Work Shadowing – A Useful Guide

Developed by Cumbria Children’s Trust
Workforce Project Group
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WORK SHADOWING – WHAT IS IT?

Work shadowing refers to a reciprocal learning process whereby a person 'shadows' or follows someone in their work role for a period of time, for the purpose of enhancing their own performance and that of the person they shadow. The exact period in which they work shadow is subject to discussion and agreement with their Line Manager / organisation.

The Work Shadowing Scheme provides a unique opportunity for individuals to exchange ideas and best practice while developing or strengthening links with partners or even simply gaining a fresh perspective of different roles and organisations. The scheme is designed to be flexible and relaxed which is helped by both Host and ‘Shadow’ discussing objectives and practicalities beforehand.

PRINCIPLES OF THE SCHEME

- A learning experience that is beneficial for both the person undertaking the shadowing and the placement jobholder.
- Opportunity to reflect and share experience of the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge (Appendix 3) and take part in a learning exchange
- Opportunity to reflect from one another about the
- A Learning method to enhance career, personal development and organisational learning
- A fully inclusive scheme open to all
- No direct costs or payments to be involved
- An opportunity to experience a ‘day in the life’ which may be beneficial for all parties in order to enhance understanding and raise awareness of different roles / jobs/ organisations

CONFIDENTIALITY

Some information learned during the shadowing arrangement may be classified as confidential to the shadow and the person being shadowed and must not be divulged to any other parties. Some confidential information will be defined as such by the person being shadowed. An element of discretion must be used by the shadow and it may be necessary to withdraw from the shadowing arrangement from time to time because of confidentiality. However colleagues are encouraged to share 'good practice' and to engage in the art of positive feedback. (Note: some activities can never be 'shadowed', for example, job interviews, disciplinary hearings or appraisal interviews).

Please refer to Appendix 1 for further information on Confidentiality and CRB clearance information.
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING READY

1. **Preparation:**

   a) For you to gain the maximum benefit from this pilot Work Shadowing scheme, it may be helpful to consider the following:
   
   • What you particularly hope to gain from the experience, for example, pinpointing a particular process or activity
   
   • The scheme is a learning experience for both parties, what are your learning objectives?
   
   • Are there any particular questions you need to find the answer to?
   
   • Are there any particular areas that interest you most?
   
   • How could you use the information you have learnt in your work?
   
   • Some degree of social interaction (lunch or dinner for example)
   
   • Structure of the process: one session or several, time, duration, etc.
   
   • How you can share what you’ve learnt more widely: article for staff bulletin, organising a discussion group,
   
   • Meeting formally/informally or both and setting time aside for discussion or reflection
   
   • Not taking on too much and valuing what you learn
   
   • Discuss any problems and how to overcome them, for example, any language barriers or training needs
   
   b) It is also helpful if both participants agree informally or formally what they expect to gain from the experience and are frank about any areas of special interest or anxiety. It’s also a good idea to discuss practicalities (transport, office or local events, etc) and let colleagues know in advance.

   c) You may need permission from your line manager and mutually agree a date, length of time.

   d) You should draw up a programme ready for the visit. It’s important for this to be varied in order to gain information about the organisation as a whole as well as the work role and the generic processes involved behind work tasks. Examples may be:
   
   • Orientation and general introduction
   
   • Attend departmental and/or other areas
   
   • One to one sessions with other staff and self
   
   • Build in time for reflection, review, questions and answers
   
   • Managing any risks involved
   
   • The right to disengagement from the scheme at any time
   
   • Allow time for exit exchange of information and critique
Types of Shadowing

Versatility is the key and schemes may be agreed for a morning or an afternoon, a day, or a week. You may be looking for:

- A 2-way relationship where you take turns to shadow each other
- A 1-way shadow where you only wish to learn something in particular
- A 1-way provision of opportunity for others to shadow you

Observer Status Only?

This is where you decide to carry on your work as usual while your shadow makes notes. The only interaction might be an introduction when others become involved. After an overview at the end of the period, it would be the shadower’s responsibility to write the main comments.

Advantage: The role is clear-cut and there would be little interruption to work
Disadvantage: Little chance to learn as you go or build confidence in the experience.

Half and Half?

