

Team Around the Child: The Handbook



The Handbook for Guidance and Ideas for Team Around the Child in
Lincolnshire 2023

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Introduction

Welcome to the Team Around the Child team. Our job is to support you in your role and we hope this handbook will be a 'Go-to-Guide' for all professionals working with children, young people and their families.

We want to explain the theories and methods we have adopted as best practice in early help and Team Around the Child within Lincolnshire; to empower, inspire and help you develop your confidence.

Early Help Vision

What is TAC?

We recognise that all children need their own support network of family and friends to help them feel safe, happy and loved. Sometimes families need extra support from professionals involved in this team; in Lincolnshire we call this 'Team Around the Child' or 'TAC'.

Team Around the Child is a group of people who care about the child and who are willing to work together in an open and honest way to meet the needs of that child or young person.

A TAC starts when a child, young person, family or professional has a worry about a child or young person and this is something that they need some help with.

The first step is to have an open and honest discussion with everyone, either separately or together, about the worries and strengths, to make sure that everyone's voice is heard.

The next step is to identify and agree what the key worries are and set goals that everyone can work towards.

The TAC then has everything it needs to empower the family to create a plan which shows who will do what, when and how they will know this is making a difference to the child.

The TAC team should always make arrangements to review the plan. This should include celebrating success, identifying things that are stopping the family from moving forward and changing the plan if necessary.

The aim of the TAC is always to build on the skills and confidence of the support network so they can keep up the progress made, manage any future difficulties and be there for the child or young person both now and in the future.

Why is Early Help so important?

"Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early help can also prevent further problems arising..."(Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018)

Some children and families will need some additional help for a little while, to prevent needs escalating; we refer to this as early help. The aim of early help is to work with families, to find their own solutions to the problems they are facing as early as possible, so we can work together to move things forward positively. It gives the child or young person the opportunity to tell their support network what help they need to feel safe, happy and well.

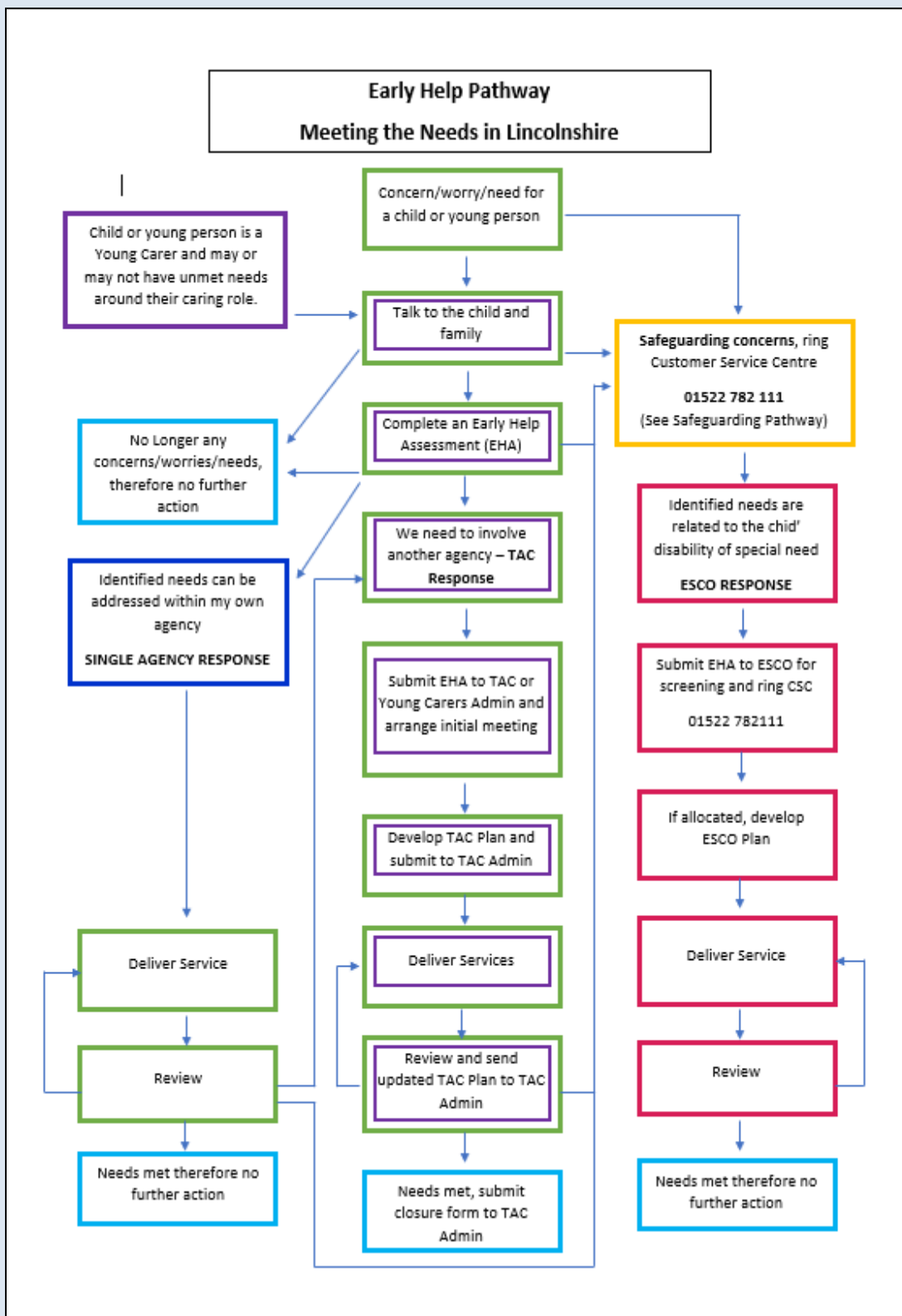
The child's team get together to create a plan and this involves listening to the child or young person's voice and acting in their best interests to ensure the child is safe from the risk of harm and able to live a happy life.



