



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Embedding the outcomes approach

Find information and resources on how culture, systems and processes need to change to support the embedding of an outcomes approach across our organisations.

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Find information and resources on how culture, systems and processes need to change to support the embedding of an outcomes approach across our organisations.

Balancing rights and responsibilities: considering risk

Balancing rights and responsibilities can be difficult, as professionals often see risk as something to avoid and control, instead of being part of a shared decision-making process.

In reality, taking some risks is an important part of everyday life that supports people to do what matters to them.

We commissioned some work to co-produce practice principles for balancing risks, rights and responsibilities in adult services. The principles set out how social care practitioners can take a positive and shared approach to making decisions about risk.

[Practice principles Balancing risks, rights and responsibilities for adults: a positive approach to risk](#)

PDF 325KB

We'd like to know how we can help you use these principles in your practice, take a moment to [answer our survey](#).

The work builds on a study we produced to help understand how professionals who support people can move towards shared decision making, which found that decision-making should be:

- balanced - recognising the potential for benefit as well as the risk of harm, and considering the possible emotional, psychological, social and physical impact of each option
- defensible - well-founded, justifiable and recorded proportionately, and not defensive or driven by the need to protect ourselves and our agencies
- collaborative - with people who use services, their families and other professionals, using all available resources to achieve the outcomes that matter most to people.

You can read the full report below:

[Positive risk and shared decision-making - by Imogen Blood and Shani Wardle](#)

PDF 410KB

There are common principles across similar models

Children's services currently use several models which might be described as 'outcome focused', 'strengths based' or 'relational'. All of these models are based on similar principles:

- a collaborative relationship between the practitioner and individual/family, developed through active and reflective listening, and based on empathy and a recognition of differences of power
- a belief that change is possible and that ambivalence is natural
- affirming strengths and building on exceptions, balanced with assessing risks
- honest and open conversations with families and others about risks
- working with individuals and families to identify solutions and set goals

- identifying and mobilising wider networks and resources
- taking a whole systems approach to families, communities and services.

What supports practitioners to work in this way?

Effective and regular supervision is key and should:

- ‘hold’ tension and uncertainty by providing a secure base for practitioners to think about and consider their interaction with families and other professionals, and to process their own emotional responses
- constructively scrutinise each other’s judgements
- promote a learning culture where creative practice with families is encouraged and risk and proposed innovation is openly debated
- discuss the values which inform practice
- seek out the exceptions, strengths, desired outcomes and possible solutions with families
- promote shared responsibility for risk.

Other factors that were supportive of practitioners working in this way are:

- developing skills and training, backed up by opportunities to shadow and co-work
- maximising opportunities for earlier intervention
- involving families in safety planning to build their capacity to prevent and respond effectively to crisis in the future
- recognising the impact that poverty can have on families, with practitioners being sensitive to power and structural inequalities.

Watch this video to see how social worker Dawn works with a parent to develop a safety plan:

[View transcript](#)

00:00

So as I said earlier, with this safety plan, we're going to sit down together like we are now

00:08

and we're going to look at what's happening when things aren't going so well at home,

00:12

and what's happening when things are going well at home.

00:16

And how we're going to have more good situations and less challenging periods, okay?

00:23

First we'll look specifically at your relationship with Llyr,

00:27

and also the arguments that happen between you and Peter.

00:34

What can we do to reduce the risk of you arguing, and we'll also think about whether you have friends or family

00:42

who could help you during these difficult times. Does that sound okay? Yes.

00:48

So you noted that the arguing between yourself and Peter worried you

00:55

and that you also worried about money being short.

01:00

We're also worried about the fact that you didn't

01:04

know where Megan or Llyr were when the argument was happening, so I would like to add into

01:10

the plan that if something were to happen again, the children would be safe and we know

01:17

where they would go. Okay? Yes. Oh and remember that this is a flexible plan, we can change it so if you feel that

01:24

things aren't working we can take a second look and go back and reevaluate and try new things.

01:32

Let's think about the times when you and Peter argue, what happens?

01:41

We shout at each other, the two of us say things, just like any argument.

01:49

At times when you and Peter have argued, what's worked then, what's worked before?

01:55

Well he goes out and then I calm myself down.

02:02

So time apart is what helps you both to calm down?

02:07

Yes, but then he goes for a pint and he gets drunk and sometimes he can't go to work the

02:14

next day, so its a never-ending cycle.

02:17

Is there anywhere else he could go? Someone he could talk with?

02:23

No I can't think of anyone, you'd have to ask him.

02:29

Yes I'll come back tonight if that's okay, to chat with Peter.

02:32

It's important that you and I chat but we need to get his point of view too.

02:40

Yes fine.

02:42

So you feel as though you're going round in circles,

02:47

at those times when you're both upset, do you think he understands how you feel?

02:57

No, no he doesn't.

02:59

May I suggest

03:01

that you have time apart in different rooms in the house,

03:06

and that you write down your feelings, at the time when you're wound up, you write

03:13

down what you're each feeling at that time. Then afterwards when you've calmed down, you

03:19

come back together and discuss your feelings with each other.

03:22

Do you think he would be more willing to listen to your side of things then?

03:30

What, if I wrote everything down?

03:33

Yes, do you think that could help?

03:35

Maybe.

03:37

Well the hope is that if it works, there will be

03:41

less arguing and the arguments won't last as long or they won't happen as often.

03:46

You may also start to understand each other a bit better.

03:53

Yes, hopefully.

03:54

So you said family time is important to you,

03:59

could you talk a bit more about your relationship with Llyr?

04:04

Well I just don't think that Llyr understands that we don't have money to go out and buy

04:09

new trainers like his friends have, you know? Once he wanted these football boots and they

04:16

were too expensive, but he couldn't understand that and he was asking why.

