



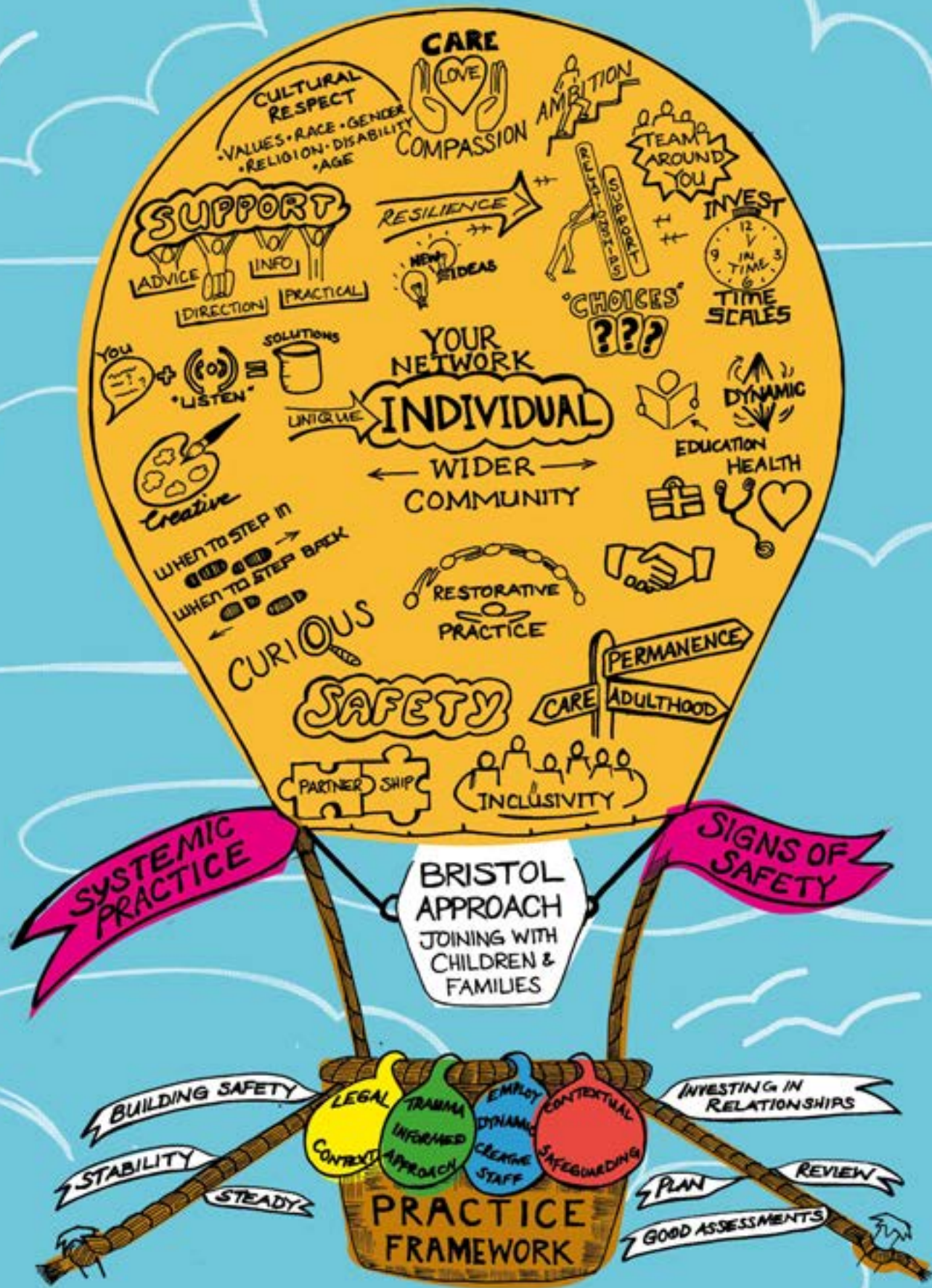
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Bristol Practice Framework & Practice Standards

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Children and Families Services





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Introduction

Across Bristol's Children and Education Directorate, we share a commitment to helping every child, young person and family thrive.

Our Systemic Practice Framework and Practice Standards set out the values, principles, methods and approaches that underpin our work in Children's Social Care, providing us with a shared language and consistent ways of working that are grounded in systemic social care practice.

The work that we do with children and families is so important and impactful, and can often be complex and span many teams, so having a Practice Framework and Standards ensures that all our work and interventions are based around the same theories and approaches, and that children and their families will receive the highest quality support throughout our work with them.

One of our core values in Bristol is to work 'with' families, rather than doing things 'to' or 'for' them, with a strong emphasis on understanding the whole system around a child, including their family, school and community.

We also understand that our own experiences and the experiences of families affect how we each see the world, and we use curiosity and reflection to understand the multiple perspectives of children, their parents and carers and their wider networks to provide the right support at the right time.

The Practice Standards and Practice Framework allow us to describe this culture of practice in Bristol as one which embraces and promotes difference and individuality, whilst challenging discrimination and inequality.

The Children's Social Care Practice Framework and Standards, and the WAVE

Practice Framework in Education, are built around Bristol City Council's shared values of Dedication, Curiosity, Collaboration, Ownership and Respect for children, families, communities and each other.

Both frameworks emphasise fairness, relational practice and purposeful engagement, reflecting the distinct focus of each of our services, whilst offering a consistent, evidence-informed approach to working with children and families. We are proud of the progress made so far and remain focused on learning, reflecting and working together to build even more joinedup, inclusive and impactful services across Bristol.

We want you as our workforce to have the necessary tools and resources to deliver high-quality services to children, so the Practice Framework and Standards also provide an evidence-based structure within which skills, knowledge and good practice can be shared. This will also help us to attract and recruit practitioners whose values and beliefs align with how we want to practice in Bristol, further strengthening our workforce and the services we are able to offer.

I am so proud of all we have already achieved in Bristol Children's Services so far, and I am genuinely excited to continue on this journey with you all to support our children across Bristol to live happy and healthy lives, both now and into their futures.



Hannah Woodhouse
Chief Executive – Children & Education

What does our workforce say about working in Bristol?

"We are curious about families' lived experience, and we don't make assumptions that we know best"

"What is most important is our relationships with families"

"We show kindness, empathy and understanding, and we are clear about any worries without being judgmental"

"We are creative about how to hear and seek children's voices and include them in plans through creative direct work"

"I am proud of my colleagues' genuine care, professionalism and commitment"

"A happy workforce that enjoy coming to work will be better placed and equipped to meet the needs of families"

"Our teams and colleagues support each other in the face of pressure, and continue to strive for the best outcomes for children"

"Everyone knows their families really well, and this helps to create child centred plans which are specific to each child"

"We work with children to help keep them safe and stay safe with their families".

"We help families to recognise who is already helping them and help identify any other help they may need".

"We see foster carers as equals and value their skills"

Children's Services Workshop, 2025



A valued & healthy workforce

The health and wellbeing of our workforce is a core component of our Practice Framework. We understand that we can't achieve the best outcomes for children without a healthy, stable, and sustainable workforce. Our workers are and will always be our most valuable asset in helping families achieve and sustain change.



In Bristol we know that to be able to work in ways that are consistent with our values and principles, you need to have the capacity to do your best work. Whilst we recognise that unplanned events and crisis intervention will always be a feature of some of our work across Children's Services, we remain committed to constantly reviewing workloads to create the conditions for meaningful, preventative, relationship-based work throughout our service.

In doing so we strive to strike the right balance between ensuring that families are able to access the right support at the right time, whilst enabling practitioners and teams to have time and capacity to undertake meaningful work.

We also understand that psychological safety is a crucial component of our workforce being able to provide thoughtful and sensitive support to children and families. Whilst our teams across the service may be structured differently, we are committed to ensuring that you receive monthly supervision which includes reflective discussion and consideration of your wellbeing and professional

development needs, and that our excellent Managers have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to be able to provide effective leadership.

