

Supporting social workers to support Residential Child Care – starting a guide

From April 2027 the standards for child and family social workers include a revised Standard 5 Works collaboratively and effectively with other professionals.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-and-family-social-worker-early-career-standards/child-and-family-social-worker-early-career-standards-use-from-1-april-2027>

This mirrors the Children's Homes Quality Standard 5: Engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met

- (a) seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans;
- (b) seek to secure the input and services required to meet each child's needs;
- (c) if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans; and
- (d) seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation.

The Guide to the QS makes the authority of the home clear as follows (see NCERCC Compendium for more)

The important thing is that homes take the initiative in identifying others who must play a part for their children and engage with those relevant people proactively, advocating for the children in their care... Staff should act as champions for their children, expecting nothing less than a good parent would... Homes must be promoting the best interests of the child, proactively advocating for the child to ensure that others play their role and deliver the high quality support that is needed. Such partnership working should always take place: before a child arrives; while the child lives in the home and where the child prepares to return home, move to another setting or leave care.

Parenting Together

Social workers and Residential Child Care workers are the (corporate) parents for a child.

Working together they hold the domains of the Parenting Assessment Triangle (NCERCC think Scotland's GIRFEC model is holistic and practical)

The Triangle is a simple way of representing the three domains that assessment should take account of: The parents' or caregivers' capacities to respond appropriately Each domain relates to the others. Any child's development is

significantly shaped by both their particular experiences and the interaction between a series of factors.

The framework is based on legislative foundations and requires a thorough understanding of:

- children's developmental needs
- the capacity of parents and carers to respond appropriately to these needs
- the impact of wider family and environmental factors on parenting capacity and children. The model below shows these three inter-related systems.



If we define parenting as caregiving to one's child, then the best parent is not the one who parents most, and certainly not the one who parents least, but the one who parents just the right amount. That's the parent Goldilocks would pick, if she had tried out three different parents along with the three different bowls of porridge, chairs, and beds. It's the one most children would pick if they had the power to choose

Be good-enough parents

The good-enough parent is one who makes active adaptation to the child's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the child's growing ability to adapt and to tolerate frustration

'Good enough' parenting encompasses being sensitive, warm and empathic, being physically and emotionally available, and meeting needs responsively. It also involves providing a nurturing environment where a child feels safe, contained and held – literally and emotionally. To be good enough in these ways requires an ability to be adaptive to the spontaneous experiences of a child.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-and-family-social-worker-early-career-standards/child-and-family-social-worker-early-career-standards-use-from-1-april-2027#standard-5--works-collaboratively-and-effectively-with-other-professionals>
Standard 5

The start of a guide for Social Workers working with children's homes

Here's some people made earlier...

How to Practice Effectively: The Day-to-Day Guide

A practical guide to handling visits and casework alongside a residential home highlights several key steps:

1. Before You Visit the Home

- **Check in with the keyworker:** Always phone the child's residential keyworker before arriving. Ask how the child is at the moment, start with the good experiences, successes, etc that you can praise when you visit, before asking about any recent incidents
- **Manage your own emotional state:** Children who have experienced trauma are highly sensitive to adult stress. Practice what practitioners call emotional regulation—make sure you are calm and grounded before walking through the door.

2. During the Visit (Direct Work)

- **Be a "container," not a busy doer:** Do not rush through a checklist or action plan. Practice "containment"—providing a quiet, safe, and stable environment where the child feels secure enough to talk.
- **Use low-pressure communication:** Instead of sitting across a desk for an interview, use activity-based communication. Bring a "social work toolbox" that you know meets the interests of the child e.g. lego, drawing pads, or board games.
- **Respect their boundaries:** Give the child the explicit right to say "this is too much" or to end a difficult conversation early.

3. Working with the Residential Staff Team

- **Practice "Care and Good Authority":** Work with the home to balance warm empathy with clear boundaries. Never undermine the home's house rules in front of the child, as consistency is what makes a traumatised child feel safe.

- **Co-record outcomes:** Ensure that what the child tells you during your visit matches what they tell their daily caregivers. Share your visit notes with the keyworker/manager so the home can update their daily care plans immediately.