04:20

So when he gets his own way, he does stop arguing.

04:27

Can you think of something else that's helped in those situations?

04:33

No nothing's helped, no.

04:37

What if I speak with Llyr too when I come back tonight?

04:42

We can think about how you can improve your relationship, and discuss that when he

04:48

does go out it worries you and maybe it would be a good idea for him to let you know where

04:57

he's going and who he's with. If he does let you know when he'll be home, or you tell him

05:06

what time to be back by, would that help?

05:09

Oh yes. But I'd prefer if he didn't go out with that gang at all, all they do is cause trouble.

05:16

It sounds very difficult, and I understand

05:21

that you want to do your best for your son, but on the other hand it is difficult for

05:28

Llyr too as he just wants to be with his friends. Let's discuss this tonight with Llyr too,

05:35

so that he's a part of creating the plan, usually the plan is more effective if the

05:40

child is part of the discussion and planning.

05:47

As far as Llyr and Pete, I would really like

05:52

it if Pete spent more time with Llyr. Maybe he could take him to football practice or

05:58

something, he needs more attention from his dad. But that's just something else I can't

06:05

get Pete to understand.

06:07

So there are times when the relationship between you and Llyr

06:11

has been good. From what I understand he would be less likely to go out with his friends

06:19

if he went to football practice with Peter. Maybe we could discuss times when he and Peter

06:25

should spend time together, a special time.

06:32

Yeah great if Pete sticks to it, it could work I think.

06:38

Okay so we should put that in the plan tonight. We can discuss all this

06:43

in more detail with Llyr and Peter tonight.

06:45

Yes and maybe they'll listen if you're telling them.

06:49

The other thing we talked about was the fact that Megan left the house without

06:56

asking, so if that happens again or she just needs some time alone, where could she go,

07:08

apart from John's house, because we know that he is a sex offender.

07:11

Nain Keri's house.

07:14

That's your mum yes?

07:16

Yes.

07:17

And how would she get there?

07:19

Well she could just walk there, they don't live far.

07:22

Mum could call me then to say that she's arrived.

07:24

Great idea, I'll put that on the plan.

07:27

So Megan will go to Nain Keri's house and Nain Keri will phone you when she's arrived.

07:33

We can discuss and plan the rest of the plan together tonight, when I'm back.

07:39

I'll leave this copy with you, and this is a plan to keep everyone safe, it's not something

07:46

that's being forced upon you, okay? Fine. When I'm back later I'll discuss with you

07:51

and Peter and Llyr, and we're going to co-produce this plan and I can come back next week and

07:59

we can discuss how it's going and if you have new ideas that could help, we can talk about

08:04

those too. So like having a family meeting? Yes. I'll write this up for you now, and I'll

08:12

bring a copy tonight, and then we can continue when I come back.

08:19

Fine.

08:21

Thank you very much for working with me today, see you tonight.

What gets in the way of practitioners working in this way?

- a performance system which focuses on processes, tasks and outputs, rather than on the quality of engagement and tangible outcomes for children and

young people

- pressure from inflexible timescales
- increasing demand within a context of reduced resources
- a blame culture in services, the wider system and the media which can increase defensive practice
- assumption that a quantifiable threshold is possible in a complex situation
- taking an over-simplistic view of risk factors
- court processes increasing defensive and adversarial practice.

Why is hearing the child's voice in child protection processes important?

- the legislative framework is clear that children should be involved in decision-making when they are subject to statutory processes
- where children are unseen, and their voices are unheard, there is more likelihood of unsafe practices
- effective involvement of children and young people allows practitioners to develop a better understanding of their needs as early as possible
- when they are involved in their plans children and young people are more likely to be empowered, they can feel they are a part of the positive changes happening in their families effectively involved children and young people report more positive experiences in child protection processes.

What children and young people value in child protection services

- the opportunity to build a trusting relationship with their worker

- receiving clear, accessible and timely information about processes, meetings and plans
- being able to decide whether to attend meetings and supported to contribute if they do; or being involved in decision-making in other age-appropriate ways

Watch social worker Ian use the 'drama triangle' to describe how children can view formal interventions from services:

[View transcript](#)

00:06

For those of you who have experience of working in childcare social work, you might recognise

00:14

this in terms of if you're meeting people socially and they say "what do you do for

00:21

a living?" and you say "oh I work in child protection", you get a certain look, where

00:24

they go "oh that's a difficult job, how do you sleep at night, you must be carrying those

00:31

worries at home with you, you must see some horrible sights" etc. If you tell them that

00:37

you work in childcare they think you work in a creche and you get a different kind of

00:43

image, and a different kind of perception of the work that you do. We all know that

00:50

sometimes we work with very challenging situations, particularly those people that are known to MARAC,

00:56

the domestic abuse and stuff like that, and there are challenges for Social Workers. For

01:01

that reason because I live in Neath Port Talbot and my daughter went to school in Neath Port

01:06

Talbot, we sort of made it a point that if she was to be asked about what I did for a

01:14

living, she would say "My dad works for the council". She was also told that if I turned

01:23

up at school, she was to blank me out. Now being a teenage daughter she was quite good

01:28

at doing that in any case. There was this one occasion where she brought a new friend home

01:33

to the house, me and my partner were out at work at the time, and the friend looks at

01:39

the photo and sees a photo of myself and she goes "I know him, I know him. Now where do

01:50

I know him from? What does he do for a job?" and my daughter on cue said "He works for

01:54

the council", "Ah that's where I know him from, he's our bin man".

