



‘Think Family’ Practice Guidance



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Introduction

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults with care and support needs is a shared partnership responsibility. Partners in Swindon have adopted a 'Think Family' approach, which recognises that often people live as part of families, who provide support for each another. This approach is important in helping to understand the unique circumstances of an adult or child, and the strengths and resources within the family to provide for their needs, but also identifies where additional support may be required.

This means:

- That all professionals need to remember that people rarely live in complete isolation and therefore we need to understand the needs of the wider family when we are working with a child, parent or adult.
- All professionals and services need to talk more, work together better and make sure that all the people working with children, young people and adults in a family, plan and coordinate their work.

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is intended for all services working with children, young people and adults, and those who work with families. It sets out how services that work with adults and services that work with children and young people can work together better to safeguard children, young people and adults with care and support needs through more joined up support. We can provide support to help families help each other.

This guidance supports the implementation of the 'Think Family' approach developed to improve the support offered to children, young people and adults with care and support needs, within the same family, whereby individual needs should be looked at in the context of the whole family, so those who use services are seen not just as individuals but as parents, carers or other family members.

'Think Family' Swindon's Approach

We want Swindon to be a safe place for all and recognise that in order to support families to make changes that are helpful and long lasting we need to work with all members of the family. To achieve this, we need to think and work in new ways with families. By understanding and recognising that the needs and desired outcomes of each person in the family affect each other, we are more likely to affect sustainable change. For this reason, the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership are committed to working across agencies, to improve joined up working, through the provision of high quality and responsive services which meet the needs of children, young people, adults and families.

Family means different things to different people. We know that different communities and cultures consider family in different ways, and this is not static. The understanding and practice of family changes, develops and is often affected by external circumstances and environments. Therefore, it is important to explore with individuals what family means to them, and the individuals who make up their family (including blood relatives, extended family or community members).

When working with someone to understand their needs and wishes, it will also be important to understand their family support networks, considering whether other family members are able to provide the appropriate care the person needs, and what the impact of these arrangements might be on them. Family members may have their own care or health needs or need support to carry out their caring role. Consideration of the demands and impact on others will help ensure the arrangements made are sustainable and reflect the support needs of the family. When considering people's family networks, it is important in particular to recognise the role of and the demands on young carers within the family.

We know that some families have linked complex difficulties in their lives such as learning disabilities, physical disabilities, domestic abuse, mental health conditions and diagnoses, substance or alcohol misuse. Evidence shows that traditional approaches alone cannot make the difference therefore a joined up approach that helps both children, young people and adults is needed to support what is already in place. Consideration should be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments that can be made to ensure that barriers to accessing support are removed.

There are some services in Swindon who are already working within a 'Think Family' approach. Children's Social Care have implemented The Family Safeguarding model that works on the basis of a whole-family approach and therefore requires the expertise of not just children's social workers but also specialisms within the fields of substance misuse, domestic abuse, and mental health. We want to ensure that this is embedded in all services and agencies across the local authority area.

Early Help

[Early-help-and-graduated-response](#)

We know that Early Help is support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes and can support to reduce the chance of a problem getting worse. When offering early support, we can help children and young people and their families to develop the skills they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives. It can improve the quality of home lives for children, adults and family relationships, increase educational attainment and support good mental health.

Early help support promotes multi-agency working and the opportunity for a focus on whole family support. When engaging with family members, professionals are given an opportunity to identify need in the whole family and extended family, including grandparents and partners etc. taking into account the whole family circumstances and responsibilities.

It is important to understand family history, existing contacts and family context to help identify any risks. [Chronologies](#) and genograms enable us to see the ways in which an individual child or a family have functioned over time and to analyse how families have managed their own circumstances, as well as how professionals have managed the case over time. This helps us to understand what support has previously been offered and provides an opportunity to refer to other services for targeted support, which can help prevent problems escalating and potentially limits harm.

[Professional curiosity](#) is key. Professionals need to be open minded about the whole family and the support that they might be accessing or gaps in support. Assumptions should not be made that other professionals are taking responsibility for some aspects of support without having a conversation to verify this.

Communicating and sharing information with other professionals working with the family is imperative and consent should be sought for this. It is only when a full picture of the family is known that effective assessment and planning can happen. Adults and children's workers will bring their separate expertise and professional experience. Joint working can therefore, significantly increase the skills and knowledge available to support a family.

'Think Family' Practitioner Checklist

A 'Think Family' Checklist has been developed to support this approach. The checklist should be used as a reflective tool both for individuals to use and for use within supervision. Ask yourself.....

