The DCP Practice Principles
THE SIX PILLARS OF OUR PRACTICE
THE DCP PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The Department for Child Protection (DCP) is focused on ensuring the safety of children and young people in South Australia. The DCP works in partnership with families and government and non-government agencies to support the most at risk and vulnerable children and young people in our community.

Ensuring children, young people and families receive high quality services is a pivotal objective of the department. The Child Protection Systems Royal Commission Report 2016 recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on professional skills and judgment in decision making. It is essential that this professional judgement is underpinned by a shared understanding of the essential elements of quality child protection practice. The Practice Principles encourage a focus on what matters most to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, and their families.

The Practice Principles are an important element of DCP Practice Approach and reflect best practice aligned with the department’s legislative mandate under the \textit{Children and Young People’s Safety Act 2017}. The Practice Principles of child centred, cultural safety, strengthening families, supporting carers, partnership and collaboration, and learning culture have been identified as crucial pillars of practice. DCP understands the fundamental importance of working alongside Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities to achieve lasting, positive change. The Practice Principles acknowledges that due to a history of injustice and dispossession, Aboriginal children and young people are overrepresented in every stage of the child protection system. The Practice Principles recognises the strengths of Aboriginal approaches to parenting, Aboriginal family-led decision making, and the importance of ensuring Aboriginal children and young people maintain connections to culture.

The Practice Principles will be used across the DCP to guide operational practice, and inform the development of policy and practice guidance. The Practice Principles will also be used in supervision to support reflective practice.

DCP anticipates that the Practice Principles will assist partner agencies to work collaboratively with the DCP to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.
The DCP Practice Principles

THE SIX PILLARS OF OUR PRACTICE

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CHILD CENTRED
Safety | Rights | Voice
Responsive to individual needs

CULTURAL SAFETY
Respect for diversity | Connection
Genuine partnership

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES
Respect | Trust
Building safety

SUPPORTING CARERS
Valued | Advocate
Team work

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION
Mutual respect | Enduring relationships
Shared knowledge

LEARNING CULTURE
Bravery | Growth
Expertise | Reflection
Child centred practice is crucial to providing services that ensure children’s safety and meet their long term needs. Decision making responds to the unique needs of the child or young person and recognises critical developmental time frames in childhood and adolescence. The right of children and young people to have their voices heard in matters concerning their care is respected and supported. Child centred practice recognises the fundamental right of children and young people to be connected to family and culture.
WHAT CHILD CENTRED PRACTICE LOOKS LIKE:

• The safety of children and young people is paramount
• Children’s rights are respected
• The importance of cultural, social and emotional wellbeing is reflected in decision making
• The voice and cues of children and young people are recognised and respected
• The unique needs of children and young people are considered and responded to
• The critical need of children to develop secure attachments is reflected in case planning and timely decision making
• Connection to family, culture and community is valued and actively promoted
• Consistent with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, efforts are undertaken immediately to identify the best placement for Aboriginal children and young people when safety at home cannot be achieved
• Contemporary knowledge of child protection practice and awareness of cultural implications of decision making underpins professional judgement
• Ongoing assessment considers the child or young person and family’s changing needs
• Case planning and decision making reflects an understanding of the importance of stability, permanence, attachment relationships, culture, identity and belonging to children’s wellbeing
• Decisions about the care of Aboriginal children and young people are based on Aboriginal people’s cultural values and belief systems
• Genuine commitment is demonstrated to improving outcomes for children and young people

AM I….

• Able to separate the safety, needs and wellbeing of the child or young person from the needs and wants of their family and others?
• Spending enough time with and getting to know the child or young person so that we are building a relationship?
• Undertaking my own learning about the child or young person’s culture and communicating about this with the child in a way that enhances their identity and self-esteem?
• Warm and genuine in my contact with the child or young person and clear about appropriate boundaries?
• Engaging with the child or young person directly about their wishes and views rather than relying solely on carers or others who know them?
• Listening to their views and responding accordingly where it is safe to do so?
• Seeking to understand and reflect on how my own values and potential biases impact decision making?
• Proactively supporting the child or young person’s connection to kin, culture, community and country?
• Considering what the child or young person’s behaviour is communicating?
• Working with carers to identify opportunities that support the child or young person to develop positive self esteem?
• Clear about the child or young person’s needs? Using assessments of relevant professionals, including Aboriginal cultural guidance, to inform my assessment?
• Case planning in partnership with the child or young person, family and carers (the Care Team), and Aboriginal community controlled organisations where appropriate? Making decisions that are consistent with the child or young person’s developmental needs, and need for stability and certainty?
• Looking for opportunities where the child or young person can have a say in decisions that affect them? Including them in meetings and annual reviews in a way that they can manage?
• Ensuring that children and young people have connection to their family in a way that meets their cultural needs, individual needs, circumstances and development?
• Putting plans in place that support the child or young person to reach their full potential?
• Supporting the child or young person to develop a coherent, age appropriate narrative regarding their experiences, family and entry to care?
• Making sure important documents, photos and possessions are being cared for and kept for children and young people and/or they are being supported to develop a life story book?
CULTURAL SAFETY

