



Department  
for Education

# **Knowledge and skills statements for practice leaders and practice supervisors**

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# Knowledge and Skills for Practice Supervisors

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accrediting Practice Supervisors in child and family social work.

Practice Supervisors are qualified social workers whose primary function is to supervise the practice and decision-making of Approved Child and Family Practitioners, and to develop the skills of individuals and teams within child and family social work services. This requires experience of working with a high level of social complexity and risk of harm, and is likely to require substantial experience of working within the statutory system.

The Practice Supervisor will be able to do the following:

## 1) Promote and govern excellent practice

Establish and maintain a highly valued position of influence within the organisation, and be recognised for extensive knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Help shape and influence an environment which enables excellent practice by setting high standards and motivating others to do the same. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and build positive relationships with children and families and other professionals. Lead by example, showing integrity, creativity, resilience and clarity of purpose. Be visible and accessible to all staff, children and families.

Be accountable for ensuring the highest professional standards and professional conduct. Design and implement measures to assure the quality of practice and the effective throughput of work. Interrogate decisions, ensuring they are underpinned by theory and the best evidence and that they will contribute to the goals of the family and their social work plan, whilst ensuring that the safety of children remains the highest priority. Closely monitor the wellbeing of children in public care, ensuring that they grow up in homes in which they are happy and thriving, holding high ambitions for their futures.

## 2) Developing excellent practitioners

Recognise, respect and value the expertise of practitioners and provide a practice framework, underpinned by theory and the best evidence, within which they can work effectively. Explain and champion the framework to practitioners, other professionals, children and families and set an expectation that this framework will be applied to practice. Facilitate use of the best evidence to devise effective interventions, which are most likely to support family welfare and reduce risk to children. Secure excellent practice through an analytical understanding of different patterns of family functioning, matched with service responses which are most likely to effect change for families, as well as support children in public care and young people leaving care.

Recognise the strengths and development needs of practitioners, and use practice observation, reflection and feedback mechanisms, including the views of children and families, to develop practice. Develop a culture of learning and improvement, where staff are sufficiently stretched and mentored to meet their aspirations. Gauge different learning styles and recognise when the role of the Practice Supervisor is to teach and when it would be more effective to draw on practitioners' own knowledge. Invest available resource into staff and service development, drawing on the expertise of children and families.

### **3) Shaping and influencing the practice system**

Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that processes are fit for purpose and efficient. Create an ethos within which staff are motivated and supported to be ambitious on behalf of children and families. Use resources, including those that lie within families and communities, to the best effect. Facilitate constant reflective thinking about the welfare of families and the safety of children. Build and develop influential and respectful partnerships between practitioners and partner agencies. Pay attention to different structures, pressures, priorities and levers for influencing and shaping the thinking of others.

Share practice knowledge and expertise and influence the wider organisation and national system to function to the best effect. Offer constructive advice and creative, strengths-based solutions to difficulties.

### **4) Effective use of power and authority**

Apply a proportionate and ethical approach to the exercise of authority, which develops and maintains relationships with families and professionals and ensures the protection of children. Maximise opportunities for children and families to make informed choices. Secure an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law. Exercise statutory powers where social work assessment shows that families require help and support and children are at risk of significant harm, ensuring that actions are proportionate to risk. Support practitioners to always communicate clearly, honestly and respectfully the purpose and content of the social work plan.

Recognise the patterns of relationships between professionals, identifying where these are likely to compromise the welfare of families and the safety of children, taking immediate and corrective action. Invite challenge and debate and be accessible to children, families and professionals. Ensure the professional network identifies the logic by which children and families are functioning and use this as a basis for effective engagement. Take into account diversity, the experience of discrimination and the impact of poverty.

## **5) Confident analysis and decision-making**

Create a culture of focused thinking which consistently explores a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances). Generate multiple hypotheses which make sense of the complexity in which children and families are living. Help practitioners to make decisions based on observations and analyses, taking account of the wishes and feelings of children and families. Ensure that practitioners are ambitious for children and families and that the long-term and life-long consequences of decisions are fully considered at all stages of planning and review, and in consultation with children and families. Build relevant relationships with children and families and professionals to test current hypotheses and dominant perspectives. Ensure that children and young people's expectations are met where possible and any disappointment sensitively acknowledged and sufficiently addressed.

