**One Minute Guides:**



**Restorative Approaches – In Practice**

**What is it?**

Restorative approaches are used in practice to describe behaviors, interactions and interventions which help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict. The goal is to build understanding, encourage accountability and to provide an opportunity for healing. It’s a way of being with people, working with and alongside others to create sustainable change. When we work with and alongside people, there is strong evidence to say that outcomes for children and their families are improved.

The benefits of restorative justice are well known and supported by robust evidence. This approach empowers victims and gives them a voice in the criminal justice process, helping them to move on with their lives. It also helps offenders to turn their lives around by giving them an opportunity to hear from their victim, to take responsibility and to make amends.

Restorative approaches can range from formal to informal processes that enable workers, colleagues, managers, children, young people and their families to communicate effectively.

Restorative approaches also support young people to think for themselves about how to respond to challenging situations, develop skills in repairing conflict, building trust and stronger relationships. Therefore, improving their life chances and choices now and in the future.

**Why are we doing it?**

Using restorative approaches is the ambition to provide staff with a range of language, behaviors and tools that strengthen their relationships with children, young people and families, empowering them to share responsibility by using a solution-focused approach, which supports positive change.

Kent uses a strengths-based and restorative approach, that holds families, young people and children at the center. It is a fundamental part of our Practice Framework.

Research shows us young people that experience conflict and exclusion have a higher chance of being involved in violent crime and reduced life chances. Restorative approaches are endorsed as an intervention to prevent, repair and build resilience. Everyone working with children and young people has a duty to keep them safe from harm. We want to improve the life outcomes for all children and young people, especially those in our direct care and to reduce the need for children and young people to be looked after.

Restorative approaches are widely established and accepted both nationally and internationally as a highly effective way of achieving better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

**How are we doing it?**

There is no single restorative theory. Restorative approaches are a way of being which threads through everything we do when we are communicating and resolving difficulties. The training approaches in Kent’s Practice Framework support those who work with children, young people, families, carers and colleagues to focus upon building healthy and positive relationships, creating and inspiring positive change whilst acknowledging creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support.

Restorative approaches are an important part of the way in which we support families to become better equipped to solve their difficulties and address challenges.

One of the ways we do this in Kent is via a Family Group Conference (FGC).  An FGC is a fully restorative meeting, which is held in the community – attended by all those who are important in a child’s life, including family, professionals, extended family and friends, working together in the best interest of the child.  The meetings are held in circles, rather than around tables, facilitated by skilled staff who create an environment where those attending can share their thoughts and feelings in a way that is constructive. The family hear the worries of the professionals and have “private family time” where they write their own plan. Done well, with preparation, this can help restore and maintain heathy relationships and give families real buy in to their own plan.

In Kent, we also use this process in Lifelong Links work which aims to keep children in care connected to positive members of their birth family, keeping those relationships alive, and encouraging a sense of belonging. Keeping socially connected is key to restorative approaches, learning to maintain and manage even challenging relationships is a key skill we want to role model for our young people in Kent.

These meetings focus upon, removing barriers, proactively promoting a sense of community, understanding, social responsibility and shared accountability.

Youth work, in Kent, is a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person’s personal, social and educational development.  Youth Workers build unique relationships to develop young people’s repair and resolve skills. Using the 5-step restorative approach they aim to resolve conflict and address what has happened, reflecting on individual needs. This tries to avoid the same situation reoccurring.

Restorative techniques are also being used in the day to day work of all staff in Youth Justice. Restorative questioning and language can be used by case managers and by referral order panel members as part of the panel process.

Restorative approaches can help young people to think about the effect their crime has had on others.

**Who are the Key contacts?**

For more information about restorative approaches training please contact practicedevelopment@kent.gov.uk