



Staying Together and Connected:  
Getting it Right for Sisters and Brothers

**Learning, Development and  
Leadership Framework**

June 2023

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>2. Context</b> .....	3
<b>3. Principles</b> .....	5
Summary of Key Principles: .....	5
Underpinning principles:.....	6
<b>4. The Skill Levels.</b> .....	7
4.1 Level 1: Awareness Raising .....	7
<b>Suggested approaches</b> .....	8
4.2 LEVEL 2: Informed Practice .....	10
4.3 Level 3: Enhanced, Innovative and Creative Practice .....	14
4.4 Additional Leadership Responsibilities.....	19
<b>5. Suggested Learning Methods.</b> .....	20
Level 1: Learning Methods .....	20
Level 2: Learning Methods.....	20
Level 3: Learning Methods.....	20
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	22

# 1. Introduction

On 26 July 2021, new legislation came into effect which strengthened duties in relation to siblings. This enhanced legislation has been a response to the voice of people with care experience to recognise the importance of sibling relationships and to support changes to practice and culture through the **‘Staying Together and Connected: Getting it right for Sisters and Brothers’ National Practice Guidance**. A cross-sector implementation group has led on identifying the necessary changes required in culture and practice to realise the intention of the legislation. The Learning, Development and Leadership Sub-Group (LDLG) was formed to consider how the Guidance could be implemented in practice through a learning framework. This work is complemented by additional groups exploring data, legal matters and infrastructure and scaffolding. The Participation Group hosted by Who Cares? Scotland provided the views of care experienced young people on the draft framework and this is incorporated into this output.

The Learning Development and Leadership Group met a number of times throughout 2022 to discuss:

- **Who needs to know about the changes to legislation and the National Practice Guidance?**
- **What do they need to know to help them implement this?**
- **How can they be supported to learn?**
- **What key policies and principles underpin this work?**

This legislation must be firmly understood by all those coming into contact with care experienced children and young people and their families so that they have their right to family life supported and upheld and stay connected to those who are important to them. We concluded that there were different needs and therefore different levels of learning required. These are outlined below.

## **Level One: Awareness Raising**

This level is for the public and those who may be the first point of contact with care experienced young people and their families. People in this position require to be aware of the importance of children maintaining relationships with those who are important to them. This allows them to support emotional well-being and healthy identity and development and signpost individual young people and families to information and relevant others, helping to realise their right to connection with brothers and sisters.

## **Level Two: Informed**

This level is for those who share Corporate Parenting responsibilities for children with care experience and their families, including staff and carers providing direct care, and those who are involved in providing services within health, education, social work services, and the children's hearings and court systems.

## **Level Three: Enhanced Skills**

This level is for those practitioners with direct responsibility for assessment, care planning and review of children and young people with care experience, and who are making recommendations and decisions about children's plans, and implementing those plans. This may include some individuals who more usually fit within Level Two.

**(See Appendix A for outline of groups and level identification).**

## **2. Context**

Every child deserves a good childhood, and this is reflected in the Scottish Government's vision for Scotland's children – **that Scotland is the 'best place in the world to grow up'**. This means an environment where children's needs are met and where they enjoy good relationships, including relationships with brothers and sisters. For children in care, keeping links with brothers and sisters (and those who are like a brother or sister) strong and meaningful is often harder. They may be living in different places, be subject to different legal orders which make keeping connected more difficult from a practical perspective or be surrounded by people who

do not value the same relationships as they do. The principles below reflect standards which, when integrated into policy, practice and thinking, can make those good relationships, which are in Scotland a right for our children in care, easier to achieve.

Fundamental to all of this is that where support is provided in a non-stigmatising manner and across services and communities, these principles and what they seek to embrace can more easily become a reality.

Universal services from nursery provision and throughout school life as well as targeted care services should demonstrate restorative language and conversations which link to feelings and impact all aspects of care. This provides a foundation for targeted services to build that golden thread of relationships throughout our care community when considering sibling relationships.