You discuss the day’s programme and explain a section of work. Your guest performs the work as you effectively become a fly-on-the-wall, supervise the task or get on with something else. You can discuss over informal breaks such as coffee or lunch with reflection period at the end about what each has learned.

Advantage: Observation, discussion and hands-on practice will increase work knowledge with social interaction to cement the learning experience
Disadvantage: Some interruption to normal work; requires more preparation than ‘Observer Status’; may require rearranging of normal work and tasks may take longer.

Just Do It?

You decide to share the work. The shadower is very much there and interacts with others as much as he or she feels appropriate. You may wish to provide a running commentary during the process as to why or how you are performing a function. You will need a round-up meeting and overview at the end of the day.

Advantage: Constant learning process with minute by minute explanation, discussion, interaction and hands-on
Disadvantage: Not technically ‘shadowing’ and so the roles are not clear, may slow down work; may cause anxiety on both sides.

Practical Arrangements

Expenses: These should be discussed and approved with your line manager and may include accommodation, transport, subsistence, child care provision.

Support: You may need to identify this with your host and line manager and discuss, for example, an interpreter (signing or language), and access to office equipment or car parking.

Insurance and Health & Safety: As an employee and doing the shadowing as part of your work you will be covered by your own employer’s arrangements. You are also covered as a visitor by the host institution’s insurance. You should ask the organisation providing the shadowing opportunity to check with their health and safety officer about any issues you should need to know during your stay.
Check List

**Before:** Use the information under Preparation above to check you have done all you need to.

**During:** Enjoy the experience, talking with your partner about what you are learning and enjoy sharing your experiences with others.

**After:** Prior to preparing the Joint Report form, the participants may want to discuss and reflect on the experience and consider:

- What were your aims and what did you hope to gain from the experience
- Any similarities and differences between your normal place of work and the host institution
- Describe your experiences: What was useful to you? What did you gain from the experience? What did you learn?
- Any difficulties or problems you encountered and how they were resolved
- Any advice for others who may wish to repeat the exercise
- What aspects of the service or organisation worked particularly well
- What might be improved
- What should stay the same/What could be done differently
- How can you continued to build-in shared learning in your work

**WORK SHADOWING JOINT REPORT FORM**

The Joint Report Form needs

- to be completed by the participants following the experience
- the participants will need to discuss and agree the content prior to submission and before it is shown to anyone else
- Participants are encouraged to write a separate 'footnote' of advice to assist in developing 'good practice' guidelines for the Work Shadowing Framework

In the Joint Report, we would like to you to include these points:

- who shadowed who, when and for how long
- the objectives that were mutually agreed (personal and organisational)
- the extent to which these were achieved
- the impact on each participant's learning/understanding
- the impact on the organisations involved
- the impact on the relationship between the organisations that the two participants came from e.g. in terms of integrated working on ECM agenda
- what could be done differently

When completed, they should be returned to kate.robinson@cumbriacc.gov.uk. This allows the development of reports to share thoughts about work shadowing and the process; in addition, the Trust board can be updated.
Sections A and B: details of setting up the arrangements and objectives for the activity can be completed as part of the preparation.

Section C: overall judgements will contribute to the service monitoring and evaluation of work shadowing. The four questions each require a circle or cross to be placed at the most appropriate point along a continuum.

Section D and E: two sections providing the opportunity to record evaluative thoughts against the personal and professional objectives set, to note the lessons learned and the impact on the work of your organisation.
Confidentiality and Information Sharing: the three areas of law which govern this are the common law duty of confidence, Human Rights Act 1998, and Data protection Act 1998.

As a general rule all information you acquire or hold when working with children and families should be treated as confidential and should only be disclosed with the consent from the person to whom the information relates, or the person who has provided that information on the understanding that it will be kept confidential.

However, the law recognises that disclosure of confidential information may be justified in the public interest to protect harm to others. Therefore, if there are concerns about the health safety or welfare of a child, relevant information must be shared with the appropriate people. The questions you must ask yourself are “What information do I need to share and who do I need to share it with in order to ensure the needs of the child will be met”

This duty of confidence is owed to a young person 16 years or over, or a child from 12 years who has the capacity to understand the implications of giving or refusing consent, and to make their own decisions.

