

Working Together Across Services

Safeguarding is most effective when services work together (multi-agency working). Families often face multiple, interconnected challenges that no single agency can address alone.

* Multi agency early intervention and prevention - the Early Help Assessment and plan can be used collaboratively to support families, with their consent, to prevent escalation later.
* Share information appropriately so that everyone involved understands the full context—this includes involving families in decision-making wherever possible.
* Integrated services help provide consistent, joined-up support that feels seamless to families and reduces duplication or gaps.
* When professionals communicate well and share responsibility, we create safer, more supportive environments for children and families. [Threshold Guidance](https://wfscp.org.uk/sites/default/files/2877589/2025-07/28553%20WFSCP%20Threshold%20Guidance_0.pdf)
* Team around the Family meetings are held regularly to review the plan

Build on Strengths, Respect Differences
Every family has strengths. A Think Family approach recognises and builds on these, rather than focusing solely on problems or deficits.

Look for signs of resilience, existing support networks and positive relationships to build on.

Take a culturally sensitive approach—recognise that parenting styles, family roles and support systems can vary widely across cultures and communities.

Avoid assumptions. Understanding a family’s unique values, beliefs and lived experiences helps build trust and improves outcomes.

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Think Family

What Does ‘Family’ Mean?

Families come in different guises and sizes and ‘family’ can mean different things to different people. Families can be complex and include networks of friends as well as relatives, some of whom you might not expect to be classed as a family member.

It’s important to understand the wider network, especially in complex or non-traditional family settings, including foster care, kinship care, or blended households.

Professionals should be asking: “Who else matters in this child’s life?” “Who’s involved day to day?”

Why Think Family Matters

Adopting a Think Family approach is crucial because individuals do not exist in isolation—and the needs of children and their parents are often deeply interconnected. When professionals focus solely on one individual, important risks or protective factors can be missed.

Children may be profoundly affected by adult issues such as mental ill-health, substance misuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, or financial hardship—even if they’re not the direct recipient of harm. These factors can seriously affect a parent’s ability to meet their child’s needs.

By understanding the broader family context, professionals can deliver more effective interventions, offer early help, and prevent issues from escalating into crisis. Think Family supports a whole-family approach that promotes long-term safety, stability, and well-being.

Introduction to Think Family

A ‘Think Family’ approach considers the needs of all family members and not just the individual person that a professional is supporting or working with. It promotes a joined-up, whole-family view of safeguarding, where adults’ and children’s needs are considered together.

Too often, services work with individuals in isolation—Think Family bridges that gap, encouraging agencies to work together and avoid missed opportunities to protect children.

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility—and families don’t exist in silos.

Reflection & Next Steps

Before closing a file, completing an assessment, or stepping back from a case, ask yourself:

* Have I understood the family as a whole?
* Are there hidden risks or unmet needs?
* Have I considered who else is caring for the child or influencing their daily life?
* Has there been meaningful multi-agency input?
* What can I do to strengthen this family's support network?
* Have I been professionally curious?

 Reflect, review and reach out—Think Family, every time.

Useful Links

[Westmorland and Furness Family Help website](https://wandffamilyhelp.org.uk/homepage-1) [Family Help Strategy](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/537/6683/6687/6698/6835/4559011245.pdf)

[WFSCP Webpage on Neglect](https://wfscp.org.uk/resources-and-guidance/local-resources/neglect) [All About Genograms](https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/mkydyt3f/cf_pt_using-genograms-in-practice_final.pdf)

[Professional Curiosity Guidance](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/content/internet/537/6683/6687/6862/44825103438.pdf) [Think Family Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naQoJxdz46Q)

[WFSCP Website](https://wfscp.org.uk/welcome) [Family Hubs Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTCR9eNF6gk&feature=youtu.be)

How to Think Family in Practice

The right question at the right time can unlock vital safeguarding information.

* Be professionally curious – don’t just take things at face value.
* Use whole-family assessments that explore all household members and relationships.
* Use a genogram
* Identify unmet needs as well as risks.
* Consider the voice and lived experience of every child.
* Don’t be afraid to ask sensitive questions - not taking things at face value & being willing and able to ask probing questions to understand the underlying issues.
* Make sure information is shared appropriately according to the level of risk
* Follow the WFSCP Escalation Policy should you have concerns.