A number of aspects of implementation of a learning and development framework can be **taken forward immediately**. These are:

1. Reflection and referencing of the framework within Scottish Government in any public awareness campaigns, not exclusively but including early years national induction frameworks, children's hearing redesign and The Promise.
2. National recognition through a commitment from agencies publicly stated by an icon/badge informed by Each and Every Child on how this is best framed e.g. 'We are championing brother and sister's rights to stay connected'.
3. As part of developing the workforce embedding the framework within SSSC learning and development and registration processes, and any future National Social Work Agency. This specifically ensures inclusion in any national standards applied as part of workforce training including that practice learning, and training for newly qualified social workers, advanced practitioners and para professionals.
4. Recognising the importance of maintaining connections for healthy identity, development and emotional wellbeing, the framework is incorporated into national trauma and mental health initiatives.
5. As the UNCRC is central to policy and practice within Scotland that children's rights to maintain relationships with siblings are recognised and actively promoted.

6. To support awareness raising, the legislation and guidance and children's right to connection with siblings is reflected in celebration weeks within Scotland, for example, care experience week.

### 3. Principles:

The UNCRC, details what every child should expect as their basic rights. Article 8 states that '**Every child has the right to an identity.** Governments must respect and protect that right. Knowing and being in touch with your family contributes fundamentally to a child's identity and development. The principles below seek to draw out and describe what this might look like when applied to maintaining and developing connections for children and young people in care with their brothers and sisters. Central to our thinking must be the experience of the child, young person and their family ensuring that their views remain at the centre and that people with experience of care continue to inform this framework and actions from it.

#### Summary of Key Principles:

1. This Legislation and accompanying guidance must be firmly embedded in everyone's consciousness so that children, young people, and their families can **exercise their rights to family life and to stay connected to those who are important to them.**
2. **We listen to children**, to their voice, as to who they view as Brothers and Sisters and to their wishes about maintaining connections.
3. Our universal and specialist, and formal and informal **workforce are supported** to work together to make connections happen.
4. the workforce is supported by a leadership who ensure that the culture and resources of their organisation support the best possible outcomes for brothers and sisters, including ensuring the right **scaffolding and infrastructure** is in place to enable practitioners to put the sibling legislation and guidance into practice.'

## **Underpinning principles:**

- **Assistance** – assistance to keep in touch is normalised, easily accessible, resourced (including funding) and without stigma. Public messaging about children in care and keeping in touch supports this (Article 2, non-discrimination; Article 17, access to information from the media)
- **Voice** – what children tell us about the importance of sibling relationships is central to how services, support and training are provided. This means a focus on moving at a child's pace and in a non-stigmatising manner, not 'professionalising' relationships between brothers and sisters, and children being supported and understood by those around them. It also means listening when a child chooses not to see a brother or sister, while ensuring doors to relationships remain open, and children remain informed about other siblings (Article 12, respect for views)
- **Workforce** – our universal and specialist, and formal and informal workforce work together to make connections happen. Imaginative practice is encouraged. This means both universal and targeted training and application being provided and supported (Article 15, freedom of association; Article 6, development of full potential)
- **Workforce** – those involved with children and young people work together and seek to reduce and overcome barriers.
- **Mental Health and wellbeing support and provision** is accessible throughout a child's care journey, and is linked to identity and connections with brothers and sisters (Article 24, health and wellbeing)

## **This will be delivered through the following:**

- **The GIRFEC practice model** is the core framework – the five questions, my world triangle and resilience matrix are understood and applied. This provides consistency across the country.
- **National standards** are presented in a simple and meaningful manner and 'speak' to one another. This means that children, young people, and those around them can all understand what standards mean for them. Practitioners and policy makers must therefore be creative to ensure the

standards are accessible to those with limited literacy skills (Article 17, right to information, Article 13)

- **Training** – from initial social work training, through to the advanced practice framework and leadership training – reflects the importance of relationships and links this to trauma and how individuals can heal from the impact of trauma. (Article 39, recovery from trauma)
- **Learning** is consistent and provided across services and disciplines, with particular focus on the role which care givers can undertake in maintaining positive connections and relationships. (Article 25 treatment in care, Article 39, recovery from trauma)

## **4. The Skill Levels**

### **4.1 Level 1: Awareness Raising**

This level is for the public and those who may be the first point of contact with care experienced young people and their families. People in this position require to be aware of the importance of children maintaining relationships with those who are important to them. This allows them to support emotional well-being and healthy identity and development and signpost individual young people and families to information and relevant others, helping to realise their right to connection with brothers and sisters.

