

REFLECTIVE TOOL

For actioning the Parenting
through Adversity Practice Guide
– parents of children & young
people 11 to 18

FIND MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES: [PARENTING THROUGH ADVERSITY PRACTICE GUIDE – PARENTS OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE 11 TO 18](#)

About this tool

The Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide for parents of children and young people aged 11 to 18 is one in a series of guides setting out the best available evidence for leaders in the children's social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed, and delivered. The Department for Education has commissioned the Practice Guides by to help local areas achieve the outcomes of the Children's Social Care National Framework.

Because the evidence review that underpins the Practice Guide contains information relevant to how practitioners should work directly with families, the Practice Guide speaks directly to the expectations of senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners as outlined in the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#). The key principles reflect these findings, making it easier for professionals working across the system to embed evidence into practice in their roles and achieve the desired whole-system culture change. This tool also reflects this structure, making it a useful resource for both senior leaders and practice supervisors/practitioners alike.

This step-by-step reflective tool is designed to support local areas in implementing the Key Principles and Recommendations set out in this Practice Guide and to strengthen their parenting support offer for these families. The tool aims to support local leaders in holding structured conversations and strategic co-production activities with key stakeholders, including partner organisations, parents, and young people. Practice supervisors and practitioners are also encouraged to use this tool to reflect on how the evidence from this Guide can be embedded more consistently in practice. The section **Working with Families** is likely to be most relevant.

We acknowledge that the policy and delivery landscape relating to the support of young people and their families is complex and is undergoing a period of change and reform. The tool is intended to support the wider and ongoing reforms to children's social care and aid the transformation activity that is underway as part of the [Families First Partnership Programme \(FFPP\)](#) and the national rollout of the [Best Start Family Hubs](#).

The tool focuses on parenting support and interventions for those experiencing adversity with children and young people aged 11 to 18. Leaders are encouraged to use the tool to consider parenting support within the wider local offer and assess how well it currently meets local needs, using the evidence set out in the Practice Guide.

The tool helps local areas identify and prioritise the most relevant actions based on their local context. Parenting support should not be viewed in isolation – it is one part of the broader family help system.

It takes a strengths-based approach to reviewing what is working well and assists in identifying parenting support that may not be meeting local needs as effectively. Local leaders should use this tool alongside and to complement

other local and national datasets, quality assurance mechanisms, and auditing tools for inspections and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS).

Local leaders are encouraged to use the Practice Guide to support commissioning and de-commissioning cycles using the best available evidence alongside local population and organisational data, professional knowledge and lived experience. We acknowledge that local areas are likely to be committed to existing parenting support programmes for parents; however the recommendations should inform ongoing review, planning, and decision-making. The Key Principles can support leaders seeking to bring about the whole-system culture shift that may be required to help parents of young people aged 11 to 18 to support their children effectively.

The children and young people in scope for this Practice Guide

Throughout the Practice Guide and this companion Reflective Tool, when reference is made to 'Children and Young People', this relates to parents experiencing adversity when parenting children and young people aged 11 to 18. It is this group of parents that we are referencing, and not all parents.

A fuller explanation of the families in scope for this Practice Guide, the parenting programmes included, and what we mean by 'parenting support' can be found in the Extended definitions - Foundations.

Who should use this tool?

This tool is designed for senior leaders across social care, education, and health to enable a strategic and shared approach to implementing the Key Principles and Recommendations. This approach is likely to include, but is not limited to, Directors of Children's Services, Directors of Public Health, Directors of Education, local authority Chief Executives, elected members (including lead members for Children's Services) and children's services commissioners. It is a collaborative tool created to be used in co-production with parent and other key stakeholders, such as the Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, to help build on and refine the current parenting support offer.

Practice supervisors and practitioners may also find it a helpful tool in supervision and ongoing practice to reflect on how they can consistently embed key principles in practice.

