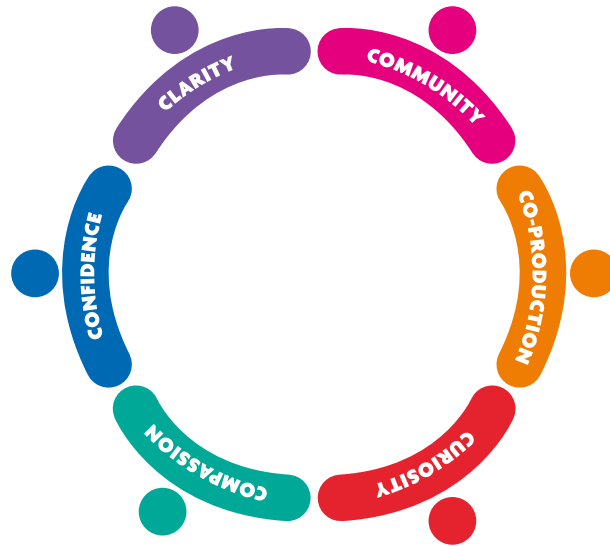


NEWHAM CIRCLES OF SUPPORT.



WE ARE NEWHAM.

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INTRODUCTION

Our ambition is for Newham to be a place where every child and young person enjoys the best possible opportunities in life – through outstanding education; exceptional family support, and a social care service that ensures children are safe and none are left behind.

Our practice framework, Newham Circles of Support, underpins this vision to ensure that every child and young person has the support they need

- **To be cared for, safe and protected from harm**
- **To be happy and enjoy improved wellbeing**
- **To reach their full potential**

Newham is a unique place. The youngest and most diverse borough in London – with almost a quarter of residents (86,000 people) aged under-18 and more than 100 languages spoken – it is an exciting and challenging place to work with children. Despite its extraordinary potential, this is a borough that experiences huge socio-economic challenges, deprivation and unemployment; with more than half of children living in poverty.



TIM ALDRIDGE
Corporate Director
for Children and
Young People

To work in children's social care and education in Newham is to be an agent of change.

We champion the rights of children – placing them front and centre of our work – and we are determined that children living in care, children leaving care and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Newham receive the same kind of support and encouragement that many young people get from their families.

The needs of the child are always our first priority. Our pioneering family-led social work approach to systemic and relational practice ensures the voices of children and families are heard, feedback is welcomed and acted on, and social workers enjoy the support, space and time for exceptional social work to flourish.

Achieving our Centre of Excellence goals will see us working imaginatively to grow, adapt, innovate and improve further – forging relationships with other experts; partnering with schools, colleges and community organisations; continuing to invest in our people and ensuring that we always listen to – and learn from – Newham's families and children, embedding their feedback in the heart of our ongoing transformation.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Our Circles of Support Framework of Practice is a clear Purposeful, Planned and Focused approach to Practice. One that is Systemic, Restorative and relational. Placing children, their families and their systems at the heart of everything we do.

We want Practitioners to think of themselves as active participants in relationships of change. Having the skills, the support and they systems to enable them to get alongside families, children and young people. To enter conversations that construct shared decision making, doing with and not to families.

We believe all of us, families, children, practitioners all need to be part of various circles of support. Circles that enable, encourage, appreciate and challenge us to do as well as we can.



EMMA COCKERELL
Director of
Operations and
Safeguarding



DAVE TAPSELL
Director of Clinical
Practice

To construct these circles of support we draw on three complementary approaches.

Systemic theory and practices

We use Systemic theory and practices to help us understand the complexities of the world we and our families live within. Systemic tools and ideas help to provide a number of lenses for us to see the world and gain a better understanding of how those we are supporting experience it. These ideas invite us to see people as living within a complex web of relationships. These relationships are where we believe support, challenge and intervention is best offered. Systemic ideas invite us to recognise that people's contexts impact on them both positively and negatively. Recognising the negative impact of Racism, Sexism, poverty, inequality has on peoples experience and their ability to respond and change.