Under the Human Rights Act 1998, there is recognition for the respect for private and family life. However, the right is not absolute so disclosing confidential information is justified if it is necessary to prevent a crime or to protect the health and welfare of a child.

This means that when shadowing another professional in their work, it is essential to remember that some of the information you hear or things you observe are confidential. You should not share this information with anybody if it means that you are identifying anybody involved, this includes any service users including children and young people, or any other professional or colleague.

However, there are exceptions to this:
- You have particular concerns about the health, welfare or safety of a child
- It is in the public interest, this would include you having concerns that the practice of the professional you are shadowing or the practice of any other professional you are involved with when shadowing, could lead to concerns about the health, welfare or safety of the child
- It is necessary to prevent a crime

CRB CHECKS

If the job shadowing opportunity involves direct contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults, there are some legal restrictions. However, it is not necessary for the professional who is doing the shadowing to have CRB checks as long as the following apply:
- The professional being shadowed has an enhanced CRB
- The professional doing the shadowing is not left alone and unsupervised by the host with a child, young person or vulnerable adult
- The shadowing experience is a one off, i.e. it is not a regularly occurring event
## APPENDIX 2: CHILDREN’S TRUST: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**WORK SHADOWING FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

### Evaluation Report Form

**Section A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Shadower):</th>
<th>Name (Host):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role:</td>
<td>Role:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service (Unit):</td>
<td>Service (Unit):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section B**

**Shadowing Objectives:**

**Shadowing Activities:**

**Section C**

**Overall Judgements:**

Please place a circle or cross at the appropriate point against these four questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of days involved</th>
<th>Low 0.5</th>
<th>1.0</th>
<th>1.5</th>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>3.0+</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of setting up the shadowing</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value to your personal develop’t</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on your professional practice</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section D**

**Evaluation against the objectives:**

**Section E**

**Lessons learned and impact on organisation**
APPENDIX 3:

Common core of skills and knowledge

The Common core of skills and knowledge for the children and young people's workforce - often referred to as the common core - sets out the basic skills and knowledge that everyone who works with children and young people (including volunteers) is expected to have.

The skills and knowledge included in the common core have been divided into six key areas:

- effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families
- child and young person development
- safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child or young person
- supporting transitions
- multi-agency and integrated working
- information sharing.

Refresh of the common core

The 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy explained the need to review the common core and explore whether we needed to update the content and encourage its universal use across the workforce.

The refresh of the common core took place between July 2009 and March 2010 and was led by the CWDC in collaboration with DCSF and other key partners.

The refresh was informed by a thorough consultation including:

- an online questionnaire
- more than 40 discussion groups bringing together members of the workforce from different sectors
- focus groups with children and young people with disabilities, and with parents
- more than 20 one-to-one interviews with government officials and other key stakeholders.

CWDC is producing a report detailing the journey of the refresh of the common core. It will be available soon on the CWDC website, and a link will be available from this page.

Useful documents

Common core of skills and knowledge
This PDF document contains the complete set of skills and knowledge required for those working with children, young people and families.

Integrated working factsheets - including a factsheet on the common core.
Effective communication with children, young people and families

Good communication is central to working with children, young people, families and carers. It helps build trust, and encourages them to seek advice and use services. It is key to establishing and maintaining relationships, and is an active process that involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding. You should always communicate with them appropriately to match the stage of development, personal circumstances, and needs of the person you’re talking to.

It is important to be able to communicate both on a one-on-one basis and in a group. Communication is not just about the words you use, but also about the way you’re speaking and your body language. You need to feel and show empathy and sincerity, and above all, listen. You need to take account of culture and context. For example, you need to be aware and communicate appropriately if English is an additional language, or the child is disabled or at risk of under-achievement or other poor outcomes.

Effective communication extends to involving children, young people, their parents and carers in the design and delivery of services and decisions that affect them. It is important to consult the people affected and consider opinions and perspectives from the outset. Another crucial element of effective communication is developing trust between the workforce and children, young people, parents and carers – as well as within different sectors of the workforce itself.

To build a rapport with children, young people, their parents and carers, it is important to be respectful, understanding and honest. People become engaged when relationships are continuous, and their lives improve as a result.

