

Knowledge and skills statement for practice leaders



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West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership



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Contents

- 1 **Lead and govern excellent practice**

- 2 **Creating a context for excellent practice**

- 3 **Designing a system to support effective practice**

- 4 **Developing excellent practitioners**

- 5 **Support effective decision-making**

- 6 **Quality assurance and improvement**

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accrediting practice leaders in child and family social work.

Practice leaders are qualified social workers with the day-to-day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, and for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors. Most usually, this is referred to as the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care or Director of Family Services. It may be that a few, mainly larger employers, would regard themselves as having more than one practice leader.



Lead and govern excellent practice

- Be a highly visible and highly valued figure, occupying a position of significant influence at a local and national level, and be known for exceptional knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Hold accountability for child and family social work practice and its impact on the lives of children and families locally.
- Provide clarity of organisational purpose and the values underpinning that, focusing on providing a world-class service for children and families. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and positive relationships and attitudes towards children and families, other professionals and partner agencies, politicians and the public.

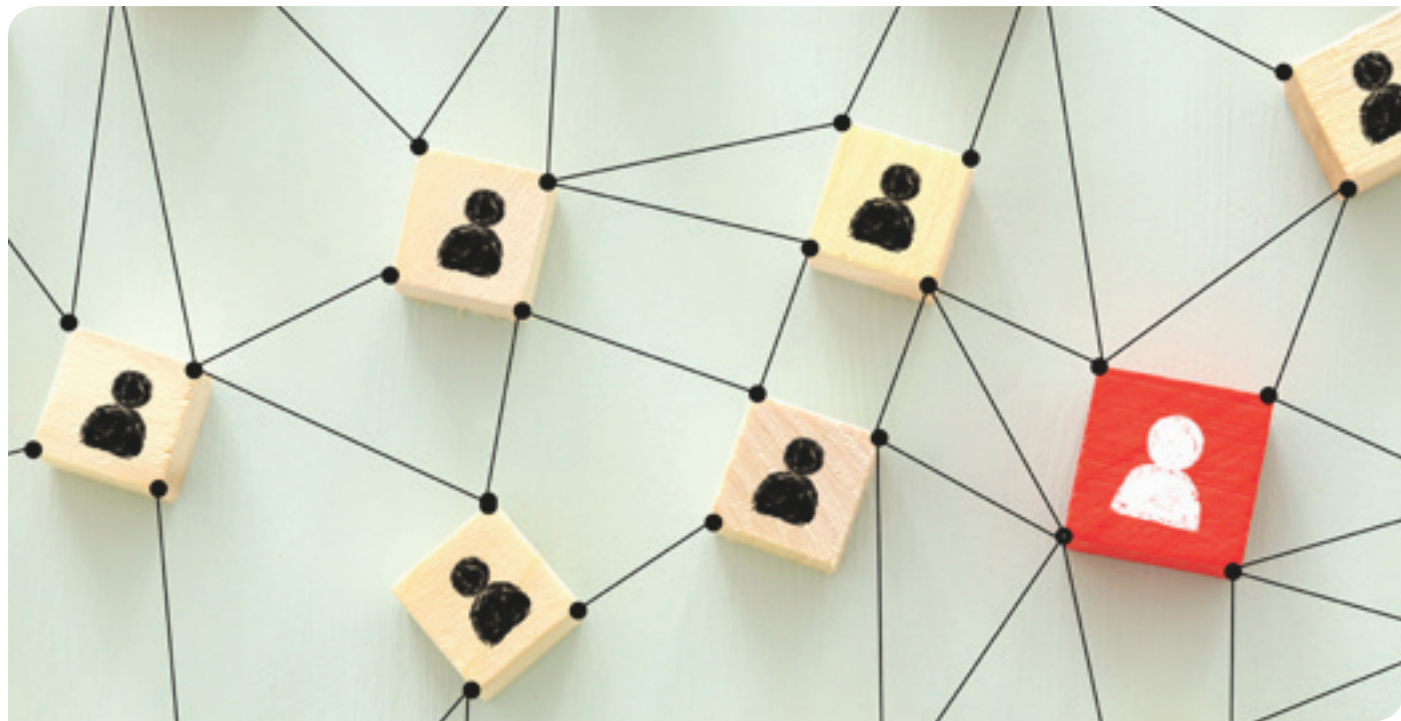
Drive change and constant progress so that children and families get the very best help and support. Secure an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law. Show the strongest commitment to children in public care by ensuring they grow up in homes in which they can thrive and, having left care, receive all the support to which they are entitled.