02:01

Given the choice

02:06

of being seen as the bin man or the child protection Social Worker when I visit a family

02:12

for the first time, I'd rather be seen as the bin man. And the reason for that is this,

02:20

a triangle. Not any old triangle, but the Kaufman Drama Triangle. This has been around

02:26

for about 50 odd years now, and it talks about kind of the dynamics that most of us will

02:32

be familiar with. In terms of team dynamics, sometimes you'll have somebody who'll go into

02:36

the victim role and other members of the team will then go to rescue them. Or sometimes

02:40

you might be in a situation where you're challenging somebody about their behavior and they go

02:47

into the victim role, then suddenly you want to rescue them and pull them out of that situation.

02:53

I think it's a useful model to actually think of when we actually start calling ourselves

02:57

child protection workers, and whether that's actually a good thing to do. So if we use

03:02

this model, I'm a child protection worker, so that must mean I am the child protector

03:08

and the person I'm protecting is the child. So who's the child being a victim of? Already

03:17

we've created a dynamic there where we're actually accusing the parents. Back to the

03:25

triangle, I suppose if we were to ask the parents, they would have a different kind

03:31

of view. They would see themselves as the protective parent, they might have their issues,

03:36

they might have their difficulties, they'd have to recognise that,

03:40

but 'I love my child, I want to care for my child'.

03:43

So they're there to protect the child. And again if we think

03:46

back to Tina's case this morning with the mum and the video that you saw

03:51

"I was mortified when I was first contacted", "I'm going to lose my kids"

03:58

So already we're working with fear.

04:02

And I think Geraint the headmaster really put that quite succinctly this morning, about

04:08

when we're having challenges and under pressure quite often we resort to strategies that may

04:13

not be helpful, we might be less than honest about things. Like when you go to the doctor

04:19

and they ask you how much do you drink? or how much do you smoke? or how much do you eat?

04:24

you probably would give a different answer to what the truth is.

04:29

Neath Port Talbot,

04:32

from the director, heads of service, principal officers, managers always want us to know

04:36

what the view of the child is. So if we were to go back to the triangle, and think about

04:41

the child, I would argue that for many of the children the drama triangle would mean

04:48

that they would see themselves as having to protect their parent. And quite often when

04:54

we're working with families, we have to work through that kind of challenge because they're

04:58

quite frightened about what could be happening. They may want the Social Worker to be supportive

05:04

and help stop certain things that happen, but they don't want to be taken off their parents.

05:08

They don't want their parents upset and distressed. They may love and have a very

05:11

strong bond with their parents, but they may also want certain things to change. I qualified

05:20

just as the Children's Act was coming in and one of the criticisms that was about at that

05:26

time, was that while it was important that things needed to happen in a more timely manner,

05:31

there was a real risk that we'd end up being process-driven, so it was more about the processes

05:36

and more about the evidence, so that we lose sight of things. In 1993 there was a fascinating

05:42

study that was done where they took Social Workers from all across Europe and they got

05:46

them to visit each of the different countries. So the English Social Worker says "they didn't

05:55

discuss evidence at all, I wondered what that says about their system. We spoke about it

06:00

most of the time, I wonder what it says about our system". The French Social Worker says

06:05

"All this talk of proof and evidence, the child is suffering, can't they see that".

06:12

They also went on to make another important point, one of the principles of the Children's

06:18

Act is the best interests of the child is paramount and they said "In France we say

06:25

something similar but we say the best interests of the child is paramount in the context of

06:29

the family". So you've been hearing a lot about the outcome focused approach all day

06:36

and I think quite importantly, as we heard from Andrew Jarrett earlier, is it's not a

06:43

process, it's not a tool that we just deploy, it's actually conceptual thinking, it's important

06:50

that we think about our value systems, we think about our language, and we think about

06:54

how we work with people. So if we go back to the drama triangle, I would suggest that

07:02

the outcome focused model actually gets us to think of us as being the support to a family

07:08

and the perpetrators are maybe the issues about how the parents maybe manage their frustrations.

07:14

So that could be anger management, it could be the domestic abuse, it could be a whole

07:17

range of other things. How do they get support around their substance misuse? How do they

07:22

get support around their mental health? And also increasingly, because one of the things

07:27

that also happens is we quite often have big issues within our societies that we try

07:33

to deal with on a casework basis, and I think more and more we're seeing and the

07:37

evidence is coming forward all the time about how much poverty is starting to impact on

07:43

our families. 68,000 kids in Wales are likely to go to bed hungry during the school holidays

07:48

because they can't get free school meals. Is that a child protection thing or is that

07:55

a community development thing? Is that something about how we approach the work that we do?

08:01

So for me, outcome focus is a good tool. Signs of safety I think is actually a very good

08:06

tool, but unless you actually have that conceptual thinking about how we work, we are really

08:12

going to struggle in terms of bringing about change. So three points that I'd like to finish

08:18

on, we need to learn that the vast majority of our parents want to do the best for their

08:27

kids and we have to trust in that, and I think you've heard that time and time again across today.

08:33

While, and again this is the whole enquiritis thing, it makes us think about

08:39

things always from a severe child protection point of view, the Maria Colwells, the Peter

08:44

Donaldsons etc. And there is this thing about the rule of optimism that its almost as soon as

08:51

you start actually advocating that these parents have strengths, or maybe you're getting caught

08:57

up too much in the parents' abilities and stuff like that. But for me that's something

09:04

about professional cynicism that has come into child protection over the last 20 odd

09:10

years, and that doesn't really help us. And finally I think it's important that we think

09:16

about how we work to build engaging relationships. And that gets us past that issue of disguised

09:22

compliance.

Why collaborate with parents and carers in child protection services?

