



## Together with children and families

### Improving our work with children and families across the family justice system

November 2022



Welcome to this short overview of Together, Cafcass' new practice framework which was launched in September 2021. We are writing a set of these documents for our partners, explaining what will be different in our practice and setting out some questions for you to consider at the end. If you have any feedback on this document or any others you will see in connection with Together, [please email Sarah Parsons, Principal Social Worker](#), or your lead contact at Cafcass.



## Together is:

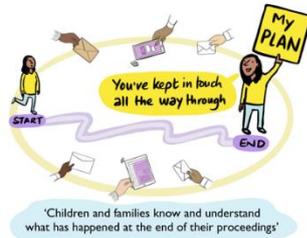
- ✓ The brand name for Cafcass' relationship-based practice framework. The framework sets out our values, how these values work in practice and the materials we use to sustain and improve the effectiveness of our work with children and families.
- ✓ A way of working with children and their families and with each other which is based on developing trusting relationships that prioritise listening, understanding, clear reasoning, respect and integrity.
- ✓ Our commitment to working with children and families in a respectful way, making sure that they feel treated kindly, that they are respected, spoken to in language they understand, prioritising opportunities for them to **listen to, influence and understand the reasons for the recommendations we make to the family courts**. It is about the 'way we do things around here'. We hope our partners, families and children all feel the impact of the new framework and notice the importance we are affording to relationships, to feedback and to improvement and learning.
- ✓ A framework that has been developed collaboratively with Cafcass family court advisers, managers, business services and corporate colleagues. The Family Justice Young People's Board have also advised and reflected with us and will continue to be involved as our practice and improvement is evaluated.
- ✓ A transformation priority within the Cafcass Strategic Plan 2020-23.

'Together' helps to  
**STRENGTHEN**  
our relationships

" I am over the moon that we are adopting this framework!

It's also about how we do this  
**TOGETHER**

## The difference this makes



## How the Together framework may feel to our partners and what we hope you see in practice

Together is about building on what our Family Court Advisers and Children's Guardians do well.

Our reports to court will be fair and balanced showing the strengths and difficulties for families and how these directly affect the children.

You will see reference in our reports to the court, that we have shared our recommendations with children and included what they have said to us about those recommendations in reports.

Engaging with children is important to us and you will see in our reports how children have engaged with us, always using their own words where this is possible, sharing their understanding of what has happened to them, what is happening now and what they want to happen in the future.

For younger children or those who communicate without speech, we will be making sure that their views and words that they might use are included. Their carers, family members and social workers if they have one will help us with this work.

We want to know that children and families feel that we have both heard and understood their views and experiences, so will ask them through feedback much more regularly than we have done before.



The difference we are hoping you will see in Cafcass' work with children and families.

## 1 Assessment and Child's Plan

We have introduced the Assessment and Child's Plan; this is our assessment of risks, harm, strengths, our analysis of what we hear from children and families and an analysis of all of this goes into our recommendations to the family court, about what is safe and in their best interests. It is also our plan to describe how we will work through the proceedings with children, their parents, carers and any local authorities who are involved. Each time a practitioner is allocated to a set of proceedings for a child and family, they will write an Assessment and Child's Plan which they will share with the child or young person and their parents and local authority social worker if there is one. The practitioner will:

- ✓ Record in jargon free words for the child what the plan will be and when we know our recommendations, what they are.
- ✓ Consider what is unique about them and record their responses to our recommendations.
- ✓ Show our workings as our assessment develops and we make recommendations. This means making sure that our thinking is understood by children and families. We should be making clear what we have heard what harm has happened for them, what risks remain to children if things don't change, how we think the harm they have or are experiencing is affecting them, what sort of things are positive and protective for them and how all this comes together for us to make a recommendation. We should also explain why we disagree with what children would like to happen if that is the case.
- ✓ Record the specific experiences, incidents and details of what is happening for the child to outline the biggest risks and strengths in their family life.

## 2 Group supervision

This is about working collaboratively with colleagues to reflect on how we make a difference for children and how we think together about complex work.

- ✓ Practitioners receive training on how to use the practice framework.
- ✓ They participate in group supervision each month.
- ✓ They map the child's situation to think through complex work as a team.
- ✓ They use solution circles to get quickly and collaboratively from challenge to solution.

## 3 Appreciative inquiry

This is a way of understanding what has worked well, and the difference it has made to children, families, Cafcass colleagues and partners.

- ✓ We use this with families to understand what works well for their children and the difference these things make to keeping their children safe and well.
- ✓ We use it in supervision and in discussions between social work practitioners and managers.
- ✓ We use it in collaborative audits and when reflecting on all our work.
- ✓ We use it in meetings to reflect on what has worked well and the difference it has made.

## 4 Family storyboards

A story written by adults with pictures to explain to children what has happened in their family, how adults around them will keep them safe and what the plan will be.

- ✓ We use storyboards whenever children or adults are unsure about what and why things are happening.
- ✓ Whenever we use a family storyboard, we will reflect with colleagues on what worked.
- ✓ We would like to talk with partners (for example local authorities and judges, family forum members, legal professionals) about using family storyboards.
- ✓ We use storyboards whenever we need to visually represent what needs to happen and why.

## 5 Introductory and endings letters

These are most often letters to children (sometimes videos) that explain to them who we are, what we do and hopefully seek to create a connection to help them to think in advance about what they would like to share with us. They help us to understand what is special and unique about them so that we can think about how this influences our recommendations to the court. We are committing to:

- ✓ Always making introductions to children and recording how these are done.
- ✓ Communicating with children in the way that meets their needs.
- ✓ Understanding their uniqueness and using this to influence our work and our recommendations to the family court.
- ✓ Keeping children up to date about what is happening and what will happen at the end of the proceedings about them.
- ✓ Asking them throughout our work with them, how well we have managed our work with them and what we could have done or do differently to make it even better.

## 6 People and Organisational Development Strategy

This is our plan to support, attract, retain and develop our people and it also sets out the aspirations and values that inform our organisational culture. The strategy:

- ✓ Prioritises five commitments; Best for Children, Great Employees, Inclusive and Connected, Living Our Values, Inspiring Leaders.
- ✓ Holds Together values at the centre of the strategy.
- ✓ Will be influenced by feedback from colleagues so that our people influence its implementation.

What we would like you to consider when you are working with Cafcass as we implement our new practice framework:

- ✓ Have you got any feedback for us about the extent to which we are explaining our reasoning in reports for the recommendations we are making, and whether we are clear about what we have explained to children and their families as well as their responses?
- ✓ As a group of professionals focused on the safety and welfare of children, whether together in each set of proceedings, we are keeping the child at the very centre of our thinking, our actions, and our explanations. What could we do better together?