Our systemic approach aims to equip Social Care Practitioners with models of change that they can use to mitigate harm, enhance strengths, enable change and do with families rather than doing to them. Recognising that it is impossible to eradicate all risk.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Restorative values

Our intention is to support families to make positive change. We do this by working with them and drawing on the strengths of the family network. We will work collaboratively with families wherever and whenever we can. We recognise that the people we work with mostly want the best outcomes for those in their family – and they are often the people who know the best way to achieve these. Central to this approach the idea of a learning system – we use feedback, both positive and negative to improve services – we aim to be transparent and supportive; we are accountable and try to avoid blame and recrimination.

We always approach our work with positive intent – we aim to help improve lives and support families. We recognise the significance of difference and the role difference and language plays in structuring the meaning and experience of the world. We use the Social GRAACCESS idea to support our recognition of difference into our work. These differences contribute to power dynamics that can cause inequality and disadvantage.

Relational practice and approaches

We aim to ensure all staff are offered relationships within the service that are of high support as well as high challenge. Our relational approach invites us all to work in ways that invite us to speak so that others want to listen, and listen so that others want to speak. Recognising that words are powerful and we have to choose them wisely to have the impact we intend. We actively encourage and seek feedback from each other so we are in relationships where the best decisions can be taken to enhance the lives of the children and families we are supporting.

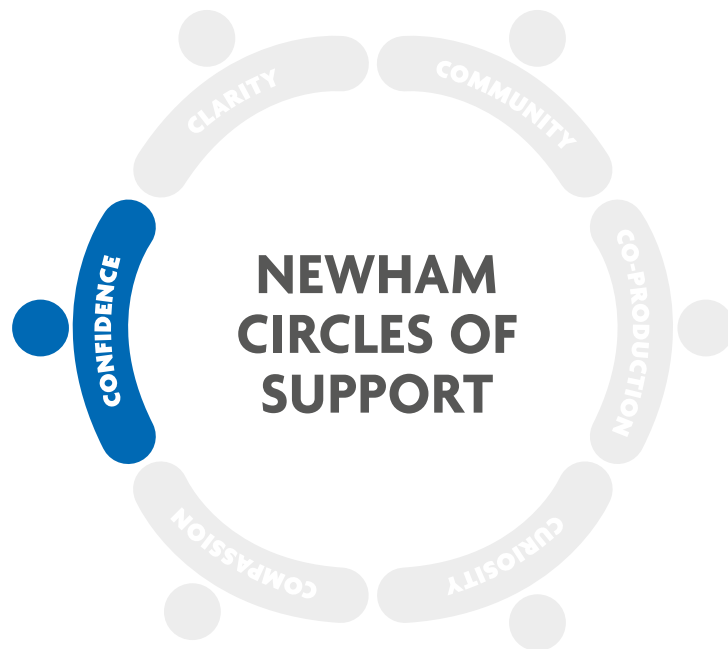
We recognise that we are in a relationship with our community, one where we see them as active partners whose voice, ideas and input we actively seek. Using this feedback to develop, improve and construct the service going forward.

CONFIDENCE

In Newham we support social workers to respond to risk with confidence. We understand that it is impossible to eradicate all risk in the work we do – instead we acknowledge risk and seek to understand it better through developing effective relationships with those we work with – creating a position of ‘safe uncertainty’.

We use a partnership approach to working with families and provide every opportunity for them to access support that reduces harm. This helps us to identify, acknowledge and build upon their existing strengths and resources, whilst also seeking to address any concerns. Our aim is to ensure that our assessments are proportionate and enable an effective response to risk. We want to keep children and young people safe, but at the same time avoid responses that cause more harm. We work alongside and through our relationships with families, and other professionals, to develop plans that make a difference to children’s lives.