The skills and knowledge highlighted here and throughout the Common Core provide a basic description of areas that may need development through training, learning or experience in order to work effectively.

Skills

Listening and building empathy

- Establish a rapport and build respectful, trusting, honest and supportive relationships with children, young people, their families and carers, which make them feel valued as partners.
- Use clear language to communicate with all children, young people, families and carers, including people who find communication difficult, or are at risk of exclusion or under-achievement.
- Be able to adapt styles of communication to the needs and abilities of children and young people who do not communicate verbally, or communicate in different ways.
- Build a rapport and develop relationships using the most appropriate forms of communication (for example, spoken language, visual communication, play, body and sign language, information and communication technologies) to meet the needs of the individual child or young person and their families and carers.
- Hold conversations at the appropriate time and place, understanding the value of regular, reliable contact and recognising that it takes time to build a relationship.
- Actively listen in a calm, open, non-judgemental, non-threatening way and use open questions. Acknowledge what has been said, and check you have heard correctly.
- Make sure that children, young people, parents and carers know they can communicate their needs and ask for help.

Summarising and explaining

- Summarise situations in the appropriate way for the individual (taking into account factors such as background, age and personality).
- Present genuine choices to children and young people, explaining what has happened or will happen next, and what they are consenting to.
- Decide together how to involve parents or carers in the choices to be made.

Consultation and negotiation
• Consult the child or young person, and their parents or carers from the beginning of the process.

• Make informed judgements about how to involve children, young people, parents and carers in decisions as far as is possible and appropriate. Take account of their views and what they want to see happen. Be honest about the weight of their opinions and wishes.

• Inform, involve and help the child or young person to express what they are feeling. Help them to describe what they are experiencing and to assess different courses of action. Help them understand the consequences of each and, where appropriate, agree next steps.

• Recognise that different people have different interests in a situation and be able to work with them to reach the best and most fair conclusion for the child or young person.

• Share reasons for action with the child or young person and their parent or carer, unless to do so would increase the risk of harm to them or another person.

• Judge when, and how, to hand over control of a situation to others.

Knowledge

How communication works

• Understand the value of the role of parents and carers, and know how and when to refer them to further sources of information, advice or support.

• Know that communication is a two-way process.

• Know how to listen to people, make them feel valued and involved.

• Understand the importance of building good relationships with children, young people, their parents and carers.

• Know when it is important to focus on individuals and when it is important to focus on groups.

• Know how your attitude and behaviour have an effect on children, young people, their parents and carers, and the importance of offering praise and support.

• Understand the effects of non-verbal communication such as body language, and that different cultures use and interpret body language in different ways.

• Be aware of different ways of communicating – including technological methods. Understand barriers to communication, which could include poverty, cultural or faith requirements, disability, disadvantage or anxiety about accessing services.

• Understand that parents and carers are partners who have the lead role and responsibility for children and young people. Involving them in decisions affecting their child can have a positive effect on supporting their children to achieve positive outcomes.

• Know how children and young people’s communication skills develop, how to recognise communication difficulties, and how to support children and young people with communication needs.

• Be aware that communication may be inhibited by factors such as cultural background.

• Understand that certain issues such as sex, death and violence are particularly sensitive or difficult and that children, young people or their families may sometimes associate or experience stigma with certain issues, such as mental health problems. It may be necessary to explain to children, young people, parents and carers that it is helpful to discuss them.

• Be aware that the child, young person, parent or carer may not have understood what is being communicated. Know how to check understanding.

• Know how to report and record information formally and informally in the appropriate way for the audience.

• Understand that sometimes it is necessary to go against a child, young person, parent or carer’s expressed wishes in the best interests of the child or young person. If this happens, make sure the child or young person understands what is happening and why, unless to do so would increase the risk of harm to them or another person.

Sources of support
• Know where information, advice and support services for children, young people, parents and carers are available locally.

• Know when and how to refer to sources of information, advice or support from different agencies or professionals in children’s or adult services.

Importance of respect

• Be self aware. Know how to demonstrate a commitment to treating all people fairly. Be respectful by actively listening and avoiding assumptions. Make sure your actions support the equality, diversity, rights and responsibilities of children, young people, their parents and carers.
Child and young person development

This core area covers the physical, intellectual, linguistic, social and emotional growth and development of babies, children and young people. It is difficult to determine specific times when developmental changes occur, as they differ from person to person.

