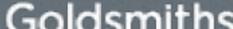


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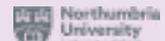
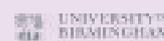
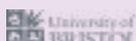


# One-minute guide for middle leaders: Developing a culture of excellent social work practice

  
Department  
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## Introduction

The '[Developing a culture of excellent social work practice](#)' briefing for senior managers highlights the importance of developing a clear practice model which promotes excellence, and which is integrated throughout the organisation.

Whichever practice model your organisation adopts (most are focussed on relationship-based practice), everyone working in the system needs to share the same values, understanding and approach in their work with families and with each other. Middle leaders have a crucial role in this. You need to believe in and own the model. That way you can embed it through all learning activities, supervision and management oversight (Stanley 2019).

The right culture encourages and supports practice supervisors to become leaders of practice who are able to motivate and sustain practitioners in the challenging times we face. It includes clear development pathways to support skills development through formal and informal training and experiential learning, shadowing, and coaching and mentoring.

The importance of high-quality reflective supervision is a theme throughout the one-minute guides, and key to developing a culture of excellence.

## Why is having a practice model important?

An increasing body of evidence suggests that having a unified approach to practice, i.e. a theory-based framework that supports professional practice, is a key factor in developing an effective children's service that supports families and communities.

The final [evaluation](#) of wave one of the DfE Children's Social Care Innovations Programme, which saw the majority of its beneficiaries adopting strengths-based practice approaches, broadly demonstrated an increase in positive outcomes for children and families, as well as value for money and savings through diminished numbers of children in care and in need.

### How do we make it work?

For a practice model to become embedded, you need to develop a culture that promotes shared values and language across professionals at every level with strong, consistent leaders driving change and using strengths-based approaches.

**It needs to be led by leaders and managers so that it can be owned by all.**

## Achieving excellence – where do I fit in?

**Understand your practice model** and, if there isn't one, lobby your Principal Social Worker and other senior leaders. Become involved in focus groups or other activities to develop the right model for your service and for children and families.

**Understand your practice model.** Take advantage of training opportunities and mirror the principles of your approach (motivational interviewing, restorative practice, Signs of Safety, etc.) in the work you do with your practice supervisors. Challenge them to do the same with their supervisees.

Celebrate and share positive examples through bulletins, your website, in team meetings and by inviting senior leaders to acknowledge particularly effective interventions or outcomes. Rewards can be a much bigger incentive to make and sustain progress than punitive measures.

Be responsible for ensuring your practice supervisors know what 'good' and 'excellent' practice looks like. Have a shared sense of what is working through audit, observations, compliments, complaints and feedback from children and families.

Think about doing a benchmarking exercise with colleagues / supervisees as a way of identifying differences in expectations and of celebrating and sharing excellent practice.

## Modelling leadership behaviours

### Fundamental questions

Am I 'owning' the vision? Do I believe it can make a difference for children and families?

Do I say or hear people in the organisation saying 'management says we have to' or am I saying / hearing 'this approach can make a difference to outcomes for children'?

Am I celebrating and sharing examples of excellent practice?

Am I at the heart of analysing what makes them so good?

Am I visible and available to support practice supervisors in supporting and containing the anxiety of their supervisees?

Do I involve myself and encourage senior leaders to be involved in supporting frontline practice?

## Don't forget the basics

### Excellent practice requires excellent assessment skills

Are your practice supervisors focussed on ensuring good practice is taking place through things like chronologies and genograms as **an intrinsic part of the assessment, not an add on?**

What about outcome-focussed plans for children?

Do they (or you) know why these are important and, crucially, what 'good' looks like?

If you're not sure, think about what you and your team need in order to develop skills and knowledge, and ask senior leaders for additional resources to improve performance and outcomes for children and families.

## References

[DfE \(2017\) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme final evaluation report.](#)

[Stanley, Y. \(2019\) Social Care Commentary: using models of practice successfully. Gov.uk.](#)

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