The Statutory Visit Agenda: A Practical Checklist

A social worker's statutory visit to a children's home is more than an informal chat.

Local authority practice manuals, such as the [Southwark Children's Services Residential Guidance](#), recommend structuring visits into three distinct, evidence-gathering parts:

1. Information Gathering (Before the Meeting)

- **Audit daily documentation:** Do not just rely on verbal updates. Physically check the home's daily logs, handover sheets, and medication records.
- **Review safety logs:** Request to see recent incident records, restraint logs, and missing-from-care reports. Cross-reference these with your own local authority system to ensure data matches.
- **Track external connections:** Look over the family time logs or contact write-ups, and the reports from the child's independent visitor to see how their wider support network is maintained.

2. Physical Observation (During the Visit)

- **Inspect the living environment:** Look at the shared spaces (kitchens, living rooms) and the child's bedroom. Ensure it is clean, safe, well-repaired, and personalised to the child.
- **Watch the dynamics:** Observe how the young person interacts with the grown-ups and other children during everyday transitions (such as coming home from school or sitting down for dinner).

3. Direct Interaction with the Child

- **Lower the pressure:** Sit on the floor, play Lego, build in Minecraft, or sketch on drawing pads: This moves the interaction away from an intensive "interview" and makes talking feel natural.
- **Give control back to the child:** Explicitly remind them that they have the absolute right to say "stop" or "it's too much" if a session feels emotionally overwhelming.
- **Capture a "Day in the Life":** Work with the young person and their residential keyworker to build a quick photo or video montage of their recent

achievements and hobbies. You can embed this directly into their upcoming Child Looked After (CLA) review.

Professional Collaboration: Working with Home Managers

To build an evidence-based, transparent relationship with a home's staff team, a social worker should adopt specific professional behaviours:

- **Implement Pre-Placement Briefings: Except in unavoidable emergencies, the [Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations](#) mandates that all medical files, known behavioural risks, and identity needs are handed over to the manager *before the child's moving day*.**
- **Synchronise the Care Plan:** Keep the overarching Care Plan aligned with the home's daily placement plan. Agree changes as part of the parenting partnership with the home so care strategies can be aligned smoothly.
- **Advocate Collectively:** Use your statutory authority to negotiate and challenge external networks (such as CAMHS or school boards) when the residential staff cannot secure the immediate support a child needs. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

And another

A guide for social workers in Relational Work in Residential Care

A Practice Guide for Social Workers Working with Children's Homes

Executive Purpose: Relational practice shifts the focus from transactional task management to shared human connection. It bridges the structural divide between the external local authority Social Worker and the internal residential care team. This guide outlines how to co-create a secure, unified emotional environment for children living in residential care settings.

1. The Foundational Framework

Relational work recognises that a child's progress relies on the psychological safety built by the adults around them. When the Social Worker and the home's residential team are divided, the child experiences inconsistency, which can trigger trauma responses or cause placement breakdown.

Transactional Approach (Avoid This)	Relational Approach (Practice This)
Visiting only for scheduled statutory review sessions	Dropping in casually to share a meal or join activities.
Treating care home staff as simple task providers	Respecting staff as expert co-professionals in care.

Hiding risk data to avoid home placement rejections	Practicing radical transparency to build mutual safety strategies.
Focusing purely on standard legal compliance forms	Focusing on the child's lived, daily emotional experience.

2. Essential Practice Concepts

Shared 'Lifespace' Navigation

The children's home is not a clinic or an office; it is the child's active 'lifespace.'

Social workers must enter this environment with humility and respect. Avoid treating the home as an interrogation room. Instead, step naturally into the home's daily rhythm

The PACE Communication Framework

Apply the PACE model to build strong relationships across the placement:

- **Playfulness:** Use an open, light-hearted tone to lower defences and reduce stress.
- **Acceptance:** Validate the child's internal feelings without instantly judging their actions.
- **Curiosity:** Wonder aloud about the underlying causes of behaviours instead of jumping to conclusions.
- **Empathy:** Sit directly with the child's emotional pain to show them they are completely safe.