We are also committed to supporting your continued professional development, investing in you as our workforce to ensure that children and families receive the best possible support, and that you can enjoy a long, happy and satisfying career within Bristol Children's Services.

We pride ourselves on being a 'learning organisation' where we not only provide training and development opportunities, but also promote spaces for reflection and peer support, where we can learn from each other and share our valuable and wide-ranging experience across the service.



We value the skills, knowledge, and individuality of everyone in our workforce, and we actively welcome multiple perspectives and reflective discussions.

Through our continued participation and commitment to the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES), we also seek to identify and challenge any disproportionality and discrimination experienced by Black and minoritized ethnic colleagues, actively promote opportunities for development and progression, and ensure that Bristol is an inclusive environment for everyone in our workforce to thrive.



The legal & National Context

Legal framework:

The rights of children and their families are protected in law, and any involvement we have in their lives is underpinned by these laws. The duties of the local authority in respect of children are set out in the Children Act 1989 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. We recognise the need for these duties to be undertaken sensitively and whilst respecting the family's human rights¹.

As well as the Children Act 1989 and Working Together 2023, our work in Children's Services takes place within the context of a wide legislative framework which includes:

- Children Act 2004
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations (2010)
- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2025

There are times when we are required to intervene in a child's life to keep them safe, against the parents' wishes. When we do this we will always use our systemic curiosity to understand the situation, we will show empathy, and we will use reflexivity to avoid bias in our decision making. The law acknowledges that there are times

when intervention from the local authority is not warranted and we remain mindful of this within all of our interventions, paying consistent attention to families' rights to respect for private and family life (Human Rights Act, 1998) to respond proportionately to any risks.

National social care reforms:

Our commitment to providing the support families need at the earliest possible opportunity reflects national social care reforms set out in the Children's Social Care Strategy (2023), focusing on early help and family networks to reduce the need for statutory intervention.

In line with these reforms, we use ideas and approaches from our systemic practice model to promote family-led decision making, to support families to find their own solutions to concerns in the first instance, whether this is in their existing network or by supporting them to develop a new network of support. By taking this approach, our ways of working are also aligned with statutory guidance in the Children's Social Care National Framework (DfE, 2023), which emphasises 'working in partnership with whole families' as a core principle.

The Practice Framework and Standards provide a narrative for our approach, supporting our work with our safeguarding partners in implementing the national Families First Partnership Guidance (DfE, 2025) by clearly articulating the principles, values and legislation which underpin our work with children and families.

1 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>



The Bristol Systemic Practice Approach



Everything we do in Bristol is to support the best outcomes for our children across the city, and we chose systemic practice as our core practice model because it reflects our commitment to working with children and their families in ways that are kind, compassionate and curious.

Systemic ideas support us to view families' difficulties as existing within the context of relationships, environments and wider systems, rather than as problems within individuals. This means that we are able to move away from working with families in ways that might be experienced as 'blaming' or 'shaming', and towards ways of providing support that are collaborative and relational.

Working systemically means that right from when we first start working with a child and their family in the First Assessment Service, we recognise that we are joining their system, and that we too are bringing our own views and experiences (our 'Social Graces') into our work with the family.

By consistently reflecting on our own values, beliefs and assumptions throughout our involvement, we are able to build more trusting and respectful relationships with families, and reflect our commitment in Bristol to trauma-informed and anti-oppressive ways of working.

Systemic approaches view families as being the experts in their own lives, with our role being to support them to identify and build upon strengths to be able to manage difficulties together. This means that we strive to identify family networks at the earliest opportunity, using systemic ideas

in family network meetings to promote and support family-led decision making at every stage of our involvement.

Through using different types of questions with families, the systemic model helps us to understand complex family dynamics and patterns of behaviour. By supporting families to explore what has contributed to these patterns, our Family Help, Safeguarding, Connecting Families and Disabled Children's Services teams use systemic ideas to work with families to strengthen relationships and create positive and lasting change. Our aim will always be for children to remain in or return to their birth families where safe for this to happen, so systemic ideas are also key within our Children in Care, Fostering & SGO and many other specialist teams, to support stability and to strengthen family networks for children in our care or in kinship arrangements.

Systemic practice is our overarching practice model for practitioners working with children and families in Bristol, and is the 'umbrella' under which our other models and approaches sit, including Signs of Safety (which most of our assessments are structured around), contextual safeguarding, and AMBIT.



Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety is a strength-based model that provides a framework and tools for our work with children and families, ensuring our assessments and plans are strengths-based and family-led. Signs of safety is underpinned by systemic practice as it focuses on the relationships and systems surrounding families, and emphasises working with the whole network to provide safety and support for children.

In Bristol we use Signs of Safety as the main structure for our assessments, using both Signs of Safety and systemic tools to really get to know children and families, and to understand their unique contexts and situations. Using ideas and tools from systemic practice and Signs of Safety together, we take a relational and reflective approach to working with families, helping them to identify and build on their strengths to achieve lasting change where needed.

The Signs of Safety model complements and aligns with systemic practice as it emphasises curiosity and taking a questioning approach, using many systemic-type questions to identify and amplify resources within family networks that can be built upon to support children to remain safely and happily within their family system.

Both systemic and Signs of Safety emphasise 'joining with' families rather than 'doing to', therefore collaboration and co-creation are at the heart of both approaches, seeing the family as the experts in their own lives. There is also an emphasis in both approaches on identifying and acknowledging power and difference within relationships and systems, considering how these might be impacting upon the family, and what this might mean for our work with them.

The Bristol Model

The Bristol Model is a 'why, what, how' framework to support adults to understand and respond therapeutically to children and families who have experienced trauma. It was developed within our Bristol Therapeutic Support Service to support carers who look after children in our care, such as foster carers and residential workers in our Children's Homes, as well as to support the reunification of children with their birth families and wider networks where safe for them to return home.

The Bristol Model very much aligns with our Practice Framework, as it is underpinned by systemic practice, as well as core approaches of trauma-informed practice, positive behaviour support and mentalization.

The evidence base underpinning the model draws from key areas of research into ACE's, developmental trauma, systems theory and

neuroscience, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of adversity on children's development, behaviour and outcomes.

As described in the Bristol Model, by providing tailored and individualized support to every child in our care, we aim to attend to all areas of their lives, supporting them to have healthy relationships, to develop independence skills, and ultimately to heal from developmental trauma and live happy and healthy lives.



Bristol Practice Standards

What are Practice Standards?

Our Practice Standards are guidelines that describe how Children's Social Care professionals work with children and families. They set clear expectations for good practice and help ensure consistent, high-quality support throughout Bristol.

Practice Standards help to guide us all in our day to day work, whilst showing our commitment to creating the conditions for our workforce to do their best work with children and families across our city.

Consistent with our local Families First transformation programme and the national Families First Partnership Programme reforms, these Standards reflect what we have learned about effective practice: supporting children to remain safely within their network, ensuring children in our care live in the most suitable home for their needs, and being proactive in reviewing care arrangements by supporting family time and considering reunification wherever possible.

They also promote transparency and accountability, and help us to continuously improve our services and support.

How have these Practice Standards been created?

In Bristol we believe that we should always have the voices of children and young people at the heart of all we do. It was therefore a huge privilege to work with the fantastic Children in Care Council to hear their views about what good support should look like from our service, to inform our Practice Standards.

We also wanted to ensure that the lived experience of families informed these Practice Standards. This meant that feedback from parents and carers and collaboration with Parent Participation

groups across Bristol was invaluable in making sure the Standards represent what is most important to families in how we work with them.

These Practice Standards are also informed by the six key principles identified by Murmuration Community Therapy [[link to website](#)], developed as part of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme to support the Improving Relationships with SEND Parent carers work. These principles emphasise believing parents, empowering them to act, acknowledging their feelings, valuing their child as an individual, staying in reliable contact, and being honest about service limitations.