#### **Learning outcome**

- Children and young people and their families, understand they have rights in relation to seeing their brothers and sisters and must be supported to exercise these rights and be directed to legal support where needed.
- Understanding the importance for a child of maintaining relationships that are important to them and which can be wider than just people in their own family.



## **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Understanding they should be supported to live with or have regular contact with their siblings, if they want to.
- Understand that “siblings” mean those you share a parent/parents with AND those you hold a sibling-like relationship with.
- Know they have a say in a sibling’s Children’s Hearing when the decision may affect them seeing each other.
- Understanding of the importance of brother and sister type relationships.
- Knowing how to signpost people to information about children’s rights around contact with others of importance to the child or young person.

## **Skills/abilities evidenced**

- Ability to identify they have rights in relation to seeing their brothers and sisters.
- Ability to ask a supportive adult about this legislation and how it may impact them.
- That those working with children and young people, including those acting in an advocacy role can support children and young people to exercise their rights.
- Ability to engage in a sensitive way with other people.
- Ability to recognise when someone may benefit from accessing information about brother and sister type relationships.
- Ability to provide a range of links to materials/other agencies that provide information about the rights of brothers and sisters.

## **Suggested approaches:**

The right to live together and stay connected impacts a wide range of areas of public and care life. As a result, awareness raising is important, and necessary, to ensure that the general public, workforce and children and young people themselves are made aware of sibling rights, and where to find out more. It is recommended that Each and Every Child are tasked

with working with young people and key agencies to develop a public awareness raising campaign which meets this need. Alongside wider information for those operating at this level, specific awareness raising is suggested for critical groups including children, young people, families and carers on the legislation, children's rights and supports.

Some thoughts from the working group on methods are included are below:

- Posters in bus stops, Children's Hearing's Centre's, family centres, contact centres, health settings etc. Picture of a child/young person (maybe aimed at different ages/stages?) and available online and through social media.
- Utilising QR codes to provide further information.
- Exploring tariff-free website hosting in conjunction with the phone networks so no data is used/charged for.
- Ensuring that general public awareness campaigns are accessible, visual, informative and shareable.

## **4.2 Level 2: Informed Practice**

This level is for those who share Corporate Parenting responsibilities for children with care experience and for those who are directly involved in providing services within health, education, social work services and the children's hearings and court systems.

### **4.2.1 Legislation:**

#### **Learning outcome**

- Understand the legislation and definitions of sibling relationships and the UNCRC and children's rights within this context and Corporate Parenting duties.
- Understanding the importance for a child which underpins the legislation of maintaining relationships that are important to them and which can be wider than just people in their own family.

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Demonstrate knowledge of what the new legislative duties mean for the practitioner in a variety of different roles and in your specific role.
- Understanding how contact with siblings' legislation fits within children's planning and decision-making processes including Children's Hearings and Court systems and the interface with local authority and other agencies corporate parenting and general statutory duties.
- Demonstrate understanding of the local authority role and duties, and how these duties and processes relate and interface with children's hearings and courts
- Underpinning knowledge of trauma informed practice.

#### **Skills/abilities evidenced**

- Application of this National Guidance, local procedures, and single and multi-agency processes to ensure children's right to time with siblings is observed.

- Ability to contribute to multi-agency assessment to support the best interests of the child in maintaining relationships with those they regard as a sibling. Mediating between siblings when there may be differing views about time together.

#### **4.2.2 Guidance:**

##### **Learning outcome**

- Be able to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the staying together and connected guidance, and how it fits within the wider GIRFEC framework

##### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Understand the definition of sibling relationships and the complexities of sibling relationships with the care system. Develop an understanding of what is meant by 'siblings' and 'brother and sister' relationships from the perspective of siblings.
- Be able to demonstrate an informed understanding of the reasons why siblings should be together and remain connected (what does practice, research and care experienced people tell us)
- Demonstrate understanding of the challenges and barriers to siblings being together and connected, the consequences of this for care experienced children and young people, and mitigating factors and approaches to alleviate or avoid this
- There should be some understanding of lifetime impact and loss for siblings.