1. Have I communicated with each family member taking into consideration their individual needs e.g. language, learning, culture
2. Have I asked who is the family, and understood family members' roles and relationships to each other
3. Have I used a tool such as a cultural genogram or triangle of care to map family and support network.
4. Do I know who else lives in the household / has regular contact
5. Do I have a picture of the family as a whole
6. Have I taken all reasonable measures to discuss and gain consent to share information, offer support and/or provide services
7. Have I taken time to understand all the demands on the family
8. Have I considered the strengths of the family and what is working well
9. Have I considered their resilience to cope with the demands they face
10. Have I considered if other family members are in need of support
11. Have I considered if other family members are at risk
12. Have I explored caring responsibilities
13. Do I know if other practitioners are working with the family and have I liaised with them
14. Have I listened to what support the family want
15. Have I made sure the plan is family led, involves all the relevant professionals and is coordinated using a multi-disciplinary approach
16. Have I explored what their solutions may be
17. Have I been open and honest about my concerns
18. Have I made assumptions about the family

19. Have the family responses helped my decision making

20. Have I taken my concerns to supervision

Strengths Based Approach

Strengths based approaches focus on individuals' strengths and not on what is not going well. Strengths based practice is holistic and multi-disciplinary and works with the individual to promote their wellbeing. We know that strong families can support and improve the life chances of individual family members. A strengths based approach builds the family's capacity to deal with current and future problems as well as supporting them to take responsibility for their own lives and their own choices.

Adults [Strengths-based-approaches/guidance](#)

Children [Strengths-based-approaches/young-people](#)

Relationship Based Practice

Relationships between professionals and the family are important, as research shows that this relationship is key to making any necessary changes. Professional relationships should not be a barrier to safeguarding and protecting the relationship with the family should not impede making a safeguarding referral. Professional boundaries must be kept at all times.

The Right Help at the Right Time

Adults and children are the experts within their own families and know most about their own circumstances and should be encouraged and supported to help to shape their own packages of support and care. In doing this they are much more likely engage in support.

Adults and, where appropriate, children should be supported to make decisions about their own lives. Sometimes this may mean that we need to challenge families to help to raise their expectations for themselves, their families or their children. As Professionals we need to ensure that we are offering children, adults and their families the right help at the right time to prevent escalation of need.

Professional Challenge and Escalating Concerns

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership have procedures in place to support professionals to challenge decisions made by other professionals in relation to children and adults at risk of abuse and neglect.

[Children's Escalation policy](#)

[Adults escalation policy](#)

[Professional disagreement and escalation](#)

Where any professional has concerns that there are increasing risks to a child or an adult with care and support needs or to both, they should follow local safeguarding procedures. The needs of both the adult and child should be considered.

Where there is an identified care and support need for an adult and a referral is made to adult services, professionals should consider the impact of this on any children living in the home and any children they may care for. Consideration should be given as to whether a referral to Children's Services is also required.

- **Right Help at the Right Time Threshold Guidance** – Swindon Safeguarding Partnership has developed this guidance in order to encourage an approach to working with children and their families (0-25 years) that ensures they receive the right help at the right time.

[The right help at right time threshold guidance](#)

- **Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures** – This document helps professionals decide whether the reason or incident they are considering referring meets the criteria for an adult safeguarding referral. The guidance contains lists of examples to support decision-making on the best course of action. The lists are not exhaustive and the guidance does not replace professional judgement.

[Adult safeguarding policy and procedures](#)

Other Information

Safeguarding Legislative Framework

- Children and young people - Children Act 1989
- Adults with care and support needs - Health and Social Care Act (2014)
- Working Together (2018)
- Care Act (2014) guidance – care and support statutory guidance

Definitions

A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Safeguarding duties apply to any adult (over the age of 18) who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the Local Authority is meeting any of those needs);
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect.

Local Contact Details and additional Information

Children and young people

- Early Help: Telephone: **01793 466479**
- Child Protection Concerns: Telephone: 01793 466903 (during normal office hours which are 8.30am to 4.40pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 4.00pm Friday)
- The Emergency Duty Service (EDS) is available outside office hours on 01793 436699
- [Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub](#)
- [MASH referral form](#)
- [Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Adults with care and support needs

Adult Social Care: Where care needs are identified by a professional, a referral to Adult Social Care should be made to enable an assessment of these needs so that appropriate care can be put into place. Contact ASC on 01793 463555 (Out of hours: 01793 436699)

- Adult Safeguarding: Where a person has been identified as having care and support needs under the Care Act, and is at risk of harm, self-neglect or abuse, a referral should be made to Adult Safeguarding.
- And referrals can be made online to the Adult Safeguarding Team [Adult Safeguarding referral form](#) and the team can be contacted on 01793 463555.
- [Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Police

- Immediate risk – 999
- Non immediate risk - 101

Family Group Conferences

The main aim of this service is to empower families and friends to take responsibility for a child and to find solutions to address family and professional concerns. It is a voluntary process and families must consent to the referral.

Children and young people are normally involved in their own Family Group Conference, although often with support from an advocate. They can also design their own invitations and choose refreshments for the meeting if they wish. An independent Family Group Conference coordinator will prepare the family for their meeting and explore support from extended family members and friends.