Social workers In Newham have access to a range of support to help them confidently assess and manage risk, including regular individual and group supervision, access to coaching, and consultations with specialist colleagues and in-house therapists. This supports social workers to keep a range of perspectives and



CONFIDENCE

possibilities in mind. As well as these opportunities for support, we have oversight systems in place to checks that risks are being identified and appropriately responded to.

Newham strives to be a learning system and we use feedback, both positive and negative, to improve the responses we give to families at both the individual and systemic level. We are accountable, but at the same time aim to avoid blame and recrimination. We actively seek feedback from families and professionals and use this alongside performance data and audits of practice to help us know what works and what we could have done differently. By constantly challenging ourselves, we can feel more confident that we are doing the best we can do for the families we work with.

The Newham Together Social Care Academy is the vehicle for developing our workforce and improving outcomes through development and training. We believe that by supporting and empowering our social workers to feel confident in their role, it will help them to support and empower the families they work with.

Example in practice

“I worked with a family of six children in which the father was perpetrating domestic violence. I took this case to my Group Supervision and spoke about how intimidated and scared he made me feel. It was really helpful to be able to talk about this openly, without judgement, and hear the perspectives of others in the group. It helped me relate my experience to that of the mother in the family, and what she has lived with for many years. I think she has really appreciated that I now better understand her experience and I have used the tools from the Safe and Together to think through with her what safety measures and contingency plans we need to put in place now that she is taking legal action against him.”

Newly Qualified Social Worker

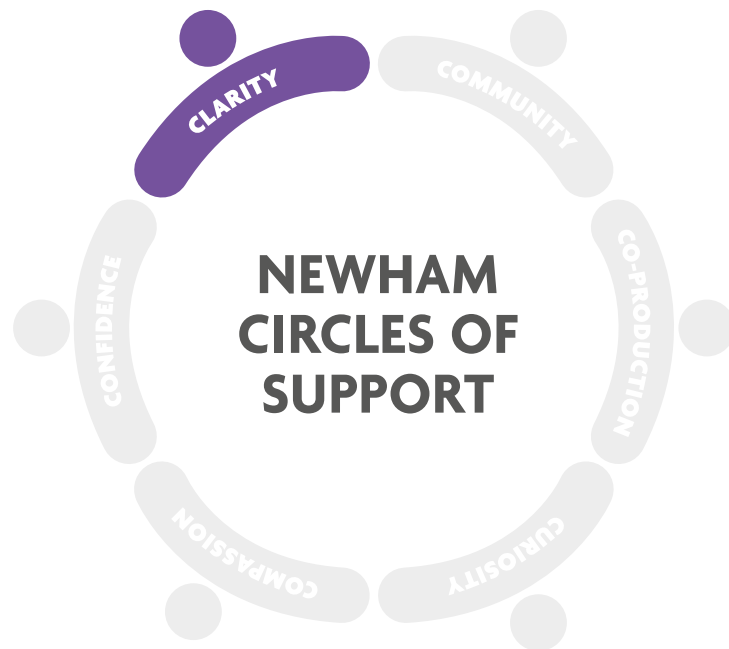
CLARITY

In Newham our practice is purposeful, planned and focused, helping us to achieve clarity. We understand the importance of strong collaborative working relationships and draw upon our relational social work skills in order to join alongside families and hear their stories (voiced and unvoiced).

Social Workers know it can be difficult for families to hear what is being said when they are feeling emotional, so we take time before calling or visiting to think about what they might be feeling, and what they might need from us during our time together (emotional posturing and preparing).

In Newham we do not make assumptions about families or what might be happening for them. We listen actively, giving them time to talk about what is important, helping them feel listened to, respected and emotionally contained.

Remaining curious and asking different questions that help us to understand the problem (and solutions), from different perspectives is important to us. We take time to reflect on what we are seeing and hearing and what this might mean for families and their lived experiences (hypothesizing), sharing and checking out our ideas with them as we go along.



