

Tackling Child Exploitation: taking a principled approach

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Background

- TCE Programme: a DfE-funded consortium programme led by Research in Practice with The Children's Society and the Safer Young Lives Centre at the University of Bedfordshire.
- 2019-22, TCE supported over 80 areas across England to improve their strategic responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- 2022-23, TCE was commissioned to develop a set of Practice Principles to inform local multi-agency responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.



Over 750 multi-agency professionals across England

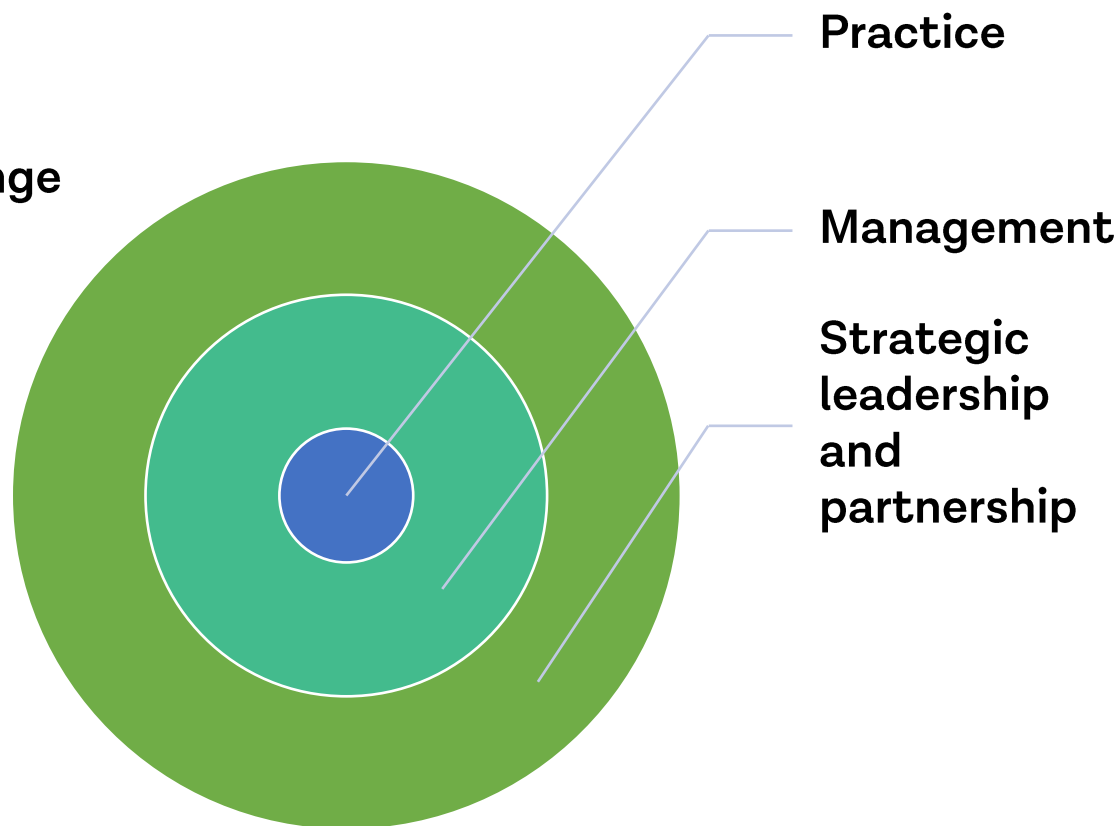
- 200 children and young people
- 39 parents and carers



The Practice Principles

- ☐ **Interrelated and interdependent**, focusing on the 'how' not the 'what'.
- ☐ **Offer a compass to help navigate a complex landscape**, rather than a detailed map for every individual situation.
- ☐ **Are high-level** to support a **coherent** approach across local partnerships and to support multi agency working.
- ☐ **Focus on behaviours and culture** to help direct work with children, young people, and families, operational management and strategic leadership to align.
- ☐ **Aim to complement existing and forthcoming guidance** endure over time and fit with diverse local contexts

- **Parallel processes**
- **Whole system change**
- **Congruence and coherence**
- **Modelling**





The eight Practice Principles



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Tackling Child Exploitation
Support Programme

Initial reactions...?



