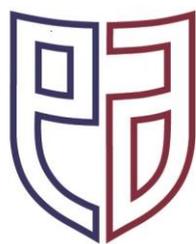


getting it right *for every child*

A Practitioners Guide to Chairing Team Around the Child meetings



East Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir an Ear



Introduction

This guidance is suitable for all Named Persons and Lead Professionals, regardless of the agency they are based in. The Team Around the Child (TAC) is the operational embodiment of the Single Planning Process supporting the Child's Plan in East Ayrshire. As such it is a key delivery mechanism for GIRFEC. This should be read in conjunction with the Team Around the Child Model Guidance and the All Ayrshire Child's Pathway.

<https://www.girfec-ayrshire.gov.uk>

This guidance is intended to assist:

- Named Persons and Lead Professionals who are new to chairing Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings
- People expecting to take on the role of Named Person or Lead Professional in the near future
- Professionals already experienced in leading meetings who want to brush up on their chairing skills and practices.

This guidance should allow you to:

- Explain the function and purpose of Team Around the Child meetings
- Understand the role and responsibility of the chairperson
- Communicate and engage effectively with everyone involved in meetings
- Structure and conduct solution focused meetings
- Use a range of tools to get the most out of a meeting
- Apply a range of strategies for handling different behaviours in meetings.

1. Planning your meeting

1.1 The child or young person's view

Every child has the right to have their voice heard and professionals need to listen to what they think and feel in order for plans to be effective. Understanding the views and feelings of children, recording these and taking action on them is critical to GIRFEC. A good chair establishes who is best placed to take this forward and knows how important it is to address issues on a case by case basis. There is no fixed rule about who should obtain the child's view because there will be situations where a parent, carer, teacher or social worker may not be appropriate for the task.

It should never only be the job of a parent to gather a child's view. Neither should it only ever be a professional who does this. As chair you should have an informed view as to who is best placed to acquire the child's views and feelings based on your knowledge of the child, the parents/carers and the circumstances.

Children or young people will have preferences and these must be respected. Never assume that all parents or professionals evoke the same feelings of confidence and security in children or young people that we might expect. There may be a range of relational issues that would impede particular adults from effectively gaining a child's views and feelings about their plan. Every child has the right to have their voice heard in the planning process. We need to be mindful that the easiest way for us to gather information may not be the best way for children to be heard.

A good chair finds out how a child sees their own circumstances. They try to understand how the child feels about their world, and if the child is too young to give a view, then observations of behaviours and interactions with adults are used to inform assessments and plans. They consider carefully how they are hearing about what a child thinks about their life. This is what the Wellbeing Indicators and the My World Triangle were developed to assist with.

It is helpful, and can be confidence building, for a child to have the opportunity to share their views with a professional that they trust in advance of a meeting. It is even better when that professional can be with them during the meeting. It is critical that all children and young people are supported through this process at a level in keeping with their needs.

It is important to remember that children with disabilities have the same right as anyone else to be involved in planning for their own needs. Having a disability should never exclude anyone from contributing to planning their own support arrangements. Ensure children with disabilities are fully consulted, included and informed at every stage and that they have the opportunity to express their views about their plan in a genuine, meaningful way. If you are not the person to gather this information you need to get others to provide you with it so it can be recorded in the Child's Plan.

Following these 9 steps will make your consultation process reliable and effective:

Children should;

- be fully informed about and prepared for the meeting
- attend meetings only with adults whom they already know
- be asked their preference for who attends a meeting
- have a choice in how they express their views in a meeting
- be given evidence of being listened to during a meeting
- understand the language used during a meeting
- be involved in decision making during a meeting
- have their views recorded in the plan
- receive verbal feedback after a meeting and a copy of their plan.

In carrying out these steps it is important that a mediating adult is responsible for all nine strategies being applied before, during and after the meeting. In East Ayrshire the Starting a conversation... Wellbeing Web pack should be used to assist with seeking the views of the child.