These principles align closely with, and are embedded throughout, our Practice Standards to strengthen how we communicate, collaborate, and build trust with families in Bristol, particularly families of disabled children and children with SEND.

In addition to participation with parents, carers and children, workshops also took place with the Children's Social Care workforce to create these Standards, which were attended by a range of practitioners in various roles and from different teams across our service. These workshops were complemented by feedback from our annual Children and Education Staff Conferences, and it was truly inspiring to hear so many perspectives about what makes our workforce so proud to work in Bristol, and what makes it such a unique and special place.

This means that as well as demonstrating our aspirations and commitment to how we work with children and families, these Practice Standards are also a celebration of the excellent practice that is already taking place across our system, and a reflection of our continued passion and commitment to making a difference every day.

Practice Standards Summary

Practice Standard 1: Listening and responding to the lived experiences of children & families

Practice Standard 2: Clear and transparent communication

Practice Standard 3: Family networks at the heart

Practice Standard 4: Providing the right help at the right time

Practice Standard 5: Working together with partners

Practice Standard 6: Language and recording

Practice Standard 7: Equality, diversity and inclusion

Practice Standard 8: Caring for children in our care and supporting care experienced young people

Practice Standard 9: Supporting and developing our workforce

Practice Standard 10: Commitment to continuous improvement



Practice Standard 1 : We listen and respond to the lived experiences of children and families, and keep their voices at the centre of our work.

Aims:

We want children, young people, parents and carers - including disabled children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - to feel heard, understood, and involved in decisions that affect them. Their voices should inform the way we work and influence the support we provide.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We will make sure that children, young people, and families are at the heart of everything we do. This means showing curiosity and taking the time to build strong, trusting relationships by listening carefully to what matters most to them.
- We believe that listening means exploring the meaning behind what is shared, asking curious questions, and responding in ways that show care and understanding.
- Our practitioners will use systemic tools such as cultural genograms to explore family history, identity, and relationships, helping us understand the wider context of a child's life. We will use reflective questions to deepen understanding and avoid assumptions, asking "What does this mean for you?" or "Who else is important in this situation?"
- For disabled children and children with SEND, we will use communication methods that meet their needs, and we will work closely with parents, carers and professionals who know the child best to understand how they express their views.
- We show that we value each child as an individual by being curious, avoiding assumptions, and responding with empathy to what parents and children tell us.
- We will spend time with children away from their care givers when appropriate, including in line with expectations for seeing children over the age of four alone, so that we can hear their voices as clearly and confidently as possible. This means also seeing them in different contexts like at school or in the community, and could also mean seeing them with a trusted teacher or support worker so that children feel as comfortable as possible whilst we are getting to know them.
- We know that parents and carers know their children best, and we will ensure that what families tell us directly shapes assessments, plans, and interventions. This means co-creating plans that reflect family priorities, strengths, and aspirations, and adapting our approaches when feedback shows something isn't working.
- We will create opportunities for children and families to provide feedback about our services, and will ensure that families are aware of our complaints procedures.
- When families share feedback, we will actively reflect on what they tell us and use it to improve our practice. This includes discussing feedback in supervision and group reflective sessions, so that decisions are thoughtful and collaborative.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Children's records will consistently show that plans and decisions reflect the voices and experiences of those involved.

When seeking feedback, children and families will tell us they feel listened to and their views make a difference.

We will be able to show how feedback from lived experience has led to visible improvements in services.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- [Improving Relationships with SEND Parents](#)
- Cultural genograms - [Practice explainer - Cultural-genograms.pdf](#)
- [Using genograms in practice: Practice Tool \(2024\) | Research in Practice](#)
- [Rethinking gender in genograms | Research in Practice](#)
- Systemic questions in building relationships - e.g. [relationship with help questions](#) (Reder and Fredman)
- Family Group Decision Making Guidance

"The worker who I had was the best; she really listened to me, she didn't judge, she validated me and my partner in that moment...when a family like ours was going through trauma"

– North Parent Participation group

"A good social worker or support worker is someone who listens to young people and someone who makes an effort to get to know the kids they work with" – Children in Care Council

"Be an active listener, hears our views and feelings and don't shrug our problems off" – Children in Care Council



Group discussion - Children in Care Council 2025

Practice Standard 2 : We build strong relationships and trust with children and families through clear communication.

Aims:

We want families to understand what is happening and why, at every stage of our involvement. We understand that clear communication and trust are the foundation of strong relationships.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that trust grows through openness, honesty, and consistency. From the very first contact we have with a family, we will take time to explain who we are, why we are involved, and what families can expect.
- We will use language that is clear and respectful, avoiding jargon and joining with the words families use to describe their own experiences.
- We will maintain regular and timely communication throughout our involvement, and we will keep families informed. When decisions need to be made, we will explain the process step by step, checking understanding and inviting questions.
- We will be honest about what support is available and we will be transparent about any service limitations whilst still advocating for families. We will communicate sensitively, recognising the emotional impact of uncertainty or new information on parents and carers.
- We will use Signs of Safety tools such as 'Three Houses' or 'Words and Pictures' to help children make sense of what is happening in ways that feel safe and age-appropriate.
- We will adjust our communication style so that all children can participate in communicating with us, and we will do this by understanding the child's individual speech and language strategies and by ensuring appropriate communication aids are used where needed (e.g. British Sign Language; Makaton; PECs – picture exchange communication systems).
- For families, we will use reflective questions like "What would make this process clearer for you?" or "What do you need from us to feel informed?" to ensure our approach meets their needs.
- We will also ensure our communication is tailored to the families' needs – for example using translation services for families where English is not their first language, or adapting our communication for families who experience neurodiversity. Our practitioners will reflect in supervision and team discussions on how our communication and Social Graces impact relationships. We will consider power dynamics and work to reduce barriers by being transparent and collaborative.
- By prioritising clarity and trust, we aim to create relationships where families feel confident, respected, and fully involved in decisions about their lives.

Practice Standard 3 : We will keep family networks at the heart of our work.

Aims:

We want children to be supported and cared for by the people who know and love them best. This means recognising the importance of family and community networks and ensuring they are involved in planning and decision-making at every stage.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that children achieve the best outcomes when they are able to live safely within their family networks, and that children thrive when they are surrounded by strong, supportive relationships. We will demonstrate that we value each child by exploring their strengths, identity and lived experience through the lens of the whole family network.
- We will take time to explore who matters most to the child and understand the roles, histories, and strengths within their family system, making sure to include fathers and non-resident parents in assessments, interventions and decision making.
- We recognise families are the experts in their own lives, and will ensure they are supported to make informed decisions through clear information and collaborative planning.
- We will use Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) as a core approach, ensuring that families have the opportunity to come together in Family Network Meetings, share their perspectives, and develop plans that reflect their strengths and priorities. Our role will be to support these meetings with clarity and respect, providing information and resources so families feel empowered to make decisions.
- Where challenges arise, we will look first to family-led solutions, supporting kinship care and community-based options wherever possible. Practitioners will reflect in supervision on how our own assumptions and Social Graces might influence decisions, and we will remain open and curious about the possibilities families bring.
- By placing family networks at the heart of our work, we aim to create plans that are sustainable, culturally sensitive, and rooted in relationships that matter most to children.

Practice Standard 4 : We will work hard to provide the right help at the right time.