CLARITY

Social Workers understand communication is not a simple linear process and is a circular interactive process of co-creation by the participants. We always consider 'Social GRRAAACCEESSS', how these interconnect and might influence the family's use of language, level of understanding and the meaning attributed to different words. To avoid misunderstandings we check in with families, summarising and asking clarifying questions (open/closed), without judgement (neutrality), and seek feedback about accuracy.

In Newham we are clear about our role as social workers and what is expected from us. We use our supervision creatively as a reflective space to remain focused on the needs of the child, ensure interventions are proportionate and remain targeted on the key priorities, providing us with clear thinking to support our practice.

By reflecting upon and critically analysing information from a range of different sources, we work collaboratively with families to develop a shared understanding of the worries, strengths and plan moving forwards. We practice with purpose and a clear view of the child-centered outcomes we are working together

to achieve. Our plans detail what needs to happen, when and for how long (sustainability) to be successful. They are specific about how we will know when there has been progress for the family and are clear about what will happen if this isn't achieved within the child's timeframe.

Questions that invite clarity:

- Did I understand you when you said...?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- What is important to you about that?
- Did I hear you correctly when you said...?
- What do you mean by the term...?

COMMUNITY

Newham is one of the most diverse but also one of the most deprived boroughs in the country and 41% of the borough do not have English as a first language. In Newham, there are more than 104 languages spoken. In Newham, we celebrate the diversity in our community, recognising and responding to difference. We build lasting relationships and value feed-back. Our understanding of children's lived experience takes account of Gender, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Sexuality and Spirituality.

We want to work alongside families to co-produced plans, with the wider family and also including community resources. The aim is to build resilience to achieve permanence for children. We consider potential barriers to accessing support and the most appropriate local services. We ensure our services and interventions are able to meet the diverse needs of the community here in Newham to create fair access to support for all of the families we work with.

Reflective practice utilises the Social GRAACCEESS to recognise the interrelated elements of social context in the child's experience and the practitioners' world. We are committed to working in accordance with anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches, and our practice explicitly recognises disproportionality and inequality and how that impacts on the families we work with.



COMMUNITY

Practice example

Caring Dads was introduced to Newham in 2018. This is a parenting programme which is aimed at men whose relationship with their children or children's mothers is problematic. This may include over-controlling, over-involved, distant and irresponsible, emotionally abusive fathers or fathers who have hostile, highly conflictual, or abusive relationships with the children's mothers.

Delivering Caring Dads in first language is important in a diverse borough such as Newham. By using the first language the aim is to promote sustainable change. Caring dads has 5 facilitators. 3 of the facilitators are bilingual. The benefits are that some groups can be delivered in Dhaka, Sylheti, Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi without having to use interpreters. Currently groups and 1-1 sessions are being delivered in Urdu, Dhaka, Albanian, Punjabi, Gujarati and Arabic. The following first language groups that are on the waiting list are: Romanian, Polish, Sylheti, Tamil and Tagalog.

In the delivery of Caring Dads operationally we have discussions on the subject of cultures and how the gender roles have been defined and what is the norm for them. Similar to the discussion around shame and guilt, we discuss religion and culture within our program.

We are working closely with Language shop to create short videos in a variety of different languages around the key concepts of Caring Dads that social workers and practitioners can use with fathers initially.