1.2 Things to think about and do before your meeting

i) Give people enough notice

Notify everyone who needs to know about the meeting in good time. Use a way of notifying people that ensures they tell you whether or not they can attend. A TAC meeting can be scheduled appropriately without happening immediately. Multi-agency TAC meetings may be scheduled for a certain day of the month with ad-hoc meetings being called as required depending on the needs of the child.

ii) TAC Meeting length

There are no hard and fast rules for the length of time the meeting should take but it is good practice to set a time limit on the meeting of 45 minutes – 1½ hours. As a rule of thumb;

- A review should take around 30 – 45 minutes
- A straightforward plan should take around 30 – 60 minutes
- A complex plan should take around 45 – 90 minutes

Anything going beyond 90 minutes runs the risk of people becoming fatigued, losing the thread and not making effective decisions. The length of the meeting needs to be tailored to accommodate planning for the needs of the child.

iii) Attendance issues

- Ensure the right people are invited. Try to invite those who will contribute to the plan rather than people who are there to simply give information they could get to you in a report.
- Think about who should be invited. Too many people make the meeting unwieldy, intimidating and impractical. Too few people will mean you can't plan effectively. It is necessary to have people at the TAC meeting who will be contributing to the plan otherwise it is hard to develop one which is achievable, inclusive and outcome focussed.
- If it is impossible for a required person to attend then ask that they send a suitable alternate to the meeting to contribute or they provide the relevant information.
- If the child and/or parents/carers do not turn up for the TAC meeting the chair requires to determine if the meeting should go ahead based on the needs of the child. The child and/or parents/carers will already have given consent and been invited to the meeting. The justification for carrying on with the meeting in the absence of the child and parents/carers requires to be documented.

iv) Reports and information

It is absolutely essential that everyone attending the meeting has all the relevant information they need beforehand. This might include assessments, previous Child Plans and the child's chronology. For most people these should be available on AYRshare otherwise they should be e-mailed securely or posted. Giving this material out at the beginning of a meeting uses up valuable planning time and often does not give attendees enough time to fully understand the situation, form a coherent view, come to a conclusion or think of how they might contribute to the plan.

The more familiar people are with the details in advance the less time will be wasted getting everyone up to speed. A good chair maximises the time spent on finding solutions at meetings rather than going over the historical details that can be picked up elsewhere.

v) Consider any potential risks to the child

While taking a solution oriented approach to meetings is generally effective in bringing about change, where there are concerns over the safety of the child then it is crucial that the chair moves to undertake an assessment of risk. This is likely to include asking specific questions about the events, behaviours or circumstances that are placing the child at risk of harm. The current AYRshare chronology should be discussed at every TAC.

While it will still be important to establish goals and next steps, protecting the child from harm will be the paramount consideration. The chair, requires to establish whether formal Child Protection processes should be initiated.

When a TAC meeting is considering potential risks to or from a child, and where this is identified in advance of a TAC meeting, the Named Person/Lead Professional should discuss these concerns with their local Child Protection Advisor. Where there may be a risk of significant harm, concerns should be discussed in advance with Social Work and consideration given to Social Work attending the TAC meeting. Contact the Initial Response Team if there is no current Social Work involvement.

If at any point in the preparation or planning phase you think there are child protection concerns follow your child protection procedures immediately.

