

Embedding the Four Cornerstones into Team and Service Plans

The Four Cornerstones (also known as The Rotherham Charter) were co-produced by Rotherham parent carers and practitioners and are based on stories of experience told by children and young people with SEND and their families. By embedding the Cornerstones in systems, policy and practice trust builds, relationships will be strengthened and co-production becomes more meaningful:



Creating a team or service plan that aims to embed the Cornerstones in policy and practice should be an outcome of a co-productive process that actively involves *everybody* in the team's community in its development, including service users/partners.

How can this be achieved?

Invest in building relationships Engaging and including all partners in co-production usually involves strengthening relationships. This might mean being prepared to arrange meetings with some individuals and groups at times/venues that will help them feel most comfortable, and being resilient, positive and creative if they lack confidence or enthusiasm.

Include everybody, always It is vital that partners do not feel excluded from conversations as this can impact on trust. Try to start and maintain co-production by ensuring that everybody is involved from the start.

Let go of the need to control what happens Consider power imbalances and the nature of equal partnership. Partners may perceive that they have a responsibility to control activities, because traditionally this is an aspect of their role, or that others hold more power than they do and therefore their voice is less important. For some individuals this will significantly affect their personal confidence and trust in the process in which they are being invited to participate.

Be honest The implicit imbalance of power that might exist when people are invited to co-produce may be heightened at a strategic level, although it can exist within any interaction. If the aim is to strengthen equal partnership working, addressing power differences openly, safely and honestly can create a more positive platform for future relationships.

Introduce, learn names and allow some time for chatter One way to address power imbalances is to take the time to get to know people at a human level. Ensure introductions take place, learn names and make space for individuals to have informal conversations that might be about their family and personal experiences.

Adopt a friendly approach that helps people feel welcome Smiling, making sure there are refreshments, and bringing some good humour are key ingredients. This approach in meetings can help diffuse tension and enable people to feel more comfortable. Facilitating refreshments, for example, demonstrates care and appreciation that some people are giving up their time despite the stress that might exist for them outside the scope of the meeting.

Offer choices Ask about the best time for people to meet or their best means of communication. Anybody who is a parent or carer may struggle to attend early or late meetings because of childcare responsibilities, which can be magnified when a child or young person experiences SEND. Some may find e-mails and meeting notes inaccessible but prefer texts or a phone call. Find out *how* they wish to participate.

Accept that you may need to change your plans, slow down and do things differently Some partners may not wish to attend formal meetings in formal rooms, at venues they find hard to access, at times of day impossible for them to attend. Co-production works best when leaders and managers are prepared to have their systems and usual way of working challenged and they are keen to work together with their team and service users to do things differently, if that is what they prefer.

Have an appreciative, systemic outlook that avoids blame and demonstrates empathy Co-production is about the relationships between people and so can often involve emotionally charged situations. Sometimes, the way somebody responds, which

might seem negative or aggressive, could be because that is their way of dealing with their own strong emotions. These may be generated by pressures on budgets, a breakdown in communication, a parent carer feeling overwhelmed by the systems they are trying to navigate personally or a practitioner who is feeling challenged and ends up passionately defending their position leaving others uncomfortable. Everybody needs people around them to help when emotions spill over. Acknowledging your own and others' feelings and being able to share vulnerabilities in a safe and open way can bring containment and greater experience of equality.

Acknowledge there can be different perspectives It is essential it is accepted there is always more than one perspective and that is okay. A solution is rarely found when an individual or organisation is targeted for blame.

Find strengths Implementing an appreciative, strengths-based approach is powerful. Recognising strengths and building on them instils greater confidence. It encourages questions such as, "What works?" rather than, "What doesn't work?" and "What is this person good at?" rather than, "What is wrong with this person?"

Explain or avoid jargon to empower others Communication is a purposeful activity so take care to communicate well, using accessible language. When people are working in co-production the way language is expressed can reinforce power imbalances. Working in co-production is a time for good listening and to ensure that those in the room who might have quieter or less confident voices have the space to feel sufficiently empowered to contribute and share their stories.