Aims:

We want families to receive the right support before problems escalate. Assessments, support and interventions should feel timely, coordinated, and tailored to each family's unique circumstances, including the needs of disabled children and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that early, purposeful intervention can make a real difference for children and families, and we will take time to understand families' situations. We will ask open questions like "What is most important to you right now?" and "Who else is part of this picture?" to explore the wider context.
- Where an assessment is needed, we will use systemic and Signs of Safety tools and approaches to maintain curiosity, and to develop hypotheses about what is happening within the family and what might help.
- We will ensure we always seek and include the views and voice of the child, parents/ carers, wider family members and the professional network, and we will complete and share assessments with families in a timely manner.
- For disabled children and children with SEND, we will ensure that assessments and plans take account of their specific needs and strengths, and we will work with parents, carers and relevant professionals to coordinate support across education, health and social care - this means we will link social care plans to the child's 'Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) if they have one.
- We do not wait for a diagnosis before offering support, and we will ensure parents are equipped with clear information about available options so they feel empowered to act. We take parents' insights seriously and use them to guide timely planning and intervention.
- We will use scaling questions to help families reflect on progress and priorities. Our interventions will build on family strengths and promote resilience, recognising that families often hold the solutions within their own networks.
- We acknowledge that there may be times when a safeguarding response, or a more intensive intervention, is needed. When this happens, we will keep families informed and involved, explaining what is happening and why, and ensuring that decisions are transparent and collaborative.
- If a family needs help from a different team within our service, we will manage any transitions and handovers with care. This means planning together, sharing information clearly, and introducing new practitioners in a way that feels safe and supportive for the family. We will avoid abrupt changes and ensure continuity of relationships wherever possible.
- Similarly, if a family needs help from a different agency, we will make any necessary referrals in a timely way and follow up on these to confirm the outcome as part of any ongoing planning and involvement with the family.

- When we carry out assessments for children, we will look at the needs and strengths of the whole family. This includes considering whether parents or carers have their own care or support needs, and, with consent, making referrals to Adult Social Care or other relevant services where appropriate.
- When children do need to come into our care, we will seek to understand whether any additional support could have helped them remain safely at home, so that we can learn from this and improve the timeliness and effectiveness of our future interventions.
- For children who are in our care, we will support stability by proactively identifying and coordinating additional help when needed, so that we can support children to remain in family-based care wherever possible.
- By acting early and purposefully, we aim to prevent crises, reduce stress, and help families feel supported when they need it most.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Children's records will show that there has been early intervention, and will evidence support that has been offered and provided to support children to live safely at home.

Assessments will be completed within expected timescales, and families report that the process felt timely, coordinated and clear.

Quality assurance activity will show that interventions are purposeful, build on strengths, and lead to improvements in children's safety, stability and wellbeing.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- Early Help Strategy
- Local Support Directory
- Systemic Tools for Early Intervention (Cultural Genograms, SOS Scaling Questions)
- Hypothesising
- Assessment skills

"When I received support from early help it was like an angel had come into my life" – South Parent Participation group

"Being a good social worker or support worker means... understanding my personality, understanding my opinion and understanding the needs that I have" – Children in Care Council

"Families need to understand what the offer of support is"
– East Central Parent Participation group

Practice Standard 5: We will work effectively with our partner agencies to provide the best support and interventions.

Aims:

We want children and families to experience joined-up support that feels seamless, coordinated, and focused on their needs. Multi-agency working should reduce duplication, build trust, and improve outcomes for children.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that strong relationships between professionals are essential for strong relationships with families. Our work with partners will be based on trust, transparency, and a shared purpose: achieving the best outcomes for children. This means communicating clearly and respectfully across professional boundaries and valuing the expertise that each agency brings.
- Early help and safeguarding are shared responsibilities across our system. We will work closely with schools, health professionals, and community partners to coordinate support, so families experience joined-up help rather than fragmented services. Practitioners will reflect in supervision on how our interventions align with systemic principles, asking questions like "How are we considering the whole system?" and "What patterns are we noticing over time?"
- We will work closely with health professionals (such as GPs, midwives, health visitors, and mental health services) to ensure children's physical and emotional wellbeing is supported, and we will make effective use of multi-agency meetings like the Valuing Families Partnership Panel to support children and families to receive the best support to enable families to stay together.
- With education partners, including schools and early years settings, we will collaborate to promote learning, attendance, and inclusion.
- We will also work with the police and community safety teams to keep children safe and respond effectively to concerns about harm outside the home or exploitation. In addition, we will engage with housing, voluntary organisations, and specialist services to address wider needs.
- We will be transparent with families about what each agency can offer and any limitations, while working together to minimise gaps and avoid parents and carers having to co-ordinate services alone.
- Systemic practice underpins how we work together. We will use reflective multi-agency meetings to share perspectives and understand the whole system around the child. This means asking systemic questions like "What do we each see from our position?" and "How do these different views fit together?" We will avoid siloed thinking and instead create shared understanding that consider patterns, relationships, and strengths across the family and professional network.

- When coordinating support, we will ensure families remain at the centre. We will explain who is involved and why, and check that families understand and agree with the plan. If disagreements arise between agencies, we will manage these respectfully and keep the focus on the child's needs.
- By working systemically with partners, we aim to create a joined-up approach where families experience clarity, consistency, and care, rather than confusion or duplication.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Children's records will show evidence of active multi-agency collaboration, including joint visits, shared assessments, or coordinated interventions where appropriate.

Meetings involving multiple agencies are well-organised and purposeful, with agreed actions, clear next steps and follow-up that happens within expected timescales..

Families experience joined-up support, and feedback shows they do not feel responsible for coordinating services or repeating their story unnecessarily.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- Partnership Protocols
- Multi-Agency Working Guidance
- Tools for Network Mapping and Reflective Practice
- Harm Outside the Home Strategy
- [Bristol City Council Joint Protocol for 16/17-year-olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness](#)

"There are often so many professionals involved...I would like professionals to work together more effectively and this not be down to the parent to work it out"

– East Central Parent Participation group

"The workers were really good at arranging all the right help, like the therapies and meeting the Police, and relaying back information to me...they were brilliant"

– Feedback from SGO carer

Practice Standard 6 : We care about the language we use, and we pay careful attention to how we talk and write about children and families.

Aims:

We want our spoken and written words to reflect respect, empathy, and understanding. Language should help children and families feel valued and understood, and records should tell their story in a way that makes sense to them.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that language shapes relationships and identity. Every word we use matters because it influences how children and families experience our support and how they see themselves. Our commitment is to use language that is trauma-informed, non-blaming, and strengths-based, so that families feel respected, validated and empowered rather than judged.
- When writing records and assessments, we will make sure they are clear, accurate, and sensitive to the child's experience. This means avoiding jargon and technical terms, and instead using words that feel human and caring. We will join with the language families use to describe their own lives, and we will check how our words might be received by asking ourselves: "If the child or parent read this, how would it feel for them?".
- We will ensure parents', children's and family members' perspectives are recorded respectfully and taken seriously.
- We will write records directly to the child, using language that helps them feel seen and understood, and we will provide guidance and training to our practitioners to support them to write in this way. This approach supports transparency, builds trust, and enables children to make sense of their own story in a way that feels respectful and hopeful.
- We will avoid labels and descriptions that stigmatise or shame. Instead of focusing on deficits, we will highlight strengths and resilience. For example, rather than writing "non-compliant," we might say "we have found it difficult to engage the family so far", or "the family have described worries about professional involvement and need time to build trust with the team". This approach reflects systemic thinking by acknowledging multiple perspectives and avoiding blame.
- Our practitioners will use tools such as Language That Cares to guide how we write and speak about children and families. We will also reflect in supervision and team discussions on the impact of language, asking questions like: "What story are we telling about this family?" and "Does this narrative reflect hope and possibility?"
- We will seek feedback from care experienced young people and others who have accessed their records, and we will learn from and act upon areas we can improve on.
- By communicating with care, we aim to create records that children can read and understand, helping them make sense of their journey and feel proud of their story.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

- We will provide our teams and team members with regular training, support and spaces for reflection about the language we use and the impact this has on children and families' lives and experiences.
- We will regularly review the language in children's records to ensure they will feel valued and respected when they read our records.
- Children will be able to understand their journey and the support provided to their family from what is recorded on their record.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- [BCC Inclusive language glossary](#)
- [Signs of Safety Manual Bristol.pdf](#)
- [Research in Practice - Reflections on good recording](#)
- [TACT Language That Cares \(tactcare.org.uk\)](#)
- [BASW Recording in Children's Social Work Guide](#)
- [Good practice in recording \(2022\) Research in Practice](#)
- [Word Busting for Children in Family Courts – Cafcass](#)
- [Research in Practice - An Experience of Accessing Care Records](#)

"Stop labelling parents as "hard to reach". We are not hard to reach - systems are hard to trust"

– South Parent Participation group

"The language that services use to talk about me and my family is really important" – North Parent Participation group

Training, resources and guidance to support our use of language



Practice Standard 7 : We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Aims:

We want every child and family to feel valued, respected, and understood, which is what we also want for our practitioners in the workplace and in their work in communities.

