



One minute guide

Therapeutic Social Work Team

No. 114, July 2023

What is the Therapeutic Social Work Team and who is it for?

The Therapeutic Social Work Team (TSWT) is Leeds Children's Services' innovative response to promote the emotional wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after, living in [kinship care](#), subject to child protection plans (where basic safety needs are met) or subject to a [supervision order](#). The team works with children and young people up to the age of 18, or to 25 if the young person is a care leaver.

The TSWT does not work with children subject to Child in Need plans (unless children are placed with kinship carers and would otherwise be in care). Support for these children and young people should be sought within local cluster services or directly from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (assuming their threshold is met) through the [Leeds MindMate Single Point of Access](#).

The TSWT is staffed by experienced social workers, many of whom hold additional therapeutic qualifications; they work as therapeutic social workers, not therapists. The team also benefits from clinical psychology input on children already held by the team.

Why are children and young people referred?

Children and young people may be referred if their early life experiences are having a significant impact on their emotional wellbeing.

These might include:

- Severe abusive or neglectful experiences (physical, emotional or sexual harm);
- Abandonment and loss;
- Parental alcohol and substance misuse;
- Domestic violence; and/ or
- Multiple placement breakdowns.

The kind of symptomatic behaviour which might be routinely seen includes:

- Extreme dysregulation—children struggling to manage their emotions;
- Acting out (aggression) or internalising (withdrawal) behaviours;
- Regulatory difficulties (eating, toileting or sleep disturbance);
- Self-harmful behaviour;
- Sexualised or harmful sexual behaviour;
- Problems with attention, concentration and impulsivity.

Does the team work directly with children and young people?

Direct therapeutic work usually starts with support being offered to a child or young person's care giver, as the most effective 'treatment' for trauma is equipping the people and communities around children to be agents of healing. In some circumstances the team offer direct work to children and young people; this will usually include their carers or key adults. The team provide direct work individually only when it is not possible to involve a care giver or for those older young people who are living independently. This work is influenced by a variety of therapeutic models including Psychotherapy, family therapy, DDP (Dyadic developmental psychotherapy), Neurodevelopmental and CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), depending on the child or young person's presenting behaviours.

How does the team work with carers and professionals?

The team offers therapeutic interventions to help children, young people and their carers overcome the impact of abuse, trauma and/ or neglect. The TSWT is a citywide service, located in their east Leeds base, although much of their work takes place in the community. In addition to the direct work described on page one, a range of services are offered including:

- **Fostering Surgery**—this is usually the first intervention the team will offer. It's for all carers and special guardians of Leeds children (carers ring directly to make the appointment) to discuss any concerns they have regarding the children they are caring for.
- **Life Story Clinic** - to support social workers undertaking life story work with children and young people (social worker rings directly to make the appointment). Life Story work is about helping looked after children understand their life experiences and generally precedes therapeutic work.
- **Social worker discussion clinic.** Any social worker in children's services can book into these hour-long slots to support them in thinking and care planning around complex cases where a child may have therapeutic needs.
- **Consultation to local authority children's homes.** The team support homes to think therapeutically about the children they care for.
- **Carer support/ therapeutic parenting work.** The team offers a therapeutic parenting program, Foundations for Attachment, for foster carers and kinship carers. This is via a direct referral from Supervising Social Workers.

How are referrals made?

The child's social worker or personal advisor (for care leavers) is welcome to ring any member of the team for a brief discussion on whether the service is appropriate; if a more in depth discussion is required, they should book a social worker discussion slot by phoning the general number (please see box below).

A referral form needs to be completed (via [Mosaic](#)) with the informed and meaningful consent of the child, young person or family. The social worker must also seek agreement from their team manager who will approve the referral.

When a referral is received, a decision is made by the Therapeutic Social Work Team managers, alongside Therapeutic Social Workers. If the referral is agreed, it goes onto a list for allocation and a screening of therapeutic need is undertaken. This is a six week assessment process to explore what is required, from which a formulation or recommendation is developed. Following this, the referral is either closed or work begins. Where the referral is not accepted, this is explained and advice and information is offered about more relevant services.

Want to know more?

The team can be contacted on 0113 378 1800 for more information, and to discuss whether a child or young person you are working with could be eligible and could benefit from the support of TSWT. The team can also be contacted via email at TherapeuticTeam@leeds.gov.uk.