- Lead by example with integrity, creativity, resilience, and clarity of purpose. Sustain wide, current knowledge and understanding of child and family social work practice and broader child protection and welfare systems, locally, nationally and globally.



Creating a context for excellent practice

- Engage staff, children and families and the wider partnership in constructive thinking about the future. Create a shared strategic vision, which inspires, motivates and encapsulates the organisational commitment to supporting families, protecting children and providing safe and stable childhoods for children in public care. Champion this vision and drive strategic leadership throughout the organisation, so that it is applied to everyday practice.
- Focus on best outcomes for children and families and ensure that the vision, purpose and plan for the organisation is welcomed and owned by all. Continuously evaluate how best to keep the vision a reality, and what needs to change to build upon existing strengths.
- Create a culture in which excellent practice is expected and celebrated; critical incidents are handled with grace and discipline; and public commitment to protecting children and supporting families is frequent and authentic.



Designing a system to support effective practice

- Design with political and financial astuteness, and within a clear set of principles, a practice system that enables excellent child and family social work practice to flourish. Aply translate local and national policy into the organisational context, without compromising high quality professional practice. Prioritise budgets in order to meet demand and ensure quality of service provision. Confidently illustrate the relationship between efficiency, children's outcomes and financial flexibility so that services can respond to changing need and risk.
- Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that process is well considered, fit for purpose and efficient. Create sufficient capacity for practitioners to build relationships with children and families and undertake effective direct work with families, which enhances family wellbeing and reduces risks. Use resources, including those that lie within families and communities, to best effect and have mechanisms in place to ensure constant reflective thinking about the welfare of families and the safety of children. Build influential and productive relationships across the organisation and the wider local partnership, across regions and nationwide, to secure the very best support to families and the protection of children.
- Establish communication channels that report on the welfare of children and families, and the safety of those at risk. Be alert to anxiety and pressures within the organisation, even at the earliest stages. Secure high quality legal, financial and human resource services for the organisation and ensure communication technology is fit for purpose. Challenge orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence for children and families, and model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to practice and leadership.



Developing excellent practitioners

- Critically appraise theory, the best evidence and rationale for different practice approaches. Select robust methodologies to form an overarching practice framework. Identify the skills needed to practise within the complexity of children's and families' lives, and in particular the population being served by the organisation. Secure the resources and support needed to implement the practice framework and shape, in partnership with others, the current and future quality of practice through effective training and sustained professional development for all staff and throughout a practice career. Recognise and utilise the resource that children, families and communities can bring to the development of staff and services.
- Recognise the value of excellent social workers remaining in frontline practice. Provide sufficient organisational, professional and personal support to ensure the wellbeing of practitioners so that they can provide excellent social work services to children and families. Identify and develop people with emerging leadership talent, and support retention through the provision of challenging, interesting and motivating opportunities.



Support effective decision-making

- Build a culture where managed risk is accepted and understood as being inherent in every decision that is made. Encourage practitioners to make decisions and take subsequent actions in this context making sure they know they have the backing of the organisation to act reasonably and in a child's best interests. Actively demonstrate trust in the workforce and develop a culture that promotes learning, reflection and the acceptance of accountability.
- Publicly acknowledge the enormity of separating a child from their parents. Participate and add rigour to decision-making about children coming into public care, returning home or to the wider family, or moving to new permanent families. Ensure that all long-term consequences of current decisions are properly explored and understood.
- Make sound and complex decisions in high pressured, fast-paced conditions, striking a balance between speed and depth of thought. Draw on the best evidence to help inform thinking and decision-making.



Quality assurance and improvement

- Set and uphold high quality practice standards, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on the lives of children and families. Establish rigorous and fair processes for managing the performance of staff, including accurate measures of practice through direct observation. Secure an in-depth, comprehensive and current understanding of the realities of practice across the organisation and know how to address early signs of difficulties. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice, which builds social workers' confidence in their practice. Meet complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.
- Learn from local, national and international review, inspection and research and lead local and national debate. Ensure local children, families and communities play an active role in assessing the quality of services received and developing ideas for service and staff development. Pay close attention to the organisation's local and national reputation, taking steps to manage its public profile successfully. Establish the organisation as a credible and respectable public service, proudly promoting the achievements of staff, children and families.

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