The Early Help Pathway

The Early Help Pathway aids in identifying when a worry would lead to an Early Help Assessment and TAC.

It is really important, that the moment you, a child or young person has a worry, you have a conversation with them and their support network about that concern, what it looks like and how it affects the child's life, as well as what everyone is doing to keep them happy and safe. It's key that the conversations about the positives and concerns continue with the child, whichever route is taken through the pathway.



"Preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services, and the co-ordination of services is important to maximise efficiency." Eileen Munro, 2011.

The Early Help Assessment should be completed by any professional at the earliest opportunity when they are worried about a child or young person's health, development, welfare or progress; or if the child, young person or their family raises a concern with you. The assessment can be found on our website.

Please note that if there are immediate safeguarding concerns, it may not be appropriate for you to complete the assessment, as this would be completed by a Social Worker. If there are immediate safeguarding concerns, please call Children's Social Care via the Customer Service Centre on 01522 782111 straight away.

Best practice is always to gain consent from the family when you start to complete the assessment, this then allows you to talk to other professionals and the family's support network; please remember consent is required from the family prior to sending the assessment to TAC Admin. The assessment is a tool to understand a full and holistic picture about a child's life at this point in time.



As you are reviewing the plan with the TAC team, sometimes you may identify that there are additional needs that require support outside your service, and some organisations use this assessment as an explanation of support being requested. If a professional from that agency is allocated then they can join in with the on-going TAC.

The Early Help Assessment has been developed in line with Signs of Safety methodology, which is an evidence-based approach to safeguarding children and young people. This approach is used in several countries across the world to ensure that assessment of, and work with, children and young people and their families is focused and effective. Signs of Safety provides a clear template to facilitate a meaningful assessment with the participation of the child, young person and their parents/carers.