We are committed to attracting, developing, and retaining a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

Our Work with Children and Families

- We will take time to understand each family's cultural identity, lived experience, and unique strengths. Tools such as cultural genograms will help us explore heritage, traditions, and relationships, ensuring that our plans reflect the whole system.
- We will adapt our approach to meet individual needs, including supporting disabled children, children with SEND, and neurodiverse children and parents/carers. This means listening carefully, making reasonable adjustments, and ensuring communication is accessible and inclusive.
- We will take time to understand the emotional and cultural context of each family's experience, including the impact of navigating diagnosis or unmet needs.
- We will challenge discrimination wherever children and families experience it - whether in education, health, housing, or the community. Our practice will actively promote belonging and inclusion, using systemic questions like: "What helps you feel understood?" and

"Who else needs to be part of this conversation?" to ensure plans are collaborative and culturally sensitive.

- Our workforce will have access to training, reflective supervision, and learning spaces to explore biases and assumptions. We will encourage systemic reflection, asking questions like: "How does my identity and position influence this interaction?" and "What patterns of inequality do we need to address?".

Our Workforce

- We will create a workplace culture that promotes equality and inclusion. Guided by the Children & Education Directorate's Equality and Inclusion Action Plan and the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), we will strive to recruit and retain team members from diverse backgrounds and provide opportunities for progression.
- We will embed anti-racist practice in all aspects of our work and challenge discrimination wherever it occurs—whether in our systems, in the community, or in professional interactions. We will use the No Space for Hate Guidance to ensure colleagues feel safe and supported when facing discrimination in their work with families and communities.
- By embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in our workforce and our work with families, we aim to create relationships that honour difference, promote belonging, and ensure that every child and family feels respected and safe.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Children's plans will be seen to reflect cultural identity, individual needs, and family strengths.

We will be able to demonstrate that staff and families experience a culture that actively challenges discrimination and promotes inclusion.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) - [WRES Action Plan](#)
- [Anti-racism Toolkit for Managers](#)
- [EDI Digital Hub](#)
- [No Space for Hate](#) - Children's Social Care Guidance for responding to incidents of racism, abuse and discrimination experienced by our workforce
- Children and Education Equality and Inclusion Action Plan

"Understanding the historical context of the family is important and what they have experienced and also the racial context. Services must understand that social work doesn't take place in a vacuum" – South Participation Group

"I feel like I can be myself, and not leave parts of myself at the door" – Child in Need Keyworker



Children & Families Services' Conference focusing on Anti-Racist Practice – November 2025

Practice Standard 8 : We provide the best support we can to children in our care and care experienced young people.

Aims:

We want children in our care to feel safe, loved, and supported to thrive. We will only look after children for as long as is needed, and we will actively promote and support family relationships.

We want our care experienced young people to feel prepared for independence and supported throughout their journey into adulthood.

Children in our care:

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that every child deserves stability, belonging, and love. We value each child for who they are, celebrating their strengths, identity and differences.
- We will listen to children's views and involve them in decisions about their lives, using creative, age-appropriate, and trauma-informed direct work to explore their experiences and provide the support they need. We will build strong relationships with children in our care, and will visit them within timescales, and more often when needed.
- We will take time to understand and respond to the different needs of children in our care, including working with our partner agencies to identify and ensure support is in place in relation to health needs, neurodiversity and the impact of trauma.
- We will ensure that we use the information we have about children and carers to effectively match children with homes which will best meet their needs, and to reduce the likelihood of children moving between different homes. Where children are moved to different homes whilst they are in our care, we will take time to understand what has happened, and how we can support and improve stability for children in future.
- We will use residential care purposefully, and will view it as a supportive intervention to help children and young people move towards family-based care or to prepare confidently for independent living.
- Where possible, we will always seek for our children to live in or near Bristol, so that they can maintain their networks whilst we are looking after them. This means we will proactively develop and maintain relationships with carers and providers in our local area, and will regularly review care plans for children living outside of Bristol, to ensure they are receiving the right support, and proactively seek for them to return closer to home wherever appropriate.
- We will support children to maintain cultural traditions, language, and community connections, and ensure care plans reflect their identity. We will work with carers and professionals to provide culturally sensitive care and challenge any barriers to inclusion.

- We will celebrate achievements and nurture each child's identity and potential, supporting hobbies, friendships, and cultural connections so that children feel valued and understood.
- We will create reflective life story work to help children in our care to make sense of their experiences and feel proud of who they are, and thoughtful later life letters to support children who are adopted to understand their journey and their identity. Where safe and appropriate to do so, we will involve families in creating this work, and we will focus on life story work that begins early in a child's journey and continues as they grow, ensuring that workers who know them best contribute to this process to provide clarity and continuity.
- We will only look after children for as long as necessary, and we will actively promote family relationships and reunification wherever possible. This means that we will explore family networks early, we will support children to maintain relationships with their family in ways that feel safe and positive, and we will be proactive in reviewing family time arrangements.
- We will use systemic tools like cultural genograms to understand family relationships and identity, and we will reflect in supervision and at child in care reviews on how our decisions and care planning support long-term belonging. We will ensure permanence is at the heart of our decision making, and will regularly review whether alternative care arrangements such as Special Guardianship Orders might be considered.

- We will demonstrate that we value our foster carers and the love they provide to children in our care by ensuring they are listened to and well supported.
- We recognise the experience and expertise of our foster carers, and we know that foster carers are essential in supporting children's relationships with their family. We expect foster carers to actively nurture these relationships, so we will support foster carers and birth families to develop and maintain positive relationships with each other to support our children.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Information from the Children in Care and post-16 services will show:

- Visits are taking place within timescales.
- Less Family Time is being supervised.
- Consistent reunification figures.
- An increase in placement with parent assessments.
- Quality assurance will show good story life story work on children's records.
- The Identity section of Children in Care plans will include thoughtful reflection re. identity.



Our Bristol Pledge, to all children in care and care leavers

Support for Care Leavers:

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We know that leaving care is a significant transition, and our support for care experienced young people will be relational and purposeful, helping young people develop practical skills while maintaining emotional support. We will continue to offer life story work beyond care, ensuring young people have a clear understanding of their journey and identity.
- We will manage transitions and handovers between teams thoughtfully, introducing new practitioners in ways that feel safe and supportive. We will avoid abrupt changes and maintain continuity wherever possible. Our commitment to Staying Close means that young people will have ongoing relationships and support beyond their time in care. We will also ensure they have access to Personal Adviser support whilst they are in care, to provide support and guidance in preparation for independence.
- We will work systemically with our colleagues in Adult social care, housing, education, health, and employment partners to create opportunities and reduce barriers. We will ensure that our partners and the wider city are aware of care experience as a protected characteristic in Bristol, and that partners understand their responsibilities in relation to this.
- We will ensure that young people feel comfortable and able to return to us for support in future through accessing the Hub, and we will provide relevant support to them through significant life changes, like becoming a parent, moving house, going to University or getting a job.

