Guidance Document: Our Family Journey

This guide explains Islington's "Our Family Journey" tool, which helps professionals understand and support families.

Families need to be listened to, included and respected throughout this process.

This tool helps practitioners and professionals to:

- Create a balanced picture of the family, taking a strengths-based approach.
- Build a partnership where families are respected and involved.
- Create a clear family record that reflects their views and needs.
- Understand family dynamics.

Stages of 'Our Family Journey'

1. Family Agreement and the Request for Support form
2. Our Family Journey Assessment

Stage 1: Family Agreement and the Request for Support form

The process starts when a child or young person has been identified as needing additional support.

What is a Family Agreement in the Safeguarding Context?

A Family Agreement is a document created with the family to outline realistic expectations about Children' Services' duty of care to share information with relevant professionals if there is a risk of harm to the family or anyone else. They are not the same as partnership agreements.

This agreement serves as a formal record of working together to safeguard children and families. It is a crucial tool for safeguarding children. Although it is not legally binding, it is only effective when all parties agree and sign it.

It may be helpful to use the standard template, and the document must be signed by all relevant people for it to be valid.

If you want to understand more about consent, read here for additional information.

How do we share information and retain trust with families?

In line with relational-based practice and whole family approach, when working with children and families, professionals need to build trust and communicate openly. A Family Agreement or referral process should be collaborative. If children or families have a choice about how their information is shared, you should make this clear to them.

However, if you have concerns about a child's safety or welfare and are considering contacting support services to provide specific support then you need to be transparent with the family that their information will be shared to support the referral. Take on the motto 'If in doubt, chat it out'. You should still explain who you intend to share information with, what information you will be sharing, and why. The only reason not to do this is if it would put the child or others at risk.

If children or their parents/caregivers object to sharing specific information, but you decide it's appropriate to share, then record your reasons and the legal basis for these.

If you are unsure about whether you should be sharing information, get advice. This could be from your manager/supervisor, the agency or organisation's designated safeguarding children professional, the data protection/information governance lead, Caldicott Guardian, professional regulator (if applicable) or your organisation's relevant policy or legal team.

There are a few key things to keep in mind at this stage.

- **Be clear and upfront** about why information sharing is important, who will see it, and how it helps them get the support they need to achieve their goals.
- **Ask about the family's concerns** about information other services have or about how and why different services are involved. Share any information available to address these concerns.
- **Focus on the positives** about how sharing information is key to bringing them the right support.
- **Respect their privacy** and reassure them that only relevant information will be shared. Information will be shared to safeguard the child or young person.
- **Regularly check in about family awareness and agreement** around the Early Help process.

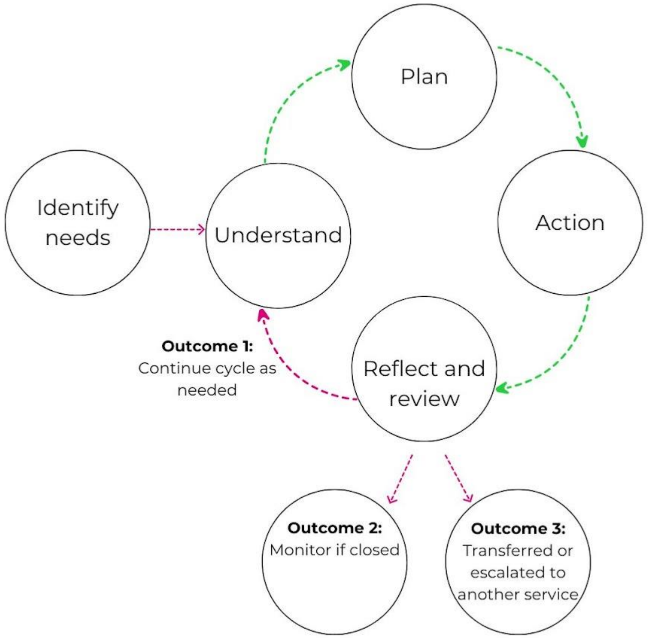
Filling in the Request for Support Form

If a Universal Service is not the right solution, professionals should refer to children's social care and fill in the CSCT referral form. You can read more on how to do this here.

Stage 2: Our Family Journey Assessment

This assessment helps gather information about a family's situation and relationship with their wider networks. It has five steps:

1. Identify the family's needs
2. Understand their situation and wider context
3. Plan the best support strategy
4. Implement the plan
5. Review how things are going and adjust if needed



In summary, these are the key actions under each step.

Step	Key action
Identify needs	Identify the family's needs 1. Speak to the family about your concerns, 2. Engage in the family, and if appropriate, get agreement on the next steps
Understand	Understand their situation and wider context, gather information about the family's situation and wider network through talking to the family and engaging with different services and organisations.