Quality assessments include:

- ✓ Time given to gather the information
- ✓ Regular conversations with the child or young person about the worries and positives as well as what they would like to happen
- ✓ The child's support network is to be identified and be involved in open and honest discussions
- ✓ Time given to analyse the information in the form of worry statements and goals
- ✓ Enabling the whole support network to scale and create their first steps towards the agreed goal



Once the Early Help Assessment has been completed with the family and it has been decided that you are going to open to TAC, please plan your first review ideally within 15 working days of the assessment being sent to TAC Admin. Also please ensure you are having regular TAC reviews and these are happening every 6-8 weeks.

The Role of the Lead Professional

If you are lucky enough for the family to choose you as their Lead Professional, it is clear that you have a good relationship with them and this is a great step on their journey forward.

Your role from here is to:

- ✓ Be the point of contact for family and professionals
- ✓ Co-ordinate arrangements for the TAC team to review the plan in a way that suits the family
- ✓ Make sure everyone has a chance to share the positives and their concerns
- ✓ Ensure the child's voice is continually sought, heard and reflected in the plans
- ✓ Arrange who is going to chair each review; whether this is a family member, a professional or yourself
- ✓ Arrange who is going to be writing notes to update the plan; whether this is a family member, a professional or yourself
- ✓ Access support as and when you would like to from the TAC Admin team and the Early Help Consultants

Your role is not:

- ✗ Delivery of all services and support
- ✗ To be solely responsible for safeguarding



How does the team review the plan?

The first TAC review will be initiated by the professional who has completed the assessment; they will be TAC Lead Professional at this point. During this conversation and subsequent reviews, the child/young person and their family can request and should be given the opportunity to decide who they would like their Lead Professional to be, it does not matter how many times the Lead Professional changes; this is the family's choice.

If the family have chosen you as the Lead Professional and you have any concerns about this, please recognise this highlights the positive relationship you have built and feel free to contact TAC Admin and the Early Help Consultants for advice and support.

Previously, the reviews were referred to as 'TAC meetings' but we are ensuring that we meet the family's needs by celebrating the successes and reviewing the plan in which ever way best suits the family. This might mean thinking outside the box with venues, methods of communicating with different members of the team at different times and sharing the voice of team members in creative ways. What's important is the positive steps that have been made so far are celebrated and there are conversations led by the child, young person and family about how they want this progress to continue. This is achieved by using affective worry statements, goals, scaling and best questions.

As a helpful tool, there is the Child and Family Progress Plan that is used across TAC, Child In Need, Child Protection and Child In Care. In the TAC arena, this is not compulsory but can be a useful aid. What's important is that the family lead and fully understand the written representation which explains the details of your conversation and the plan to move forward. As with all paperwork, if the family are in agreement, please send this to TAC Admin.



Closure and sustainability plan

A child or young person can be supported by their TAC team for a short or long period of time. It is important throughout, that there is a clear focus on what closure looks like, so everyone involved knows what they are working towards; this makes it much easier when you are coming to the point of closure as discussions will already have taken place and closure will not be a shock to anyone.

We recognise that every child and young person needs the support of their family and friends to help them throughout their life. When we are closing the TAC it's important to make sure that this support network still has their on going plan to help maintain positive changes and look towards a bright future to ensure the child or young person feels safe, happy and loved.

The closure summary paperwork helps to celebrate all the successes so far, as well as highlighting the views of the child, family and professionals. This is a really good reflection tool for the family, which they can also use in the future.

As with all paperwork, if the family are in agreement please send the Closure Summary to TAC Admin.



Social Care 'Step Out' to TAC

When a child or young person has been supported by a Social Worker and they are looking to end their piece of work because of the good progress the family have made, TAC should be considered with the family and they can chose a new TAC Lead Professional from the team who is continuing to offer support.

The Social Worker will then give the Lead Professional the worry statements and goals so that the plan can continue to be reviewed within TAC, these will be updated and changed from the danger statements and safety goals that the family were working towards whilst being supported by the Social Worker.