vi) Planning checklist

Item	Action required
Am I clear why I think a TAC meeting is required? What is the purpose? What's to be gained?	
Have I obtained informed consent to share information from parents/carers and the child (dependent on age and level of understanding)?	
Have I gathered information from all relevant parties? (Using AYRshare where appropriate)	
Have I had time to analyse assessments and considered risk based on a thorough knowledge of the child and parents'/carers' circumstances?	
Have I discussed the need for this meeting with parents/carers and the child and explained my assessment and analysis of the situation with them?	
Have I got all the information I need for my meeting including chronologies, assessments, previous plans etc?	
How much time will people need to prepare and discuss things with parents/carers and the child or young person before the TAC?	
Have I considered everyone's needs when deciding where the best place is to hold the meeting?	
Are there any issues such as race, language or disability that need to be considered?	
Have I invited all the right people and requested information from people who can't attend?	
Have I explained to parents/carers and children who will be present at the meeting?	
How will I support and enable parents/carers to express their views and wishes or have them represented?	
How will I support the child to express their views and wishes or have them represented?	
If the child can't attend, or chooses not to, who will represent their views?	
Is there someone in the parents'/carers' network of support that they would wish to attend the meeting as a supporter?	
Have I planned time after the meeting to check the child and the parents/carers feel they were listened to and understand what has been agreed?	
When calling a multi-agency TAC meeting have I considered in advance who may be best placed to take on the role of Lead Professional?	
Is the likely Lead Professional aware of my thinking so no surprises or debates ensue in the meeting?	

1.3 Establishing relationships with children and parents/carers

Successful meetings hinge on the positive relationships you have with children, young people and parents/carers. Research tells us that when children and their parents/carers feel included and involved in assessment, planning and review processes, outcomes for children are more positive.

It is the responsibility of the Named Person or Lead Professional to create an environment where the parents/carers and child or young person are able to help drive the meeting and can contribute meaningfully to the plan. The more familiar you are with the parents/carers and their circumstances, the better placed you will be to accommodate their needs when arranging to talk about and reassure them prior to the meeting. In some instances you will need to sit down with them but in others you may only need to call them and discuss things on the phone before the meeting.

As chair you will have to make critical decisions. You may have to delay a meeting by a few weeks to ensure the fullest participation and involvement of parents/carers and child. You will have to consider the appropriateness of timescales based on the needs of the child. If necessary you can even implement short term strategies and actions, agreed by the parents/carers/young person, whilst waiting for the meeting to take place.

You may have to consider issues of non-engagement and non-attendance as a risk to the child's wellbeing and decide how long you will wait before moving things forward. In such a situation you may need to seek advice from an appropriate person with an advisory role for Child Protection or GIRFEC on what the next steps should be.

2. Chairing the meeting

2.1 Before you begin

A big part of making a meeting successful occurs in the preparation phase. Think about:

i) Arriving early and being prepared

It sends a very clear non-verbal message to people as they arrive that you are committed to planning for the child and that this meeting is important. When they find you are already there it says you are;

- organised
- prepared
- professional
- in charge.

It also helps people to believe;

- you know what you are doing
- they will be safe in the meeting
- they can be confident with you leading the meeting.

ii) The meeting place

Below is a list of things you should consider about the environment of your meeting.

The Location

- Where a meeting is held is extremely important. The location can confer status, affect the tone and influence the emotional state of participants
- When people are uncomfortable in a location this can lead to them being distracted, losing focus and even becoming angry or resentful.

The Space

- Use as private a space as possible
- A very big room can make people feel isolated
- A very small room can make people feel cramped, uncomfortable and intimidated. Sitting shoulder to shoulder with the angriest person in the room often makes it hard to concentrate
- A cluttered or messy room sets the wrong tone
- Get the temperature right for everyone – check beforehand
- Be aware of how bright or dark the room is. People need to see to read and take notes e.g. ensure no sunlight is slanting through windows into the eyes of any participants
- Ensure everyone can hear everyone else
- Arrange the room to allow easy access and exiting
- Consider any additional needs participants may have and organize the space accordingly.

The Seating

- Seat people around a table where possible
- Have the chairs arranged before the meeting, have extras available in case they are needed
- Use the best, most comfortable chairs available
- Where necessary have a seating plan and use place cards if it helps
- Make sure you have a clear line of sight to everyone else in the room
- Ensure things are appropriate for the child or young person attending.

iii) What to have at the meeting

Professionals should bring copies of the Child's Plan and chronology from AYRshare. These should be provided to professionals who do not have access to AYRshare and to the child and family.