- Our aim is for care experienced young people to feel connected, capable, and cared for as they move into adulthood.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Information from the 16+ Service will show:

- Visits to young people taking place regularly.
- Pathway plans - Digital Pathway Planning and workers needs assessments starting when young people are 16 years old and following them through.
- Less young people in temporary or emergency accommodation; fewer evictions/ increased stability of tenancies.
- Fewer young people who are NEET.
- Regular utilisation of the Hub by our young people, through tracking footfall.
- Young parents being supported, and children remaining in their care.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- [Pathway Planning Guidance July 25](#)
- [Care leavers local offer July 2025](#)
- [Staying Close Guidance](#)
- [Bristol Practice Guidance for Life Story Work](#)
- [Bristol Practice Guidance for Reunification](#)
- [Children & Education Plan 24-30](#)
- Tools for Trauma-Informed Direct Work
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Graduating Care South West App

"Being a good social worker means...being supportive, understanding our problems, getting to know us...listening to our voice" – Children in Care Council

"A good social worker...gives as much contact with family as possible" – Children in Care Council

"Be patient, understand our family, be kind to us and our family" – Children in Care Council



Personal Advisor and Social Worker discussing support provided by our Care Experienced Hub



Practice Standard 9 : We support and develop our workforce.

Aims:

We want our workforce to feel valued, supported, and equipped to do their best work. We are committed to creating a culture of learning, wellbeing, and inclusion, where staff feel proud to work in Bristol and have opportunities to grow and thrive.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We know that the quality of relationships between practitioners and families depends on the support practitioners receive. By investing in our workforce, we ensure that teams have the confidence, skills, and emotional resilience to build strong relationships with children and families. This includes giving practitioners time for purposeful direct work, space for reflection, and access to tools and training that help them work systemically and creatively.
- We will offer opportunities for learning, growth, and career development, including access to training in systemic practice and Signs of Safety, coaching and leadership development.
- We will encourage team members to use Signs of Safety approaches and systemic tools such as reflective questions and hypothesising in their work, and to bring these reflections into team discussions.
- We will equip practitioners to use systemic ideas in their everyday practice, such as mapping family networks, asking curious questions, and considering multiple perspectives. We will support teams to manage transitions and handovers thoughtfully, ensuring continuity for families and reducing disruption.
- We will support our Managers to provide regular supervision that is reflective, relational, and supportive, using systemic principles to explore patterns, perspectives, and emotional responses. Supervision will be a space for curiosity, not judgment - a place to think about the whole system and how our work impacts families and ourselves.
- Our commitment to equality and inclusion means we will challenge racism and discrimination wherever it occurs, and we will proactively strive to ensure our workforce reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.
- We will ensure our workforce has the skills and confidence to support disabled children, children with SEND, and parents with neurodiversity. This means providing training on inclusive practice, reasonable adjustments, and communication strategies, as well as access to specialist advice when needed. We will equip our workforce with the knowledge of local SEND pathways so they can provide families with accurate information.
- We will recognise and celebrate good practice across our teams, sharing examples of innovation and success. We recognise that learning and development are wider than just our training plan, and we use quality assurance and appreciative enquiry to learn from our successes as well as our challenges.

- We will promote wellbeing by creating spaces for connection and peer support, and by providing resources that help teams manage the emotional demands of the work. We will respond quickly and compassionately when additional support is needed, particularly after serious or distressing incidents, and we will link practitioners in to the support they need.
- By caring for our workforce, we create the conditions for excellent practice and better outcomes for children and families.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

- We will measure the impact of training by seeking feedback from participants, and undertaking quality assurance activities to track and respond to themes in practice.
- We will use Staff Surveys to measure whether teams and practitioners report feeling supported, valued, and proud to work in Bristol.
- We will monitor our workforce recruitment and retention by tracking vacancies and turnover, so we can respond to any themes as they arise.
- We will seek feedback from children and families to ensure they experience consistent, high-quality support.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

Wellbeing Resources:

- Team as a secure base: [practice-supervisors-team-as-secure-base-pt_web.pdf](#)
- The containment wheel: [ps-the-holistic-containment-wheel-pt_web.pdf](#)
- [Emotional resilience and containment | Research in Practice](#)
- [Supporting practitioner wellbeing: Practice Guide \(2022\) | Research in Practice](#)
- [Clinical Supervision Policy](#)
- [Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- [Reflective supervision: Learning Hub | Research in Practice](#)
- Systemic questions - [interventive-interviewing.pdf](#)



Colleagues from the Children's Workforce Development Service

"I have worked in Bristol for so long because I feel well supported, teams work well together and I feel supported by colleagues; everyone pulls together across different teams, and Managers are available" – Social Worker

"The work is so interesting, and there are always new things that come up" – Social Worker

"Being in a supportive team has kept me here" – Social Worker

Practice Standard 10: We are committed to continuously learning and improving.

Aims:

We want to learn and improve every day so that children and families benefit from the best possible support. Our goal is to create a culture of curiosity, reflection, and innovation across our workforce and service.

Actions, beliefs & behaviours:

- We believe that improvement starts with curiosity and reflection. We will take time to think about our practice, individually and collectively, asking systemic questions such as: "What patterns are we noticing?"; "Whose voices are missing from this conversation?" and "What would success look like for this family?"
- We will seek feedback from children, families, and colleagues, recognising that lived experience is a vital source of learning. This feedback will not just be collected - it will be acted upon as a key source of learning and improvement.
- We will use reflective supervision, team learning sessions, and group case discussions to explore what is working well and what could be better.
- We will use Quality Assurance tools to support learning and improvement, and we will model strengths-based practice by undertaking quality assurance activity with kindness and respect.
- Service Learning Reviews will provide reflective spaces where practitioners and managers can explore practice with curiosity, identify strengths, learn from challenges and think about solutions. Collaboration and transparency are important in our approach to quality assurance, and Service Learning Reviews will focus on understanding the whole system and improving outcomes, rather than attributing blame.
- We will use thematic audits to identify and explore patterns in our practice, and we will adapt our approaches and services accordingly to benefit children and families.
- Our quality assurance activity will keep the child and their experiences central to the work, with the key focus on the impact for the child of our work with them. We will create a culture where individuals feel safe to respectfully challenge decisions and practice, in the best interests of children.
- We will share learning and celebrate innovation across our service, creating spaces for practitioners to showcase creative approaches and systemic tools that have made a difference. We will encourage openness to new ideas, whether they come from research, other local authorities, or our own workforce.
- Evidence and data will inform our decisions, but we will always combine this with professional judgment and systemic thinking. Our quality assurance processes will focus on learning and growth, helping us identify strengths and areas for development in a way that feels safe and constructive.
- By building a culture of curiosity and continuous improvement, we ensure that our service evolves to meet the changing needs of children and families.

How will we know we're meeting this Standard?

Children and families experience improvements in the quality, consistency and impact of our work, as shown through feedback, reviews and quality assurance activity.

Practitioners feel supported and confident to reflect on their practice, try new approaches and use learning to inform their decisions.

Feedback, audit findings and performance data will lead to clear, visible changes in practice, systems or processes, with evidence of what has improved and why.

Learning from supervision, Service Learning Reviews and thematic audits is acted upon, and contributes to service development over time.

Training, Tools & Resources to support this Standard:

- [Quality Assurance Framework](#)
- Service Learning Review Guidance
- Thematic Audit Tools
- [Children's Workforce Development Hub](#)

"I like working in Bristol as there is a sense of progression and aspiration for wanting to do things better for children, families and practitioners" – Social Worker

"We need to have a culture of learning so that when things go wrong we look for the learning in the situation rather than the blame" – Service Manager

"Parents should not just be clients. We can help build a better system - not just survive the current one"

– South Parent Participation group



Children and Education colleagues learning from each other and celebrating good practice – Celebration Event 2026

Putting the Standards into Practice

We recognise that delivering these Standards consistently can feel more difficult at times. The work we do is meaningful and can sometimes affect us personally. Our roles are often fast paced, and there will be times when competing demands mean we cannot do everything we would like to.