Plan	Decide on the best support plan
	• Create a Family Plan with the family's agreement. This includes:
	  ○ Actions and steps to support
	  ○ Responsible individuals or teams to support the family.
	  ○ Success indicators for each area.
	  ○ A schedule for further meetups (if this is done elsewhere, this step is not needed)

Action	Implement the plan against agreed timeframes
Reflect and review	Review how things are going with the family and adjust if needed a) Continue cycle, as needed b) Monitor the case, if closed c) Transfer or escalate to another service if concerns persist

There is a useful 'Our Family Journey Tool' that can guide you through the process. More details can be found on [Our Family Journey | ISCP](#).

1. Identify the family's needs

A collaborative approach to understanding the family's needs can make a big difference in the success of the family's journey. This aligns to the Whole Family Approach competency. Key sources of information are the family and wider services and organisations.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Meet the family where they feel safe. Have a conversation to find a first meeting spot (consider their location and any safety concerns).
- Take a culture-informed approach. Be aware of cultural differences when engaging with families. Engaging respectfully is essential in building trust.

- Practice active listening. Take the time to understand the family's situation, letting them share their story in their own way. This might take more than one visit.
- Be positive and supportive. Avoid judgment and don't get stuck in the past or on a challenge. Try to focus on the family's strengths, rather than the problems.
- Consider families' engagement patterns and behaviour as a way of communicating their needs. Based on Trauma-Informed Practice, some families may take time to open up and share their story because past trauma has made them wary of trusting others. Use reflective conversations with your supervisor and colleagues to explore how engagement challenges might signal a need and how to respond in a way that helps the family gradually build trust.

After engaging the family about the next steps, professionals can gather information for a more complete picture. The Petal Measuring Tool is a useful tool, which forms part of the wider 'Our Family Journey' tool. It addresses six outcomes based on Troubled Families Outcomes. These include anti-social behaviour, education, children needing help, worklessness, domestic violence/abuse, and health.

How to use the Family Analysis / Petal Measuring tool
This helps families to identify their strengths and priorities for change. It also helps you understand how priority areas impact each other. For instance, a parent's mental health could be affecting how they set boundaries for their child. Take time to work with the family to label each section with areas for change (for instance, getting children to school on time). This helps identify some shorter term goals and immediate actions.

Use this information to create a Family Plan with actions to address the areas identified. Discussing what success looks like (being at a 9 or 10 on the scale) helps everyone stay focused on positive change.

You may need to meet with other services/organisations (e.g. schools or social workers) to get information about the family's risks and challenges. Make sure that the appropriate data-sharing agreements (DSAs) are in place. All the information must be clearly and securely recorded in line with the service retention policy or information sharing agreement of your organisation. Keep in mind that different services and organisations may have different understandings of the family's situation.

Keep the family involved throughout this information-gathering process. Only withhold information if it could place the child at increased risk. In this case, the information will still be shared based MA decision.

2. Understand

Once all the information has been gathered, the professional and the family can begin to analyse and identify patterns, priorities and areas for change. The Scaling Tool in the 'Our Family Journey' toolkit can help. There are some important sections of the tool to unpack.

How to use the Outcomes Scale tool This tool takes multiple areas of a family's life and asks them to assess their current situation in each. This is done on a scale of 1-10 (1: We don't know what to do about this, things are as bad as they could be, and 10: Everything is going very well).

3. Plan

The professional now has sufficient information to work with the family to build out the family plan. This plan outlines:

- What are the actions and steps to make changes?
- Who are the responsible persons to support (including multi-agency teams)?
- What does success look like for each area (e.g., 9 or 10 on the Scaling Tool)?
- How often will reviews happen?

Family ownership is key, as they are more likely to work towards the priorities they've identified- so keep them involved as much as possible. This includes involving children and young people in age-appropriate ways. If multiple services are involved, then hold a 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) meeting. Refer to this page to learn more about the TAF meeting.

4. Action

Once the Family Plan is created, everyone works together to implement it within the agreed timeframes. Building strong, trusting relationships with the family is crucial for professionals. This means being reliable, consistent, and offering practical support. However, the ultimate goal is to empower the family towards independence. Professionals need to recognise when to support and when to step back and let the family take ownership of their actions and responsibilities.

5. Reflect and review

Working with families experiencing trauma is emotionally difficult for professionals. They need reflective spaces and support. Trauma-informed practice suggests that supervision shouldn't just focus on caseload management; it should include reflection on each family. This helps staff stay reflective and deal with situations where the family's trauma might trigger their own past experiences. Reflection and reviewing the family's progress is standard practice, not just something done when professionals need advice.

There are three possible outcomes of this process.

a) Continue cycle, as needed

b) Monitor if the case is closed

The family and professional (and if relevant, the TAF) should meet frequently to check on progress. Reflect on what's worked well, what challenges they've faced and what adjustments are needed to the plan. Family life is never constant, and so this plan needs to be seen as ongoing and open to adaptation. This ongoing process acknowledges the family's strengths, values, and hopes for the future while adapting to changing circumstances. It's a chance to celebrate progress and set new goals, ensuring the Family Plan remains a helpful tool for lasting positive change.

c) Transferred or escalated to another service

If concerns continue or escalate despite support efforts, the professional needs to decide whether the case needs to be referred to the Children Services Contact Team for further intervention.