Establish recording processes, provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.

## **6) Purposeful and effective social work**

Ensure practitioners adopt an approach to practice which is proportionate to identified risk and need. Use supervision processes to challenge the balance of authoritative intervention and collaborative engagement to determine how current practice is achieving the best long-term outcomes for children and families. Use focused questioning with practitioners to clarify the direction of work, and identify whether practitioners need to adopt a more reflective and curious approach, or respond with greater pace and assertion. Ensure that family narratives are sought and listened to, that all relevant family members, including fathers, are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry these out, and that practice empowers families to make positive changes.

Ensure methods and tools used are based on the best evidence, that progress is frequently reviewed and that the social work plan is adjusted accordingly. Reflect upon and review the welfare and support needs of children and families and be alert to evidence of actual or likely significant harm ensuring that identified risks are managed and new risks identified, assessed and addressed.

Implement effective strategies for ensuring throughput of work. Frequently review the requirement for continued involvement so that cases are closed in a timely manner and that families have an appropriate and long-term support plan where that is required, and ensure that no child or family is left unnoticed in the system.

## **7) Emotionally intelligent practice supervision**

Recognise how different relationships evoke different emotional responses, which impact upon the effectiveness of social work practice and provide responsive, high quality individual supervision. Use mechanisms such as peer supervision and group case consultation to help identify bias, shift thinking and the approach to case work in order to generate better outcomes for children and families. Recognise and articulate the dilemmas and challenges faced by practitioners and use this expertise and experience to guide, assist and support the provision of services.

Identify emotional barriers affecting practice and recognise when to step in and proactively support individuals. Promote reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place. Demonstrate a high level of resilience within pressured environments, be attuned to the effect of high emotion and stress and respond in calm, measured and pragmatic ways.

Reflect upon the confidence of practitioners and adapt management and leadership style according to the needs of individuals and the organisation. Protect practitioners from unnecessary bureaucratic or hierarchical pressures and have in place strategies to help manage the root causes of stress and anxiety. Continually energise and reaffirm commitment to support families and protect children.

## **8) Performance management and improvement**

Explain to practitioners the full legal, regulatory, procedural and performance framework within which they operate and be accountable for their work within it. Provide opportunities for staff to give and receive constructive feedback on performance. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice and build social workers' confidence in their practice. Challenge complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.

Establish available capacity so that work is allocated appropriately across the staff group and ensure best use is made of resource, ability, interests and ambitions. Devise and implement systems which both demonstrate effective practice and trigger immediate corrective action where necessary. Produce and utilise data to understand current demand, historical patterns and likely future trends. Scrutinise system performance and devise and implement effective and timely improvement plans.

Strike a balance between employing a managerial, task-focussed approach and an enabling, reflective leadership style to achieve efficient day-to-day functioning. Develop a strategy for future improvements and contribute to similar within the wider organisational system. Draw on and share best practice within local and national contexts. Implement communication channels with children, young people, families and other professionals inviting feedback and ideas for improvement. Respond thoughtfully and proactively to

complaints and mistakes, creating learning opportunities for self, staff and the organisation.

# Knowledge and Skills for Practice Leaders

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accrediting Practice Leaders in child and family social work.

Practice Leaders are qualified social workers with the day to day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, and for Approved Child and Family Practitioners and Practice Supervisors. Most usually this is referred to as the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care or Director of Family Services. It may be that a few, mainly larger employers, would regard themselves as having more than one Practice Leader.

The Practice Leader will be able to do the following:

## 1) Lead and govern excellent practice

Be a highly visible and highly valued figure, occupying a position of significant influence at a local and national level, and be known for exceptional knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Hold accountability for child and family social work practice and its impact on the lives of children and families locally.

Provide clarity of organisational purpose and the values underpinning that, focusing on providing a world-class service for children and families. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and positive relationships and attitudes towards children and families, other professionals and partner agencies, politicians and the public. Drive change and constant progress so that children and families get the very best help and support. Secure an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law. Show the strongest commitment to children in public care by ensuring they grow up in homes in which they can thrive and, having left care, receive all the support to which they are entitled.