- better engagement with families improves the ability of workers to get a fuller picture of the well-being of children
- when parents' strengths are recognised by professionals, this can improve their morale and their motivation to change
- increased likelihood of improved outcomes when parents are actively involved in developing child protection plans
- a lack of effective engagement with and support for parents whose children are removed may increase the chances of them being unable to cope as a parent in the future, and having further children removed – particularly for younger parents
- families' experiences and views must be seen as a resource to help improve systems and processes; we can learn from existing practice about what works well to engage parents who may have been initially hostile.

What parents and carers value in child protection services

There is a relatively small body of research evidence regarding the views and experiences of parents and carers within child protection processes. When asked however, there is a consistent message of wanting to be more involved when their children are subject to statutory child protection services. Specifically, parents and carers say they value or would like:

- clear, jargon-free information about the processes and time and support to digest the information at their own pace
- the opportunity to build a relationship with a (ideally one) social worker, who gets to know the family, spends time with their children and acts 'like a human'
- hands-on support, not just monitoring
- a balanced approach with workers and their reports acknowledging parents' strengths and positive intentions, but also being frank and specific about concerns and risks
- conferences which don't involve too many people or too many surprises, and which are as informal and inclusive as possible
- workers who ask parents for their ideas about solutions within their own families, and also seek their feedback about how the wider system and processes might be improved
- plans which set out clearly what is expected of them, focusing on outcomes and not just outputs, and are followed without 'moving the goalposts'
- workers who are non-judgemental, reliable and trustworthy
- workers who really listen and recognise how stressful and traumatic these processes can be for families.

Listen to a parent talk about how being worked with in an outcome focused, strength-based way supported her to make changes for herself and her children:

[View transcript](#)

00:00

I was mortified

00:02

I'm gonna lose my kids

00:05

People telling me, You're not good enough

00:08

You haven't got the family support behind you

00:10

and they are going to take your kids away

00:12

because you're on your own

00:16

So I was initially worried

00:19

I was reluctant to listen

00:22

Because I had those dark voices in my head

00:24

I would lose my kids

00:26

My ex...he would destroy everything

00:29

I struggled, I was in a really low income

00:33

My son's attendance was 63%

00:35

It was terrible

00:36

He was late all the time

00:38

It wasn't he didn't like school because he loved school.

00:41

Because he was in that habit of

00:42

pick and choosing

00:45

Because

00:46

there was a lack of encouragement to make him want to go

00:50

there was a lot of fighting with him then

00:54

Due to lack of order and discipline,

00:57

Everything was chaos in his life

1:00

At the time

1: 2

I'll be honest, I think I was a selfish person

01:04

It was all me, me, me

01:07

Not realizing that it was the children

01:10

All I wanted to do was escape

01:13

I wanted to escape the life I was in

01:16

I was watching my children suffer

01:19

My kids, they deserved better

01:23

They deserved more than me

01:26

I thought I couldn't give them what they want

01:30

Love of family

01:32

So at the time, it was me, it was me

01:35

When Tina came over,

01:37

he asked me what you really want

01:39

what are the outcomes you want for yourself

01:42

It really made me realize,

01:44

I didn't want my kids to be in the position they were in

01:46

I didn't want to be in the position I was in

01:48

I was looking at my children

1:51

and I could see my childhood in them

01:53

They were isolated, unsure

1:57

They were not beaten,

2:00

They were mentally beaten,

2: 3

They could not speak out

02:05

I was that scared little scary girl

2: 9

where I could not speak as a child

02:11

That realization ...

02:14

I did not want my children to be mentally destroyed

02:17

They need a full week at school

02:20

But also that one-on-one with their parents

02:23

That's what school did for me

02:26

They opened that door

02:29

About that one-to-one service with my son, so I can understand it,

02:33

Seeing through a child's eyes

02:35

See it through his own eyes

02:37

In the one to one sessions

02:40

They taught me how to talk to my son

02:45

And get him to open up

02:47

Schools should be able to do that

02:50

Coad Frank acknowledged that

02:53

children need to work with peers and parents

2:59 pm

Basically, what I think is

3: 2

If everyone who is at a Conference meeting

03:07

ready to listen to each other

03:10

... and listening to the parents

03:13

they can understand the distress for the parents

03:18

Because you all understood me

03:21

because you took the time to listen and look

03:26

Anyone can bark orders at you

03:29

You can be a robot all your life

03:32

But it does not fill that darkness and emptiness inside you,

03:36

Until someone asks you

03:39

What do you want for your future,

03:41

for the future of your children

03:44

You step out of that phase of being a robot

03:47

You become a person

03:50

You are recognized as a human being not a robot

03:55

When you are recognized as a person

04:01

Things are getting a little brighter

04:05

Because I'm not an invisible shadow

04:10

I'm not a door mat

04:13

I'm a person

04:14

I have a voice and an opinion

04:17

and someone is interested in my opinion

04:22

that brightens my day

04:24

It's everything ...

04:26

The way they eat is different,

04:29

My son wouldn't eat any fruit or vegetables,

04:34

He eats every vegetable that is put before him now

04:37

He used to have night terrors,

04:39

45 minutes screaming and crying

04:43

Fits in her sleep

04:46

Wetting himself,

04:49

He has not done so for over a year

4:54 pm

I forgot what it was like to have my son in complete fear,

4:58 pm

the thought of it scares me now

05:06

But it doesn't do that anymore

05:10

He is polite,

05:13

He is kind and caring to his sister

05:15

My daughter,

05:17

she's very peculiar, she has character, she has charisma,

05:24

They both are eager to learn

05:26

they are not afraid,

05:29

they are very confident children now

05:32

I could not have done it alone.