During the meeting, professionals set out their concerns and offer advice on what support could be available. Family members then have private family time to make a safe plan for the child. The family will also have the opportunity to attend a further meeting 3 months later to review their plan.

Contact: FGCservice@swindon.gov.uk

Supporting Parents with Additional Needs

https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/info/15/for_professionals/102/supporting_parents_with_additional_needs

Advocacy

The Care Act 2014 imposes a duty on local authorities to provide an independent advocate where an individual would otherwise have substantial difficulties in being involved in processes such as their own assessment and care planning.

The Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on local authorities to make reasonable adjustments so as to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity; the provision of an independent advocate may assist with this.

The Human Rights Act 1998 entitles a parent to participate fully in the process; this includes stages prior to any formal legal proceedings being initiated.

Local councils must involve people in decisions about their care and support. No matter how complex the person's needs, they are required by law to help the individual express their feelings and wishes, weigh up their options, make their own decisions.

Advocacy services help the most vulnerable to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

An advocate can:

- help someone express their opinions
- provide information
- help someone understand and explore their choices
- offer practical help, such as writing letters and attending meetings
- make sure the correct procedures are followed
- make sure Human Rights are upheld

All local councils must commission advocacy services and in certain situations individuals are legally entitled to an advocate. This is called statutory advocacy and there are three types:

- **Independent Mental Health Advocates (IMHAs)** - if you are being assessed or receiving treatment for a mental health condition under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- **Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs)** - if you lack capacity to make certain decisions and there is no-one else (such as a family member or friend) who can support or represent you (including DOLS)
- **Care and Support Advocates (Care Act)** - if you have 'substantial difficulty' in being involved in assessments and decisions about your care and don't have an 'appropriate adult' to support you.

Children's entitlement to statutory advocacy is determined by virtue of their circumstances, namely their care status, physical and/or mental health needs, special educational needs and disabilities, or their position in the youth justice system.

The following list outlines the groups of children who are entitled to statutory advocacy support:

- 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless
- 16 and 17 year olds who lack mental capacity
- Care leavers
- Children and young people in custody
- Children and young people in England who are detained under the Mental Health Act
- Children and young people in receipt of social care services (including child protection) who wish to make a representation (including a complaint, and those subject to child protection processes)
- Children and young people living in children's homes
- Children in receipt of health services who wish to make a complaint
- Children who may continue to need care and support in adulthood
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Children looked after and young people who go missing
- Children looked after whose care and progress are being reviewed
- Young carers

Mental Capacity

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) is designed to protect and empower individuals aged 16 and over and help to safeguard the human rights of people who lack (or may lack) mental capacity to make decisions about their care and treatment. These include decisions about whether or not to consent to care or treatment. This may be because of a lifelong learning disability or a more recent short-term impairment, for example due to drug or alcohol abuse and mental ill health or long-term impairment resulting from injury or illness. However, just because a person has one of these conditions it does not necessarily mean they lack the capacity to make a specific decision.

Someone can lack capacity to make some decisions (for example, to decide on complex financial issues) but still have the capacity to make other decisions (for example, to decide what items to buy at the local shop).

Principle 1

Everyone has the right to make his or her own decisions. Professionals should always assume an individual has the capacity to make a decision themselves, unless it is proved otherwise through a capacity assessment. In emergency situations, professionals should follow their own organisational guidelines on the MCA and how to apply it in practice, e.g. police officers.

Principle 2

Individuals must be given help to make a decision themselves. This might include, for example, providing the person with information in a format that is easier for them to understand.

Principle 3

Just because someone makes what those caring for them, or in a position of responsibility for them, consider to be an “unwise” decision, they should not be treated as lacking the capacity to make that decision. Everyone has the right to make their own life choices, where they have the capacity to do so.

Principle 4

Where someone is judged not to have the capacity to make a specific decision (following a capacity assessment), that decision can be taken for them, but it must be in their best interests.

Principle 5

Treatment and care provided to someone who lacks capacity should be the least restrictive of their basic rights and freedoms possible, while still providing the required treatment and care.

Resources

[Mental capacity, intimate relationships and adult safeguarding: Frontline Briefing \(2022\) | Research in Practice](#)

An easy read guide to the MCA can be accessed [here](#)

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/legal-rights/mental-capacity-act-2005/overview/>

Carers

Carer's assessment

A carer’s assessment is an informal discussion about the impact that caring for someone has on an individual. It can reveal a lot about how their life is affected by caring for someone and what can be done to support them.

Benefits include:

- Emotional and practical support
- Signposting to relevant services and carer groups
- Access to a carers emergency card
- Possible access to a [carer's direct payment](#)
- Receive information specific to your circumstances and a regular newsletter

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20189/carers/1360/carers_assessment