

# A NATIONAL VOICE

**coramVoice** )))  
getting young voices heard

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**Stable Homes, Built on Love**

**Social Worker  
Training**

# Session 11 - Social Worker Training

The online session for children and young people took place on Tuesday 6 February 6.00-7.30pm.

The session looked at the Children's Social Care Early Career.

The policy team were interested in looking at some of the outcomes within the Early Career Framework, how these would feel to children and young people and how other people would know that something had happened.

## Who we heard from:

A total of 17 young people attended the session. They were aged 15-25+ and were from across England.

- Devon
- Dorset
- Essex
- London
- North Tyneside
- Northamptonshire
- Scunthorpe



## Stable Homes, Built on Love - Social Worker Training

In February 2023 the Government released 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy, which suggested a number of changes to improve children social care for families, children and young people.

There is not one thing that's going to fix things but we have analysed what we think are the main problems and have tried to come up with some solutions. And as part of this, we've decided to write an Early Career Framework for child and family social workers.

When social workers first start to practise their social work, what are the skills and knowledge that they need in the first 5 years of their career and beyond. What are those skills and knowledge and what do they need to know to build good relationships with children, young people and their families, make good decisions and be effective social workers.

We need to speak to lots of different people, especially the people it's going to affect. So that's why we've been engaging children and young people, parents, foster carers, adoptive parents, grandparents, parents, family, friends, anyone we could speak to about what they think is good and what could be better.

We take all of this information and then we feed it into our expert writing group. They're made-up of experienced senior social workers. So they're hearing all this feedback from people who are actually affected by social work. They've taken on writing the framework. We're really trying to push the voices of children and young people into the framework. Hopefully it will be released in a couple of years.

## What Children and Young People Told Us:



- More support and training needs to be given to social workers to understand young people's different identities. Using chosen names and correct pronouns (he/her/they) helps to build a good relationship.
- It's important to make meetings informal by including a fun activity.
- It is essential for the social worker to be down to earth, for example wearing casual clothes, making an effort to have a conversation rather than jumping straight into the heavy stuff, remembering the smaller details like a child/young person's interests.
- Choosing a venue that is comfortable for the child/young person – i.e. not being taken out of class or met at school gates.
- For social workers to be aware of changes to care policies and letting children and young people know when this happens in case it might affect them.
- Regular updates – including if the social worker is going on leave/ or will be unavailable.
- Providing a variety of ways to stay in contact with your social worker.
- Making children and young people aware of any support, financial that they can access.

### Questions to DfE:

Does this framework cover when a family member, say, an aunt and uncle, takes on the responsibility of the care (kinship Care)?

## Quotes from Young People:



"For my social worker to spend more quality time with me this should be done outside of the house"

"He is nice, but we need to see him more"

"Calling and texting more outside of visits"

"Contact me back within 72 hours of getting an email, phone call or text"

"Text back within 72 hours"

"All children's services should have an app for texting and calling your social worker. So, the texts and phone calls are tracked in terms of how long they have taken to get back to you. If the 72-hour time frame isn't meet a message should be sent to their manager. This is the only way to make sure this happens"

"The Social Worker should do more direct work with me"

"Make sure Residential Homes and Foster placements do keyword sessions with us around these key areas. Also, we need independence training from around 12 years old. We need to have discussion about what life looks like after we reach 18."

"This should be evidenced and mandatory. This should be checked by children's services. A booklet should be created for the child or young person."

## Quotes from Young People:

"Training should be mandatory for social workers, foster carers and residential staff around gangs, exploitation, safe sex, drug use, relationship-based practice, independence, healthy relationships, bullying etc"

"Social workers need more time to do direct work and visits"

"Children and young people should have good foster carers or residential staff. They should be good at listening without judgement"

"They all need training on how to do this"

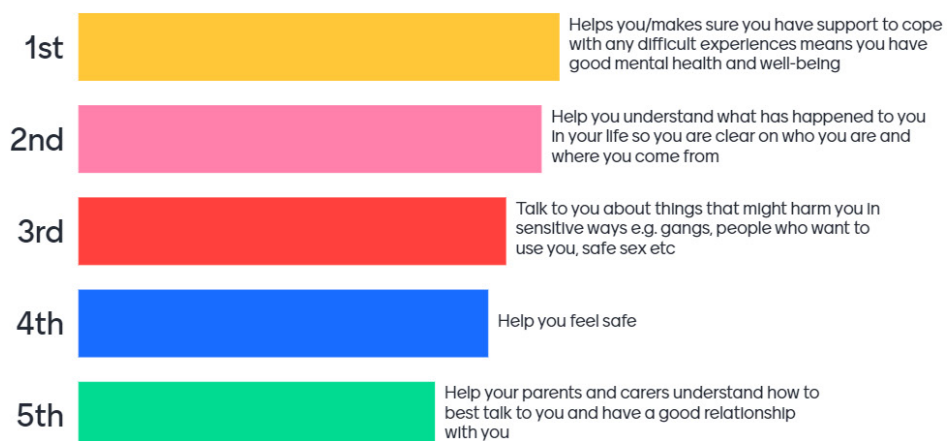
## In the Early Career Framework It Says That Social Workers Need to:

- Help you feel safe
- Help you understand what has happened to you in your life so you are clear on who you are and where you come from
- Talk to you about things that might harm you in sensitive ways e.g. gangs, people who want to use you, safe sex etc.
- Helps you/makes sure you have support to cope with any difficult experiences means you have good mental health and well-being
- Help your parents and carers understand how to best talk to you and have a good relationship with you

## During the Session We Looked at 3 Topics to Explore:

- What does this look like to children and young people?
- How would other people know that this thing has happened?

## Rank in order of what you would like to talk about today



# Topic 1: Helps you/ makes you sure you have support to cope with any difficult experiences means you have good mental health and well-being

- Younger children- maybe read emotion books to them to help them understand or use games.
- For younger children having the chance to explore emotions through different things like games or play and for older children having the safe place to tell social workers how they're feeling without being judged.
- Also not being forced into doing therapy or going to CAMHS as most young people won't be ready to deal with or share what they have been through.
- Don't share everything you have spoken about with the social worker to the foster carer unless it's needed for safety because that can break down placements and relationships.
- I also don't think all social workers know what young people are in entitled to or how we can provide feedback.
- To be honest it was after my IRO left and was promoted that she texted me about driving lessons. I had a pathway meeting today and we need another one because they have to go and check so many things and that's my social workers team leader.

Topic 1: Helps you/makes sure you have support to cope with any difficult experiences means you have good mental health and well-being

**What would it look like to children and young people?**

**Or games**

Don't pressure young people into trusting and talking straightaway it takes times.

don't remove support network that has already been implemented with professionals that they have set up and is going well with YP

Younger children- maybe read emotion books to them to help them understand

New SW should read into what is currently going well for YP and to continue that with them. Don't disregard previous SW positive changes for their own agenda

We have a nurture library, which has books about feelings and being in care that young people can access. the books for all ages which can be accessed as needed

For younger children having the chance to explore emotions through different things like games or play and for older children having the safe place to tell social workers how they're

Have options for help/therapy when the young person starts showing warning signs of mental health. Early intervention.

Teenagers may prefer to go for a 'walk and talk' i personally find this useful as it enables the YP to talk freely about any issues in the placement aswell (like other YP's, carer etc)

Also not being forced into doing therapy or going to camhs as most young people won't be ready to deal with or share what they have been through

When waiting on a waiting list make sure there is someone talking with us while waiting- we can feel that no one cares when on waiting lists.

communicating with the young person and listen to them do not use the tick box method and treat the young person as an individual not as a case number.

Having a good support network and let others know if it has happened by asking the young person or the people that run the group if the step was to attend a support group

Take them to a local park, boys in particular but not limited like football. Maybe the social worker could have a kick about and chat etc

Making sure the YP has a good relationship with one strong adult so they feel comfortable to go to them when needing to talk.

When a young people works with you, don't just refer them to services and make them wait without help. This is often a long wait without help.

Don't share everything you have spoken about with the social worker to the foster carer unless it's needed for safety because that can break down placements and relationships

Creating a support network of people (including professionals and friends) around the young person so that they have people to reach out to or that you can connect them

Therapy sessions are really helpful to young people these go alone way.

If you say you are going to do something do it, and update us in between visits. Don't leave us in the dark.

Offering services outside of social work and giving the info to keep so they can make the first step

Be honest with us when you haven't done things you said you would- referrals, contacting services, care team members and family.

feeling without being judged

Don't sugarcoat things when we are old enough to be told the true story.

build relationships with us, before talking about emotional/ serious things.

If you give us resources, ask us if we would like to look at these together.

Taking a young person's feelings seriously, validating them and listening as a human being

Helping the young person make friends and connections for the future



## How Would You Know This Has Happened?

- I was really uncomfortable in my placement the other week. Issues resolved now but the out of hours team told me I couldn't sleep anywhere else and to just use my breathing techniques to prevent other issues. Really unhelpful.

### How would other people know that this has happened?

Social workers being able to identify and evidence the support systems/professionals /services that have engaged with the young person

Maybe looking back on there behaviours. If they have improved since this piece of work has taken place.

**Social workers having to fill out a report and the YP signed it.**

Have a independent form or have a photo of a text from young person on file to show that was helping.