Listen to Keri talk about how she encouraged culture change in children's services by collaborating with families and front-line staff:

[View transcript](#)

00:00

One of our biggest challenges was how we developed closer working relationships

00:06

with partner agencies. We'd been quite risk-averse, we had one of the highest

00:13

looked after children populations in the country, we had one of the highest child

00:18

protection registrations in the country, and we had the highest child in need

00:23

population in the country. Partners had lost confidence in us and as a result

00:28

the workforce had become very pressurised and overheated, and staff had

00:36

started to leave the authority and when we came in we had 42 agency staff

00:41

working for us, the turnover was huge. It was like spinning

00:47

plates all at the same time. Whilst we were trying to create a

00:50

happy, healthy and resilient workforce and build up experience, at the same time

00:56

we were trying to build relationships with partners. We took the same approach,

01:00

we spoke with partners, we made them aware of the situation, and we talked to

01:06

them about what our plan was in order to recover from that position. We took a

01:11

very hands-on approach, I spent time, along with other principal officers, in

01:16

case conferences, we spent time with our conference-and-review service and

01:22

we sat in on conferences. We sat in on conferences to particularly look at

01:31

the experience of vulnerable families and children in that formal setting. My

01:40

feelings at that time were that we were very process driven and that we had lost

01:44

the voice of the child and the voice of the vulnerable mum and dad in that

01:50

conference setting. The outcomes model of working has transformed the

01:58

conference arena. I've been delighted by the way in which we have now moved to a

02:06

way of working where families remain at the heart of everything we do in a

02:11

conference, and that older children are invited to the conference,

02:15

they are prepared for conference and their voice is heard in conference. The language

02:21

is family-friendly, every opportunity is given to talk to families about their

02:28

own personal outcomes, they play a big part in the plan, the outcomes focused plan,

02:34

and I have spent time then with families that have experienced conferences before

02:39

outcomes and after outcomes. The difference is incredible, hearing some

02:44

families say 'there were lots of big words', 'there was lots of jargon', 'people

02:51

looked very official', 'I didn't think I could speak', 'I just wanted to get it over

02:57

with', and 'then we have meetings after the

03:00

conference where they talk about me, they talk about my children as if I'm not

03:06

there', families saying 'we just needed time to pass for our children to come off the

03:16

register' but not really understanding what the local authority was worried

03:20

about, what the priority risks were. Very little discussion around what the

03:25

strengths were, what they were doing well as a family, and a recognition that all

03:32

families including our own will get things wrong sometimes. I think that's

03:38

something that we are particularly proud of. It's still a work in progress,
partner

03:44

agencies have started to see the difference it's making. We've moved away

03:48

from statements being made, for example, 'I don't believe the child is
suffering

03:55

significant harm but I will recommend registration so that the family will get

04:01

support'. And empowering chairs, and helping chairs support partners in

04:09

reminding them of what the criteria is for registration and helping

04:16

them during the conference process to remain focused on what those

04:22

priority risks are.

What leadership is needed to embed this way of working?

These ways of working need to be part of whole systems change if they are to be embedded. Leaders have a key role to play and should:

- model strengths-based, collaborative and co-productive approaches in their own leadership style
- support practitioners to identify what they're doing which is working to improve outcomes for children, and help to think about how they can build on this
- celebrate and promote good practice - to reinvigorate social work with children and families
- templates and processes that have been co-produced with families and front-line workers
- promote shared values and consistent ways of working across agencies
- share responsibility across the system rather than protection of individual budgets and passing on risk.

Listen to Maria explain how changing paperwork and processes to become outcome focused made a positive difference to families:

[View transcript](#)

00:00

We loved the training, we just embraced it and thought this is exactly why we went into

00:04

social work in the first place.

00:08

When we went back into the team, the important thing really was,

00:12

what are we going to do next?

00:15

What are we going to do now?

00:19

What we did was set up regular meetings on a fortnightly basis, to meet and talk about cases.

00:26

So we started talking about how we would work different cases in more of an outcome focused way.

00:35

Then we started looking at paperwork and how we would score.

00:40

We met up with business support and looked at how we could work with the system, and

00:46

they came up with scoring sheets.

00:50

So little by little we started implementing it in the team, we had the system set up so

00:57

that we could score on the system.

00:59

So we could go into case recordings and say how people were feeling, to score their outcomes.

01:06

And it was working within the team, but what we quickly realised was we're working in isolation

01:11

here, it was really difficult for us because we felt that actually cases were coming up

01:17

to us and then we were working with them in a different kind of approach really.

01:23

We all felt it was more or less going back to old fashioned social work, all those values.

01:30

It was, I think at first, we found it a little bit difficult because we were used to rushing

01:40

in and putting plasters on everything and wanting to fix everything.

01:45

So we really needed to, we quickly realised we needed to do some exercises together, to

01:51

sit back and just say to people 'Tell me how you're feeling'.

01:57

And even when there are risky situations, rather than going in and saying 'Oh we're

02:02

scared about this...', just to sit back and say 'Okay what's been going on for you?'.

02:07

Having different conversations actually lowered barriers quite quickly.

02:11

So instead of going in and saying look we've had this referral, we're really worried, what

02:15

have you done, we said look we have had this referral, tell me about your life, what's

02:21

going on for you, what's happening for you.

02:25

And people didn't have their backs up.

02:29

It prevented them from being so scared, and they were able to just talk to us.

02:34

And what we found then was that hidden harm went down quite quickly really.

02:40

So we embraced it, and then just at a time when Neath Port Talbot was in a really good

02:46

place, we'd come out of a difficult period, I went to a management meeting, and the then

02:55

head of service Andrew Jarrett started talking about how we can implement any models, signs

03:01

of safety, motivational interviewing.