If you have safeguarding concerns

If you have an immediate safeguarding concern, please call the Customer Service Centre on 01522 782111. Please let them know this is immediate and you need to pass on your concerns straight away. They will ask if the parent(s)/carer(s) are aware of your call, so please have this chat beforehand unless there is evidence that it could cause more harm to the child.

If it is not immediate safeguarding, but you feel as though you need to talk through your concerns please contact your local Early Help Consultant or the team email on earlyhelpconsultants@lincolnshire.gov.uk and someone will get back to you as soon as possible within our 48 hour response time.

Signs of Safety

What is Signs of Safety?

Signs of Safety originated in Western Australia and was created by two Child Protection Social Workers: Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards. In Lincolnshire, we have incorporated Signs of Safety across all of Children's Services.

The Signs of Safety methodology empowers families to develop their own plans, which means involving children in discussions and decisions that affect them and creates hope for families by honouring the things that they do well, whilst measuring and reviewing safety, risk and progress.

Genogram/Support Network

A genogram is a visual representation of who is in a person's family, friends and current support network. When we complete a genogram it helps us to better understand the family make-up and dynamics as well as opening up conversations about those relationships and the relationship of others around the child or young person.

It encourages families to share information that they wouldn't necessarily think is important, and gives us a better understanding of dynamics within a family and what this means to the children.

By completing this, it helps to identify potential networks that can offer the family support, which then enables us to create family led plans and sustainable outcomes for children.



Voice of the Child and Family

Within the Signs of Safety approach, it is important that the way we work with children, young people and their families is open and honest and uses family friendly language.

Signs of Safety also recognises that the child's voice is paramount within all the work we do with families and should be at the heart of everything we do. The 'voice' does not just mean what the children are saying verbally, but also what is seen when observing the child; for example what is their behaviour telling you, their interactions with family and friends and any changes in presentation.

There are tools that can help gather the voice of the child such as: Three Houses, Safety House, the Fairy and the Wizard. However, these are just a guide and initial ideas to start a conversation. When we are supporting children to share their thoughts and feelings about their life, it's important to ensure we are always asking the best questions at the right time and being creative in ways to capture this rather than using a set worksheet.

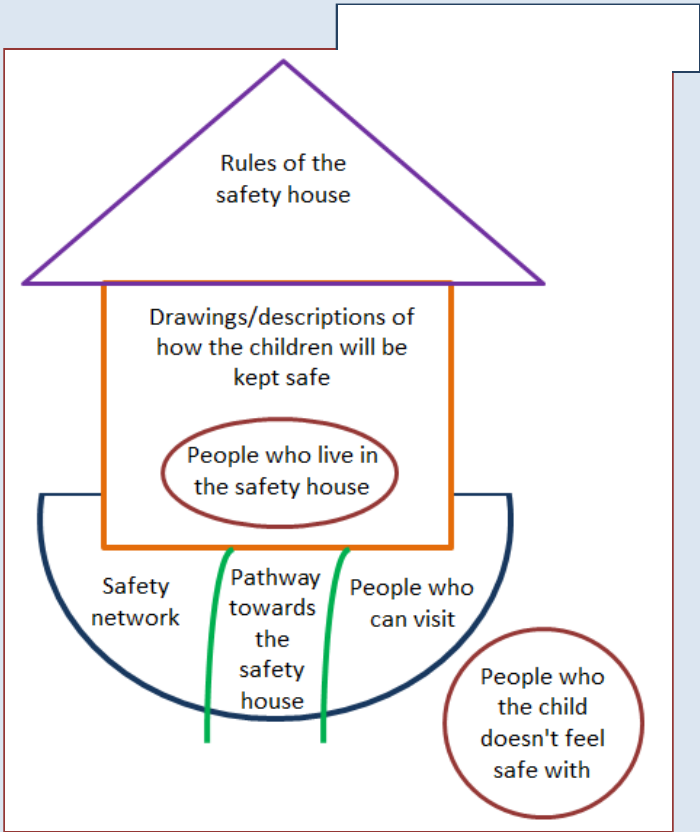
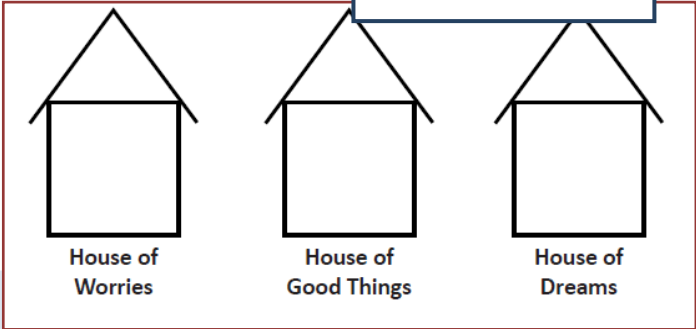