It is essential to understand these changes, and the effect they can have on behaviour. Parents and carers may be well placed to identify developmental and behavioural changes in their children, but they may also find them difficult to cope with and may seek reassurance, information, advice and support at various stages. It is important to be able to assess and respond to children and young people’s needs as they emerge, and to parents’ and carers’ needs for support at different stages.

Parents’ and carers’ engagement in their children’s learning and development is a key factor in determining children and young people’s attainment, physical and emotional health and well being as well as their social and cultural development. The impact of parents’ communicating and participating in activities with their children from an early age continues into adolescence and adulthood.

Skills

Observation and judgement

• Observe a child or young person’s behaviour, understand its context, and notice unexpected changes.
• Recognise signs that a child or young person may be engaged in unusual, uncharacteristic, risky or harmful behaviour, including in the online world.
• Listen carefully and respond to concerns expressed about developmental or behavioural changes.
• Record observations appropriately. Observations should be based on evidence not opinion.
• Evaluate the situation, taking into consideration the individual, their situation and development issues.
• Be able to recognise the signs of possible developmental delay and/or regression in the behaviour of children and young people.
• Support children and young people with developmental difficulties or disabilities.
• Make considered decisions on whether concerns can also be addressed by providing, or signposting, additional sources of information or advice.
• Where further support is needed, know when to take individual action and when to refer to managers, supervisors or other relevant professionals.
• Judge when it is appropriate to intervene early to stop problems developing.

Empathy and understanding

• Support a child or young person to reach their own decisions while taking into account health and safety, any concerns about harm, and their age and stage of development.
• Encourage children or young people to value their personal experiences and knowledge.

Knowledge

Understand context

• Know and recognise the child or young person’s position in their family or caring network, as well as a wider social context. Appreciate the diversity of these networks.
• Understand the importance of parental engagement in their child’s learning and development, and the barriers that may be faced by parents and carers.
• Understand that effective forms of parental engagement change as children and young people develop. Understand how the balance of influence from parents, peers, authority figures and others alters as the child or young person develops.

• Understand and take into account the effects of different parenting approaches, family structures and composition, backgrounds and routines.

• Know and recognise that for some children and young people, delayed or disordered development may be a symptom of an undiagnosed disability.

• Understand how children or young people may be affected by underlying problems faced by them or their families, or their peers.

• Understand the impact of technology on children and young people’s lives.

Understand how babies, children and young people develop

• Know that development includes emotional, physical, sexual, intellectual, social, moral and character growth, and that these can all affect one another.

• Understand the different ways in which babies and children form attachments and how these might change.

• Understand that babies, children and young people see and experience the world in different ways.

• Understand the importance of forming positive relationships in the development of children and young people, and how this can be supported.

• Understand that play and recreation that is directed by babies, children and young people - rather than by adults - has a major role in helping them to understand themselves and the world. It also helps them to build confidence and realise their potential.

• Know how to interact with children and young people in ways that support the development of their ability to think, learn, and become independent.

Be clear about your own job role

• Understand that families, parents and carers should be treated as partners and respected for their lead role and responsibility in addressing the specific needs of their child.

• Know when and how to obtain information, advice and support for children, young people, their parents and carers, and when and how to report concerns about their physical or emotional health and development.

• Know how to use theory and experience to reflect upon, think about and improve practice. Know how to take responsibility for meeting your professional development needs.

• Be aware that working with children, young people and their families may affect you emotionally and know how to access support for yourself to manage this professionally.

• Draw upon personal experiences and other people’s perspectives, to help you to reflect, challenge your thinking and to assess the impact of your actions.

• Know how to motivate and encourage children and young people to achieve their full potential in their physical, emotional and social development and resilience. Know how to empower and encourage parents and carers to motivate and encourage their child.
Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child or young person

People who work with children and young people have responsibilities to safeguard and promote their welfare. This is an important responsibility and requires careful attention. It means being able to recognise when a child or young person is not achieving their developmental potential, or when their physical or mental health is impaired. It means recognising when a child is displaying risky or harmful behaviour, or is being neglected or abused. It also means being able to identify sources of help for them and their families. Sometimes more than one risk factor may be affecting a child or young person and it may be necessary to work with others to address them.

