

Learning from Reviews Podcast - Think Family

Introduction

Alison: Hi, I'm Alison Gilmour and I am Head of the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Partnership.

Joining me on today's podcast I have Cheryl Gerrard, Associate Designated Nurse Safeguarding (Mid Essex) Safeguarding Team, Louise McSpadden, Safeguarding Service Manager for Essex County Council and Ruth Murdock who is the Strategic Lead - Quality Assurance in Thurrock Children's Services.

This podcast is a collaboration across the children and adult safeguarding boards/partnerships in Southend, Essex and Thurrock and the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board. We have looked at several reviews across all 7 Boards and a common theme is the concept of Think Family.

No matter what your role everyone can bring some Think Family to their work, whether you're working with an older person, a working age adult or a family with children. Sometimes visits may be carried out face to face, but sometimes it may be through a telephone or video call and if that's the case think about how you can make sure that it is convenient to speak and that it is safe for them to do so.

We hope that this podcast poses some questions for you to think about and enhance the work you do with families. We would also encourage you to have conversations with others about some of the ideas.

Alison: So to talk a little bit more about the Think Family approach we have Cheryl Gerrard. Cheryl, can you tell us what the term 'Think Family' means?

Cheryl: Think Family means securing better outcomes for adults, children and families by coordinating the support and delivery of services from all organisations. When an individual first has contact with any service they should receive a welcome into a system of joined-up support and safeguarding together with coordination between adult and children's services. In order to achieve this, services working with both adults and children should take into account family circumstances and responsibilities.

- Families do not exist in isolation, they are part of a wider network and Think Family aims to promote the importance of a whole-family approach, ensuring practitioners work in partnership and collaboration with families recognising and promoting resilience and helping them to build their capabilities.
- Contact with any service offers an opening into a system of joined-up support and safeguarding together with coordination between adult and children's services
- Services working with both adults and children should take into account family circumstances and responsibilities
- Practitioners should work in partnerships with families recognising and promoting resilience and helping them to build their capabilities

- A family focus alone may not be enough to address the problems faced by some parents with complex health needs, nor will it necessarily prevent a child from suffering harm. The adults' problems need to be addressed through specific clinical expertise and services, just as children's problems need to be, or those requiring a whole family approach

Alison: Thanks Cheryl. As we continue to go through this podcast we would like you the listener to think about what family means to you and how this may influence your work. So Cheryl, for example, during a first home visit, how do you get a picture of who is in the family and who supports that family?

Cheryl: I would ask the person who I am visiting who is living in the house with them, who comes and visits the house regularly and who is important to them in their day to day life. Often, I would then put this all on a piece of paper and try and draw links between the different people, using genograms etc and bearing in mind there may be influential people in the family circle who don't visit regularly e.g. if they live abroad.

Alison: Who do you consider as family?

Cheryl: Family could mean many things to different people, for example it could be blood relatives, it could be community, cultural or religious groups or it could be friends. It's about who is involved in their everyday life.

Alison: That could be lots of people...?

Cheryl: It could but it is really important to get a picture of who is in that person's life or perhaps even see that the person does not have any support at all

Alison: What do you do if a person has no support?

Cheryl: We would talk to them further as this may be about the way they are feeling and then we would look at potential opportunities for them to connect with others, that might be through a befriending service, volunteers or attending social events. Training and employment is another avenue we could look at to build confidence and self esteem.

Alison: What if they are not interested?

Cheryl: Then we will ensure that they are safe and that they know where to go if they change their mind.

Alison: What happens if there are children in the home?

Cheryl: Well, if there are children in the home then we need to assess whether they are safe and to build a picture of their world, what school/playgroups they go to etc. No matter who we are supporting it is good practice to find out if there are any other organisations involved with the household.

Alison: What do you do with the information?

Cheryl: Well it would depend, if the person I am working with agrees then I may talk to the other organisations that are working with them, this decision would be based on risk and consent.

Alison: Thanks Cheryl, that's been really helpful. So we're now going to think about what reviews have taught us and what good practice looks like? To talk us through this I'm going to bring in Louise and Ruth. Louise what have recent reviews taught us?

Louise: Evidence from reviews continue to highlight cross generational issues, including a whole range of circumstances where family relationships and dynamics have been factors for example:

- Impact of adult problems on children or impact on parents capacity hasn't been recognised or responded to.
- Families where dementia has changed the family dynamics and family members are struggling to cope
- Aging parents unable to continue to care for their vulnerable adult children
- Parents trying to support their adult children with significant addiction issues or mental health problems
- A victim of domestic abuse who attempts to end an abusive relationship and the escalation of incidents as a result of child contact or disputes over custody
- Recognising the role of carers and young carers and whether that's over and above what is expected of a child of that age.
- Stalking behaviours from an ex -partner and consideration of the potential for multiple and secondary victims.
- Recognising that children are also victims of domestic abuse
- Role of fathers/men and including their voice in our work
- Don't make assumptions about mental capacity due to health conditions
- Loss of employment/poverty

Alison: Ruth, can you give some ideas for best practice?

Ruth:

- Having an identified lead professional who co-ordinates the agencies involved especially where there are complex needs
- Ensuring carers are offered appropriate support including recognition that the carer may be caring for multiple family members
- Early help may occur at any point in a person's life and should include interventions for emerging issues to support people to achieve the best outcomes for them
- We know that the best outcomes are achieved if we work together, share information and have a mutual respect

- Open and honest communication with the person you are working with and listening to the family will also achieve the best outcomes
- It is important to offer individual members of the family a safe space to talk to you about any concerns they may have
- Risk assessment is an ongoing process and consideration needs to be given to the safety of all members of the family or network

Alison: Thanks Louise, Ruth and Cheryl, it's been great talking through the concept of Think Family with you. To end, we just wanted to leave our listeners with some questions/thoughts to reflect on.

- Do we understand what each others roles and responsibilities are?
- Do you feel comfortable to discuss with other practitioners who are working with the same family why they have made a decision? What prevents you having these conversations? Are you aware of how to escalate concerns should they not be resolved in the discussion with the other practitioner?
- How do you maintain your professional curiosity?
- Are we really listening to children, young people and adults - what are they actually telling us and what are we doing with what they have said?
- Where can you get support? Peer reviews, joint working across agencies etc.
- Are you aware of the different local policies and procedures that can support your practice?
- We know things work best when people talk to each other.

Thank you for listening, there's information, resources and links to support services about everything we have discussed on the Safeguarding Board websites.

We hope you have found this podcast useful, we would really welcome your feedback, if there is anything you would like to let us know about this podcast please contact your relevant Safeguarding Board. We would welcome your thoughts on other ideas for podcasts too!

The Board websites are as follows:

www.escb.co.uk

www.thurrocklscp.org.uk

www.safeguardingsouthend.co.uk

www.setdab.org

<https://www.essexsab.org.uk/>

<https://www.thurrocksab.org.uk/>