

A quick guide to Coventry Family Valued

**for Children's
Services**



This leaflet describes our approach to working with children and families, our commitments to them, and what this means for you.

It has been written for Children's Services practitioners.

What is Coventry Family Valued?

Coventry Family Valued is our way of working with children and families.

Coventry Family Valued is about **empowering families to find their own solutions** and make changes in their lives. At the heart of Family Valued is a focus on how we work with families to build relationships.

Coventry Family Valued seeks to **strengthen our relationships with families and improve outcomes for children.**

Where children are at risk, we will continue to take swift and decisive action to protect them.

Our commitment to Children and Families

- We help families find their own solutions
- We help families stay together where possible
- We explain to children and families why we are working with them
- We use clear language so that everyone understands what we mean.

Promoting a city-wide change in how we work with families

Coventry Family Valued is about achieving better outcomes for vulnerable children by creating **a city-wide culture and ethos of relational working.**

This commitment will create the conditions for good social work practice and support Children's Services to keep families together, where safe and appropriate.



“ ”

We couldn't have asked for a better person to support us as a family.

Parent

The 'three spires' of Coventry Family Valued:

1

**Making Coventry a
child friendly city**

2

**Family-led decision
making**

3

**The Coventry Way
(our practice approach)**

A CHILD

FRIENDLY

CITY

1

FAMILY

LED

DECISION

MAKING

2

THE

COVENTRY

WAY

3

The campaign to make Coventry a **child friendly city** is about being a place where children are **valued, supported, and enjoy themselves.**

We want Coventry to be the best place in the UK for children to grow up.

We are **working with people and businesses** across the city, asking them what can be done to make Coventry a city which is child and family friendly.

“ ”

We want to have opportunities, be able to settle in our community and become familiar with it

A group of Coventry children



How are we making Coventry a child friendly city?

Family-led decision-making is about supporting the family to be in control of their own lives. Central to this is a simple idea – that families are the most important influence on outcomes for children, and if we work with them, solutions can be found earlier and more effectively.

What this means for us:

- We use **Family Network meetings** to encourage families to draw on support from their whole network
- We develop **Safety Plans** with families. (We no longer use Working Agreements.)
- We enable and host **Family Group Conferences**

“ I was really worried about getting my family involved and it was quite helpful in the end to open up and tell them what was going on and have their support... It brought my side of the family closer.

Child



What is family-led decision making?

Our Family Group Conferencing Service

A **Family Group Conference (FGC)** is a meeting that brings together all the people in a child's life to develop a plan to protect and support them. The process aims to be **empowering for the family**, putting them at the centre of decisions about the future of their child.

Decision-making in FGCs is led by the family, facilitated by an FGC coordinator (not a social worker). Before the meeting, the FGC coordinator works with the child's family to help them understand the process and issues that will be talked about.

The intended outcome of an FGC is a **plan for the child** that allows them to safely remain with their family. Because of the involvement of the family in developing these plans, they are more likely to be sustainable.

“ They listened to me and involved me in all decisions made, and really helped my family when we were going through a tough time. ”

Child

How we use language

Language is powerful and is part of everyone's life.

Spoken language can change our mood, how we feel about ourselves, someone else, or a situation.

Over the years, Children's Services has created language of its own. Some of this can be helpful but often it can create distance between us and families, and feel negative, impersonal and hurtful.

Family Valued requires us to be conscious of our language, and ensure it is **positive, inclusive and helps us build relationships with families**. For example, we use children and parents' names to when talking to them or when discussing our support with colleagues.

The Coventry Way

The Coventry Way is our name for how we practice social work – with relational and restorative practice being central to our work with children and families, strengthening our use of the Signs of Safety model.

Restorative and Relational practice is about us putting relationships at the centre of how we approach interactions with children and families, as well as colleagues and partners.

Restorative Practice supports us to recognise the importance of working with children, families and each other, through the use of high-challenge and high-support. Relational Practice focuses on the positive qualities of a person or group and recognises that everyone has unique potential, strengths and capabilities. It is about listening to, and valuing people's experiences and voice, and appreciating their lived reality.

Signs of Safety is our method for social work practice. It provides a series of tools and methodologies to help social workers support families, focusing on the strengths of families and how we can work with them.