It is important to identify concerns and where appropriate take action as early as possible so that children, young people, their families and carers can get the help they need. The proposed action should be proportionate to the nature and severity of the risk factors identified and build on strengths and positive factors. As well as ensuring that children and young people are not suffering from harm, it is equally important to ensure their well-being and quality of life.

Skills

Relate, recognise and take considered action

- Establish respectful, trusting relationships with children, young people, their parents and carers.
- Make considered judgements about how to act to safeguard and promote a child or young person's welfare. Where appropriate, consult the child, young person, parent, or carer. This may mean making decisions early when the situation may not be clear, with a view to protecting children and young people from harm.
- Give the child or young person the opportunity to express their views and participate in decisions that affect them, as appropriate to their age and ability, and taking their wishes and feelings into account.
- Address barriers to a child or young person expressing their views due to disability, stage of development or other factors.
- Judge when it is appropriate to speak to the child or young person on their own.
- Involve parents and carers appropriately in safeguarding and promoting children and young people's welfare.
- Recognise the factors that can affect parenting and increase the likelihood of a child being neglected or abused, for example domestic violence or parental substance misuse.
- Recognise the range of possible behaviours which may harm children and young people. Know how to address them.
- Support children and young people to develop resilience and build mental, physical, emotional and social well-being.

Communication, recording and reporting

- Use appropriate information and communication technology and language skills to observe, record and report.
- Undertake formal, or informal, assessments and be alert to concerns about a child or young person's safety or welfare. This includes being alert to unexplained changes in behaviour and signs of abuse or neglect.
- Be able to recognise when a child or young person's life is in danger, or when they are likely to suffer harm, and take action to protect them.

Personal skills

- Have self-awareness and the ability to analyse objectively.
- Have the confidence to actively represent the child or young person and his or her rights.
• Have the confidence to challenge the way you or others practise.
• Develop appropriate professional relationships with children and young people.

Knowledge

Legal and procedural frameworks

• Understand what is meant by safeguarding and the different ways in which children and young people can be harmed. This includes by other children and young people, by a single event or ongoing maltreatment, through the internet and other media, or by their own risk-taking behaviour.
• Have awareness and basic knowledge, where appropriate, of the laws and policy areas relevant to your role that relate to safeguarding children and young people, including in the online world.
• Know how to find information about the risk factors that may impair a child or young person’s health or development.
• Understand that signs of abuse or neglect can be subtle and be expressed in play, artwork or online activities, as well as behaviour and the way children and young people approach relationships with other children and adults.
• Know about government and local guidance on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
• Understand the crucial role that information sharing plays in maintaining the safety and well-being of children and young people.
• Understand when information may be shared, with and without consent, to safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

Wider context of services

• Know when and how to discuss concerns with parents and carers.
• Understand the use that children and young people make of new technologies to understand the implications of risks of harm.
• Be aware of local procedures and inter-agency arrangements for safeguarding children and young people, including the role of adult services.

Self understanding

• Know the boundaries of personal competence and responsibility, when to involve peers, managers, supervisors or professional bodies, and where to get advice and support.
Supporting transitions

The term ‘transitions’ is used to refer to changes between services, such as moving from primary to secondary school, or transitions at 16 to school, college, an apprenticeship or part time training alongside full time employment or volunteering. The term may also refer to life changes which may be common, such as experiencing puberty, or particular and personal transitions, not necessarily shared or understood by all their peers. These include: family illness or the death of a close relative, divorce and the split of the family, issues related to sexuality, adoption, the process of asylum, leaving care, teenage pregnancy, disabilities, parental mental health or substance misuse, and the consequences of crime.

As recognised in the sections on effective communication and child development, it is important to understand a child or young person in the context of their everyday lives, and to recognise the impact of transitions they may be going through or where they are struggling to cope. It is also vital to acknowledge the role of parents and carers in working in partnership to support children and young people at points of transition, and to understand the need for reassurance, advice and support that parents and carers may have.

Skills

Identify transitions

• Listen to children and young people’s concerns. Recognise and take into account the signs of changes in attitudes and behaviours.