DCP is committed to practicing with cultural safety when working with children, young people, families and communities. Culturally safe practice recognises the strength of culture in helping children and young people develop a positive identity, and promoting their health, wellbeing, self-esteem and development. Active work to ensure children and young people have an ongoing connection to culture, family, kin, community and country is recognised as a pivotal role of DCP. It is acknowledged that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people within the child protection system results from a history of injustice embedded within laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions. DCP recognises that culturally safe and responsive practice is essential in reducing this overrepresentation. This is why we must recognise the strengths of Aboriginal approaches to parenting, Aboriginal family-led decision making, and the importance of ensuring Aboriginal children and young people in care maintain connections to culture.
WHAT CULTURALLY SAFE PRACTICE LOOKS LIKE:

- Openness, honesty and a desire to understand how culture influences practice, and a willingness to enhance the cultural responsiveness of our practice
- Cultural connection and participation is acknowledged as essential for ensuring good health, wellbeing and positive outcomes for children, including identity and self-esteem
- The impact of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities is recognised
- Ongoing reflection upon cultural differences and how this impacts engagement and decision making is actively undertaken
- Partnership is demonstrated in planning and critical decision making with children and young people, families, kinship carers, the non-government sector (including Aboriginal community controlled organisations) and communities
- Children and young people’s right to know about and experience their family, culture and country is actively supported
- Internal and external cultural collaboration and consultation strengthens decision making
- The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is recognised and respected
- The cultural knowledge, authority and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is valued and respected
- The core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Prevention, Identity (Skin and Clan Group), Partnership, Placement Hierarchy, Participation and Connection are implemented through active efforts
- Aboriginal and CALD Cultural Identity Support Tools, genograms and Life Story Books are used as living documents to support children’s knowledge of and connection with their family, culture and community
- Accountability for culturally safe practice and identifying and challenging unsafe practice is shared by all staff
- All staff working with Aboriginal children and families will have a high level of knowledge and skill in relation to cultural competence
- Aboriginal staff members will be assisted to manage the unique considerations involved in being part of a community that they support.
REFLECTION – AM I….

• Proactively educating myself about the culture of families that I am working with?
• Seeking to understand Aboriginal history and its impact on Aboriginal people?
• Exploring all options for keeping the child or young person with family or kin and scoping appropriate family based placements?
• Implementing all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle to ensure Aboriginal children and young people can maintain connection to culture?
• Recognising the individuality of each family and avoiding making judgements based on preconceived ideas or experiences with other families?
• Ensuring that I am not engaging in any practices or behaviours that diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity of the child or young person and their family?
• Being responsive and understanding of the family’s previous experience of welfare agencies or government authorities?
• Seeking to understand Aboriginal kinship systems, social organisations and family relationships?
• Actively demonstrating that the child or young person’s cultural identity is valued and respected? (i.e. showing genuine interest in cultural activities, relationships, events, stories etc).
• Developing and regularly updating the child or young person’s genogram?
• Keeping my word and demonstrating I am trustworthy?
• Ensuring that a placement in care supports the child or young person’s connection to and expression of culture and spirituality?
• Actively engaging with the child or young person, carers, family, kin and community in developing and implementing the Aboriginal/CALD Cultural Identity Support Tool (and other relevant tools such as Aboriginal Life Story Books)? Monitoring and updating these tools on an ongoing basis?
• Consulting with Principal Aboriginal Consultants, Kanggarendi, Aboriginal Family Scoping Team, senior Aboriginal staff, the Multicultural Services team and external cultural consultation (including Aboriginal Gazetted organisations and Aboriginal community controlled organisations)?
• Mindful of my dress, body language and demeanour in consideration of cultural protocols?
• Ensuring that building capacity and increasing skills in relation to cultural safety and responsiveness forms part of my professional development?
• Working alongside my colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, acknowledging the expertise and experiences that they bring to the department and actively integrating these learnings into my practice?
• Building relationships with and developing knowledge of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services?
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

We know that children and young people experience better outcomes across their life domains when they are safely cared for within their family and community. We also recognise the significant outcomes which can be achieved by enabling family-led decision making.