Prioritise child, young person and parent carer voices Prioritising service users, especially children, young people, parents and carers, can help redress some of the unspoken power inequalities that may be evident through body language, format or the tone of a meeting.

Agree ground-rules Agreeing ground-rules at the start of processes for how we will work together in co-production can help everybody feel safe, and groups may need to return to these from time to time.

Avoid making assumptions and be conscious of own constructs We all bring our personal constructs with us to situations based on our experiences and how others have reacted to us. These constructs often shape the way we make decisions about how to act, speak, think, live our lives and relate to others. When doing co-production and striving for equal partnership, we need to try to be conscious of our constructs and whether they are helpful or hindering the way we are responding, not only when we are reflecting on a situation afterwards, but also in the moment.

How to create a Cornerstones team or service plan

Draw upon the feedback gathered from team members and service users/partners to reflect on, discuss and agree together a response and potential follow-up action:

For each Cornerstone think about

- ✓ how well you are doing
- ✓ what does good look like?
- ✓ what are your examples of best practice?
- ✓ what is happening already?
- ✓ what could be better?
- ✓ how are you thinking about these questions in co-production?
- ✓ what do you need to do next? (to form the basis of your service plan)

Also consider how the Cornerstones

- ✓ feature in your vision/mission statement
- ✓ are modelled and promoted by leaders
- ✓ are included within your strategic plan
- ✓ are evident in your organisational values
- ✓ impact on organisational processes
- ✓ are embedded in recruitment processes
- ✓ determine joint decision-making
- ✓ affect budgets and investments
- ✓ help shape workforce development priorities

Using the Cornerstones to evaluate teams and services should feel an appreciative process. Confidence to take actions forward is always greater when starting from a place of strength, at a personal and organisational level. If teams know what they are doing well, they are likely to do more of it. As a result, it will be important for those facilitating discussions to support others involved to refocus on what is going well if everybody becomes too immersed in what is going wrong.

Once areas of strength are identified, areas for development will emerge under What could be better? It will be important for individuals within the team considering these questions to avoid defending their position because an area for development has been indicated despite best efforts. All experiences and perspectives need to be allowed so long as there is commitment to exploring next steps together constructively.

You may wish to use the Initial Evaluation grid below as a starting point to creating your plan. The format and content of how this features in your Team or Service Plan will be unique to each Team or Service.

Cornerstone	Strengths	Areas for Development
<p data-bbox="140 322 619 398">WELCOME AND CARE</p> <ul data-bbox="102 443 638 963" style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing a happy and secure environment or context ○ Nurturing confidence, wellbeing and self-esteem ○ Working together with you to build a supportive community ○ Making sure your voice is heard and valued ○ Responding with sensitivity ○ Communicating expectations clearly ○ Emphasising strengths and achievements 		
<p data-bbox="140 1122 619 1198">VALUE AND INCLUDE</p> <ul data-bbox="102 1220 638 2018" style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying needs early, welcoming your involvement at every stage ○ Having a 'can do' approach ○ Making sure that all our practitioners have the right skills and understanding ○ Sharing information about strengths and needs sensitively with relevant partners ○ Being creative and flexible so that we can respond in the best way to individual strengths, needs and changing circumstances ○ Involving all relevant partners in decision-making processes about referrals to others ○ Encouraging all partners to contribute to the development of our values, systems and policies 		

COMMUNICATE

- Asking for your views and involvement
- Being available when people need to talk and making time to listen
- Listening calmly and respectfully
- Responding promptly and following up
- Reviewing regularly
- Providing all the information needed in a timely way, in a form that will be understood
- Striving to use positive and constructive language

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

- Encouraging participation
- Valuing your contributions as an equal partner
- Working together to develop plans, set targets and create and deliver specific programmes
- Involving you in decisions about organisational changes and improvements