• Manage the process of transition in a timely way and help the child or young person to reach positive outcomes by making choices appropriate to their age and stage of development.

• Support young people to develop confidence in their own decision making.

Provide support

• Communicate straightforward, reassuring messages about key transitions.

• Reassure children, young people, their families and carers by explaining what is happening, by involving them in decisions as appropriate, and by exploring possible actions to deal with new and challenging situations.

• Identify opportunities to discuss the effects and results of transition.

• Act to ensure that information transfers ahead of the child or young person, when appropriate, to support transitions.

• Illustrate the benefits and challenges of transition for a child or young person’s physical, sexual, mental, intellectual, moral or social development.

• Develop appropriate one-to-one relationships with children and young people and employ mentoring skills that enable the child or young person to address the various issues they may face in making transitions.

• Make effective links with other practitioners if further support is necessary.

• Operate cross-agency referral processes where appropriate.

Knowledge

How children and young people respond to change

• Understand issues of identity, delayed effects of change and be aware of possible signs that someone is going through a particular transition.

• Know about the likely impact of key transitions, both between services and life changes.

• Understand how transitions may affect those most at risk of exclusion or under-achievement and that it may be necessary to adapt or intensify support for these children or young people.
• Understand patterns of transition from childhood to adulthood.

• Understand that children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) or at risk of not fulfilling their potential, and their parents or carers, may need additional support to manage transitions. Know when to seek specialist advice.

When and how to intervene

• Know about organisational procedures and legal frameworks, as well as appropriate referral routes within your own organisation and to other agencies.

• Know that in some family situations you may need to be more proactive about involving services - for example, if you know parents or carers have not accepted help, but are continuing to experience problems with their child’s behaviour.
Multi-agency and integrated working

Multi-agency working means different services, agencies, teams of professionals and other staff working together to provide services that meet the needs of children, young people, and their parents or carers.

As multi-agency working becomes more widely practised, it is increasingly referred to as integrated working, defined as where everyone supporting children, young people and families works together effectively, putting children, young people and their families at the centre of decision making in order to meet their needs and improve their lives. This is supported by a number of tools and processes that make integrated working more effective in meeting those needs. These include early intervention, information sharing, common assessment processes and supporting information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

There are a number of different models of multi-agency working. They include multi-agency panels, multi-agency teams, integrated services (such as extended services) and the team around the child approach.

To work successfully with children and young people it is important to be clear about your role and to be aware of, and respectful of, the roles of other workers and agencies. You should actively seek and respect other people's knowledge and input to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people. These behaviours should apply across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Skills

Communication and teamwork

• Communicate effectively with other practitioners and professionals by listening to them and ensuring that you are being listened to.
• Provide timely, appropriate, succinct information to enable practitioners to deliver support to children, young people, parents or carers.
• Record, summarise, and share information where appropriate, using information and communication technology skills where necessary.
• Work in a team context, forging and sustaining relationships across agencies and respecting the contribution of others that work with children, young people and families.
• Develop skills and knowledge with training from experts, to work with specialist services; enabling continuity for families, children or young people while enhancing your own skills and knowledge.
• Share experiences through formal and informal exchanges.

Assertiveness

• Be proactive, initiate necessary action and be able to put forward your judgements.
• Be persistent with families judged to need support even when they are reluctant to engage with offers of help.
• Have the confidence to challenge situations by looking beyond your immediate role and asking considered questions. Be assertive about what is required to avoid or remedy poor outcomes for the child or young person.
• Present facts and judgements objectively.
• Judge when you should provide support to a child or young person yourself and when you should refer the situation to another practitioner or professional using common assessment processes where appropriate.

Knowledge

Your role and remit

• Know your main job and responsibilities within your working environment.
• Understand the value and expertise you bring to a team and that which is brought by your colleagues.
• Understand that different factors may combine to cause particular risks for children and young people, and that it may be appropriate to seek support from colleagues in other agencies early, before problems have developed.

Know how to make queries

• Know your role within different group situations and how you contribute to the overall group process.
• Have a general knowledge and understanding of the range of organisations and individuals working with children, young people, their families and carers. Be aware of the roles and responsibilities of other professionals.