This resource is structured around the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach:

STEP 1: ASSESS

Improve your understanding of your parent population's needs; reflect on your current parenting offer for the 11- to 18-year-old age group and explore how it meets their needs. Gather and analyse information about the current and projected needs of young people; work with multi-agency partners to map the available parenting support; consider whether this parenting support features in the Practice Guide. Actively involve the voices of parents and young people, critically evaluate retention and completion rates of parenting support programmes, and assess parental satisfaction and outcomes data. Establish the right team and bring them together to agree on priorities, ways of working and a shared responsibility across the partnerships.

STEP 2: PLAN

After establishing the baseline for your local parenting support across the multi-agency partnership, consider whether any gaps have been identified and which Practice Guide Recommendation(s) and Key Principle(s) you need to focus on first. When considering where to start, use the information gathered in the Assess stage, alongside practical considerations, such as capacity and joint commissioning processes. Plan your approach and establish workstreams. The Practice Guide Audit can help you clearly record your strengths and set priorities for longer-term development.

STEP 3: DO

Proceed with the agreed-upon plan and address any challenges that arise. Be clear about who will be involved in each agreed-upon action and when it will be reviewed. Establish governance and partnership oversight. Ensure parents and young people are heard and are equal partners in the 'doing'.

STEP 4: REVIEW

As you progress through the plan, review the changes you have made. This review may involve gathering new or additional information, but it may also mean revisiting the information you collated first. Remember that this is an ongoing, cyclical process.

As local contexts are continually changing, and it is important for services to be responsive, the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach in this resource is intended to be ongoing and cyclical. Following a structure like this allows you to clearly keep track of the progress you are making, and your rationale for making the changes you do.

How to use this tool

Each stage of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach has questions to guide you in reflecting on your local context in relation to the Key Principles and Recommendations in The Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide for parents of children and young people aged 11-18. This tool acts as a starting point for local areas to prioritise the implementation of the Key Principles and Recommendations in the Guide. We encourage you to record your reflections in response to each question, for future reference and to track your progress.

As local contexts continually change, it is important for services to remain responsive. The Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach in this resource is designed to be an ongoing and cyclical process. Following a structure like this allows you to keep track of the progress you are making and your rationale for making the changes you do. [The Audit Tool](#) can support you with this. You may also wish to use the reflective questions in this tool to help structure conversations with stakeholders, parents, young people, other partners, and colleagues, prompting discussion and delivering actions.

Throughout this resource, we use the language of the Children's Social Care National Framework to reflect the core audiences:

- **Local leaders – primarily Directors of Children's Services:** Have strategic responsibility for the whole local children's services system and partnerships with other agencies. This responsibility also includes strategic leaders where relevant, such as Directors of Public Health and Assistant Directors in Children's Services.
- **Local commissioners:** Make choices on allocation of money to providers, service specifications, market shaping, and contracting. They can be based in a local authority (LA), an NHS trust, within the Integrated Care System, or be a joint role where co-commissioning is present across the partnership.
- **Practice supervisors:** Usually Heads of Service or team leaders who report to senior leaders. They are responsible for supervising and setting conditions for practice and frontline service delivery.
- **Practitioners:** Direct practice professionals who work with children, young people and their families. These include Social Workers, Residential Social Workers, Family Help Lead Practitioners and Designated Social Workers (DSCO). When using this tool, senior leaders should reflect on the practitioners based across the partnership and seek to secure the engagement of wider local system partners.

We use symbols throughout this resource to indicate how questions relate to one, more, or all of the key principles and recommendations outlined in the Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide (for parents of children and young people aged 11 to 18), as in the example below:

- What specialist training are your kinship service staff offered? **KP1**

Where a question applies to all of the key principles and recommendations in the Practice Guide, this is indicated by this symbol **ALL**

