



Sussex Family Justice Quality Circle Creating a Culture of Respect

Guiding Principles

All of us who work in the Family Courts do so with the aim of achieving the best outcomes for the children and families with whom we work. To achieve this, the court environment needs to be a safe and respectful space where families and professionals can feel that their voice has been heard. The court is powerful and influential, and should model interactions that are respectful, sensitive, open and trustworthy. This document sets out how we approach each other.

Approach

- We should listen to each other (the family and professionals) and treat everyone with respect and without judgement and avoid using inflammatory language. We should speak up when professionals interact or behave in a way that is disrespectful or unacceptable.
- We should seek to be balanced – giving due credit to positive work done by parents, children, Cafcass Officers, social workers and others.
- Criticism needs to be delivered in a constructive and respectful way, allowing for disagreement, robust challenge and holding people/organisations to account, without being unduly harsh or undermining of individuals.
- Parties/representatives should introduce themselves in Court, explaining what their role is – this is particularly important for the family.
- Be mindful and come from a position of empathy and respect for everyone's social, cultural, racial, religious and sexual background or disability.

Language:

- Families are entitled to have options set out for them in a way that can be understood
- Language used should be clear and direct and we should avoid words and phrases that are obscure or meaningless. So far as possible, Court Reports should be written with both the parent (and older children/young people) in mind using plain language and avoiding jargon.
- Precision is helpful e.g. when using the word, "attachment" (does this just mean relationship?) – or if talking about significant harm, name the type of abuse.
- Inflammatory or loaded language should be avoided (e.g. use of "Disclosure" instead of "account") and we should strive to diminish rather than escalate conflict.
- When professional / legal terms are required these should be explained and families directed to: "[Language that Cares](#)" from TACT.
- Some families would also benefit from excellent independent literature like, "[How do family courts deal with cases about children where there might be domestic abuse – A guidance note for parents and professionals](#)" from the Transparency Project.
- If a parent needs extra help to understand, find creative ways to ensure that happens e.g. use visual material, employ a translator, or a learning disabilities advocate, intermediary or anyone who will be able to help them understand.