families and sustained over time.

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Case Study

Engaging the family network for children in care



Overview from the Social Worker

The case involves two siblings living together in long-term foster care. They came into care due to concerns about domestic abuse and neglect within their birth family.

They were initially placed with a foster carer who later became their Special Guardian. Unfortunately, due to changes in circumstances, that arrangement broke down and the children returned to care.

Prior to their current placement, they experienced a great deal of instability. They have now been in their current foster placement for almost three years, which is the longest period of stability they have experienced for a very long time.

Reflections with the Social Worker

What did the family network look like when you first became involved?

‘The adult network were at odds with each other and were not child-focused’

‘It was tricky to get everybody on the same page whilst keeping the children central to the planning’

How did you bring the family network together?

‘I remained very, very neutral and always drew the conversation back to the children.’

‘We've acknowledged all of that, but how do we move forward?’

What helped build trust and engagement?

‘A lot of my time was spent containing people's anxieties’

‘It wasn't easy and it was very time-consuming, but it was rewarding’

‘Meeting face to face really, really makes a difference’

Reflections with the Social Worker

Who is now part of the children's network?

‘*Everybody is part of the plan*’

‘The children have had two really lovely family times with their wider family’

Father Inclusive Practice

Working Through the Wider Family Network

‘Because I've got communication with his mum, that feels more supportive in terms of actually putting together this idea about what would feel comfortable for him. What does indirect contact look like and what does direct contact look like for him currently?’

Adapting the Plan Around the Parent

‘He didn't feel comfortable writing a letter or a card, but we came up with the idea of perhaps a video message’.

Finding a way, not finding a barrier - Keeping the Door Open

‘He is part of the plan, even though he's not, because he's been able to successfully do that with the help of his mum’

The Role of Paternal Grandmother

‘She helped him do it. You could see she was the one taking the video message. She sent it to me. I've been able to share it with the foster carer, who's been able to share it with the children.’

Impact

Stability

‘At one point, adult conflict featured so heavily that it distracted from planning for the children and their needs. We're now in a place where their needs are being met in a way that they weren't before’

‘We're seeing that they're much more settled because there isn't this constant conflict and infighting over family time arrangements’

Identity

‘When they're 25, they'll know all of their family and they'll have that sense of identity outside of being a child in care’

The Foundation for Future Relationships - Choice and Agency

‘They will have the choice, won't they, when they're 18, what relationships they have with those people.’

Sarah: ‘They'll have the foundation to have that choice because they know them.’

Advice for other professionals

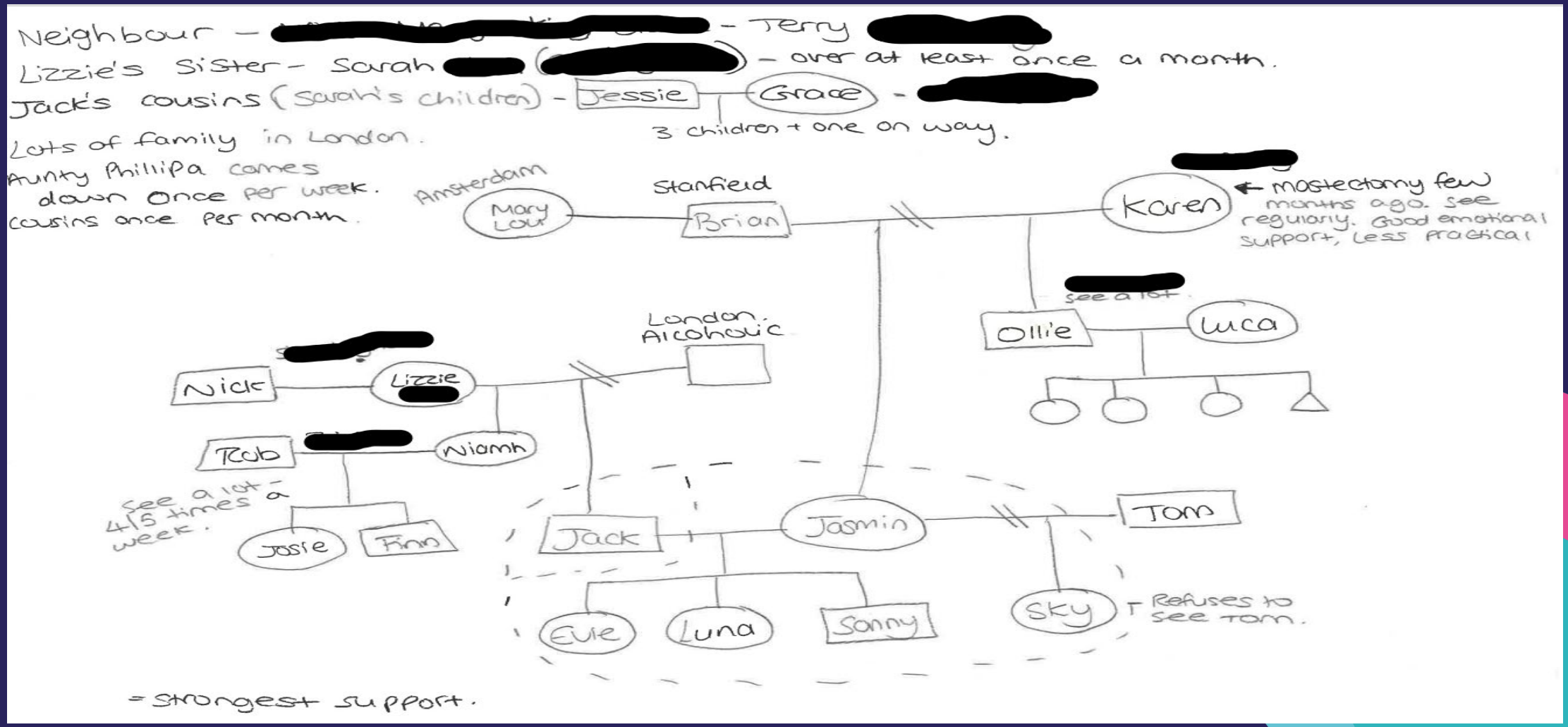
It starts with communication.

