

# THE ROTHERHAM FAMILY APPROACH

“Would this be good enough for  
my child and family?”



[www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk)

# Introduction

Rotherham has worked relentlessly to embed a learning culture across the organisation and is committed to evidence-based approaches when working with children, young people and families, as well as working together as professionals. As part of the journey towards 'Outstanding', Rotherham selected three methodologies to support a consistent operating model and the methodologies complement one another to help practitioners deliver the best possible interventions to support children and families to achieve.

## Rotherham Family Approach

This is the language used to describe the **methodological approaches used in Rotherham.**

The Rotherham Family approach **embodies our obsession** with keeping the following question at the heart of all that we do:

*“Would this be good enough for my child and family?”*

This simple, but powerful question is held at the centre of practice across Rotherham and is visible from front line practitioners through to the senior leadership of the organisation.

Our positive outcomes stem from ensuring that we strive relentlessly to answer 'yes' to this critical question. The Rotherham Family Approach supports the development of its workforce in order to clearly evidence the following in practice.

- **A relentless focus on children:** Children are always at the heart of quality practice that helps to build safety, wellbeing and success.
- **Working 'with' families** to help them solve problems, maximising their existing strengths, resources and networks.
- Enabling '**space for positive change**' within families through empowerment and real opportunity to help that change occur.
- **Building meaningful relationships:** Improved communication that includes high challenge and high support in collaboration with families that enables change for children.
- **The lived experience of the child is evident in all that we do.** Children and young people are actively involved in work that affects them and

are always consulted on their wishes, feelings and decisions about their lives.

- **Effecting long term, sustainable change.** Families are supported so that they can be clear about what the problems are, what needs to change and how it needs to change. They can then feel empowered to take action to make things better for their child(ren).
- **Risk, worries, danger, safety, success and wellbeing goals are clearly evidenced** and articulated to families. We work with families to support their understanding of why there are worries concerning their children and what the 'bottom line' is.
- **Language that cares:** Rotherham has taken part in national consultation with children and young people to establish preferred language when describing children within the statutory care system. Practitioners are being encouraged to consider this work when working with , writing and/or talking about children and young people in order to ensure that their voice is heard:

*“The language of care is so mixed up with our everyday language that it is difficult to separate the two. These words that we challenge are used by everyone: foster carers, social workers, teachers, Independent Reviewing Officers, administrators and even children and young people. We should challenge ourselves and challenge people who we hear using them.”*

Rotherham Young People; TACT (2019)  
Language that Cares

[https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019\\_online.pdf](https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf)

# What is the Rotherham Family Approach?

**Signs of Safety, Restorative Practice and Social Pedagogy** have common principles that are grounded in relational based practice. This includes placing high emphasis on the nature and style of communication and promotes the importance of producing simple, solution focused plans that appropriately meet need to achieve tangible change. These methodologies promote a value base that sustainable change is most likely to be achieved when families are empowered to find their own solutions to the issues that they face. This is reinforced by placing high support, as well as high challenge, at the centre of practice and emphasises risk, as well as strengths, to enable families to 'own' their plan and professionals to understand what is needed to produce strong outcomes for children and the wider family.

- **Signs of Safety** offers a range of tools for; assessment, planning, direct work, decision making, engaging children, the disciplines for workers' behaviour and application of the tools and processes through which the work is undertaken with children, young people and families.
- **Restorative Practice** embodies a set of core values, beliefs, principles and a way of being with people. 'Restorative Practice' creates a common language and a common approach for fostering a sense of social responsibility and shared accountability. It also aims to find creative ways to deal with conflict that repairs emotional harm and allows everyone involved to find a positive way forward. Restorative approaches often work in repairing conflict where past solutions have repeatedly failed and focus on 'working with' people rather than doing 'for' or 'to'.
- **Social Pedagogy** is a well-established and proven framework for meeting the needs of children being supported by services. It blends the use of knowledge from academic research and established child development theories (head), with an important emphasis

on relationships and emotions, recognising that everyone has their own emotional and ethical needs (heart), in combination with a focus on using practical tasks and every day activities as vital opportunities for learning (hands). Individuals trained in social pedagogy work with the whole child, aware that children think, feel, have a physical, spiritual, social and creative existence, and that all of these characteristics are in interaction in the person which has an important bearing on their development. This approach promises to herald a shift away from following procedures to a system that supports workers to build positive relationships that lead to stability, better outcomes and long-term wellbeing.