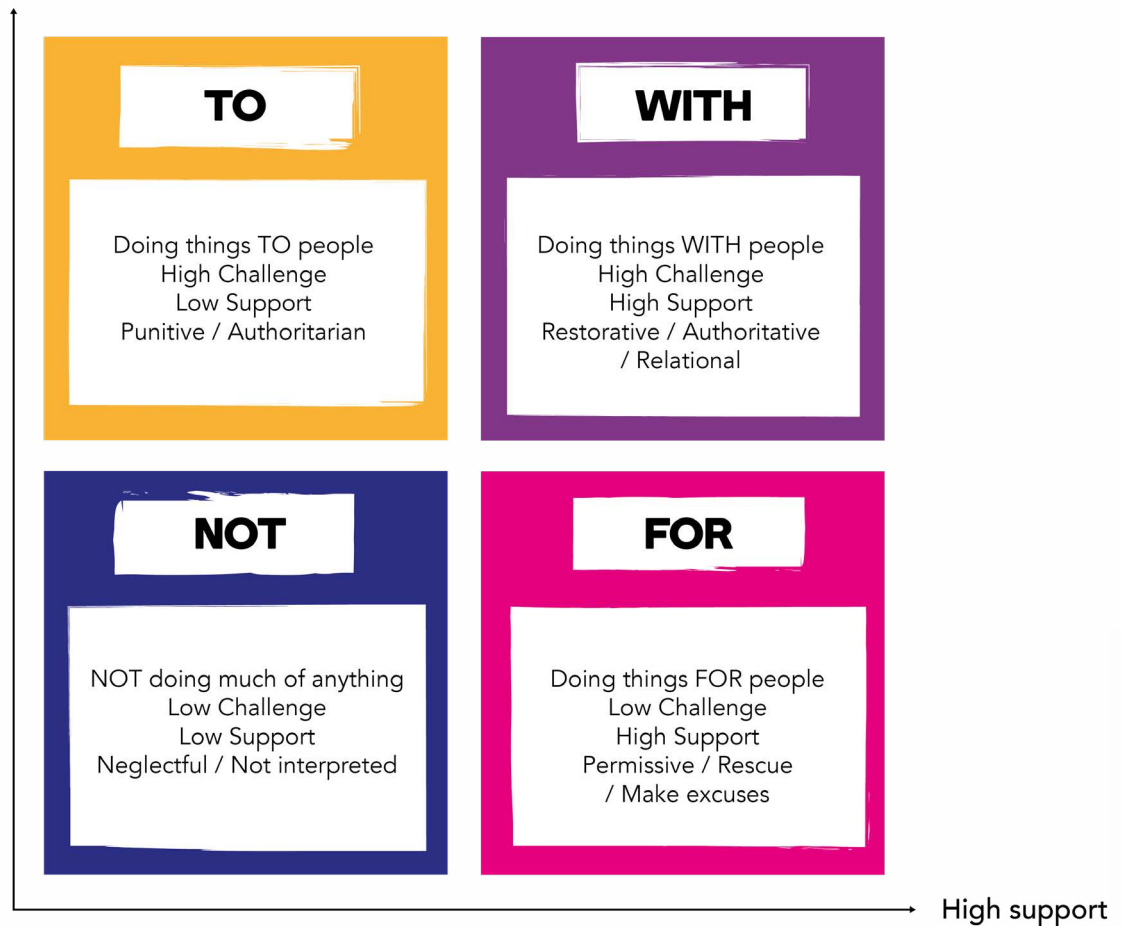


What this means for us:

- **Signs of Safety** is 'what we do.' **Restorative and relational practice** is 'how we do it.'
- We use family-friendly tools, such as Words and Pictures, Signs of Safety mapping, and creative way of working with children to hear what they say.
- We reflect on our **use of language**, its impact on families and the way it influences practice
- We value all colleagues' contribution, using 'check-ins' and **listening to each other**
- We **work with partners** and invest in building good relationships.

The Four Ways of Being:

High challenge



Adapted from: Wachtel, T. & McCold, P. in Strang, H. & Braithwaite, J. (eds), (2001), Restorative Justice and Civil Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

What does this mean for staff in Children's Services?

Family Valued represents a **shift in our approach to working with children and families**, building on existing strengths-based practice. It sends out a clear message about how much we value families.

You will notice changes in our processes, practices and systems. All this will be designed to embed this new way of thinking, and put **relationships between families, colleagues and partners at the core of our work.**

Family Valued means that risk will need to be understood and managed differently. Wherever possible, and where safe to do so, risk will be managed through safety plans developed with the family. However, where children are at risk of significant harm, we will continue to take swift and decisive action to protect them.

“ ”

I was completely involved in all decisions with my child, [the team] were great in communicating with me.

Parent

We want you to be excited about this change and join us on the journey!