CO-PRODUCTION

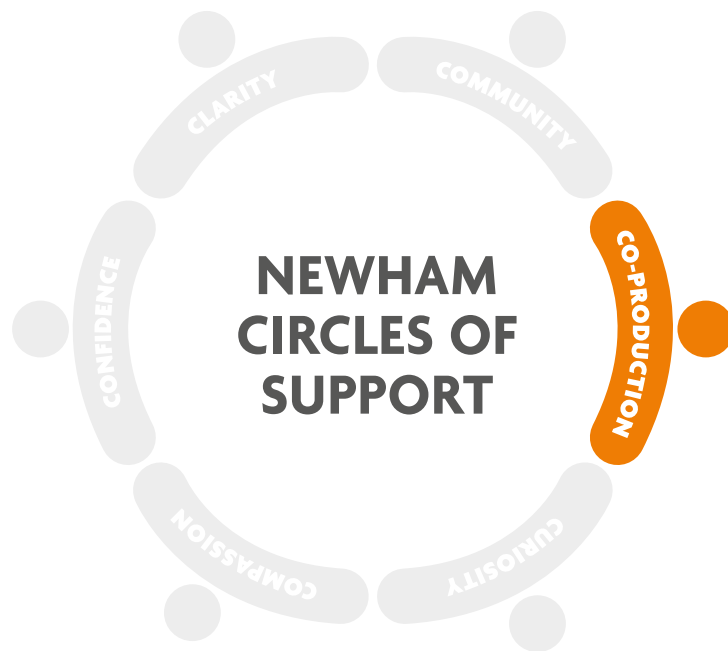
In Newham, the lived experience of children and young people is paramount. We listen to them and seek to build a relationship of trust. We value their feedback and involvement and this is central to what we do in our work.

We want to hear the child's voice and we are curious about their perspective and lived experience. We think about how we have communicate with children and young people and how we gain an understanding of their wishes. We write assessments in a way that they can understand and recognise.

Our plans consider how we can be sure that the plan will make a difference for this child or young person. We consider how we engage the child or young person to consider what they would like to see in their plan. We write all plans in a way in which the child or young person can understand. We keep plans jargon-free and with clear outcomes.

We frame reflective discussions to consider the lived experiences of the child, and ensure that we evaluate any plan for intervention through this lens. We seek feedback to ensure the child or young person's wishes and feelings are taken into account.

We value children and young people's and their families' feedback on their reviews and plans and practice in Newham centres on this. In Newham, feedback from the experiences



gained from children and young people helps all of us shape the support provided to them.

CO-PRODUCTION

An example in practice

Sayah is now 18 years old and spent some time living away from home between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years. This was because those who cared about her were worried she was being exploited by adult males who lived in her community. Sayah's mother contacted the local authority asking for help to keep her safe.

A social worker worked with Sayah, her mother and other family members to explore different ways to keep Sayah safe and protect her from those who were harming her. Sayah's mother was very worried that while her daughter lived in the same area she would not be able to protect her from the men she feared, but she had become estranged from her own small family who lived a long way away and her friends were few and had their own struggles. The social worker told Sayah and her mother about

a residential home for young people where there would be others there to look after her, help her with her studies and keep her safe. Sayah didn't want to leave her own home and live with strangers. Sayah's mother asked the social worker to help her to reunite with her sister to see whether Sayah could go to stay with her for a while but due to her sister having her own children and living in cramped conditions this was not possible. The social worker then spent time with Sayah and her mother helping them to explore all other options together. After finding out more about the residential setting Sayah asked if she could visit to see what it was really like and to meet people there. After this happened she said she would give it a try as long as her mother was able to visit her as much as possible.

Sayah moved in and was supported to continue her education and to explore how her experience of being

exploited had affected her emotional wellbeing. Sayah received counselling and was encouraged to make positive relationships with other young people.

Although Sayah has said she found that time difficult because she was separated from her family she realises now it was the right decision. Sayah moved back to the family home when she was 16 years of age and is now open about her time away and how initially she felt frightened but now recognises the progress she has made.

S has said that the right decisions were made in moving her out of the area, she had been influenced by peers and now knows, that she was being exploited.

Sayah has now has 3 now has 3 A levels and is hoping to go to University.

CURIOSITY

In Newham, we take a systemic approach to complex issues. Our aim is to understand the relationships and contexts that frame family life, recognising that language and difference shape meaning and experiences. Using systemic tools and ideas provides a lens to make sense of the world and gain an insight into how others experience it; we demonstrate our curiosity by asking questions that show we are interested in, and open to, people's varied experiences and positions in their families and cultures.