wizard



Three Houses



What is Appreciative Inquiry?

This is the name given to a way of asking questions.

Our key purpose is to help the family identify the strengths that already exist within their own support network.

It is all about finding out what already works and using this to reflect with families to aid them in finding their own solutions to problems.

Think about the areas of the child's life you don't know a lot about... how would you explore this with them?

What are Best Questions?

Best questions are used throughout the Signs of Safety methodology and is the name given to open ended questions that help us have reflective conversations. These help to build a picture of a child's needs and their safety; it increases the opportunity for a shared understanding, helps to strengthen engagement with families and encourages focusing on solutions.

What are we WORRIED about?

What have you seen or heard that makes you worried?

How often does this happen?

When was the first, worst and last time this had happened?

Who has been affected and how?

What is making things harder to deal with?

What is working WELL?

What has helped you to keep your children safe?

Can you tell me a time when things were going well or were even a little bit better?

Who helps you when things are difficult?

What would you say is the best thing about your family?



Worry Statements, Goals and Scaling Questions

Towards the end of an assessment, when you have gathered all the information and the family's voices this is analysed by creating worry statements and goals. These highlight the biggest worry/worries and create the bookends of the case.

There is a structure to writing worry statements and goals, which keeps us focused, affective and helps to create our judgement scaling question(s).

Worry Statement

Be clear, focused and honest.

Use the family's words and language.

Structure:

- What are you worried about?
- What are you worried will happen if nothing changes?

Goals

Link this to the worry, make it achievable and describe the outcome we want to reach, not a list of tasks.

Structure:

- Positive statement - something the child/family have done well linked to the worry
- What we need to see to not be worried anymore?



Scaling Question

The judgement scaling question is written from our worry statement and goal and would read as follows:

On a scale of 10 to 0, where 10 is... (goal) and 0 is... (worry statement – worst case scenario), where would you scale today?

This can lead to some really good questioning to encourage a family led plan.

- *Tell me about why you've given that scale point.*
- *What's gone well for you to scale that highly?*
- *What do you feel is stopping you scaling higher?*
- *What do you need to see to move one point up the scale?*

Safety Planning

Within Signs of Safety, family-owned safety planning is highlighted as significant to supporting children and families. Safety planning includes writing affective worry statements and goals, which are created with the family and allow the TAC team to identify how the support network is going to implement the plan, which in turn provides safety for the child or young person.

The child should understand what their own safety plan is, and the reasons around this and it should be monitored and reviewed regularly by the TAC team.

To know that the safety plan is working, the family are given opportunity to regularly demonstrate how they are making sure their children are safe and these positives are celebrated and built upon from one review to the next. By using an affective scaling question, the success can be easily seen as everybody's scale increases.

The image shows three overlapping safety planning forms. The top form is a 'Student Safety Plan' with sections for Triggers, Coping Skills, School Support, and Parent Support. The middle form is a 'My Safety Plan' with sections for My reasons for living, My warning signs, Lifting my mood, My informal support, My coping strategies, and Professional support. The bottom form is a 'SAFETY PLAN' with sections for 'If I feel I cannot stay safe from suicide...', 'I will talk to:', 'I will seek help from:', 'I will calm myself by:', 'I will go to a safe space:', and 'My ideas for keeping safe:'.