The eight Practice Principles





Practice Principle 1



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Put children and young
people first**



Put children and young people first



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- Children cannot be held responsible for harm caused by others
- Where children are causing harm – they are still children & responses should reflect that
- *All* children and young people deserve to be supported in a way that respects their rights and offers protection
- The complexities and presentation of child exploitation and extra-familial harm means that responses sometimes undermine the realisation of these rights



Put children and young
people first



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How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:

*“I feel understood, believed and treated like a human being. I
feel my worker is interested in me and on my side. I know
they don’t judge or blame me.”*



Practice Principle 2



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**Responses to child exploitation
and extra-familial harm must...
Recognise and challenge
inequalities, exclusion and
discrimination**



- Inequalities, exclusion and discrimination faced by children, young people and their parents / carers can be experienced in multiple ways and must be recognised and challenged
- Systems issues can affect outcomes for children and young people, e.g. what data are or are not collected



Recognise and challenge inequalities,
exclusion and discrimination



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How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:

*“I am seen, respected and accepted for who I am,
professionals can relate to me, and they challenge any
discrimination I face.”*



Practice Principle 3



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Respect the voices,
experiences and expertise of
children and young people**



Respect the voices, experience and expertise of children and young people



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- **Children and young people:**
 - **have the right to have a say about matters that affect them and be heard in decisions made about them**
 - **should be respected and listened to as experts in their own lives: to develop trusting relationships and increase safety**
- **Participation is a powerful way to invert the coercion and manipulation of exploitation and extra-familial harm**



Respect the voices, experience and expertise of children and young people



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How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

“I feel heard, acknowledged, and validated because my views and opinions are sought and included. This matters to me and makes me want to talk to them.”



Practice Principle 4



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Be strengths-based and
relationship-based**



Be strengths-based and relationships based



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- **Applies to working with children, young people, parents, carers and colleagues**
- **Take a holistic approach: identify strengths, positive factors**
- **Build on strengths, assets; work relationally to support growth and change**



**Be strengths-based
and relationships based**



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**How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:**

***“I have someone to go to who genuinely cares about me
and my future. They do things to actually help me. I feel safe
with them and can trust them.”***



Practice Principle 5



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Recognise and respond to
trauma**



Recognise and respond to trauma



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- Understand how individuals perceive and respond to threats and support.
- Recognise that these responses might underpin perceived 'non-engagement' or 'negative' coping strategies.
- Trauma can be experienced at different levels:
 - Direct trauma for children and young people - and potentially their parents / carers
 - Trauma that can impact wider communities, stemming from shared experiences
 - Trauma that can impact those working to support and protect traumatised individuals



Recognise and respond to trauma



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How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:

*“People understand how I have been affected by what has
happened to me and they show that in the way they help
me. I feel like I matter.”*



Practice Principle 6



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Be curious, evidence-informed
and knowledgeable**



Be curious, evidence-informed and knowledgeable



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- Responding to the complexity of child exploitation and extra-familial harm requires:
 - curiosity, critical thinking, analysis skills
 - thoughtful use of evidence
 - a commitment to reflection and learning
- Balance pace with purpose



Be curious, evidence-informed
and knowledgeable



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How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:

*“I feel properly seen, because the people who are there to
help me put in the effort to understand me and my life. They
are knowledgeable, and are always learning about how to
help me feel safer.”*



Practice Principle 7



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Approach parents and carers
as partners wherever possible**



Approach parents and carers as partners wherever possible



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- **Starting point: include parents and carers as partners**
- **Parents and carers can hold invaluable information about their child and the contexts of their lives**
- **Acknowledge and attend to their own potential distress**
- **Recognition that circumstances *will* differ between families so there is no 'one size fits all' solution.**



Approach parents and carers as
partners wherever possible



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How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

“I am included in decisions about involving my parents and carers. Supporting my parents and / or carers to understand what has happened to me can help improve family relationships and the support I receive.”



Practice Principle 8



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**Responses to child
exploitation and
extra-familial harm must...
Create safe spaces and places
for children and young people**



Create safe spaces and places for children and young people



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- Understanding of harms and protective factors in spaces and places where children and young people spend their time (on- and off-line)
- Identify harm and intervene accordingly (e.g. disruption) to make the space/place safer
- This focus can prevent children and young people feeling blamed



Create safe spaces and places
for children and young people



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How it should feel for a child / young person being
supported:

*“In my community, I have opportunities to do
activities and make new friends. The spaces and
places where I spend my time feel safe, and give me
a sense of belonging.”*

Which Principles
resonate most with
your practice /
leadership, at its
best?

Which ones offer
the greatest
challenge to you?

How might you use
them to support
improvement and
development in
your local system?





Supporting Resources

Six supporting resources to support the application of the Practice Principles:

1. **An evidence summary**, a succinct summary of the research drawn upon in developing the Principles
2. **An individual practice and reflection tool**, a professional development tool to support practitioners to reflect on the Principles, and their application to their own practice
3. **A multi-agency partnership reflective tool**, an interactive, reflective tool for local partnerships to work together to assess their responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm
4. **An animation** to explain the evidence, ideas and interdependencies that underpin the Principles
5. **Parent and Carers Shifting Mindset**, a resource to support local agencies and partnerships to engage parents and carers as partners at an operational and strategic level
6. **Youth Voice in strategic change**, a resource to help local agency leaders and partnerships incorporate children and young people's views at a strategic level.