The key principles and recommendations are summarised in the following tables, alongside the symbols associated with each one.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Working with families This group of Key Principles relates to the way that the local system and its workforce enable engagement and work with families during the delivery of support and/or interventions. Key Principle 1 KP1 Increase engagement in parenting support by creating trusting, respectful, and anti-discriminatory environments for parents and families. Key Principle 2 KP2 Approach family dynamics with curiosity, aiming to understand behaviours and build on family strengths. Key Principle 3 KP3 Build parental confidence through parenting support to respond effectively to behaviours that challenge.	Meeting families' needs Outline the findings relating to specific delivery of parenting support that is tailored to specific needs, including choosing the relevant support, adapting support and promoting flexibility. They are mostly pitched to Practice Supervisors and Practitioners. Key Principle 4 KP4 Implement a flexible local offer that responds to families' needs and preferences through a mix of support types, including options for intensive support when needed. Key Principle 5 KP5 Group-based support encourages peer connection, providing parents with the opportunity to build reciprocal relationships. Key Principle 6 KP6 Implement a local parenting offer which is culturally responsive and addresses the cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of the local population.	Local system culture Outline the conditions needed for effective parenting support at a system level. These principles address the requisite culture required for success across the local system, partnerships and leadership. They are mostly directed at senior leaders and commissioners. Key Principle 7 KP7 Promote an evidence-informed, integrated, and innovative culture to enable effective implementation and fidelity of parenting support. Key Principle 8 KP8 Ensure effective multi-agency collaboration through defined organisational responsibilities, and strong place-based systems to enable seamless, family-centred coordination to improve referral pathways and family experience. Key Principle 9 KP9 A consistent, supported and skilled workforce is essential to the delivery of effective parenting support.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 R1

Make evidence-based interventions available to families where behaviours that challenge are present to improve and empower effective parenting practices.

GOOD EVIDENCE**Recommendation 2** R2

Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to families experiencing poor family functioning and child behavioural issues to reduce parenting stress.

GOOD EVIDENCE**Recommendation 3** R3

Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to reduce negative emotional behaviours.

GOOD EVIDENCE**Recommendation 4** R4

Make evidence-based family therapy interventions available to reduce behaviours that challenge in children and young people.

GOOD EVIDENCE**Recommendation 5** R5

Make evidence-based systemic family therapy models available to support improved family functioning where there are behaviours that challenge.

GOOD EVIDENCE**Recommendation 6** R6

Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to families whose children have been identified as needing support from children's social care, to support parental mental health.

GOOD EVIDENCE

STEP 1: ASSESS

Start to develop your approach by gaining a better understanding of the parenting support needs of those experiencing adversity who are parenting children and young people aged 11 to 18 in your area. Consider who should be engaged with and collaborated with to collate your baseline information.

These individuals could include, but are not limited to, parent carer representatives, transition workers, young people's voices, strategic leads for Health, Education and Social Care (Children's and Adult Services), lead members Councillors, senior partners from VCFSE, commissioners, Family Hub leads, and data leads.

The reflective tool can help you assess your starting point, refine and develop your parenting support aspirations and local offer for parents of children and young people aged 11 to 18. It can also help you understand what a measure of success would look like. As with the Practice Guide, this reflective tool is structured around three overarching themes to support a systematic and holistic approach: **Working with families**, **Meeting families' needs** and **Local system culture**.

Working with families

Local context

- How do we use data and insight to identify gaps in support for families experiencing adversity and inform strategic commissioning? **KP2** **R1** **R2** **R6**
- Are there elements of our local system (e.g. referral pathways, assessment processes) that may unintentionally reinforce stigma or discourage engagement? **KP1** **R6**
- How do we ensure that our local offer includes whole-family approaches that recognise relational contexts? **KP2** **R4** **R5**
- Are we commissioning interventions to be delivered in a range of ways, e.g. group-based and individual? **KP3** **R2** **R6**
- Are our parenting and family support services sufficiently tailored to address both behavioural and emotional challenges in children and young people, including those facing adversity? **KP2** **KP3** **R1** **R3** **R4**

TIP

This work is complex and takes time, but you can start small by making achievable changes and setting longer-term strategic goals. Start by assessing whether existing programmes meet the needs of your families experiencing adversity with children and young people aged 11 to 18. Use the Recommendations to inform future commissioning cycles and decision-making. Aspects of the Key Principles can be implemented immediately to bring about culture and practice change.