##### **Skills/abilities evidenced**

- Evidence the application of the guidance in practice and continually reflect on your practice and improvement.
- Identifying any organisational or cultural barriers to promoting sibling contact.

### **4.2.3 Be informed**

#### **Learning outcome**

- Know and understand the aspirations of The Promise and actively promote cultural and practice change within your organisation.
- Know and understand the aspirations of The Promise and actively promote cultural and practice change within your organisation

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Knowledge of key messages particularly from people with care experience about the importance of sibling relationships to current and future support, security and resilience.
- Understand the lifetime impact of not remaining connected with siblings.

#### **Skills/abilities evidenced**

- Ensure your contribution to assessments is informed and evidence the key knowledge of the importance of brothers and sisters remaining together and connected, and how challenges and barriers to this can be challenged and overcome.
- Undertake risk assessment of sibling separation.
- Ensure recording is understandable, jargon free and accessible to children and their families.

### **4.2.4 Responsibility**

#### **Learning outcome**

- In your own practice and workplace, safeguard and promote wellbeing and in the context of remaining connected to those children and young people regard as a sibling. This should be an ongoing assessment that reflects the voice of adult siblings and children now and throughout their childhood and adulthood.

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Knowledge and understanding of the benefits of relationships that are supported, sustained and that the enduring nature of sibling relationships is evidenced to be central to emotional wellbeing.

- Ability to use knowledge, key research and understanding to provide evidence informed assessments and recommendations

### **Skills/abilities evidenced**

- Focus on practice that builds and strengthens sibling relationships and where damaged, focuses on the repairing and rebuilding of those sibling relationships. Demonstrate commitment to making a positive difference in your agency and within your corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Link understanding from assessment, evidence critical thinking to recommendations that are trauma and developmentally informed. Using this evidence, contribute to decision making that forms robust plans to ensure sisters and brothers stay together where appropriate and remain connected through relevant age and stage appropriate and person-centered contact with each other.
- If necessary, constructively questioning and challenging practice or decision making that does not prioritise sibling relationships.

## 4.3 Level 3: Enhanced, Innovative and Creative Practice

This level is directed to practitioners **involved in assessing and making recommendations about brothers and sisters staying together and connected** to enable knowledge, skills and interventions that implement the guidance in practice. All Leaders undertaking supervision of these workers must also understand this level along with the **additional leadership competencies** that follow this level and are noted in section 5.

### 4.3.1 Legislation

#### Learning outcome

- Be able to demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of legislation, policy drivers and national frameworks, both those specific to sibling relationships and the wider childcare legislation and context

#### Knowledge demonstrated

- Sound knowledge of childcare legislation and in particular the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, the The Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021, Children’s Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (which placed GIRFEC and corporate parenting duties in legislation)
- Understand definitions of sibling relationships and the UNCRC and children’s rights within this context and Corporate Parenting duties
- Sound practice knowledge of the Getting It Right for Every Child National Practice Model as the overarching framework, and how it is applied.

#### Skills evidenced

- Application of legislation, frameworks, and guidance in practice.
- Within your role in relation to the child, can use legislation to support children’s needs and rights, and legal processes including the Children’s Hearing and Court Processes.

### **4.3.2 Guidance**

#### **Learning outcome**

- Be able to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the staying together and connected guidance.

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Be able to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the new national practice guidance and the key principles and changes.

#### **Skills evidenced**

- Evidence the application of the guidance in practice and continually reflect on your practice and improvement.
- Identifying any organisational or cultural barriers to promoting sibling contact.

### **4.3.3 Be Informed**

#### **Learning outcome**

- Know and understand the aspirations of The Promise and actively promote cultural and practice change within your organisation.

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Knowledge of key messages from people with care experience of the lifetime impact of not remaining connected with siblings and how older siblings can provide ongoing secure relationships and support.

#### **Skills evidenced**

- Ensure your contribution to assessments is informed and evidences the key knowledge of the importance of brothers and sisters remaining together and connected, and how challenges and barriers to this can be challenged and overcome.
- Undertake risk assessment of sibling separation.