We also know that we are human, and even with strong values and best intentions, we won't always get things right. Every family is different, and what feels supportive for one may not feel the same for another. In addition, wider system pressures and finite resources can often affect what is possible in ways that are not always within our control. Acknowledging these realities helps us maintain compassion - for ourselves, for each other, and for the families we work alongside.

These Practice Standards are not about perfection; they are a shared framework that supports us to work purposefully, reflectively and with consistency. They reflect the principles that already underpin good practice in Bristol and help us stay aligned in the way we build relationships, make decisions and support families.

By using these Standards as a consistent reference point, supporting one another, and maintaining space for reflection and learning, we can navigate any difficulties in our work while still delivering practice that is thoughtful and systemic. Even in difficult circumstances, the commitment, skill and care within our workforce make a real difference - and these Standards are designed to help us continue doing so with clarity, fairness and confidence.

Bristol Best Practice Timescales

Seeing Children (Visits)

Process	Timescale
Targeted Support (Family Help)	First visit within 5 working days of allocation; then minimum 6-weekly , proportionate to need (rationale recorded).
Section 47 Enquiry	Visit within 48 hours of strategy discussion (or sooner if risk requires).
Children in Need (CIN)	First visit within 5 working days ; then minimum 4-weekly (can extend to 6-weekly with clear rationale recorded on LCS). Unannounced visits considered as part of safeguarding. 12-weekly visit only for children open for specialist short break.
Child Protection Plan (CPP)	Minimum every 4 weeks ; frequency agreed at ICPC and core groups. See CP visits practice guidance
Children in Care (CIC)	Within 1 week of move to a new home; then 6 weekly for first year. After a year may reduce to 3 monthly with child and IRO agreement at CiC review if child in a stable permanent home.
Reg 24 carers	Weekly until first review, then minimum 4 weekly while temporarily approved.
Prospective Adopters	Weekly until first review, then minimum 6 weekly .
Privately Fostered Children	First visit within 10 working days of referral ; then minimum 4 weekly , may extend to 6 weekly with rationale. After 12 months: 3 monthly with management oversight.
Placed with Parents (PWP)	Within 1 week of return home; then minimum 6 weekly . If assessment incomplete: weekly until review. Under ICO: weekly until 1st review, then minimum 4 weekly until final hearing. Under full Care Order: within 1 week , then 6 weekly .
Unregistered Homes	Weekly until first review, then monthly (as agreed with service manager and IRO). See Core Procedure for Unregistered Provision

Process	Timescale
Care Leavers (CL) age 16 -20	2-monthly face to face unless agreed in pathway plan with senior manager sign off (or sooner if concerns or risk require it)
Care Leavers (CL) age 16 -20	2-monthly face to face unless agreed in pathway plan with senior manager sign off (or sooner if concerns or risk require it)
Care Leaver (aged 21+)	Support is available to all care leavers through our Hub. Where there is a named Personal Advisor, frequency of visits will be dependent on need , to be outlined in the pathway plan.
CL moving accommodation	Visit within 5 working days of the move, then again within 28 days to review the pathway plan.
CL in custody	Visit within 10 working days of entering custody.



Bristol Best Practice Timescales

Assessment, Planning & Review

Process	Timescale
Targeted Support Assessment & Plan	Completed within 45 working days , reviewed 3-monthly.
Social Care Assessment	Completed within 45 working days .
Section 47 Outcome	Completed within 15 working days .
Child in Need (CIN) Plan	Completed at assessment; first review at 1 month , then 3 monthly .
Child Protection (CP) Plan	Drafted before/during conference; developed by core group within 10 working days .
Core Group meetings	First within 10 working days of ICPC; then minimum every 6 weeks as per agreement at CP Conference
Care Plan	Created within 10 days of entry to care; updated at every CIC review.
Placement Planning Meeting	On day of placement or within 5 working days .
Child in Care (CIC) Reviews	Within 20 working days of entry to care , then 3 months , then 6 monthly .
Initial Health Assessment (IHA)	Within 20 working days of entry to care.
Permanence Plan	Completed by 2nd CIC review (approx. 4 months).
Pathway Plan	Reviewed at least once every 6 months and after a big life event such as a move / pregnancy.
Short Breaks	Follow CIN planning timescales.
Placement with Parents	Placement with parents assessment updated 12 monthly .

You can read the full version of our Key Timescales for Visits, Assessments and Reviews on [Tri-X](#), where you will find our Local Resources, including our Bristol Policies and Procedures, as well as links to national guidance and legislation.

Language that cares:

Language shapes how children, families and professionals understand care, support and decision making. National guidance shows that traditional social care terminology can feel stigmatising, confusing or disempowering for children and young people, which is why many services have moved toward clearer, more human, family friendly language. By choosing words that are plain, respectful and centred on children's lived experience, we strengthen relationships, reduce barriers, and support children and families to feel included and understood. [tactfostering.org.uk], [nsscp.co.uk] [durham-scp.org.uk]

The table below offers simple, everyday alternatives to some of the more technical or outdated terms still commonly used in children's social care. These changes reflect our Practice Standards: communicating with kindness, reducing jargon, and ensuring that our records and conversations make sense to the people they are about.

Traditional / Old Language	Bristol Language that Cares
Case	Child / Family
Placement	Home / where the child lives
Service user	Child / Parent / Carer
Failed to attend	Was not able to attend
Non-compliant	Finding it hard to work with us
Resistant	Unsure or worried about working with us
Hard to reach	We need to find better ways to connect
Contact	Family time / time with parents
Disclosure	Told us / Shared with us
Removed from family	Could not safely stay at home
LAC / Looked After Child	Child in our care
Foster placement	Foster home
Residential placement	Children's home

Our teams & services

We're proud of the breadth and depth of our services - and of the people who deliver them. This summary provides a clear and accessible summary of the teams across Bristol's Children and Families Directorate and our Strategic Improvement & Collaboration Directorate. It's designed to help our workforce understand who does what, where teams are based, and how we work together to support children, young people, and families.

We've made lots of changes recently - new teams, new locations, and new ways of working - so this guide is here to help everyone stay connected and informed.

Children & Families : Director – Fiona Tudge

First Assessment Service (FAS)

FAS is the "Front Door" to Children's Social Care in Bristol, managing all contacts and referrals seeking Targeted Support and Protection for children. It includes several specialist teams:

First Response: The team triages initial contacts and referrals, including safeguarding concerns and requests for Family Help. The team received a high volume of contacts and focuses on achieving timely decisions for children and families.

FAS Social Work Team: A small team of social workers working alongside First Response. Social workers complete short-term assessments and specialist workers assess 16–17-year-olds presenting as homeless.

MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub):

Located within First Response. The MASH facilitates intelligence sharing and decision-making where additional multi-agency information is required to aid the decision making on referrals. The MASH is a hybrid model including professionals from health, police, housing, education, and probation.

Safer Connections: Supports social care responses to children experiencing Harm Outside the Home. This includes a small team of key workers working directly with children and families.

The team includes a dedicated partnership team, supporting multi-agency and community partner responses to Harm Outside the home with a focus on prevention and protection. The service also considers safety in groups, places and spaces.

Connecting Families: Supports families with children aged 11+ at risk of entering care, aiming to keep families together safely through targeted, intensive interventions.

Drugs & Young People Project (DYPP):

Offers 1:1 and group support for young people affected by substance use, either their own or their parents'.

Priority Intervention Team (PIT):

Provides intensive family support (3+ visits/week for 6–12 weeks), particularly for children under Child Protection Plans or in court/pre-proceedings.

Youth Justice Service (YJS):

Supports children in contact with the justice system, offering help at police stations, courts, and during sentences. The team works holistically with families and victims, using trauma-informed approaches and preventative programmes like Turnaround and the 'Weapons in School' responses.