Leadership

- How do we monitor and respond to feedback from parents and young people about their experience of practitioner relationships and service culture? **KP1** **R2** **R6**
- How do we evaluate the impact of parenting support on parent-child relationships and parental self-efficacy? **KP3** **R1** **R2** **R5**

Multi-agency workforce

- How do our services assess and respond to complex family dynamics without problematising families? **KP2** **R4** **R5**
- What governance structures are in place to oversee multi-agency responses and ensure accountability for outcomes? **KP2** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**

Meeting families' needs

Building a flexible local offer

- How well does our local parenting offer reflect the preferences and circumstances of families in terms of delivery format, location, and intensity? **KP4** **R2** **R6**
- Are group and one-to-one support options commissioned in a way that reflects local geography, access needs, and population diversity? **KP4** **R2** **R6**
- Do we offer specialised or hybrid models for families who may not benefit from standard group formats? **KP5** **R2** **R6**

Culturally responsive offer

- How do we ensure parenting support is culturally responsive to the values, beliefs, and lived experiences of our local population? **KP6** **R6**
- Do our commissioned services reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the families they serve, including bilingual and bicultural staff? **KP6** **R6**

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TIPS

- Use inclusive language in all communications and materials to avoid reinforcing stigma
- Invite parent carers to share lived experiences in safe, facilitated spaces to inform service design
- Ensure that engagement activities are accessible (e.g. childcare, transportation, interpreters) and culturally responsive
- Partner with peer support groups to reach and involve underrepresented voices.

You may wish to refer to the Foundations' report, which explores ways in which local areas and their partners can strengthen Equality Diversity Inclusion and Equity (EDIE) support for families and children. [Developing local approaches to improve services for minority ethnic children & families – Foundations](#)

Local system culture

Evidence-informed, integrated, and innovative culture

- How do we assess our system's readiness to implement evidence-based parenting support, including alignment with local policy and processes? **KP7** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**
- Are we engaging with communities to understand local needs and address inequalities in access and outcomes? **KP7** **R6**

Multi-agency collaboration and place-based systems

- Are referral pathways into parenting support clearly defined and coordinated across health, education, adult and children's social care? **KP8** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**
- How do we respond to risks and influences outside the family context through coordinated multi-agency approaches? **KP8** **R3** **R4** **R6**

Consistent, supported and skilled workforce

- How do we ensure staff delivering parenting support have access to high-quality training and reflective supervision? **KP9** **R2** **R4** **R6**
- Are we supporting manageable caseloads and sustainable staffing to enable effective delivery? **KP9** **R2** **R6**

TIP

Actioning the information gathered in Step 1 Assess can feel daunting and knowing where to start can be overwhelming. Identify a core group of representatives from across the partnerships and work towards reaching a consensus on priorities listed in the Assess section. Consider whether establishing Task and Finish groups to address two to three local priorities would be a suitable approach. You can also develop a work plan, set timelines and allocate tasks.

Refer to the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Extra-Familial Harm toolkit: <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/toolkits/extra-familial-harm-toolkit/>

STEP 2: PLAN

Once you have looked more closely at your existing parenting support offer for parents experiencing adversity (for parents of children and young people aged 11 to 18), you can consider where there are gaps in support to help you identify which Recommendation(s) and Key Principle(s) you need to prioritise and plan for. You can use the [Practice Guide Audit Tool](#) to summarise priorities, reflections, progress, and actions. The following prompts can support your thinking as you plan your next steps.