By focusing on the relationships between people we can avoid viewing people as the 'problem'. We understand that it is impossible to eradicate all risk in the work we do – rather we acknowledge risk and seek to understand it better through developing effective relationships with those we work with, creating a position of 'safe uncertainty'. Systemic ideas help us to develop options for managing risk alongside others rather than seeing processes of 'escalation' as the only way of managing risk effectively.



CURIOSITY

In assessing and managing risk we appreciate the differing experiences of family life, paying attention to the importance of engagement and of understanding each family's unique story / script.

In our planning and interventions we engage wider family, social, and professional networks in the process with the aim of understanding relationships and dynamics that might support change.

We are committed to using a variety of models of case supervision to encourage curiosity and bring in multiple perspectives. We offer reflective opportunities and support the use of systemic techniques – testing hypotheses through reflective discussion. This may involve group supervision or reflective consultations to explore options for intervention.

An example in practice - Questions from a position of curiosity

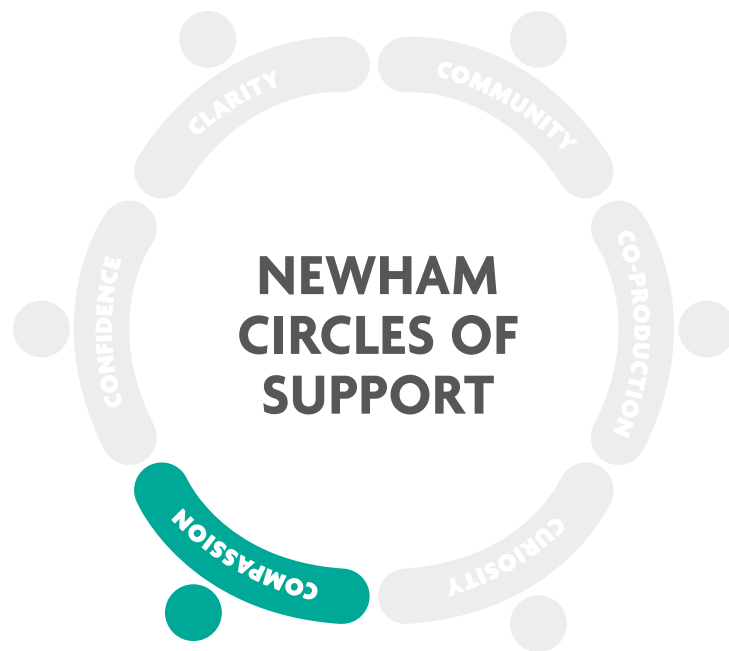
- What is most important to you / your family?
- What kind of family / relationships / life have you wanted to create?
- Who else understands how important this is to you?
- What have you hoped your children will learn / gain / achieve in this family?

COMPASSION

In Newham we engage people with positive intent. We have an appreciation of the strengths of those we work with and their ability to find solutions to complex issues. We work alongside families to co-produce goals and plans that draw on their strengths and meet their unique needs. We take an appreciative position and recognise the efforts and intent of family members to find solutions, working alongside them to offer support in achieving these.

We seek to understand any barriers the family may face in accessing support and place importance on having a good understanding of their family history. When co-producing plans with families we include their wider family networks and resources, building on the family's current strengths and incorporating them into our work to shape the plans and objectives of the intervention. Wherever possible the support plan will involve the wider family network.

Supervision in Newham offers a space for the social worker to consider the resources of the individual, family and system in responding to challenges and contributing to solutions. Reflective discussions are facilitated that support practitioners to focus on how they engage with families and how their practice can support the co-production of plans with the family and wider partnership. Our supervision framework places



COMPASSION

importance on recognising the families' strengths and progress made, creating discussions that ensure our expectations are realistic and evaluation is fair and proportionate.