03:05

And then I jumped up and down and said hang on a minute what about outcomes focused work?

03:11

What about the work that we've been doing.

03:13

So we had a long discussion then about what we were doing, and he absolutely embraced

03:20

that, loved it, and then wanted all the managers to have the training.

03:25

And they all had the training, everybody straight away said yes this is what we want, it's very

03:33

similar to signs of safety, your motivational interviewing, but we felt that it was a bit

03:41

more fluid, we could work with it.

03:44

It wasn't so rigid, so we could work with it in our own way.

Questions for further self-reflection and discussion

Practice:

- what is the quality of your relationships with families?
- what are the benefits and challenges of building a relationship with families?
- what are the risks to you and our organisation of working more collaboratively with families?
- what are you already doing that works to manage risks collaboratively with families?
- do families understand our concerns, what they need to do about it and what the consequences might be? How do you know?
- what role do you play in supporting collaborative work with families?
- what might a successful outcome look like for families? Can you give an example and what the components were that brought this about?

- what would the families you work with say has been the most useful to them to help them manage risks better?
- how do you know the children you work with are safer?

Strategy:

- how do you create a culture where you're able to manage risks collaboratively with families?
- how does your organisation support creativity, curiosity and hold ambivalence and uncertainty in practice?
- what do you notice about your organisation when things go wrong?
- which of the processes are helping families most; which could be counter-productive?
- do you articulate and measure 'risks' and 'outcomes' in terms of concrete differences for children and families, or in terms of 'your' processes?
- how can different parts of the system, and partner agencies, best support each other to manage risks collaboratively?
- what is the role of elected members in this?
- what would be the trigger/motivation to change the system in your organisation?

Outcomes focused supervision and reflective practice

Taking an outcomes approach requires a culture of co-production, practitioners need to build their skills, confidence and capabilities in strengths-based working. To support this cultural shift, we a whole system change to ensure all processes and policies support this was of working

This means building personal outcomes into:

- support for staff
- workforce planning
- performance management
- continuing professional development.

Supervision is a two-way process, which supports, motivates and enables professionals to develop good practice. Supervision provides regular contact between a supervisor and a worker, where space is given for reflection and learning.

Good two-way discussion is at the heart of the supervision experience, modelling the outcomes approach which is strengths based and outcomes focused. The supervisor's practice framework will influence the nature of the discussion which, in turn, shapes the process of review, reflection, evaluation and outcome setting.

In the same way that we should be building relationships with families where power 'with' rather than power 'over' is established, an environment where both supervisor and supervisee can contribute their expertise to the relationship should be developed.

This way of working supports supervisees to find solutions within themselves based on their existing strengths and prior positive experiences.

Outcomes focused supervision can be structured using the following discussion framework:

- what are we working towards (outcome)?
- what is working well (strengths)?
- what are we worried about (priority risks)?
- what needs to happen (what options are we exploring)?

- where are we now (what has been the progress so far)?
- where do we want to be (what are the next steps)?

Watch these videos to see how using outcomes focused supervision supports the worker to reflect on her work.

You'll see in the first video about the 'traditional' supervision session that it's not outcome focused. It gives less space for reflection.

[View transcript](#)

00:04

[Music]