Neighbourhood Teams (East/ Central; North; South):

Family Help - Safeguarding Teams: Each Safeguarding team is made up of 3 Social Workers, a Child in Need Keyworker, a Family Support Worker and a Children's Social Care Assistant. Safeguarding teams work with children under statutory frameworks such as Child in Need, Child Protection, and Public Law Outline proceedings. They assess risk, coordinate multi-agency support, and initiate care proceedings in relation to children who may not be able to safely remain at home.

Family Help – Targeted Support

Interventions: Comprises Family Help Keyworkers, Family Help Social Workers. Youth and Community Workers and other professionals. Family Help Keyworkers and Social Workers act as lead professionals when working with children and families. Family Help Social Workers will support children and families who need Targeted Support and/or Children in Need. They will also support the work of lead professionals within the team. Youth and Community Workers will in some circumstances be the only professional from Family Help - Targeted Support involved with a young person and at other times will support the work of a lead professional e.g. Family Help Keyworker, Safeguarding Social Worker.

Family Help - Neighbourhood Specialists:

To further support children and families, our specialists work alongside practitioners when the needs of the family require this. Neighbourhood Specialists include - Parenting Practitioners; Primary Mental Health Specialists; Adult Mental Health Specialists; Independent Domestic Violence Advisers; Domestic Abuse Practitioners; DWP Family Community Work Advisers; Family Help Preventing Homelessness Manager; Substance Misuse Specialists; Permanency Social workers; and Senior Youth and Community Workers..

Disabled Children & Specialist Services

(DCSS): Supports children with complex and life-limiting conditions. Includes 2 Social Work teams who work with children under Child in Need, Child Protection and in Court Proceedings, and the Social Care Hub who complete the needs assessments for Education Health and Care plans, Short breaks and review and re-assessment; Occupational Therapy; 2 residential short breaks homes and a children's home.

Permanency & Specialist Services (PASS)

Children in Care: Support children in care who have a permanency plan to be cared for by the local authority. This includes children living with foster families, in residential homes, and in kinship arrangements, and can also involve assessing whether children can return safely to their birth family.

Post-16: Provides advice support to children in care and carer leavers to enable a successful transition from childhood to adulthood. Seeks to work collaboratively with young people so they can make informed choices about their lives. Fierce advocates for our young people and work with partners and networks to ensure young people know where and how to access help. The post 16 service offers specialist support to young people seeking asylum and has a Hub in central Bristol where young people can drop in to receive support – in this way the service is open ended and young people can continue to access help, support and advice when they need it.

Bristol Therapeutic Support Service

(BTSS): Promotes stability for children in care, those returning home, and care leavers. Delivered through four specialist teams including Children in Care, Family Network, and Staying Close.

Fostering, Kinship & Special

Guardianship (SGO): Fostering teams recruit and assess foster carers, and provide support through Supervising Social Workers. The kinship and SGO teams carry out kinship assessments, and provide support to SGO kinship carers. Teams also offer training and support groups for carers.

Children's Homes: Operates five homes for children aged 6–17.

Adoption: Managed regionally with partner authorities through Adoption West.

Sanctuary Services

Refugee Resettlement: Welcome team and independence team, supporting resettled refugees on central government schemes such as the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). Provides housing, health registration, benefits access, education placements, ESOL programmes, employment support, and legal advice.

Homes for Ukraine: Supporting Ukrainian guests, securing accommodation with host families. Support with health registration, benefits access, education placements, ESOL programmes, employment support.

Housing: Working closely with refugee resettlement and Homes for Ukraine to provide housing

NRPF: Supporting those with no recourse to public funds, where LAs have a statutory duty under Children's Act or Care Act.

Asylum seekers: Provide LA 'wrap around' support (Home Office provide housing and core support).

Strategic Improvement & Collaboration : Director – Heather Storey

Children's Transformation & Commissioning Team:

Leads strategic planning, procurement, and monitoring of services for children and families.

Home Finding Team: Receives referrals for children aged 0–18 who need to come into care, or who are already in care and need to move to a new home.

Home to School Travel Team: Ensures safe and reliable transport for children who need help getting to school.

Youth Homelessness Service: Focuses on preventing homelessness among 16–17-year-olds and care leavers.

Strategic Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Principal Social Worker: Provides practice leadership across Children's Services, acting as a link between the workforce and senior managers through the Children's Social Care Forum and other engagement routes. The role oversees quality assurance activity, training and development, and elements of participation through hearing and responding to feedback from children and families. The Principal Social Worker also leads the Systemic Practice Hub to promote reflective and relationship-based practice, and a range of activity relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Children's Workforce Development Team:

Coordinates training and development across the workforce, including student placements, apprenticeships, the ASYE programme and career progression. Delivers in-house training on a range of topics including Signs of Safety and systemic practice, and coordinates training from external providers.

Systemic Practice Hub: Promotes and supports systemic practice rooted in the Bristol Practice Framework. Offers consultation, training, and direct work with families. Supports practitioners to embed systemic thinking and reflective practice in their day-to-day work.

Quality Assurance Team: Lead the coordination of Service Learning Reviews, thematic audits, and Practice Week. Provides insight into practice strengths and areas for improvement. Works closely with operational teams to embed learning and improve outcomes.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs):

Chair statutory reviews for children in care, ensuring care plans are robust, child-focused, and rights-based. Provide independent oversight and escalate concerns when needed.

Child Protection Conference Chairs:

Chair Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences. Ensure multi-agency meetings are inclusive, transparent, and outcome-focused. Provide challenge and quality assurance across safeguarding practice.

Policy, Improvement & Partnerships Team:

Drives continuous improvement across Children's and Adults' services. Prepares the council for inspections, coordinates self-assessments, and leads the Corporate Parenting approach. Supports strategic planning and partnership working.

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP):

Bristol's statutory safeguarding partnership. Coordinates multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, commissions training, and promotes learning across children's, adults', and community safety services.

Families First Transformation Programme

Early Help Locality Project: Strengthens early support from pre-birth to adulthood by improving coordination across services. Uses data to guide decisions and improve visibility of outcomes. Supports locality-based working and multi-agency collaboration.

Valuing Families: Helps families stay together safely by improving support when children are at risk of entering care. Builds capacity in Connecting Families and Family Group Decision Making. Focuses on relational practice and early intervention.

Fostering: Builds a strong fostering community through better recruitment, retention, and support. Explores innovations like Support Carers, Capital Grants, and enhanced training. Aims to increase placement stability and reduce reliance on external providers.

Stability: Helps children in care remain in safe, nurturing homes. Improves visibility and proactive support for children at risk of instability. Supports carers and professionals to maintain placements and reduce disruption.

Coming Home Planning: Supports children in residential care to return to family-based homes where safe and appropriate. Promotes proactive planning, regular reviews, and wraparound support.

Permanence: Ensures children grow up in stable, loving homes. Strengthens networks and supports long-term planning through reunification, Special Guardianship, or adoption. Improves tracking and oversight of permanence planning.

Commissioning Partnerships: Improves care commissioning, manages the IFA market, and develops preferred providers. Ensures sustainable, high-quality care and better outcomes for children and families.

A final thankyou

Your commitment, compassion and professionalism make a huge difference to the children, young people and families we work with. Working in children's social care is complex, emotionally demanding and deeply skilled, and we are grateful for the care, curiosity and determination you bring to your practice. This framework is designed to support you, but it is your relationships, your insight and your persistence that truly create safety, stability and hope for families. Thank you for your continued dedication, and for all that you do to make a difference to children and families every single day.

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- Practitioners, Managers and Service Managers from the Children's Social Care workforce
- The Children's Workforce Development Team
- Bristol Systemic Practice Hub

Your thoughtful reflections have kept children and families at the heart of this Framework and Standards, strengthening our practice and inspiring us to continue to do better every day.

Author – Principal Social Worker – Children & Families

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Documents available in other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, audio tape, large print, easy English, BSL video or CD rom or plaintext please contact:

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