Lead by example with integrity, creativity, resilience, and clarity of purpose. Sustain wide, current knowledge and understanding of child and family social work practice and broader child protection and welfare systems, locally, nationally and globally.

## 2) Creating a context for excellent practice

Engage staff, children and families and the wider partnership in constructive thinking about the future. Create a shared strategic vision which inspires, motivates and encapsulates the organisational commitment to supporting families, protecting children and providing safe and stable childhoods for children in public care. Champion this vision and drive strategic leadership throughout the organisation, so that it is applied to everyday practice.



Focus on best outcomes for children and families and ensure that the vision, purpose and plan for the organisation is welcomed and owned by all. Continuously evaluate how best to keep the vision a reality, and what needs to change to build upon existing strengths.

Create a culture in which excellent practice is expected and celebrated, critical incidents handled with grace and discipline, and public commitment to protecting children and supporting families frequent and authentic.

### **3) Designing a system to support effective practice**

Design with political and financial astuteness, and within a clear set of principles, a practice system which enables excellent child and family social work practice to flourish. Ably translate local and national policy into the organisational context, without compromising high quality professional practice. Prioritise budgets in order to meet demand and ensure quality of service provision. Confidently illustrate the relationship between efficiency, children's outcomes and financial flexibility so that services can respond to changing need and risk.

Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that process is well considered, fit for purpose and efficient. Create sufficient capacity for practitioners to build relationships with children and families and undertake effective direct work with families which enhances family wellbeing and reduces risks. Use resources, including those that lie within families and communities, to best effect and have mechanisms in place to ensure constant reflective thinking about the welfare of families and the safety of children. Build influential and productive relationships across the organisation and the wider local partnership, across regions and nationwide, to secure the very best support to families and the protection of children.

Establish communication channels which report on the welfare of children and families, and the safety of those at risk. Be alert to anxiety and pressures within the organisation, even at the earliest stages. Secure high quality legal, financial and human resource services for the organisation and ensure communication technology is fit for purpose. Challenge orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence for children and families, and model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to practice and leadership.

### **4) Developing excellent practitioners**

Critically appraise theory, the best evidence and rationale for different practice approaches. Select robust methodologies to form an overarching practice framework. Identify the skills needed to practise within the complexity of children's and families' lives, and in particular the population being served by the organisation. Secure the resources

and support needed to implement the practice framework and shape, in partnership with others, the current and future quality of practice through effective training and sustained professional development for all staff and throughout a practice career. Recognise and utilise the resource that children, families and communities can bring to the development of staff and services.

Recognise the value of excellent social workers remaining in frontline practice. Provide sufficient organisational, professional and personal support to ensure the wellbeing of practitioners so that they can provide excellent social work services to children and families. Identify and develop people with emerging leadership talent, and support retention through the provision of challenging, interesting and motivating opportunities.

## **5) Support effective decision-making**

Build a culture where managed risk is accepted and understood as being inherent in every decision that is made. Encourage practitioners to make decisions and take subsequent actions in this context making sure they know they have the backing of the organisation to act reasonably and in a child's best interests. Actively demonstrate trust in the workforce and develop a culture which promotes learning, reflection and the acceptance of accountability.

Publicly acknowledge the enormity of separating a child from their parents. Participate and add rigour to decision-making about children coming into public care, returning home or to the wider family, or moving to new permanent families. Ensure that all long-term consequences of current decisions are properly explored and understood.

Make sound and complex decisions in high pressured, fast paced conditions, striking a balance between speed and depth of thought. Draw on the best evidence to help inform thinking and decision-making.

## **6) Quality assurance and improvement**

Set and uphold high quality practice standards, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on the lives of children and families. Establish rigorous and fair processes for managing the performance of staff, including accurate measures of practice through direct observation. Secure an in-depth, comprehensive and current understanding of the realities of practice across the organisation and know how to address early signs of difficulties. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice which builds social workers' confidence in their practice. Meet complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.

Learn from local, national and international review, inspection and research and lead local and national debate. Ensure local children, families and communities play an active

role in assessing the quality of services received and developing ideas for service and staff development. Pay close attention to the organisation's local and national reputation, taking steps to manage its public profile successfully. Establish the organisation as a credible and respectable public service, proudly promoting the achievements of staff, children and families.



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