An example in practice-supporting Nikita and her family

The Zain family home includes mother, father, 16 year old Nikita and 11 year old Julian. They have a close wider family network in the local area, including maternal aunt and her partner and paternal grandparents. The Zain family were referred into the service by Nikita's school after she was found with a knife in her possession. Nikita has also been staying out late after school and the family were worried about her behaviour in the home, in particular her anger towards her brother, Julian.

In thinking about how an approach of compassion could support in engaging the family the social worker considered each stage of their assessment process from the first phone call through to decision on next steps, engaging the family with positive intent, drawing on their strengths and co-producing a plan that included the wider family network.

The social worker used permission seeking, encouraging and supporting all members of the family, included the wider family network, to get involved in the assessment processes and empowering the family. The parents were invited to share any ideas they might already have about how to address the concerns raised and both parents and the children were invited to share their views about safety planning and any ideas they might already have about how to keep Nikita safe.

The family shared their strengths and the solutions they already had in place including support from their wider family. It was agreed with the social worker that a family meeting would help bring everyone together to think about a family plan and get everyone's views on what additional support the professional network may be able to provide. The family, including both children, led on the planning and a Child in Need plan was produced with the family, combining their family support plan with some additional interventions from professionals agencies to help keep Nikita safe.

FEEDBACK ON OUR PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

I am proud to have been a part of the journey in Newham that has led us to a position where the foundations for good practice are now in place. Purposeful and stable leadership with a clear vision, knowing what 'good looks like' supported by an effective quality assurance system to enable this across services, an organisational culture of learning not blame and a family shared approach have all provided the context for the Newham Circles of Support to become established. I now look forward to working in collaboration with all to ensure this practice framework and the circles of support around children, families, the community and social care professionals in Newham blossom and thrive.



BEVERLEY HALLIGAN
Principal Social Worker

You can find below some examples of feedback from our children, young people and families on the impact that our Practice Framework has had on them.

Everything is going well, I went to the funfair with Mum and I have got onto the football team. Mum and Dad aren't arguing anymore and we all went to Nando's together.

Young person, 10 years old

Things are calmer and I think it will stay like this. There is a 0/10 chance for me that arguments will return because no-one wants it to go back like that and no-one enjoyed it. Dad is less angry than before.

Young person, 15 years old

[The Social Worker] wanted to help and to know what was going on. I explained what was happening, there was someone there for me, reassuring me, helping us. It was very supportive, the way they talked, they reassured me that me and my husband were going to get through it, it was comforting. The situation we were in with my child and the police, the social worker getting in touch was helpful to sort out the problem, I was relieved and she visited us after phone call.

Parent

It made me more conscious of the importance of effective and sensitive initial communication and how the person answering would respond in a cooperative or uncooperative manner depending on how the call was pitched and presented. It also made me reflect on how we often take things for granted without taking on board how little things contribute to building relationships as a whole.

Social Worker

[The Social Worker] introduced herself, they told me why they were calling, what their role is and what they would be doing. It was useful because I got a picture of what that meant for me. When I spoke to them, they listened to me, I just felt like I was able to speak to them and express my feelings. I had plenty of time to talk and this was helpful for me to feel listened to.

Parent

[The Social Worker] did inform their role and explained to me, it was helpful because I never dealt with social service before and it was quite blank for me and by the end of call I knew more what their role was, what they did and support offered. They were calm and nice and answering our questions as well as asking questions. Very good conversation and then meeting.

Parent

USEFUL LINKS

- www.newham.gov.uk/children-families
- Social Care Academy Workforce Strategy
https://onesourceict.sharepoint.com/sites/CYPS_Docs/SitePages/Cross-Service-Information.aspx
- Social Care Academy training website
(access for internal Newham colleagues only)
<https://onesourceict.sharepoint.com/sites/Training413/SitePages/TrainingHome.aspx>
- CYPS Practice Library
(access for internal Newham colleagues only)
https://onesourceict.sharepoint.com/sites/CYPS_Docs