

Information sheet for workers:

Family Networking with children living at home



**England
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Project**
*Aligning the organisation
to the practice*

Background.

Norfolk started rolling out Signs of Safety across the children's workforce in 2014. The aim was to ensure a restorative and relationship-based approach was taken to protecting children by 'working with' rather than 'doing to' children and families.

The children's workforce does not yet consistently involve wider family and network members in assessment and planning. Furthermore, where a child comes into the care system because no one in the family and wider network can provide them with the stable home they need, they often lose touch with the child. The current system for children who are looked after, and care leavers does not do enough to ensure those that provided love and care to the child when they lived with their parents, are able to continue to do so when they are in foster or residential care.

Norfolk is embedding Family Networking to ensure that all those connected to the child who can be a source of emotional, physical, mental, spiritual or cultural support are able to engage with workers and those caring for the child. This will provide opportunities to make a positive difference to the child's everyday life and give support where required, to have a relationship with the child where this would be in the child's long term best interests.

This way of working enables parents and families to take more ownership of the concerns and risks and be part of putting a plan together with workers to keep children safer and healthier.

What are the principles of Family Networking?

1. Every child/parent has a family and/or network and they can be found if we try
2. A meaningful connection to their family or network helps a child develop and maintain a sense of belonging
3. The single factor most strongly connected with positive outcomes for children is meaningful, lifelong connection to their family and/or network

How does it work when the child is living at home?

Worker Authenticity- A 'bottom line' may need to be agreed in advance.

Consent - The child (depending on age and understanding) and the parents (all those with PR) should be invited at the earliest stage to involve their wider networks in the meeting to help them put a plan together that will keep the child safer/promote their wellbeing.

Finding - The worker, working directly with the child and parents, identify members of the network that could be involved in planning and support. Start with a genogram or ecomap or use safety circles or mobility mapping to help you. Think about exploring the contact the child/children have with supportive people currently e.g. on their birthday, Christmas, or other religious/cultural events, or who they have positive



contact with on social media. Also talk about supportive people from the child or the parent's past.

Engagement - Contact those people identified to see if they would be interested in attending a meeting to help the child and family. The meeting should happen at the earliest point possible, while respecting network members caring or work responsibilities (NB: Where there are imminent risks to the child, the first meeting involving as many people from the network as possible, should happen the same day as the strategy discussion so that an interim plan with a clear bottom line can be put in place that keeps the child safe and out of care).

Meetings - All meetings should start by establishing the ground rules. The members should be empowered to decide what these should be and suggestions could be offered about listening, not interrupting, and taking a break where needed. The number of network members attending should be greater than professional support, and the first meeting should be used to see if anyone from the network has been missed out who could helpfully be included. The network will need to know why they are there and what the bottom line is i.e. what the professional plan will be if the family are unable to improve the safety and wellbeing for the child. This may involve mapping the case as the family network may be aware of other sources of danger or safety that workers do not yet know about. The network should also be made aware of any professional support available. Those people in the network who can show commitment to the child decide what resources, support and/or protection they can provide alongside the professional support required. It should be clear who will monitor the arrangements, and this might be a combination of workers and family/network members working on a rota system that includes weekends.

The Plan- The (safety) plan is written up and shared with all those attending as well as workers, (including CP Chair or IRO where relevant). There should only be one plan for each family network to be working to, whether it is a Family Support Plan, Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan. Where children are the subject of child protection procedures, the family network plan should be taken to the conference by the social worker and members of the network, to form the basis of the child protection plan. The family network will then review progress at core group meetings with the other workers involved. These should be arranged around the family network.

Review- All family network plans must be regularly reviewed to check on progress. Follow up meetings should be arranged for network members to review the plan and make amendments depending on what has worked and what else needs to happen. These meetings should align with statutory responsibilities, i.e. minimum of 6 weekly for CiN and 4 weekly for Child protection.

A 'One plan' model

Working with a child, their family, carers and network should not be an 'add on' to the way workers work, but the way we all work. Similarly, we do not want family members to have two plans to work to, a social worker's plan and the family network



plan. Where social workers and other workers are involved in children's lives, the responsibility of their welfare should be shared with the group, and everyone involved should know what the plan is that we are all working to that keeps the child safe and well looked after.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if the family is unsafe?

You won't know who is safe and able to offer a meaningful commitment to the child until you involve them. The likelihood is that families are far more aware of people who could present a risk than workers and will not agree plans that could place the child in any danger.

Are we doing this already?

Yes, in some services this already happens. We need to make sure it is a consistent approach for all children and a shared vision across Norfolk.

Can the meetings have an informal approach?

Yes, absolutely. We will all need to think about the timing of meetings, venues, and refreshments to ensure the meetings are child/yp and family friendly. If a child is attending the meeting, this will need to be carefully planned so they are not overwhelmed, perhaps by building the network gradually or arranging for the child to attend just part of it. For younger children, the network may need to meet without the child present, at least initially, and they could be shown the plan using words and pictures the network put together for them, as well as photos of the meeting, before they attend in person.

What if a person is considered to be unsafe by the parent, carer or network but the child wants to see them?

The SofS mapping tool can be used to explore risks and safety with the network; what we are worried about, what existing safety there is or could be, and what needs to happen. The child's welfare must be paramount, and they will need to be helped to understand if there are things that can't happen and why, using words and pictures to explain the reasons people are worried. The situation may be able to be kept under review if it is a situation that might change over time, use of a trajectory can help with this.

What will happen if the Family Network Meeting doesn't work out? E.g. the family/network member did not attend, or the venue isn't right?

The network, including the workers, will need to understand why a person didn't turn up. Sometimes parents and other important people in the child's life have their own vulnerabilities that need additional support. The meeting coordinator and network members will need to agree how they will explore this in the best interests of the child/yp. It is important that issues of commitment are not confused with genuine difficulties around timing/transport etc. Offering opportunities to share feedback about the meeting is also very helpful to ensure that everyone feels comfortable to attend.