It is best practice not to take a minute of the meeting. The plan is the record of the meeting and accordingly decisions, outcomes and information should be recorded within the Child's Plan during the meeting by the chair or better still by someone assisting the chair. This can be typed up into the relevant electronic format at the time or immediately after the meeting.

Appropriate Actions, Long Term Outcomes or Short Term Outcomes may be written into the plan during the TAC discussion. It's important to ensure everyone understands what is being proposed and everyone's agreement is secured.

This may seem pedantic but often people, particularly parents/carers, report feeling that they were not included and that they were presented with a series of foregone conclusions rather than involved in a genuine dialogue and decision making process.

iv) Making people comfortable

When people feel comfortable they can take part more easily and with greater confidence. How comfortable parent/carers and children and young people feel will significantly affect how included they feel.

- Collect child and parents from reception
- Shake hands when greeting them
- Use 'chat' to relax them
- Give them a choice as to where they want to sit
- Ask about worries or concerns and acknowledge them
- Present as friendly and supportive
- Show respect at all times
- Be courteous and considerate.

2.2 Checklists for opening a meeting

i) Welcome everyone to the meeting

- be upbeat and positive
- smile and shake hands
- chat with people who are early
- make lots of eye contact.

ii) Clearly state the purpose of the meeting

- about the child
- why we are sitting down together
- what we hope to achieve
- everyone being part of the solution
- to generate a plan.

iii) Identify the meeting goals

- what we would like to achieve by the end of this meeting
- what will be different by the end of the meeting.

iv) Tell people about the format of the meeting

- the agenda
- the order in which you will take contributions
- listening to the chairs instructions
- letting everyone have their say
- you will direct them as to when people will contribute.

v) Ground rules and expectations - what you expect from the people at the meeting

- acknowledge that difficult issues may be discussed
- state that the child must be at the centre
- ask that people respect each other
- ask that people are polite and courteous
- ask that people display tolerance when frustrated
- emphasise the need to make positive contributions
- tell people it is okay to take time out if they need to
- state that if we don't stick to the rules the chair will halt the meeting
- ask people if they are happy to sign up to this
- remind people about confidentiality. Information from this meeting and the child's plan will be kept confidential which means it will not be discussed outwith this group by any of the professionals attending without prior consent of the parents/carers and/or child.

vi) Housekeeping

- inform people of fire evacuation procedures and location of toilets
- state finishing time
- appoint time keeper
- build in breaks if necessary
- ask everyone to agree to the terms before continuing
- maintain a solution focused approach.

vii) Introductions

- ensure everyone knows who is at the meeting
- you might want to introduce them or people can introduce themselves
- ensure everyone knows why others are at the meeting
- get participants to say who they work for
- get participants to explain their relationship to the child
- ensure people introduce themselves meaningfully.

2.3 Considering information and making sense of it

i) Leadership

People will be looking to you for leadership in summarising the views expressed and the decisions taken at the meeting. A successful chair accurately identifies and succinctly describes outcomes and actions during a meeting to allow them to be recorded in the plan as well as discussed. Key to this process is to remain focused on what the people at the meeting hope to achieve and the steps that, are necessary to get there.

ii) Controlling input

As chair you need to make sure that everyone gets to say what they need to say at the meeting. People often want to rehash historical information or feel like going over things from the past which are not useful to the planning process. A good chair identifies this and moves a speaker back to relevant or new information. A simple recognition by the chair that the meeting has already dealt with the issue or that the information is already well known to everyone is usually enough to redirect a speaker. However, be prepared for the professional who is intent on reading aloud the written assessment everyone has in front of them and has read or the person who wants to go over old ground simply because they are focused on the past rather than on finding future solutions. It's the chairs job to make sure people don't do this. Avoid this happening by introducing the contribution with 'Thanks for your input which we have all read. Could you give us a brief summary and your ideas on what we should do as a result ...'

