

SPECIALIST EDUCATION SERVICES

Partnership with Families Policy and Practice

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1 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 AND FAMILY LINKS

This Act embodied a number of key principles relating to family links:

- Children and young people and their parents should all be considered as individuals with particular needs and potentialities
- The development of a working partnership with parents is usually the most effective route to providing supplementary or substitute care for children
- Family links should be actively maintained through visits and other forms of contact
- Both parents are important even if one of them is no longer in the family home and neither parent should be overlooked or marginalised
- Wider families matter as well as parents - especially siblings and grandparents

Continuity of relationships is important and attachments should be respected, sustained and developed.

2 SES ESTABLISHMENTS AND FAMILIES

At SES we believe that residential care has an essential role in working to keep families together, and developing and maintaining contact between family members, siblings and significant others.

What do we mean by “family”?

Different cultures and different groups of individuals have very different notions of what 'family' means. At SES we take 'family' to mean any group of people who define themselves as such, who care about and care for each other.

3 SES AND THE CONCEPT OF PARTNERSHIP

The concept of partnership is central to working with families. However it may not be easy nor straightforward to achieve, and has been the subject of some debate as to exactly what it means in practice. We believe first of all that this partnership begins even before the young person joins us. We try to build a positive relationship as early as possible, by including and involving the parents/carers and family in the referral and admission process. SES consultants are also involved at this early stage.

Once a child is with us we believe that all adults, irrespective of their roles, are responsible for putting this partnership into action whenever and however they meet with parents/carers. However, it is the Personal Tutor who drives much of the contact and develops the relationship, with support from their Case Co-ordinator and the involvement of consultants.

Helping to maintain or promote positive family contact is essential for children and young people who are looked after. Even for those who do not return to their own

families, their family links will be an important factor in their lives long after they have left care.

Although adults at SES establishments place a general emphasis on maintaining and promoting family links, there may be some occasions when there are restrictions placed on the contact a young person has with certain family members. Adults need to be aware of these restrictions and adhere to them, whilst helping a young person understand and come to terms with this.

4 KEY PRINCIPLES OF SES PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

At SES we believe that:

- parents/carers and significant other family members are equal partners in the process of working with the child
- are key contributors of information and knowledge about the child and their family context
- should be engaged with and involved in the restorative work about relationships with and the behaviour of their child
- deserve our support from simple information exchange, regular news and updates, celebrations of success etc., to therapeutic family work to help repair and rebuild relationships
- parents/carers should be introduced to and involved in the vision of SES, in particular our “no limits” thinking and attitude to learning
- parents/carers should have regular opportunities to express their views about the quality of our work
- geography of placement will not be a barrier to working with the family

To support these key principles, adults at SES establishments are expected to:

- provide a welcoming atmosphere to encourage parents and carers to express their views and ideas
- acknowledge and draw on parental experience and expertise in relation to their child to inform our work.
- focus on the children's strengths as well as areas of additional need
- recognise the personal and emotional investment of parents and be aware of their feelings
- treat all parents with respect and making every effort to understand their background and culture
- be non-judgemental and never assume anything (things are not always how they seem)
- respect the validity of differing perspectives and seek constructive ways of reconciling different viewpoints
- respect the differing needs parents themselves may have, such as a disability or communication and linguistic barriers
- use parent-friendly language
- ensure communication is a two way process by providing positive feedback to a child's parents on a regular basis

- ensure that parents understand procedures, are aware of how to access support in preparing their contributions, and are given documents to be discussed well before meetings
- recognise the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings, visits, etc.

Where the placing authority permits contact with family/significant family members, consideration will be given to the following:

- Significant family members will be involved as much as possible at the time of admission
- Adults will ensure that significant people know the protocols about visiting
- Reviews and other meetings will be held, wherever possible, when significant family members can attend.
- Young people will be supported in maintaining contact by telephone, electronic communication, letters or sending cards on special occasions
- Where appropriate and agreed, contact outside of SES will be facilitated between young people and family members
- Family members, both close and extended will be made welcome in the home and afforded privacy.
- Young people will be given the opportunity to talk about their families, to tell family stories and to acknowledge the past in whatever way this is appropriate.