Working with families

Local context

- Are our parenting interventions designed to flex around the timing, pace, and readiness of families, especially those facing multiple adversities? [KP2](#) [R2](#) [R6](#)

Leadership

- How do our commissioned and in-house services ensure that practitioners are equipped to build respectful and open relationships with families from the outset? [KP1](#) [R2](#) [R6](#)
- How do we support leaders and supervisors to model and embed relational practice across teams? [KP1](#) [R5](#) [R6](#)
- How well do our interventions integrate support for parental wellbeing and mental health, particularly for families involved with children's social care? [KP1](#) [KP3](#) [R2](#) [R6](#)

Multi-agency workforce

- How do we ensure that parenting support is embedded within a coordinated multi-agency safeguarding framework? [KP2](#) [KP3](#) [R4](#) [R6](#)

- How do we align parenting support with wider services (e.g. youth justice, education, health, adult services) to address complex needs holistically? **KP2** **KP3** **R4** **R6**
- What role do practitioners play in acting as a 'neutral ground' during family conflict, and how does the wider system support practitioners to navigate this, for example, through training and supervision? **KP2** **R4** **R5**
- How do we ensure that commissioned programmes take a strengths-based and systemic approach to family relationships? **KP2** **R4** **R5**
- How do we ensure that parents are supported to persevere with strategies, and that progress is recognised even when change is gradual? **KP3** **R1** **R2**
- Are our services clear about the boundaries of parenting support and when additional safeguarding or specialist input is needed? **KP3** **R6**
- Do we offer structured, evidence-based family therapy models that strengthen whole-family functioning and reduce antisocial behaviour – and are these accessible to those who need them most? **KP2** **KP3** **R4** **R5**
- How effectively do we coordinate across multi-agency partnerships (e.g. schools, health, youth justice) to ensure parenting and family interventions are part of a holistic support system? **KP2** **KP8** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**

Meeting families' needs

Building a flexible local offer

- Do we provide families with meaningful choice and control over how and when they access parenting support? **KP4** **R2** **R6**
- How do we ensure that intensive support is available and accessible for families who need it most? **KP4** **R2** **R6**
- How do we involve families in shaping the design and delivery of parenting support to ensure it is responsive to their lived experience? **KP4** **R2** **R6**
- Are our practitioners trained and supported to facilitate inclusive, strengths-based group environments? **KP5** **R2**
- Are our delivery models flexible and inclusive enough to engage families experiencing high levels of stress, poor functioning, or complex needs (e.g. poverty, housing insecurity, trauma)? **KP4** **R2** **R5** **R6**

Culturally responsive offer

- Are we working in authentic partnership with communities and by-and-for organisations to co-design culturally relevant support? **KP6** **R6**
- How do we address structural inequalities, racism, and discrimination in the design and delivery of parenting support? **KP6** **R6**
- Are we embedding cultural humility and intersectionality into workforce development and service design? **KP6** **R6**

Local system culture

Evidence-informed, integrated, and innovative culture

- What mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous learning and adaptation during implementation, including feedback loops with staff and families? **KP7** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**
- How do we use data and monitoring systems to evaluate the quality and impact of parenting support across the local area? **KP7** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**
- How do we promote innovation and flexibility in our parenting offer while maintaining fidelity to evidence-based models? **KP7** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**

Multi-agency collaboration and place-based systems

- How do we ensure shared values, language, and commitment across agencies to deliver seamless support for families? **KP8** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**
- How do we reduce duplication and avoid families having to retell their stories across services? **KP8** **R6**
- What governance structures support multi-agency collaboration and accountability for parenting support outcomes? **KP8** **R1** **R2** **R3** **R4** **R5** **R6**

TIP

Consider different ways of working with families, using informal and creative methods and meeting parent carers where they are, e.g. in schools and community group locations and holding ‘roadshows’ at community events, etc. More formal engagement might include facilitating focus groups, forming a steering group or task and finish group to work-plan a priority area or to zoom in on a specific Key Principles or Recommendations from the Practice Guide.

