

Exercises for thinking about Support Networks



“It takes a village to raise a child”

We operate in a system that does not value family so *we buy into the story of* “**there is nobody**”

To make a positive difference we need to assume: “**without a network, I cannot help you**”

Engaging family is OUR RESPONSIBILITY: we need to polish our skills to help families identify and strengthen the things that they already do to meet the child’s needs. **We have to work harder to recognise the positives as we have already been effectively trained to readily spot the risks!**

Finding a support network is based on the following ethos:

- Every young person has an immediate and extended family, and they can be found if we try. **If we exclude one parent we have lost 50% of the potential network.**
- **Loneliness** can be devastating, even dangerous, and it **is experienced by most children and youth in the care system.**
- A permanent, meaningful connection to family and caring adults helps children and young people to develop a sense of **belonging and hope.**

The science: a huge 15 year study in the USA found that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) cause early trauma that links to physical and psychological problems occurring in adulthood.

Greater number of ACEs = Greater likelihood of developing illness, depression and bodily failure as an adult.

**Think about our impact on children’s lives:
SAFETY IS TEMPORARY WITHOUT HEALING.**

Healing only happens in safe and loving relationships.

In order to protect children we move them away from ‘bad people’ and place them with ‘good people,’ but this also means we often necessarily remove them from everything and everyone they know which can be a traumatic childhood experience in itself.

Even when children need to be in the care of the organisation, they should remain connected to their family and friends.

Networks are about building resilience for children so they can become strong, independent adults.

Putting Support Network Thinking into Practice

To help you polish your thinking, why not try one or more of the below?

1. **Question:** Where would you rate the importance of family/friend networks being involved in a child's safety plan? *Discuss your response with colleagues*

2. **'Important people' exercise:**

- Thinking about your own network, take a piece of blank paper and identify/list who you consider to be the important people in your life
- Now imagine something drastic has happened and you and your significant other have been taken into hospital. Who else can you identify who might be worried about you?
- In this scenario, you have children, so someone else needs to look after them. Who out of those people could: provide cuddles at bedtime? Do the school run? Packed lunches? Help with homework? Bring the children to visit you in hospital?
- What other questions can you think up which would identify the level of support you would want/expect your children to receive from your network in your absence?
- How would it feel for you/your child if a stranger was asked to fulfil (any of) the things you have identified?

3. **Timetable exercise:**

- Take a blank piece of paper and draw out a calendar week with time slots down one side:

	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
8am							
9am							
10am etc							

- Think of a child you know and complete the timetable with what you understand about their daily activities: what are they doing each day? At various times? Who are they with?
- Now consider: What does the child's week look like? How much quality time do they spend with people who love and care about them (time when they are healing)? What does this tell you about their experience? Are there any gaps? How is this different from another child you work with?
- Share what you learned from this.

4. **Futures:**

Thinking about a child you know in your personal/private life: **Where do you expect they will be in 5 years time? What about in 10 years? 15 years?**

What are they doing at each stage? Who do they know? Who have they met? Where are they staying? Who is with them? What have they achieved? Who helped them to succeed?

Now thinking about a young person you are working with, ask the same questions ...

5. **Group supervision:**

Complete a cheeky Group Supervision with your pod/team. Request the focus to be on identifying the things that are potentially getting in the way of you helping the family to build a support network. **What are your next steps?**