## How Do Practitioners Use the Rotherham Family Approach?

Rotherham practitioners have been equipped with a robust toolkit of methodological approaches to ensure that they have the right skills to utilise when working with children and families. Practitioners use each methodology simultaneously when managing a family case and there are no hard and fast rules about 'when to use what.' Rotherham's assessment tools are underpinned by Signs of Safety framework however practitioners may also utilise Restorative Approaches and/or Social Pedagogy when working with children and families to gather information for the assessment. This recognises the assessment process itself as an important intervention.

Meeting agendas and reports across the directorate utilise formats based on the Rotherham Family Approach, so that the language utilised in all decision making is consistent with our work with families.

The Rotherham Family Approach methodologies are used in the directorate's supervision templates, again to embed the currency of the language within the three approaches.



## Improving Practice & Integration

Utilising these methodological approaches has helped Rotherham to build upon the strengths of existing good practice and have helped us to improve the overall 'system' for working with children and families. This has subsequently assisted us in building consistency across services (Children's Social Care, Early Help and Education) so that support to children and families in Rotherham continues to be easily accessed, seamless and collaborative. This assists in families feeling supported through consistent processes and not having to repeat their story several times to meet the requirements of conflicting paperwork and frameworks. Further work is taking place with education colleagues to broaden the scope of the Rotherham Family Approach over 2020. The wider partnership has also engaged in training to ensure the wider system reflects the key ethos of the Rotherham Family Approach.

### Outcomes:

**Effecting Positive Change:** Rotherham Children & Young People's Services is committed to continually demonstrating that the Rotherham Family Approach is making a difference and expects that improved outcomes are reflected in the following ways:

**Organisational Culture** - by adopting and embedding the Rotherham Family Approach leaders are committed to supporting the change process by working alongside the workforce to promote a learning environment that removes barriers and fosters a safe and robust organisation.

**The Rotherham Family Approach** not only focuses on the children and families that we work with but on our workforce family; where integration is at its core and service/organisational barriers are removed with strong interfaces between each specific service area.

**Workforce Development** - the workforce across all parts of the directorate is trained and receives ongoing support and challenge to practice the Rotherham Family Approach confidently, competently and skilfully. Managers and Practice Leads are supervised and model practice in a

manner that demonstrates critical inquiry, skilful use of authority and builds on the inclusive and transparent approach of team-based decision making.

**Children and young people are clearly visible.**

Their views, wishes and feelings are reflected in all aspects of the assessment, planning, receiving services and reviewing of services so we understand how they are being helped by the support in place.

**Family Engagement** - there is clear evidence that our children and families are working 'with' practitioners as opposed to being 'done to' or 'done for'.

**Data is informing us** of how to continue to shape services progressively to ensure that Rotherham continues to be a learning organisation with improvement at its heart.

**Valuing Partners** - multi-agency partners are supported to understand and appreciate the value of taking a shared approach and are working together with practitioners in a consistent way that adds value and builds safety, stability and success for local children, young people and their families.

**The Rotherham Family Approach implementation** programme continues to build over time, as a key component to add value and support to sustain the local continual improvement journey.



**Fig 1 Operating Model**



**Fig 2 The Rotherham Family Approach Supporting the 'System'**



## Attachment Friendly Schools Project:

Building on the strength of the Rotherham Family Approach, Rotherham Virtual School is working towards establishing a network of Attachment Friendly Schools (AFS). AFS are settings which have not just shown an understanding of attachment and trauma informed practice, but have firmly embedded this knowledge base and skill set within their setting.

This work has included:

- Training over 60 schools in Emotion Coaching.
- Training in Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) in over sixty schools in Rotherham.
- The introduction of creative Mentoring, offering young people one to one support through a carefully designed programme that is both nurturing and education focused.