Consistent, supported, and skilled workforce

- How do we ensure staff delivering parenting support have access to high-quality training and reflective supervision? **KP9**
- Are we supporting manageable caseloads and sustainable staffing to enable effective delivery? **KP9**
- How do we recruit and retain practitioners with the right balance of professionalism and approachability? **KP9 R2 R6**
- How do we plan for workforce capacity and resilience, especially in services responding to families in crisis? **KP9 R2 R6**

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TIPS

- Facilitate cross agency workshops to build shared understanding and commitment to the local parenting offer
- Embed feedback loops with families and practitioners throughout implementation
- Develop place based systems that coordinate services across organisational boundaries
- Use joint training and a shared language across agencies to foster collaboration
- Engage youth justice, education, and health partners in co designing referral pathways
- Use supervision to reflect on complex dynamics and support staff development
- Build a bilingual and bicultural workforce that reflects local population needs
- Translate and culturally adapt intervention materials with community input.

STEP 3: DO

Now that you have assessed, prioritised and planned, it is time to take action to strengthen your local parenting support offer for parents facing adversity with children and young people aged 11 to 18. It is normal to encounter challenges and barriers during this stage; however, there are steps you can take to mitigate and successfully navigate them.

The questions below can help prompt your thinking if you start to feel stuck.

- Reflect on any enablers that have supported you to make changes in practice. What can you learn from these?
- Think about any barriers you're facing. How can you overcome them? Do you need to seek support from others?
- Consider the progress you have made so far. Is it happening as you expected?
- Can you capture the information you need to demonstrate and whether the changes made are having a positive impact on the lives of this group of parents and young people?
- What is the feedback from parents and other stakeholders, partners, children and young people, their wider family, and networks on the changes to the parenting support offer?
- If you are offering support that you weren't before, how have you integrated this with existing services? How are you promoting this initiative to parents, multi-agency partners and other agencies? Is any 'troubleshooting' required?

TIP

Make sure you are clear on who is taking action and by when. Regular check-in points and sharing of updates, progress and challenges can help keep you on track. Using the [Audit Tool](#) as a record of discussions can support this.

STEP 4: REVIEW

Once your plan is in action, begin reviewing the changes you have made. Remember that this is an ongoing, cyclical process. The [Audit Tool](#) can support you in recording your thinking

The questions below can help you reflect on your support offer during the review stage.

- What have you learned from the data or information you have been gathering about the changes you have made? How are you interrogating this and asking ‘so what?’ questions?
- Has there been progress in working across the wider partnerships?
- How are the reflective tool findings and actions being fed into wider quality improvement processes?
- How are you closing the feedback loop with parents and young people and taking them on the journey?
- What are your parents and young people telling you about the changes that have been made?
- Has there been a positive change? How are you celebrating early successes and sharing these across the multi-agency system and workforce?
- What hasn’t gone to plan or needs more attention and focused activity? How can you work together to unblock any barriers?
- What is missing? Are there partners or communities that you still need to hear from? What steps are you taking to achieve these goals?
- Do you need to revisit the Practice Guide to ensure you remain aligned with the Key Principles and Recommendations?
- How are you reviewing and updating the local offer to reflect the changes and distance travelled?
- How is this parenting support offer helping you to achieve the outcomes of the Children’s Social Care National Framework?
- What is the workforce telling you? How are you building listening forums with your workforce to understand and share challenges and successes?
- What other data collection might you need to consider moving forward?
- How are you analysing your data, ensuring it is shared and understood to impact decision-making?
- What are families telling you about their experiences of parenting support? What are you hearing from other partners working in this space locally?
- Which Practice Guide Recommendation or Key Principle are you going to focus on next?

TIP

You may need to consider the information you have been collecting and/or revisit the information you collated in Step 1 when initially assessing your existing support offer.

For summary information on the interventions outlined in the Practice Guide, please visit: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-through-adversity-11-18-practice-guide/interventions/>

This resource is part of a set of publications linked to the Parenting Through Adversity (11–18) Practice Guide:

- Parenting Through Adversity (11–18) Practice Guide (online summary guide): <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-through-adversity-11-18>
- Full Guide (PDF): <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/full-guide-parenting-through-adversity-11-18.pdf>

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides foundations.org.uk/practice-guides

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.

Get in touch at practice_guides@foundations.org.uk.