Moodboards - used by SW's as a visual representation

**Our mood would be better.**

Collaborating with other professionals involved in the care of young people, such as mental health professionals or educators, can provide perspectives on SW effectiveness

**We would engage in more activities and stuff like school**

Metrics that track the progress of young people over time and this can provide insights into the long-term impact of social work interventions on mental health

We would be more trusting of social workers and more likely to talk honestly with them.

Comparing outcomes and experiences with established benchmarks or best practices can identify areas where social workers are excelling and improvement areas

Observing SWs in action and reviewing documentation such as case notes and progress reports to provide evidence of the strategies and interventions used to support YP

## Other Comments:

- How it would look different for different ages? I think it should also be one size doesn't fit all, so you may be a 14 year old but not everybody is textbook if that makes sense.
- I'm not saying all social workers, but it is known that social workers can lie, especially in files. I've received files that say things that never actually happened, and I think it literally depends on the young person and social workers so. I think that should be implemented after every session with your social worker. Not like that where you have like a form on what did you find useful? What areas did that happen? What did you do here? What did you do that? So you have the safe place to write it down without having to actually communicate to services. Because I think a lot of children, young people, get scared that they're going to say the wrong thing to the social worker and they're not going to kind of be. You know, dropped or left also possibly for an older young person to have a text message to their social worker and say, oh, that really helped me today and that be evidence in the files, not just young person X said this and I recorded it. I think they should actually be photos and things like that uploaded to your files. So you can actually see or other people can see. OK that was actually uploaded. This is the reference of it.
- I'm a very visual person. You could have like what you plan to do on these meeting on a board that be uploaded to social care. And once that's done, you can tick it off like :) it to say that that's actually been done. So it's a visual representation as well.
- It's important to know what grants are available to you. It's a postcode lottery and it shouldn't be postcode lottery. Like my current PA is on leave and I move address on Monday. I am chasing my PA's managers and still not getting an answer. I have no way of moving and I'm kind of left in the dark. I don't know what I'm actually entitled to.

## Topic 2: Help you understand what has happened to you in your life so you are clear on who you are and where you come from

- Duty line and other contact numbers should be available on the website.

Topic 2: Help you understand what has happened to you in your life so you are clear on who you are and where you come from

### What would it look like to children and young people?

Constructing family trees or history of the family.

Knowing why you were put in care if you don't already can be useful to some people. Others may be not depending on the reason and the situation, mental health etc

If a young person asks then you help them understand and don't tell people you've told them already until the young person has a full understanding in an age appropriate way

Compulsory life story work, but done properly. Dates checked, no stigmatising language, no opinions. Factual.

to feel like my social worker is really there for me and has given thought to what they are saying.

Supporting us with legal things, changing surnames etc. supporting the cost and process of this

Good quality life story work, that is reviewed on a regular visit, and is done with us.

To ensure that the facts in our life story work are true, we have checked information out with several sources.

If they for whatever reason can't tell us what our family history is, fund our ancestry search

Have a young person friendly story of what has happened information to correct and be mindful of what needs the young person has.

### How would other people know that this has happened?

Putting the family tree/history on file

Hopefully the reason for the YP being in care is already on file

Young people can tell professionals that they feel like their opinions are heard and valued. This might be in reviews

Get stories from people who have made a good rolemodel

We would be able to tell you that we understand our journey.

having a copy of the story on file. make sure there is everything on there so there is no missing information.

Whilst we may still ask for these- there will be less needs to request our files.

## Other Comments:

- Isn't life story work compulsory? I got told children had to have a life story book. I don't know if it is compulsory is law, but I think life story work is very, very important. But doing the life story work correctly is important.
- I have a life story book I'll never get rid of it. It's got photos of me. The only photos I have, but there's dates completely wrong and it was never checked before it was given to me. So it says 'my dad started school in this year', but he wasn't born at that point. So it needs to be done correctly.
- When I first came into care, they did something with like a family tree, but it wasn't kept on file, so we've lost it, so I've ended up paying to have it done properly from like ancestry or something because they lost the one that I already had. And so that was really, really annoying. But I do definitely agree that it is really important and it should be compulsory because it can help the young person when they kind of grow up and leave care to understand their background going forward.
- More in depth, not just clear basics of these people that people this and worded appropriately. So in my one it goes between I got this when I was 17 it goes between very childish like me pictures of me driving a car like in like a they've just photo shopped a photo to have in really big words like maternal or paternal I think they should say like maternal and then explain what that means.



## **Topic 3: Talk to you about things that might harm you in sensitive ways e.g. gangs, people who want to use you, safe sex etc.**

- I am really am passionate about removing stigma.
- Direct work and involvement from social workers in addressing sensitive topics.
- Keywork sessions within Residential Homes and Foster placements, alongside independence training from the age of 12.
- Discussions about life after turning 18.

