

Durham

Safeguarding Children Partnership



Whole Family Approach

March 2024



**Guidance
document**

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to set out a shared understanding and meaning of the whole family approach across the partnership. It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that the working and including families is central to everything we do within our daily practice.

Problems can arise when we lose sight of the Whole Family and only focus on one child or limited adults. Work with families and recognising the value their knowledge and perspective offers to the planning for the child is an essential part of safeguarding. It helps practitioners to develop an understanding of the whole lived experience of the child, and what internal and external factors contribute to their uniqueness and helps them to remain safe from harm.

Whole Family Approach: learning within DSCP

Within all four of the priority pieces of work (2023-2025) within the DSCP learning was identified around when practitioners are working with families, they do not always consider the Whole Family. There was a consistent theme that information shared with the family and about family members was not embedded within practice.

This briefing is informed by all the pieces of priority work completed in the DSCP, it is informed by feedback from families, practitioners, children, and young people alongside Local and National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

Guidance and Legislation

The Whole Family approach enables practitioners to work together across the entire continuum of safeguarding work, from intervening early to prevent a difficulty from becoming a risk, to understanding the dynamics in complex safeguarding cases and developing an intervention plan.

“Successful outcomes for children depend on strong partnership working between parents/carers and the practitioners working with them. Practitioners should take a child centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family.”

(Working Together 2023)

A key principle underpinning the Department of Health Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000) is that “understanding of a child must be located within the context of the child’s family (parents or caregivers, maternal and paternal grandparents and the wider family) and of the community and culture in which he or she is growing up”. This framework for practice highlights the importance of an inter-disciplinary approach to assessment; that the knowledge professionals have about a child and the child’s wider family is an essential component of any assessment of their needs and risks.

Gathering information about a child from relevant sources and people who know them well is also a requirement which enables the professional to apply the welfare checklist set out in Section 1 of the Children Act 1989. The DSCP want to remind practitioners that when you are gathering information about families, it is important to be professionally curious and keep the DSCP approach of verify, clarify and reflect ([insert link](#)) at the front of your minds whenever you are working with families.

What is Whole Family?

The concept of family means different things to different people. Families can include an extended network of relatives and friends; this is often a dynamic group of people. Practitioners should explore the networks of children and adults. This can help to identify sources of support as well as potential risks.

When working with families it will not always be relevant to involve all family members. There are many factors to consider in balancing of proportionate intervention as to why and whether to involve wider family members. Professional judgement is key; however, it is important that you clearly record who you have considered in the family, who contributes to the day-to-day life of the family member and why these people are or are not significant in the child’s life. A good way of quickly identifying who is in the family is by asking the child/parent who is important in their lives and whether they think your assessment/support could benefit from including that person. Decisions on who, where, and when to be including in your enquiries, will be informed by factors such as the potential to provide valuable insights, the potential to play a future role in promoting and protecting children’s welfare, and/or arrangements made in the assessment process.

The cultural context of the family and community is also an important consideration, reflecting the DSCP commitment to understanding the impact of the child’s uniqueness on their life and future. A consistent finding from Safeguarding Practice Reviews is the need to support practitioners to develop an ‘ecological’ perspective in relation to families, that is, understanding the context in which families live, the issues and tensions they negotiate daily, including prejudice and discrimination, respective roles and relationships within families, and their interaction with other services.

Questions for practitioners to consider:

- ✓ Have I asked who makes up the family and understood the role(s) of each family member and how these relate to each other?
- ✓ Do I know everyone who lives in the household or has regular contact with the child or adult I am supporting?
- ✓ Do I have a picture of the family as a whole? (this might be in the form of an Eco Map)
- ✓ Have I understood all the current demands on the family and their levels of resilience to manage these demands?
- ✓ Have I considered the family's strengths and what is working well for them?
- ✓ Have I considered if other family members need support or are at risk? Do I know what support the family might want?
- ✓ Have I explored caring responsibilities for any family member?
- ✓ Do I know if other practitioners are working with the family?
- ✓ Have I explored what the family's solutions to their support needs might look like?
- ✓ Have I been open and honest about my concerns as a professional?
- ✓ Have I made any assumptions about the family?
- ✓ Have I taken my concerns to supervision with my manager/team?
- ✓ Have I considered what may make a difference for the family?

Local and National Reviews

Messages from research, significant incidents, local and national reviews of child death and injury consistently find that the sharing of information among professionals about children with whom they work was deficient. This guidance is important in making clear that all professionals must take account of the information known by other professionals who know the child when this will improve the quality of assessment.

The importance of 'whole family' practice is key national learning from rapid reviews and highlights the importance of considering all family members and the 'impact of vulnerabilities within the household' (CSPRP Annual Report 2022/23).

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes:

Arthur's wider family members were not listened to, despite their many attempts to get agencies to look at what might be happening to Arthur. Their views were not sought, and their concerns were not taken seriously. Family members and other connected adults can speak on behalf of the child and enable their voice to be heard:

Learning:

- Too many assessments relied on his father's perspective and did not include the views of the wider extended family or other professionals who had significant involvement with Arthur.

- In relation to the decision by Arthur's father to stop contact with the maternal family, the potential for these family members to facilitate positive contact between Arthur and his mother in support of her application to the family court, could, on reflection, have been more fully considered.

Why is this important for family members?

- ❖ At the outset of the enquiries, the family can expect advice about how they can contribute to safeguarding the welfare and best interests of the child in the circumstances and understand what is expected of them.
- ❖ The significance of wider family members should be seen in the context of the family, their uniqueness, including their culture, faith, ethnicity, and history. This is relevant in making decisions in respect of who to involve in the assessment.
- ❖ The assessment process must be open and transparent with the child and parents and other people in the family of significance to the child.
- ❖ Unless it seems unsafe to do so, professionals should always work collaboratively with the family and help them to reach their own negotiated solution for caring and safeguarding their children.
- ❖ There are circumstances where the involvement of extended family members may be a source of risk to the child, for example where there is high conflict between maternal and paternal families, or when a Forced Marriage Protection Order is in place.
- ❖ Consider using a genogram/ecomap or a family network map to understand the child's immediate and extended network in their family and community.
- ❖ There may be indicators that wider family members or professionals, such as the school have only heard one side of the child's life and as such their information may need to be seen in this context. For example, they only deal with one parent, have a stepparent or other adult replacing one of the biological parents on the emergency contact list or have the child enrolled under a name not matching that on their birth certificate.
- ❖ If it is relevant to the understanding of harm or risk of harm to the child, and grandparents or other extended family members have significant contact with the child, request information from other partner agencies that might hold relevant information.

What we want to achieve across the partnership?

Each agency will provide assurance to the partnership that measures are in place to work with families and have a shared approach and understanding of the importance of the whole family approach.

Measured Outcome

- 1) Each agency should consider how to engage children in meaningful ways to talk about their family and who is important to them, with a particular emphasis on how the family members support, safeguard or meet their day-to-day needs.
- 2) Each agency should ensure that the whole family approach is embedded within all single agency audit activity.
- 3) The whole family approach will be embedded within multi-agency and partnership improving activity.

Resources

Signs of Safety Eco Map:
[Signs Of Safety Eco Map](#)

Guidance for Genograms and Eco Maps:
[Guidance For Genograms And Eco Maps](#)