- Ensure recording is understandable, jargon free and accessible to children and their families.

#### **4.3.4 Assessment**

##### **Learning outcome**

- Taking responsibility and demonstrating ability to accurately assess a child or young person's needs in order to safeguard and promote their wellbeing and in the context of remaining connected to those they regard as a sibling. This should be an ongoing assessment that reflects the voice of the child now and throughout their childhood and early adulthood.

##### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Knowledge and understanding of child development, the impact of trauma and experiences of loss, instability, and abuse.
- Knowledge and understanding of the benefits of relationships that are supported, sustained and that the enduring nature of sibling relationships is evidenced to be central to emotional wellbeing.
- Ability to use knowledge, key research and understanding to provide evidence informed assessments and recommendations.
- With ongoing assessment, understanding how children and young people can be supported to develop relationships with siblings they have separated from and to repair and grow fractured relationships.

##### **Skills evidenced**

- Using the Getting It Right for Every Child Framework, undertake a strength based, multidisciplinary holistic assessment of each child which is trauma and developmentally informed.
- Show your ability to listen and hear children and young people, paying attention to quieter voices and younger children's needs and views. Have the confidence to challenge and advocate for the child.
- Ability to engage children, families, and carers in the assessment, reflecting everyone's needs and views.

- Focus on practice that builds and strengthens sibling relationships and where damaged, focuses on the repairing and rebuilding of those sibling relationships. Demonstrate commitment to making a positive difference in your agency and within your corporate parenting responsibilities.

### **4.3.5 Recommendations**

#### **Learning outcome**

- Make recommendations based on sound evidence and informed knowledge about the best way in which brothers and sisters can stay together and if this is not appropriate how they stay connected as frequently as is in their interests and in keeping with their views.

#### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Knowledge and understanding of theory and evidence informed practice around how to sustain, rebuild and maintain relationships between sisters and brothers.

#### **Skills evidenced**

- Link understanding from assessment, evidence critical thinking to recommendations that are trauma and developmentally informed. Using this evidence contributes to decision making that forms robust plans to ensure sisters and brothers stay together where appropriate and remain connected through relevant, age and stage appropriate and person-centered contact with each other.

### **4.3.6 Planning**

#### **Learning outcome**

- To contribute as a critical part of the team around the child, and in conjunction with the child to the plan for each child taking account of their current and future relationships with brothers and sisters

ensuring plans meet identified need for in person, indirect and creative forms of contact.

- Demonstrate awareness of the importance of nurturing brother and sister relationships.

### **Knowledge demonstrated**

- Show knowledge of creative thinking around possibilities for connection.

### **Skills evidenced**

- Demonstrate in your practice individual contribution to creation of children's plans that are informed by robust assessment and the views of each sibling. The plan should reflect the child's relationships with their identified sisters and brothers and ensure and enable these relationships to flourish.
- Demonstrate ability to prioritise the support required for children, families and their carers to make reality plans for family time together by ensuring appropriate spaces, opportunities and resources to allow for successful time together. Demonstrate contribution to ensuring that the scaffolding to support relationships is in place.

## **4.3.7 Review**

### **Learning outcome**

Ensure that regular reviews are carried out as defined in legislation and local policies ensuring ongoing assessment, that is evidence informed and which includes the views of each child.

### **Knowledge demonstrated**

Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of the reviewing process, its strengths and challenges.

### **Skills evidenced**

Ability to show contribution to making any review child and young person centered and meaningful.

## 4.4 Additional Leadership Responsibilities.

Leaders of enhanced skill level practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that **the culture and resources of their organisation** support the best possible outcomes for brothers and sisters.

Leaders and Managers should ensure the right **scaffolding and infrastructure** is in place to enable practitioners to put the sibling legislation and guidance into practice. This includes the following:

- Preparing local guidance on how your agency will implement, act, make decisions and review the staying together and connected guidance.
- Reviewing existing brothers and sisters' plans in the light of the new guidance.
- Having in place and implementing supervision and support for staff involved in the assessment, decision making, planning, ongoing review and support of sibling contact and family time.
- Ensuring that processes to monitor and review children's plans are in place, which enable the best interests of every child in family time.
- Monitor arrangements and scrutiny processes for contact plans to ensure positive outcomes are achieved and that plans are in keeping with staying together and connected guidance.
- Ensuring that when brothers and sisters' plans are reviewed this is carried out by the same Reviewing officer or Chair.

