



Reason for being in care explained

North Somerset
Using ‘Words and pictures’ and case summaries to explain reason for care
September 2020

North Somerset, drafted and implemented a policy that all children should have “Words and pictures” work to explain why they are in care. In addition, policy updated so all children’s case summaries must include the reason why they are in care to ensure consistent communication.

Why?

Like in many other local authorities, children in care, especially 4-7 year olds, in North Somerset reported in the 2018 Your Life Your Care survey that adults had not fully explained why they were in care.

What difference is it making?

When the YLYC survey was repeated in 2019, there had been a 32% increase in the 4-7 year olds who said that why they were in care had been fully explained to 82%. This was significantly higher than children in care in other local authorities.

What?

As part of the Signs of Safety approach to social work, North Somerset embedded the practice of using 'Words and Pictures' to explain to children why they are in care. The approach uses story boards developed with the child to explain in age appropriate language what has happened, coupled with pictures to illustrate the words. The child has a copy and a copy is kept on the child's file.

Prior to completing the words and picture the worker would, where possible, speak to the parent, parents or previously caring adult. This discussion would hopefully gain agreement on the contents of the 'words and pictures' - sometimes this is not possible, but there would be an agreement to disagree, with openness and honesty. A significant point of this meeting/discussion is also being able to get the language used by the family, so this language and use of words can be transferred into the word and pictures, making it more and their words and pictures and less the workers.

North Somerset made it a requirement that 'Words and pictures' work is completed with all children in care. It was written into relevant policies and social workers were tasked with rolling this out.

The children in Community Family Team will get words and picture offered during care proceedings, done with a social worker or family support worker, and this is then updated when the care plan is in place. North Somerset ensured that where this had not been done with children in their Children Looked After team (who work with children in permanent placements) their social workers would do it retrospectively. Completion was audited by team leaders and followed up in supervision. More in depth Life Story work is also available once this has been completed.

In addition, they ensured that in the child's case summary there was a clear record of why the child was in care. This ensured that everyone who worked with the child would have the same understanding of this and could repeat it to the child. This also served to further emphasise the importance of being clear about why children are in care. Progress of the roll out was monitored through regular performance boards chaired by the Director of Children's Services.