Restorative Practice

What is Restorative Practice?

Restorative Practice, known as 'RP', is about how we communicate with others and how we act as one human to another. It's about building, maintaining and restoring relationships initially between professionals and families, but modelling this in a way that shows family members how to be with each other. Used correctly it becomes a 'way of being' with other people that can benefit us in our work and our private lives.

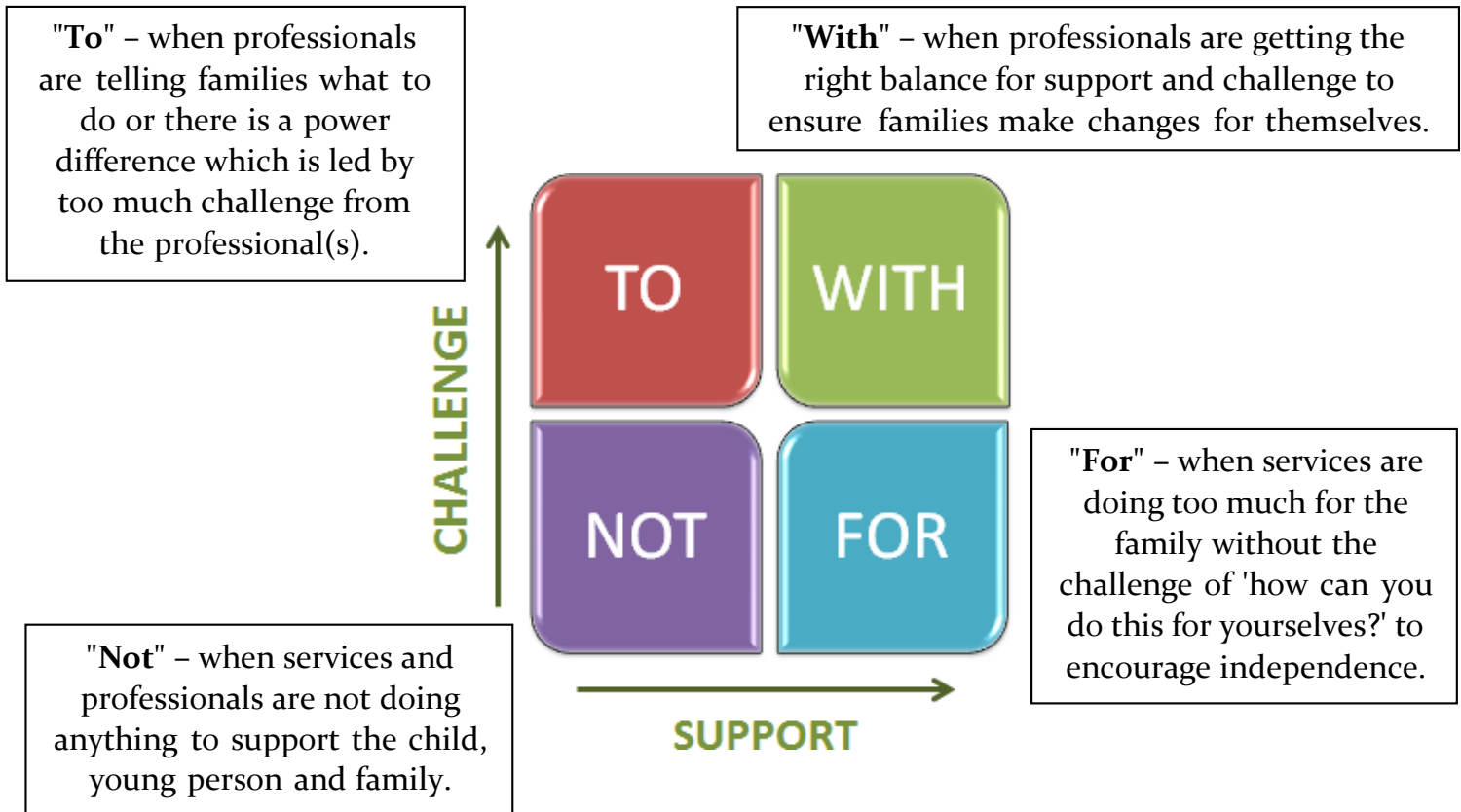
Relationship Based Practice

I'm sure you've had a personal experience before when it's felt more than a little awkward to share with a professional how you really feel about something or how things are affecting you. By taking a relationship-based approach it is important to get to know someone first, then in time this makes it a lot easier to ask those difficult questions about personal lives and child welfare. This can be done by removing barriers of power and status as well as material objects. For example, being called into a Head Teachers office could sound official to a nervous parent, with images of a large desk and a scrutinising approach, but in contrast sitting on a soft chair with a cup of tea appears warm and inviting. It's important that we take these things into account when speaking with children, young people, and their families, and are aware of how we are making them feel.



Working "With" People

There are a wide range of different ways that we can work to support the children, young people and families in our settings, and Restorative Practice asks us to analyse this a little closer to ensure that we're providing the best support.



The Social Discipline Window asks us to consider the 4 main approaches to our work and helps us to make sure that we are offering the right balance of high support and high challenge in order to work "with" families. There is always the odd occasion when we need to think outside of this box and would be operating within another quadrant, but our aim is to spend as much time "with" as possible. This encourages the family to make those decisions and changes for themselves and not to become either dependent on services or stop their own progress forward.

Circles

Working "with" children, young people and families also involves removing any sense of hierarchy and we talk about being as one human to another without status. To achieve this we can work on both the approach in our language and questioning skills but also in the physical room set up. Restorative Practice talks a lot about the importance of a circle as a non-judgmental and non-discriminatory way of sharing together where everyone is equal; no-one is on a more important chair or sitting with a large desk in front of them creating a barrier. This is something for us all to think about when preparing to meet with families.

