



One minute guide

Family-Led Practice

No. 218, March 2026

What is family-led practice?

Family-led practice is a continuous, embedded approach where families are active partners throughout our work with them. This is broader than family-led decision-making, which focuses on inviting families to contribute to decisions at key points.

In Leeds, we are working to maximise family-led practice. This is in line with findings from the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(Macalister, 2022\)](#) which emphasised the importance and potential of family networks in supporting children, as well as focusing on creating or maintaining lifelong, loving relationships for each child.

The ambition of family-led practice in Leeds is clear in our intention to ensure all families are offered a [Family Group Conference](#) through their involvement with services at an early help level onwards. We will ensure we create the opportunities for families to discuss and resolve professional concerns within their own networks as early as possible in the life of a problem.

What does family-led practice look like in Leeds?

In Leeds, we are committed to helping families to make choices, come to conclusions that guide their behaviours and plans for their children, and develop solutions from within their own families and networks. This is in line with our commitment to relational and [restorative practice](#).

We want to maximise the involvement of families in all of our interactions with them; including, but not limited to, decisions that need to be made. As early as possible, we will look to identify all opportunities to maximise family involvement, from early help and social work interventions to supporting young people to leave care.

We are committed to shifting the balance of power from professionals towards children and their families throughout our involvement, whilst recognising that there is an inherent power imbalance which can't be fully erased. Through intentional practice promoting collaboration, respect, participation and shared decision making, we will strive to rebalance this so that families are meaningfully empowered.

What is this approach informed by?

Our family-led approach is grounded in a core set of values that prioritise the rights, strengths and autonomy of families, emphasising collaboration, empowerment and respect:

- Families are the experts in their own lives
- Every family deserves to be treated with respect, regardless of circumstances
- Families have the right to participate in decisions that affect them
- All families have strengths and resources that can be built on
- Given the opportunity and the right support, families are capable of developing plans and taking action to resolve danger, reduce risk and meet the needs of their children
- Participation, collaboration and inclusion are essential to develop and implement safe, positive and sustainable outcomes for children
- Extended family and community networks are vital to the wellbeing of children
- Holding values such as cultural integrity, fairness and curiosity at the forefront supports family-led working.

How do the values align with the Leeds Practice Principles?

Underpinning our approach to maximising family involvement, is our [Leeds Practice Model](#) and, within that, our Leeds Practice Principles. These are applied in the following ways:

- Identify wider family and support networks during our first interactions with families, to inform us of the family's strengths, support and protective factors.
- Support and promote family involvement and decision making at every stage of intervention and all decision-making points, as described below.
- Family-led approaches are our 'way of being', not a one-off event to be completed.
- Identify and include both parents and their networks in our work.
- When children are looked after, continue to identify who is in the child's family networks, helping the child maintain relationships and supporting potential reunification.
- Introduce the idea of family-led practice in all its forms to families in the most open, positive and transparent ways, while being clear about what needs to be achieved for the child at each decision point.
- We will build the skills we need to be able to develop effective relationships with adults as well as children, so that we can promote, support and maximise family-led practice.
- If a family is not ready or does not want to take up an offer of family-led decision making at a particular time, we will offer again as appropriate and if situations change.

What does family-led practice look like at different points of support?

Maximising family-led practice is our ambition at every stage in our work with families:

Early help - ask about wider family and network, including paternal side, and obtain contact details. Carrying out a formulation with the family will help to develop a shared understanding and shared goals, as well as identifying who can support them.

Initial contact/ referral - asking referrers what they know about the wider family network, exploring protective factors/ family strengths and asking about the current family plan.

Assessment - identify all of the key people in the family network, develop a formulation with the family and seek consent to involve the wider family and network members.

Planning - Ensure family decisions are reflected in children's plans, and that plans involve and are shared appropriately with wider family, who are supported to understand them.

Case decisions - When recording a case decision, it should reflect the family's knowledge, involvement in and views about the decision.

Multi-agency meetings - work with family to identify who should be invited, prepare families for what will be discussed, structure the meetings to enable participation (e.g. not using jargon or acronyms), ensure family plans are available to be shared and discussed.

Care proceedings - there is scope within care proceedings to be family-led, for example through transparent communication, supporting families to express their views and influence decisions where possible and recognising the impact of trauma.

Return to family/ [reunification](#) - involve families in co-creating reunification plans, which are informed by family views about the pace of reunification and what support they need.

Case closure/ step down to early help - extended family should be involved in sustainability plans as early as possible and these should be reviewed prior to case closure.

Key contacts and further information

For more information about how we are embedding family-led practice in Leeds, contact the Rethink team via rethink.team@leeds.gov.uk, and read the [Maximising Family-Led Practice Policy, Principles and Procedure](#).