Leaders and Managers should have awareness of the **wider resource needs** arising from implementation of the brothers and sisters' legislation and feed into relevant commissioning and review of resource provision,

**Commissioning Officers** should contribute to ensuring resources are available so that brothers and sisters can live together where this is appropriate or as near to each other as is possible.

Managers should have appropriate **monitoring and quality assurance systems** in place to enable identification of need in this area.

All systems and agencies must work together in the best interests of the child to achieve the aspiration of the legislation including local authorities,

health boards, education services third sector providers, the children's hearings and courts.

## **5. Suggested Learning Methods.**

People learn in many different ways and so the delivery of the 3 skills levels should offer a variety of methods of delivery including e-learning, face to face discussion, visual and video, written formats and the opportunity to explore reflectively the implementation of the National Practice Guidance. Suggested formats for each level include:

### **Level 1: Learning Methods**

Alongside general awareness raising, combined e-learning module with evaluation to ensure understanding, use of case studies to understand application in practice and information regarding where to signpost within Scottish Government/ GIRFEC website with active links to organisations.

### **Level 2: Learning Methods.**

Combined e-learning module for underpinning knowledge, use of mixed method group learning to develop evidence informed assessment skills, webinars, presentation of assessment and contributing to care planning for children and young people.

### **Level 3: Learning Methods.**

It is particularly important at this level that knowledge, skills, and competence can be evidenced by learners. Methods could include e-learning modules, online task completion and evaluation face to face training, demonstration of models of assessment and a reflective element to demonstrate competence in using this learning in practice. Practitioners

should be supported by communities of practice and opportunities for mentoring from more experienced colleagues in addition to the support provided by line managers.

## Appendix A

**The following is provided as a guide to which roles would be best suited to each level of learning on the framework.**

### **Level one - Awareness**

- Corporate parents including housing, police, general education staff, and general health staff including CAMHS,
- Adult SWS including mental health and addictions,
- 3rd sector general,
- LA Legal Services,
- Solicitors generally and those registered with the Legal Aid Board/members of the Family Law Association/Family Law Subcommittee,
- Throughcare and aftercare staff,
- Universal services,
- housing,
- police,
- elected members.

### **Level Two – Informed – Team around the child**

- Advice and response/duty Social Workers/ early pregnancy services,
- Children’s Hearing Scotland and Panel Members,
- Court/Sheriff,
- Safeguarders,
- Teachers, head teachers, virtual head teachers,
- Education support staff, school counsellors and pastoral staff including guidance teachers,
- Early years staff-childminders, nurseries (private and local authority),
- Health visitors, medical advisors. Looked After and child protection Child Health Teams,
- Contact Supervisors/social work assistants/paraprofessionals,
- Thirds sector partners providing services to Social Work Services,

- Residential Carers including those working in secure accommodation,
- Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Carers,
- Care Inspectorate,
- Adoption and Permanence Panels, Fostering Panels, Kinship Panels, and the Agency Decision Maker,
- Continuing Care and supported lodging providers,
- Social work students,
- Promise and GIRFEC workers.

### **Level Three - Enhanced**

- Review Coordinators,
- Placing Social Workers/Children's Social Workers/Team Managers/Service Managers,
- Supervising Social Workers- Kinship, Fostering and Adoption, Permanence, throughcare and aftercare,
- Children's Social Workers with kinship role,
- Family group decision making coordinators, life- long links coordinators,
- Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Carers where there is a significant contact remit,
- Residential social worker managers and supervisors.

### **Leadership**

- Children and Families Social Work Managers- all levels,
- Commissioning and Monitoring Officers,
- Managers responsible for scaffolding and resourcing services to support brothers and sisters. This includes Local Authority Services, residential and foster care in independent and voluntary sectors and Adoption Agencies and support services.