Problem Solving Circles

One of the tools we can use in RP is called a 'Problem Solving Circle' and this allows the team to discuss a concern or issue in a way that shares openly a range of options and suggestions without focusing on the negative. It works through 3 sections:

2 minutes: Sharing the problem – Someone in the team brings a problem to the group and tells the others what that is without being interrupted.

4 minutes: Asking questions – The rest of the team has 4 minutes to ask any questions which clarify what the problem is and what might have been tried so far, and the person sharing the problem answers these questions. Make sure you don't go in to giving ideas at this point; it's easy to do by mistake.

4 minutes: Giving ideas – At this point the person sharing the problem isn't allowed to respond while everyone else gives their ideas by simply saying their idea, not as a question but as a statement, however crazy or outrageous it might seem you never know how useful that might be.

At the end the person with the problem can share how many ideas they have now been given and which ones they are going to try first.

This is a great way to be solution focused and practically come up with new ideas and possibilities without doing what we know we're often guilty of – going round and round in circles about a problem without finding a new notion or answer to try. You can play around with the timings to suit the situation as long as the ratios of 1:2:2 stay the same.



Roles within TAC

TAC Administration

Administrative support, maintaining records, monitoring processes, signposting to services.

tacadmin@lincolnshire.gov.uk and 01522 555828

Early Help Consultants

To provide support, advice and challenge on existing TAC Cases

EHC's will offer support to all Pre Birth TACs

Support offered through:

Case supervision to all Lead Professionals in Schools

Workshops, Forums and Group Supervision for all professionals

Support Conversations and Collaborative Quality Assurance visits with Lead Professionals

earlyhelpconsultants@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Early Help Advisors

Qualified Social Workers who will advise on all levels of Safeguarding, thresholds and hold hypothetical consultations for new cases where you need some advice or guidance that aren't currently open to TAC or Social Care.

01522 782111

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk - For more information and links to the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

This handbook has been created by the Early Help Consultants who are part of the TAC Team in Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services.