00:07

so Steven tell me about him everything

00:11

up to date yes he's CP visits every 10

00:14

working days it's a bit odd I'm not

00:17

really sure what to do mum's engaging

00:19

really well school attendance is a

00:22

little better but still not great what

00:25

school is it said Joseph's there's a

00:28

contract of expectations around his dad

00:30

dad recently assaulted his new partner

00:33

and he has a history of assaulting his

00:35

own mother as well

00:36

Stevens never seen the violence and he

00:39

tested positive for drugs but denies it

00:41

what's the contact then he goes to visit

00:44

his nan and sees his dad sometimes then

00:46

he doesn't go to his dad's house dad

00:49

comes to pick him up takes him out then

00:51

brings him back home again on his own

00:53

yeah what's in the contracts of

00:55

expectations not to be under the

00:58

influence no violence no contact with

01:01

new partner so the risks are substance

01:04

misuse and domestic violence in the past

01:06

with Stephens mum yes but a long time

01:09

ago there's DV with new partner can

01:13

unsupervised I'm a bit worried no

01:16

concerns have been raised Stephan hasn't

01:18

said anything and he knows about the

01:20

contract of expectations what Steven

01:22

wouldn't say anything would he who would

01:24

raise concerns mum and the police well

01:29

if he's tested positive for substances I

01:31

doubt this appears well he's not under

01:33

the influence why would that change the

01:36

Steven was there yes well if that's true

01:39

and dad's taken Steven out bowling well

01:41

he's high or on a comedown there's a

01:44

risk but Stevens quite open and he

01:47

hasn't said anything it's difficult

01:49

because I don't want to say no contact

01:51

so what are the options

01:54

you know them do you think contact is

01:57

safe I don't feel I know enough about it

02:00

I want to make sure that I know it's

02:02

safe the drug Service says dad's doing

02:05

really well he's engaging he's out of

02:08

prison all right that's great but they

02:11

have different expectations from a risk

02:12

assessment point of view I think what we

02:16

have here is a young child who's having

02:18

contact with a violent person who uses

02:20

substances he hits his partner in public

02:23

so I think he's a risk if there's any

02:25

contact it needs to be supervised I

02:29

don't think we should expect Steven to

02:31

say anything because he loves his dad

02:33

and he wants to spend time with him

02:35

I'm a man and can safeguard start with

02:38

supervised for an assessment period do

02:42

man on speak yeah and I have told mum

02:45

that he uses and men was all right with

02:47

that with Steven going she says

02:50

Steven talks about the activities they

02:52

do together hmm it can't be a positive

02:54

then I have to say mums communication

02:57

and engagement is much better the home

03:00

conditions are fine I said to her if

03:03

things didn't improve

03:04

we'd have to escalate to PLO again I

03:06

didn't want to but she's absolutely

03:08

cleared up the house and maintained it

03:11

so no concerns with men then no school

03:15

attendance still isn't great it's 82

03:17

percent but the ewo says that's the

03:20

school's problem but mum doesn't attend

03:23

to core groups why I'm not sure she said

03:27

transport was an issue but when I went

03:30

to pick her up she didn't answer the

03:31

door

03:31

how many is she not attended she hasn't

03:35

attended at all in the last six months I

03:37

think she used to attend before that so

03:40

she's had support from services but not

03:43

got the insight

03:44

[Music]

03:47

sorry Sophia to answer this hello yeah

03:56

okay yeah well I can't discuss that in

04:00

detail now I'm just in supervision I

04:03

won't do much longer bye

04:09

sorry about that Sophia carry on what

04:12

are the risks she said she wouldn't know

04:16

what to do if dad's turned up I think

04:19

she struggles it's external motivation

04:22

to avoid it from going to PLO again I

04:24

think she's scared of Steven being

04:27

removed rather than thinking about

04:28

protecting Steven we've become a bit

04:31

complacent he has been on the register

04:34

for two years so she's been through PLO

04:37

one out the other side do you feel he's

04:40

at risk of significant harm not with dad

04:43

out of the picture it's not to say we

04:46

don't need to do any work with mum I

04:48

think she'll continue to engage with me

04:50

she calls me she's never done that

04:51

before

04:52

she's always there she calls me when

04:54

Stevens gone out without dad there is no

04:58

risk is there any support now I've

05:01

referred to housing I've given Steven a

05:04

best pass told him I want to see his

05:05

school attendance improve I'm not doing

05:08

anything with mum why isn't she coming

05:10

to call group what's the issue transport

05:14

it's a fair walk or it's two buses does

05:18

she work no has she got any other kids

05:20

no so she could do it yes she could do

05:23

it I feel like the transports an excuse

05:26

it's not okay to not turn up to six core

05:30

groups she's used to it it's been two

05:33

years I think I need to revisit the plan

05:36

I put a new plan in at the last

05:38

conference but she's not adhering to it

05:41

so what are you gonna do

05:43

why is his attendance bad why is she not

05:46

worried about the father and there's no

05:49

support I'll double-check the plan okay

05:51

so actions review conference 30th of

05:55

what will be the outcome continued

05:58

registration I think we need to be going

06:01

to legal because we need to be seen

06:03

change if he's been on the register for

06:05

two years and manat what other actions

06:07

do you think there's nothing health-wise

06:09

mum's taken him to dentist appointments

06:12

and she's engaged with the school nurse

06:14

maybe it's about having a conversation

06:16

with mom about dads risk and seeing what

06:19

she says when was the last assessment

06:22

I'm sure I did one yeah I thought you

06:25

had but the last one was 18 months ago

06:29

okay I'll do a new assessment and talk

06:32

to dad about supervised contact and the

06:35

contract of expectations okay anything

06:38

else no who's next

Now watch the video below about using an outcomes approach in a supervision session. Compare the two videos and see how the second focuses on personal outcomes, priority risks and good enough outcomes.

[View transcript](#)

00:04

[Music]