3. Step-by-Step Guide for Visits and Casework

Phase 1: Pre-Visit Alignment

- **Call Ahead:** Connect with the child's residential keyworker before arriving at the home.
- **Analyse Trends:** Read recent daily logs to spot patterns in the child's sleep, eating, or peer conflicts.
- **Regulate Yourself:** Ensure you are calm and emotionally centred before entering the house.

Phase 2: Inside the Lifespace

- **Prioritise Connection:** Dedicate the first 15 minutes of your visit to building rapport without asking case-file questions.
- **Use Parallel Activities:** Cook, draw, or play board games alongside the child to make conversation feel less forced.
- **Provide Professional Containment:** Offer a stable, unhurried space where the child can express intense anger or distress safely.

Phase 3: Joint Case Management with Staff

- **Support House Rules:** Never undermine the care team's boundaries or house rules in front of the child.
- **Host Team Debriefs:** Schedule a brief 10-minute check-in with the home manager after your visit to align your updates.
- **Act as a Network Shield:** Use your local authority position to advocate for the home when dealing with schools or CAMHS.

Practitioner Reflection & Alignment Matrix

Use these three questions before every statutory visit to evaluate your relational impact:

1. How have I actively supported and validated the residential care team this week?
2. Am I entering the child's home to collect data, or am I entering to connect with their lived experience?
3. What practical steps am I taking to ensure the child feels we are a unified team wrapping around them?

A list of what not to do

When working with residential children's homes, a social worker's actions directly impact the stability of the home and the emotional safety of the children living there. To build a strong partnership with residential staff and protect the children, here is a list of what **not to do**.

1. Don't Ignore the Residential Staff

Residential child care workers spend the most time with the children and know their daily routines, triggers, and small victories.

- **Do not disrespect residential professionalism:** Avoid making decisions about a child's plan without asking the home's manager or keyworker first.

- **Do not leave them in the dark:** Never forget to share important updates about court dates, family changes, or therapy appointments.
- **Do not drop by only for crises:** If you only call or visit when something goes wrong, it damages trust. Share good news too.

2. Don't Overstep or Blur Professional Boundaries

Children in residential homes have often faced trauma and need clear, safe boundaries to feel secure.

- **Do not share your personal contact details:** Avoid giving out your private phone number, personal email, or social media accounts. Always use work according to policy.
- **Do not interact on personal social media:** Never follow, "like", or friend a child or their family members on your personal accounts.
- **Do not promise secrets:** Never tell a child you will keep a secret for them. Be clear from the start about your duty to protect them and share information when necessary.
- **Do not accept or give personal gifts:** Children should know they have your care and respect without needing to "buy" favour or affection.

3. Don't Disrupt the Dynamic of the Home

A children's home is exactly that—a home. It is not just an office or a workplace.

- **Do not talk about confidential cases in public spaces:** Avoid discussing private details about a child where other residents, staff, or visitors can overhear you.
- **Do not break the home's rules:** If the home asks visitors to take off their shoes, sign a logbook, or respect quiet hours, do not act like those rules do not apply to you.
- **Do not create tension:** Children are highly sensitive to the moods of adults and tension in the air. Strained professional relationships can filter down and trigger challenging behaviours in the children's group.

4. Don't Count "Review Meetings" as Real Visits

Fulfilling legal requirements requires building an actual connection with the child.

- **Do not count a formal review as a personal visit:** Sitting in a large room with a child during a Looked After Review or statutory meeting does not count as spending quality time with them.
- **Do not always see the child in the home:** Try not to limit your visits to the building. Whenever possible, take the child out to a park or for a snack.

Leaving the home helps build a stronger bond and makes it easier for them to speak freely if something is bothering them.

- **Do not forget to see them alone:** Unless a child refuses due to their age or maturity, make sure you take time to speak with them in private, away from residential staff.
- **A telephone call or social media 'chat' does not count as a visit**

Thanks to the following from which we have drawn particularly

<https://southwarkcs.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/guidance-on-visits-to-children-in-residential-homes>

<https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/evidence-summaries/supporting-positive-outcomes-in-childrens-residential-care-an-evidence-summary>