Procedures and working methods

• Know what to do in given cases - for example, referrals - involving appropriate services or raising concerns when a child or young person is at risk of harm or of not achieving their potential.
• Know about procedures for intervening at an early stage, or where the situation is not clear.
• Know what the triggers are for reporting incidents or unexpected behaviour.
• Know how to work within your own and other organisational values, beliefs and cultures.
• Understand that others may not have the same understanding of professional terms and may interpret abbreviations and acronyms differently.
• Know what to do when there are insufficient responses from other organisations or agencies, while maintaining a focus on what is in the best interests of the child or young person.
• Understand the procedures, objectives, roles and relationships of partner services, in order to work effectively alongside them.
• Know about tools, processes and procedures for multi-agency and integrated working, including those for assessment, consent, and information sharing.
Information sharing

Sharing information in a timely and accurate way is an essential part of delivering better services to children, young people, their families and carers. Sometimes it can help to save lives. Practitioners at different agencies should work together and share information appropriately for the safety and well-being of children. It is important to understand and respect legislation and ethics surrounding the confidentiality and security of information.

It is crucial to build trust with the child or young person and their family from the outset by clarifying issues and procedures surrounding confidentiality, consent and information sharing. Practitioners should adhere to the correct principles, policies and procedures for information sharing, ensuring that the child or young person, parent or carer understands the process.

Skills

Information handling

• Make good use of available information, appraising its content and assessing what else might be needed.

• Bring together relevant information about clients, either by completing paperwork or electronically.

• Assess the relevance and status of information - for example whether it is observation or opinion - and handle it appropriately.

• Identify gaps in information.

Engagement

• Be open and honest with the child, young person and their family or carer about why, what, how and which information will, or could be shared, unless to do so would increase the risk of them or any other person suffering harm.

• Encourage children, young people and their families to consent to the sharing of information where appropriate, ensuring that they understand why it is important to do so, their rights and the implications of sharing or not sharing the information.

Knowledge

Importance of information sharing

• Understand the need to balance the benefits and risks of sharing information with the benefits and risks of not sharing information and make a professional judgement based on the facts of the case.

• Understand that consent is not always necessary to share information, even when the information is confidential. It may be shared without consent in certain circumstances, for example where a child is suspected of suffering or being likely to suffer significant harm, or when there are legal obligations to disclose information.

• Understand that it is not always necessary to collect information directly from children, young people and families as this may frustrate them (if they are being asked to give the same information repeatedly). Be aware that information can often be gathered from other sources.

Role and responsibilities

• Know that information sharing usually involves the need to make case-by-case decisions about whether to share personal information, what to share, and with whom.

• Know the importance of ensuring that information sharing is necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure.

• Know how to share information securely in writing, by telephone, electronically or in person.

• Know what to record, how long to keep it, how to dispose of records correctly and when to feed back or follow up. This should include keeping a record of the decision to share or not to share information, the reasons for the decisions and what was shared with whom.
• Be aware of your own, and other peoples’ professional boundaries, particularly around confidential and sensitive information.

Awareness of complexities

• Be aware that different types of information exist, for example personal information, confidential personal information, and sensitive personal information. Understand the implications of these differences.

• Understand the importance of confidentiality and consent. Be aware that, in many cases, the consent of the child, young person or family will be required for the lawful sharing of information.

• Be aware of the need to respect, where possible, the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. Know that information may be shared without consent if there is an overriding public interest.

• Wherever possible, make clear to the child or young person, parent or carer how the information they provide will be used, unless to do so would increase the risk of harm to them or another person or hamper the investigation or prosecution of a serious crime – that is, a crime which causes or is likely to cause significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult.

Awareness of laws and legislation

• Have awareness and sufficient knowledge of current legislation and the common law duty of confidentiality.

• Know that the Data Protection Act (DPA) is not a barrier to sharing information but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.

• Understand the legislation that governs your own profession; and the different policies and procedures surrounding confidentiality, consent and information sharing.

• Be aware of any relevant legislation which specifically requires or restricts the disclosure of information.

• Understand the principles that dictate when young people are considered sufficiently mature to give or refuse consent to their information being shared; in particular taking into account young people’s ability to demonstrate understanding of what they are consenting to and the consequences of their decision.