We provide opportunities for families to visit, and will enhance the links between family members through:

- welcoming visits by family members
- providing space and refreshments for visits
- making sure that members of the extended family are also made welcome, unless there is a specific reason why they should not be allowed to see the child or young person
- recognising that residential care has a special role to play in the contact process; it provides a neutral setting, with supporting or supervising adults
- ensuring members of a family meet together in a way that they chose, and not having an expectation that they will just want to sit and talk.
- taking the initiative to make it possible for siblings to keep in touch, through arranging transport when they are separately placed some distance apart

5 PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE (See Appendix 1)

5.1 ADMISSIONS

During the admission process a key component of discussion is the kind of support required by the family and how this will be configured. Priorities and actions will be drawn up through discussion with the placing authority and the lead consultant for SES. This will enable a clear and coherent strategy to be agreed, which will feature as a one of the six dimensions in the Development and Learning documentation.

5.2 REGULAR AND ROUTINE FAMILY CONTACT

5.2.1 Care Team

Personal Tutors (PT) in liaison with Case Co-ordinators (CC) are responsible for facilitating a child's regular and routine family contact where this is appropriate and in keeping with the Placement Plan. SES can play an important role, where appropriate and in liaison with placing authorities, in working to keep families together. We play an essential role in building positive contact between family members, particularly siblings. Within an agreed Placement Plan adults should work to promote family contact for each child through visits, including visits of family members to the home, letters, e-mail and telephone calls. There are no limits to how the development of family relationships can be achieved as long as it is within an agreed approach.

- The PT (or other agreed Key Person) should liaise with parents **weekly** (via telephone/email) to give a general update on their child, following which a Contact Report should be compiled.
- Home visits should be arranged each term (i.e. **a minimum of 3 per year**), usually with the PT and CC attending. These visits help to maintain and develop good relationships with the family and can also be the forum for more specific discussions relating to the child, or simply to offer verbal advice or support.

Other team members may be involved as required and agreed.

Following all types of contact a Contact Form should be completed within 48 hours and placed on the individuals file on the network, with a signed hard copy going to the case file via the PT or with an email alert being sent to the PT that the form has been completed and filed. Forms are to be found on the network. It may also be important to email other key adults in the Portfolio of Achievements and Needs (PAN) group.

5.2.2 Learning Centre Team

The Learning Mentor holds responsibility for ensuring the following family contact, to explore learning progress, is facilitated at this minimum frequency:

- One visit to the family home each academic year
- Three face to face learning consultations to be offered at SES establishments each academic year, to ensure families understand the educational choices offered to young people
- Termly invitations to attend PEP meetings to discuss learning
- Weekly email or phone updates to be offered at the start of every half term
- Termly learning program updates sent to family home

5.3 SPECIFIC ADDITIONAL FAMILY WORK: TEAM LED

Beyond our routine family work, adults at SES establishments work closely with families and family members to meet specifically identified needs as part of an agreed approach. This work will grow out of the developing relationship between the establishment and the family and may take a variety of different forms.

Examples of this could include:

- delivering/supporting Life Story work
- delivering Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programmes to parents.
- helping parents work towards specific academic qualifications

This type of specific additional family work allows families to build positively on their parenting skills and understanding of themselves and their child.

5.4 SPECIFIC ADDITIONAL FAMILY WORK: CONSULTANT LED

Where the family requests it, or a Local Authority includes this as part of the placement strategy, or a need becomes apparent during the course of a child's placement, SES consultant psychologists and child and adolescent therapists will undertake to guide, support and conduct specific additional work with families.

Any such work is only done with the agreement of the placing authority and the family itself.

Specific family work will be aimed at helping the family support the care of their child, including, where possible, the child having some periods of time at home. This work will be bespoke, i.e. fitted to the needs of individual families, and may include recognised and identified therapeutic approaches as exemplified by Systemic Family Therapy.

5.5 QUALITY CONTROL AND MONITORING

5.5.1 Personal Tutor

The Personal Tutor is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of family work as described in this document. They should ensure that they monitor that delegated tasks are implemented and performed at a quality level. As appropriate they can call upon the help of Link Tutors and the support and advice of their Case Co-ordinator to ensure the necessary work is done.

5.5.2 Case Co-ordinators

As well as having a supportive overview and a willingness to get directly involved, particularly where situations may demand experience and a level of seniority, Case Co-ordinators should ensure that the quality and execution of family work is built into their personal monitoring structures.

5.5.3 Registered Manager

The Registered Manager should ensure that there are monitoring structures in place to gather information to form judgements about the effectiveness and quality of family work across the organisation. There should be a basic systematic level at which this is visited as well sample monitoring.

APPENDIX 1: PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