A principle commitment of DCP is to do all we can to support families and prevent children entering care. The DCP Practice Approach recognises that collaboration with, and the full participation of, families is critical in every case. We also recognise that due to intergenerational trauma, power imbalances, and experiences of racism and discrimination, some families may be reluctant to engage with the department. This is why, we must work to build and re-build relationships centred on empathy, transparency, respect, trust and shared power.
WHAT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES LOOKS LIKE:

• Respect, compassion, persistence and patience underpins engagement
• Commitment to building trusting, genuine relationships
• The challenges of caring for children and young people are acknowledged
• Families are recognised and acknowledged as experts in their own lives, needs and culture
• Families and communities are supported to lead decision making to establish and maintain safety for their children
• Early and effective intervention aims to prevent placement into care
• Partnerships are built with families to assist them to establish safety for their children
• Collaborative case planning is central to transparent and responsive practice
• Strengths, including Aboriginal approaches to parenting and connections to culture, are recognised and celebrated
• Realistic and achievable outcomes are identified with families and implemented in partnership with those families and their supports
• Families, including extended families, are supported to develop and maintain best connections with their children in care

We recognise that families in rural and remote regions may require different approaches to achieve desired outcomes

REFLECTION – AM I...

• Engaging with genuineness, non-judgement and respect?
• Taking into account cultural considerations and engaging in a way which is culturally safe and responsive?
• Being clear about my role and reason for involvement?
• Keeping in regular contact to build relationships and trust?
• Following through on what I agree to do?
• Giving the family a chance to tell their story?
• Reflecting to the family my understanding of their story, and checking I have understood correctly?
• Considerate of the social and structural disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal families and communities?
• Being clear about safety concerns and the impacts on children or young people’s wellbeing?
• Specifying required changes and non-negotiables in a way that the family can understand?
• Being creative when engaging with families for whom comprehension of information is a challenge?
• Engaging early through Family Group Conferencing or family led decision making?
• Using the expertise of Aboriginal staff when working alongside Aboriginal families?
• Utilising interpreters and translators where communication in the English language may be a barrier to the family having a comprehensive understanding of the information I am presenting?
• Engaging respectfully when discussing child protection concerns and having difficult conversations?
• Considering how discussions can be conducted in a culturally safe and responsive manner? (i.e. the right people are involved, the venue is appropriate and consideration is given to cultural protocols such as men’s and women’s business, and sorry business)
• Acknowledging the family’s experiences and resilience and reflecting their skills and strengths back to them?
• Considering the possibility that perceived resistance may be a response to the anxiety associated with statutory involvement rather than a lack of willingness to cooperate or capacity to change?
• Considering that historical practices, intergenerational trauma, power imbalances, and experiences of racism and discrimination may cause Aboriginal families to feel fearful of engaging with the department?
• Actively supporting the family to engage with other services?
• Acknowledging that circumstances may change and responding appropriately in a timely manner?
• Keeping the family informed of their children’s social, emotional and cultural wellbeing if they are in care? (i.e. sending school reports, photos etc).
• Having regular reflective supervision to support case planning and develop my skills?
• Attending professional development to build my skills in engaging families, risk assessment, case planning and effectively intervening?
SUPPORTING CARERS

Where the safety needs of children and young people can not be met at home, they may require placement in care. The DCP recognises the critical role carers play in supporting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, and is committed to supporting and working in partnership with carers. DCP recognises that foster and kinship carers can become ‘psychological parents’ for children and young people in their long term care and will ensure that these special relationships are respected and prioritised.
WHAT SUPPORTING CARERS LOOKS LIKE:

• The role of the carer in supporting children and young people is deeply valued
• Developing positive, collaborative relationships with carers is seen as a core professional responsibility for DCP staff
• The relationships that build between children and young people, and their carers are valued and protected
• Caring for children and young people who have experienced trauma is acknowledged as an often complex and challenging task
• Working in partnership with carers and other care team members, and actively supporting placements to promote good outcomes for children and young people
• Relevant information about children and young people, their needs and the trauma they have experienced is shared with carers in a timely manner
• Carers are recognised as holding invaluable information and as having in-depth understanding of children and young people’s needs developed through providing them with day to day care
• Carers are included in care team meetings and decision making processes
• Differences of opinion are discussed openly and respectfully
• Carers are provided with clear rationales for decisions

REFLECTION – AM I….

• Communication and demonstrating respect for carers and their role?
• Demonstrating my understanding of the pivotal importance of carers’ relationships with children and young people?
• Taking into account cultural considerations and engaging in a way which is culturally safe and responsive?
• Investing in my relationships with carers in order to support good outcomes for children and young people?
• Following through on what I agree to do?
• Acknowledging that caring for children and young people with trauma experiences is often difficult?
• Providing carers with relevant information about children and young people in their care?
• Recognising that carers hold valuable information about children and young people’s needs?
• Including carers in care team meetings and decision making processes?
• Discussing differences of opinion openly and respectfully?
• Providing carers are provided with clear rationales for decisions?
PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Protecting children and young people requires a highly collaborative approach. Working in partnership with children and young people and families is essential if we are to achieve lasting change that ensures the safety of children. Developing strong, respectful relationships in the child’s care team ensures that together we can provide the best possible care, tailored to the individual needs of children and young people. Our practice is enhanced when we partner with government, non-government organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations as we benefit from the knowledge, skills and perspectives shared through collaboration. At risk and vulnerable children and young people, and their families, benefit from a service system that works together to ensure best outcomes. Staff across DCP work together to ensure better outcomes for children and families.
WHAT WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION LOOKS LIKE:

- Commitment is demonstrated to building transparent, respectful and enduring partnerships with:
  - Children and young people
  - Families
  - Kinship carers
  - Carers
  - Communities
  - Service providers (including therapists) and interagency partners
  - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
  - The Commissioner for Children and Young People
  - The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
  - Office for the Guardian for Children and Young People (including the advocate for Aboriginal children)
  - Researchers and universities

- Collaborative interagency practice and information sharing promotes child safety and wellbeing

- Clarity on roles and responsibilities is established to ensure effective intervention

- Sharing knowledge in teams and across the department and sector builds practice wisdom

- Genuine partnership with other agencies leads to better decision making and improved outcomes

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are engaged in critical decision making for their children and young people

- The need to work collaboratively with local service providers and communities to implement place based responses is acknowledged.

REFLECTION – AM I….

- Working in partnership with the care team?
- Ensuring I schedule care team meetings in a way that maximises participation of all parties?
- Open to the advice and the professional expertise of others?
- Seeking consultation for complex or potentially contentious issues?

- Seeking cultural guidance and consulting with appropriate Aboriginal partners?
- Clear about the roles and responsibilities of interagency partners?
- Communicating with, and keeping updated of, the progress of intervention undertaken by other agencies?
- Responsive to feedback from the children/families/carers/interagency partners I am working with?
- Thinking about how I can use feedback to improve my practice?
- Finding it difficult to engage with the child or young person, members of the family or part of the service system? Considering what I could do differently to improve relationships?
- Supporting key partners (the child or young person, the family, the carer) to participate in decision making?
- Providing adequate information to partners to allow them to participate in decision making, and to make informed decisions?
- Ensuring procedural fairness in my decision making?
- Engaging with internal partners including Principal Aboriginal Consultants, Kanggarendi, the Aboriginal Family Scoping Team, and external partners including Aboriginal gazetted and other community controlled organisations when working with Aboriginal children, families and communities?
- Explaining to partners (i.e. families, carers, agencies) the rationale for decisions that have been made?
- Communicating with others in the way I would expect to be communicated with, and in a way which reflects their cultural values and beliefs?
- Considering the most effective and respectful way of communicating for particular issues? (i.e. email, phone, face to face or engaging the expertise of Aboriginal staff).
LEARNING CULTURE

A culture of reflection and learning is a cornerstone of high quality service provision. Children, families and communities benefit from services provided by a workforce that is continually striving to do better. Staff capacity to continue to do the difficult work of protecting children is enhanced when they regularly reflect on their practice and build new skills.
WHAT A LEARNING CULTURE LOOKS LIKE:

- Staff are empowered and supported to be courageous
- Staff are accountable in decision making
- Child protection expertise is continually developing
- Staff are energetic and have a desire for continual improvement of practice and to achieve positive outcomes for all children and young people
- Professional skill and practice wisdom is supported by evidence based practice approaches and tools
- Ongoing professional development takes staff on a cultural learning journey and supports increased cultural proficiency
- Reflective practice and regular supervision is embedded at individual, team and organisational level
- Supervision arrangements for Aboriginal staff supports staff to be culturally safe and acknowledges the unique considerations for those staff members being a part of a community that they support
- Learnings from stakeholder feedback, reviews, research, evaluation and reflection drives practice improvement.

REFLECTION – AM I….

- Frequently thinking about ways I can improve my practice?
- Open to different ideas, perspectives and ways of thinking?
- Using my Performance Development Plan and supervision to identify my learning needs and career aspirations?
- Referring to policy and practice guidance to inform my work?
- Identifying sources of cultural guidance (policy, documents, senior Aboriginal staff and business units, or external partners) when working with Aboriginal children, young people and their families?
- Considering practice areas where I lack confidence and identifying ways that I could address this through supervision, co-working or professional development?
- Finding opportunities to seek feedback on the quality of my practice (including feedback from children, families, other stakeholders and colleagues)?
- Striving to remain up to date on best practice and new developments in child protection?
- Respectfully and supportively helping my colleagues reflect on their own practice through providing constructive feedback and encouragement?
- Creating opportunities to pause and reflect on practice?
- Changing and adapting my practice based on new information I am learning?
- Thinking about new ways to approach my work and sharing ideas with others?