00:06

so Steven tell me about him he's CP

00:12

visits every 10 working days it's a bit

00:15

odd I'm not really sure what to do

00:17

mum's engaging really well the house is

00:20

much better

00:21

Steven school attendance is a little

00:23

better but still not great okay tell me

00:27

a bit more his attendance has gone up

00:30

from 60% to 82% last term mum's always

00:34

there the house looks alright okay what

00:38

are you worried about dad is sofa

00:41

surfing and his new partners pregnant

00:44

and he hits her when they were in town

00:46

last weekend he's still using but he

00:49

goes to his drug appointments and

00:51

they're pleased with him hmm sounds like

00:54

a mixed picture what mutters to Steven

00:58

what are his personal outcomes he likes

01:02

to see his dad he goes to visit his

01:04

paternal nan and sees his dad sometimes

01:06

then on their own or with a man on their

01:09

own what do you think about that I'm not

01:13

sure I've asked Steven about it and he

01:16

says everything's fine mum doesn't seem

01:19

to be worried and I can't reach none to

01:21

ask her would Steven tell anyone if he

01:24

was frightened when he was in contact

01:25

with his dad I don't know he knows why

01:29

were involved and he knows his dad is a

01:31

drug user but he loves him and so I

01:35

don't know that I know enough about the

01:37

situation to be able to say that he

01:39

would or wouldn't say that sounds like

01:42

something you may need to find out more

01:44

about yes okay

01:46

so there's an action there how will you

01:48

go about it first I want to speak to Mum

01:52

and nan I wonder if we should think

01:55

about asking nan to supervised contact

01:57

at the moment although I am a bit

01:59

worried about dad assaulting her if she

02:02

carries on not answering my calls I'll

02:04

have to go run to the house and I'll try

02:06

and get hold of dad as well although he

02:08

is a bit more difficult to

02:10

back down I could go to the drug service

02:12

to see him and what direct work will be

02:16

undertaken with Stephen what safety plan

02:18

will be put in place if he feels unsafe

02:21

for Dad I'll explore contact with

02:24

Stephen and talk to him about what he

02:27

could do if he ever feels unsafe

02:28

maybe there's a member of the family he

02:30

could call but given his age he'll

02:32

probably still try and have contact with

02:34

his dad anyway so it's a good idea to

02:37

explore a safety plan okay that's a good

02:40

idea

02:41

what about an ex CP conference well at

02:45

this point I think I have to recommend

02:47

continued registration even though he's

02:49

been on the register for two years go on

02:52

what specifically concerns you mum's

02:56

doing well but she hasn't come to the

02:58

last six core group meetings I asked her

03:01

about it and she said there was an issue

03:04

with the transport but when I went to

03:06

pick her up she didn't answer the door

03:07

and the next day she asked me where I

03:09

was I wonder what it's like for her to

03:12

come to a call called meeting what do

03:15

core groups mean to her and Stephen well

03:19

when I think about it they are focused

03:22

on the risks so between the school

03:25

talking about attendance and health

03:28

talking about substance misuse and the

03:31

revisiting of the plan and the risks

03:33

maybe they're just not very nice for

03:35

them tell me about the strengths what's

03:39

going well she's done well with the

03:41

school the ewo says the attendance is

03:44

his problem to worry about and she's

03:46

worked well on home conditions she's

03:48

always there she's really interactive

03:50

but it's a shame she won't come to the

03:52

core group meetings it sounds like there

03:54

are some positives here core groups are

03:57

important to identify the risks but it's

04:00

equally important to identify what's

04:02

going well for the family yes maybe I

04:06

should think about having a chat with

04:08

mum and Steven about making the meetings

04:11

nicer and more accessible so that

04:14

everyone's reviewing the outcomes of the

04:15

plan

04:16

there's more reasons for them to come

04:18

let's think about this there's been some

04:21

positive changes from them something has

04:24

led to some change what do you think

04:26

that is well I think the PLO was a

04:29

wake-up call for her to realize that it

04:31

wasn't just about dad's behavior it was

04:34

also about how she was caring for Steven

04:36

as she didn't have a great time as a

04:38

child

04:39

so anything Steven was getting was

04:41

better than what she had but during the

04:44

CP visits we spent some time talking

04:46

about what she and Steven wanted for his

04:49

future and how they were going to be a

04:51

family now and she also heard Steven

04:54

saying things like he wanted to invite

04:57

his friends around but he couldn't

04:59

because of the mess and that he wanted

05:01

to go to school every day but he found

05:04

it difficult to get up in the morning

05:06

and once he hadn't been on a Monday it

05:08

was more difficult to go on a Tuesday

05:10

and so on so it was important for them

05:13

to learn what matters to Steven yes we

05:17

explored this and what she felt her role

05:19

was and she shifted a little what's

05:22

helped her to do this this sounds

05:25

different we tried to focus on what the

05:28

important things were to change at home

05:30

so in terms of risk she could see why

05:33

people were worried she wants the best

05:36

for Steven so we have a shared purpose

05:38

and we've taken things one step at a

05:41

time we're not there yet but I need to

05:44

help support them to see what else needs

05:46

to improve so that people become less

05:48

worried and Steven can invite his

05:51

friends around and go to school every

05:53

day what are you most worried about at

05:56

the moment what are the priority risks

05:59

well I think Dad is an unknown mums

06:03

attendance at the core groups does worry

06:04

me and Stevens been on the register for

06:07

so long

06:08

hundred is worth looking at that maybe

06:10

thinking about a chronology we have got

06:12

a chronology of dates of registration

06:15

drug use and so on does it look at what

06:18

the context was so rather than just

06:20

dates of registration or school

06:22

attendance but including what else was

06:24

going on - I don't

06:26

trying a patent on what it looked like

06:27

when things were going well no not

06:30

really

06:31

what would they like to happen in the

06:34

short medium and longer-term

06:36

I could ask them that question

06:39

it could help clarify the priority risks

06:42

their strengths and what needs to happen

06:44

in the future to improve matters and

06:46

think about what the family have found

06:48

useful in the past and how they can best

06:50

understand what we're worried about yes

06:54

okay yes so you'll consider what the

06:57

priority risks are dad and contacts

07:01

sustaining change and your actions are

07:04

to explore a little more have those

07:06

outcome focused conversations with the

07:08

family to help them identify what

07:10

matters to them in the future should we

07:13

obliterate the assessment you think it might

07:16

be an idea so a child assessment and a

07:19

chronology bring all the information

07:21

together speak to who you need to look

07:25

at the strengths and risks and good

07:27

enough outcomes and we'll go from there

07:30

anything else about Stephen no that's

07:33

all okay

07:35

it was next

07:38

you

07:39

[Music]

The following resource can be used to support supervision:

Outcome focused group reflection

Group reflection should also be used to support an outcomes approach, this is different to supervision. Group reflection brings teams together to discuss case work, share practice and support decision making.

Group reflection can be done as part of a regular team meeting or can be structured to support regular team development and provides an excellent learning opportunity to develop confidence and capabilities in outcomes focused practice.

During reflection a member of the team will talk about one of their cases for 10-15 minutes and the rest of the team will listen without interruption. When talking through the details they will share details following details about the person and/or the family they're been working with:

- strengths
- outcomes
- priority risks
- what needs to happen?
- where are we?
- where do we want to be?

The team can then ask clarification questions and constructively challenge to ensure that an individual's network, community services and lastly commissioned options have been fully explored. The discussion can support decision making and should be recorded in a way that shows the reflective and decision-making stages. When group reflection is strengths based it can

increase motivation, creativity and confidence of practitioners and their managers.

This resource shows how to facilitate an outcome focused reflective group session:

[Format for outcome focused reflective groups](#)

PDF 88KB

Contact us

If you have a question or if you can't find what you are looking for [get in touch with us](#).