It starts with acknowledging and validating where people are, helping them feel heard and understood.

People need space to share their wishes and their hopes for what they would like to happen. We have to be realistic, but we must do this in a way that is not dismissive.

When people feel heard, it becomes possible for the plan to move forward.

Example of network mapping



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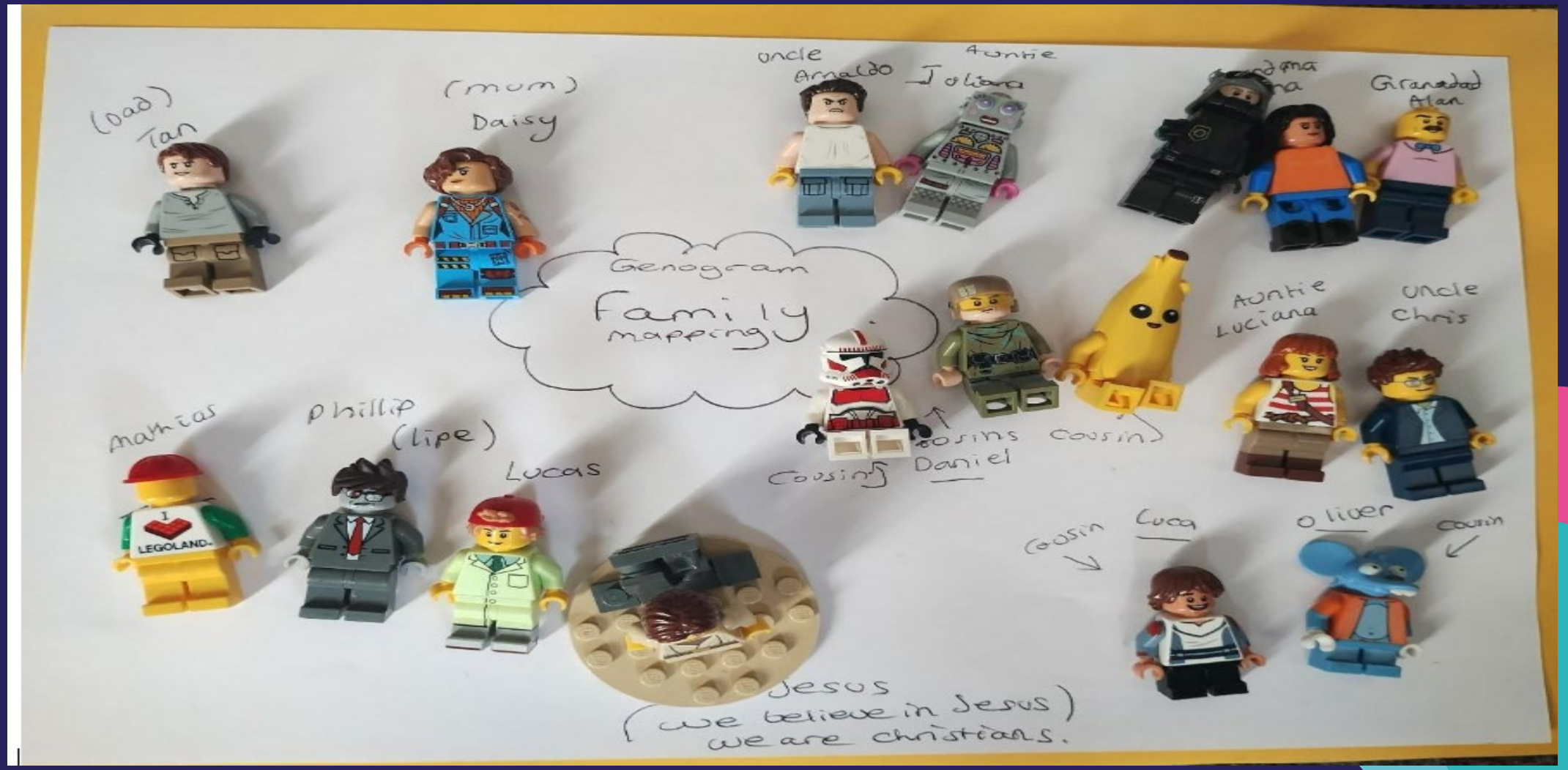

Reflections

What stood out to you from the practitioners' experiences today?

What helped these family networks become engaged, and how can we create more of those conditions in our own practice?

When you think about the children and families you are currently working with, who might be missing from the conversation?

What helps you feel confident involving wider family networks, and what gets in the way?

How early in our involvement are we thinking about family networks, and what difference might it make if we started those conversations sooner?

What is one thing you have heard today that you could take back into your own practice?

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If every child we work with had a room full of people who cared about them, who would be in that room, and what would it take for us to bring them together?

Please provide some feedback - it only takes a minute!