## **How Would You Know This Has Happened?**

- Recommendations for evidence-based and mandatory procedures for this work to be done, with checks conducted by children's services and the creation of informational booklets that the child or young person can keep.
- Emphasizing mandatory training for social workers, foster carers, and residential staff on various topics like gangs, exploitation, safe sex, drug use, relationship-based practice, independence, healthy relationships, bullying etc.

## Other Comments:

- Mental health should be included in this as well.
- I had problems with things where I would hurt myself, but there was never a conversation in an appropriate way about what was happening and why.
- Regarding safe sex. I think there needs to be more training on it because when I got to the age of 17/18 and wanting to be on the contraception pill, not because of being sexually active, because of hormones and stuff like that. And in case something happened, you know, children are 17/16 year olds are, you know, crazy hormones everywhere. My social worker turned around and went, didn't know she was sexually active like I would understand if she was, but I didn't know she was. There was no conversation on this. That's not okay.
- I think it should be brought up if something like this happens to you, please come and tell us or tell someone you trust.
- I was taking birth control for my hormones and to regulate, and we've even discussing with me just checking my files, my NHS files, they show where I just put on.
- Sometimes young people do go through unfortunate situations that you know, some responses might make them more traumatised, you know and it's hard to handle that. You know, it's not just OK you can come and speak to me, but is there any services that are available to support us and we should be told about them.
- Taking about sensitive issues can take time for children and young people. Be patient with us.

## Other Comments:

- Social workers should support young people in talking to the police or going to court if needed. We also need to be told about processes and our rights. It might not be the right time for us but if there is a time limit then we need to be told about that.
- I think there need to be safety courses for young girls (and young boys) to go through. We need to know how to protect ourselves. I went on a safety course and it was actually quite helpful because we had someone coming in to teach us for self-protection. We had the police as well coming in, actually.
- I think many of us can say that in any type of topic we have been called liars just because we are foster children and are seen as vulnerable and they think that is OK to take that advantage.

## Topic 4: Help you feel safe

- Spending more quality time with their social worker outside of the home.
- Increasing communication through calls and texts outside of scheduled visits.
- Expecting a response within 72 hours of reaching out via email, phone call, or text.

## How Would You Know This Has Happened?

- Suggesting the implementation of an app for texting and calling social workers, with tracking capabilities to ensure timely responses. Suggestions for managerial oversight if response times are not met.





## **Topic 5: Help your parents and carers understand how to best talk to you and have a good relationship with you**

- Having supportive foster carers or residential staff who are adept at listening without judgment.

### **How Would You Know This Has Happened?**

- Advocating for comprehensive training on effective communication for all involved parties.



# Key messages to policy team

- **Enhance Training on Diversity and Inclusion:** Social workers need more support and training to understand and respect young people's diverse identities, including using chosen names and correct pronouns. This respect for identity is crucial in building trust and effective relationships.
- **Adopt Informal and Youth-Friendly Engagement Practices:** Incorporating informal and engaging activities into meetings, choosing comfortable venues, and adopting a down-to-earth approach can significantly improve the interaction between social workers and young people. Remembering small details like a young person's interests can make a substantial difference.
- **Ensure Regular and Transparent Communication:** It's essential for social workers to maintain regular updates, including information about availability and changes in care policies. Providing a variety of contact methods and ensuring responses within specified time frames (e.g., 72 hours) would foster better communication and trust.
- **Incorporate Direct Work and Independence Training:** Young people highlight the need for more quality time with social workers focused on direct work outside traditional settings. Independence training, starting from around 12 years old, should be mandatory, ensuring young people are prepared for life after care.
- **Mandatory Comprehensive Training:** Training for social workers, foster carers, and residential staff should be mandatory and cover a wide range of topics, including gangs, exploitation, safe sex, drug use, relationship-based practice, independence, healthy relationships, and bullying.
- **Feedback and Improvement:** There should be mechanisms for incorporating feedback from children, young people, and their families directly into the framework and practices.
- **Addressing Mental Health and Well-being:** Social workers should help young people cope with difficult experiences and support good mental health and well-being. This includes discussing sensitive topics like exploitation, gangs, and safe sex in ways that are appropriate and supportive.
- **Life Story Work and Understanding Personal History:** It's vital for young people to understand their backgrounds and histories. Life story work should be accurate, comprehensively conducted, and preserved to help young people make sense of their pasts and identities.
- **Visual and Practical Tools for Engagement:** Suggestions include the use of visual aids and practical tools to plan and track meetings and achievements, making the process more engaging and transparent for young people.



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