



PRACTICE REVIEW

& POLICY TOOLKIT

2025

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: “WORK WITH, NOT ON, FAMILIES”

When involving children and families in reviews — especially in serious or tragic situations — we must:

- Be **kind, honest**, and **clear**.
- Offer real choices about whether, **when**, and **how** they take part.
- Prioritise creating a **safe space** – **emotionally** and **physically** – where people feel heard and respected.

Reviews are not about scrutinising families — they are about learning from their lived experiences to improve the system. Whether the child has been harmed, died, or there's been a positive outcome, families deserve to be treated with compassion, clarity, and respect.

SPACE: CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Why it matters:

Children and families must feel physically and emotionally safe to speak openly. Trauma, grief, or distrust of services can make this difficult.

How to do it?

Ask: “Where and when would you feel safest and most comfortable?”

- Use familiar, welcoming spaces – avoid clinical rooms or offices where possible.
- Be flexible: evening/weekend availability, childcare support, or virtual sessions may help.

Provide:

- **Interpreters** if English isn't the first language.
- Written explanations if verbal info feels overwhelming.
- **Sensory adjustments** for neurodiverse children or parents.
- Think about who leads the conversation — a trusted practitioner or advocate may help reduce power imbalance.



VOICE: HEARING THEIR EXPERIENCES

Why it matters:

Children and families often hold insight professionals never see — especially about what life is like day-to-day, what help worked (or didn't), and what really mattered.



How to do it:

- **Start with purpose:** “We’d like to understand what life was like for you, so we can improve how children and families are supported in future.”
- Use **age** and **stage** appropriate tools:
 - Children: drawing, emojis, play-based prompts, videos, or storytelling.
 - Young people: music, photos, social media-style prompts, or trusted peer advocates.
- Make **clear**:
 - They don’t have to talk about anything they’re uncomfortable with.
 - Some topics may be off-limits (e.g. if police investigations are active).
- **Always** check your understanding: “Have I got that right? Is there anything I’ve misunderstood?”

AUDIENCE: WHO'S LISTENING?

Why it matters:

Families are more likely to engage when they know they're being taken seriously and that what they say will be used for change, not judgment.



How to do it:

- Be open about who's involved in the review and how decisions are made.
- Explain limits to what you can promise (e.g. legal constraints, timescales).
- If parts of their story cannot be included (due to confidentiality or legal concerns), explain why and offer them support.
- Share progress and next steps regularly. A single contact person may reduce confusion.

INFLUENCE: MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE

Why it matters:

It's not enough to "listen and move on". Families and young people want to know that their contribution has shaped the outcome.

Why it matters:

- Offer ways for them to shape the questions, not just answer them.
- Let them know how their feedback will be represented in the report.
- Offer a chance to comment on the draft, even if only on how their voice is reflected.
- Share what's changed as a result — with examples.

INCLUSIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Reviews must hear from all kinds of families – not just the most confident or vocal.

Plan for:

- Non-English speakers.
- Refugee or asylum-seeking families.
- Disabled children or adults.
- LGBTQ+ young people.
- Those without internet, stable housing, or phones.

Offer **advocacy** or peer support.

Consider referrals for **counselling** or **therapeutic** support after engagement.

ETHICS & LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some families may be involved in criminal or civil proceedings. Reviews must not compromise justice, privacy, or safety.

Why it matters:

How to do it:

- Work with police and legal teams if there are ongoing investigations.
- Delay engagement if there's a risk of interfering with interviews or court processes — but plan to return later.
- Explain what cannot be shared (e.g. sensitive third-party info or active case details).
- Encourage families to seek legal advice where appropriate.
- Make notes of why any family was not involved, and whether that can change in future.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Why it matters:

Trust is everything — **especially** when families feel **hurt, angry, or let down** by services.

Be human — not robotic. Show empathy. Apologise if services failed.
Don't rush — give time to build trust.
If families say no, respect it — but leave the door open.

CHECKLIST FOR REVIEWERS

- ☐ Have we co-produced a plan with families for their involvement?
- ☐ Do they know their rights, options, and limits of confidentiality?
- ☐ Have we adapted our communication for their needs?
- ☐ Are their insights influencing the questions, themes, or findings?
- ☐ Will they see their words reflected in the report?
- ☐ Have we documented clearly why someone was not involved, if applicable?
- ☐ Have we closed the loop — shown them what's changed?

Every review is a chance to learn with families, not just about them. Whether the outcome was tragic or positive, involving them meaningfully helps us build a system that listens, adapts, and protects.