If you have someone who has been very quiet at the meeting try and draw them into things by asking them directly for a contribution 'Jane, you've not had chance to have a say, would you like to add anything?'

iii) Use the tool

The main assessment tool that helps a chair is the Wellbeing Assessment (My World Triangle) which should be used at the meeting to ensure all the relevant information is considered, as well as allowing any new or very recent developments to be brought up and discussed appropriately. Sometimes the Resilience Matrix can be used to get the clearest information around vulnerability when a child's situation is very complex. Both of these tools are contained within the Child's Plan. More information can be found at –

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright>

iv) Things to think about when considering and making sense of information

Things to do to acknowledge the issue or the problem

- Acknowledge people's experiences
- Attend to the person who is speaking
- Be aware of any bias you may have - do not try to change, rewrite, reframe the person's story
- Give credit for small or large efforts, strength facing a challenge, perseverance and avoid being patronising!
- Make sure people have said everything they need to - Have they told us everything we need to know right now?
- Thank people for sharing.

Questions to help focus discussion on solutions

- What has worked in the past?
- What is going well now?
- What is working ok?
- What does not need changing?
- What are the competencies?
- What are the strengths and resources?
- What are the protective factors?
- How are people managing to cope at the moment?

Questions to use to explore exceptions

- Are there times when there are no problems?
- How do you account for your ability to do that?
- If things were to get a little better over the next couple of weeks, even in a small way, what would be happening differently?
- Which strategies can grow, alter or be retried?
- Who can help?
- How would this make a difference? Who will notice when things improve?

v) Considering any potential risks

The Chair needs to be alert to potential risk, listen carefully and ensure there is sufficient consideration of risks in the meeting

Questions to help explore risk:

- What exactly happened?
- What are you worried could have happened?
- What effect did that have and on whom?
- How likely is it that this could happen again?
- What makes it more likely to happen again?
- What can we change to make it less likely to happen again?
- Do we think that the child may be at risk of significant harm?
- Is this possibly a child protection concern?
- Is there anyone else we need to tell about these concerns?
- Are there any other children that we think might be at risk?
- Have we clearly identified what we are going to do to help manage these concerns?

There are many children who are at some level of risk in their home or community and whose behaviour may place them or other people at risk. To enable clear actions to be put in place to reduce these risks, it is important that concerns around risk are clearly and explicitly identified in the TAC meeting. This can feel very uncomfortable and there is a temptation to skirt around things, talking in general or bland terms. We often talk about 'issues', 'incidents' or 'behaviour' because this stops us feeling uncomfortable. However, this does not help us to understand and address the concerns.

Where meetings are considering possible risks, the following questions can be used by the chair to help the meeting be more explicit. In many situations it is all too easy for us to imagine the worst so throughout the TAC meeting an effective chair will help ensure that discussions remain balanced and proportionate.

What exactly happened? What are you worried about?

Where for example there was an incident or series of incidents try and get the meeting to be as explicit as possible about what exactly happened, where, when and what was the effect? Refer to the child's AYRshare chronology. Consider where someone may be at risk who and what exactly are they at risk from or what exactly do we think might happen?

What was the impact/effect and on whom?

What harm actually occurred and to whom, what do you think could have been the impact? Did something happen that harmed someone or is it a worry that something more serious might have happened?

Is it likely to happen again?

If relevant, get the meeting to consider what lead up to the behaviour or incident? What things make it less or more likely to happen again? What is the pattern of previous incidents?

What will the effect be, and on whom if it does happen again?

If the same thing happens again or the same incidents are repeated – what will be the impact? Is there an escalation pattern or behaviour or incidents that are likely to create greater risk/harm?

The National Risk Framework provides guidance and tools to support practitioners with the task of risk identification, assessment, analysis and management. This information is available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/11/7143/1>

In most situations where there are indications of a potential risk of significant harm there should have been advanced discussion with Social Work to identify options for progressing these concerns. Where a Social Worker is in attendance they will offer advice on whether formal child protection processes should be initiated or protective measures sought. For a definition of 'significant harm' see the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/05/3052/0>

Where new or unanticipated concerns emerge that a child may be at risk of significant harm these must be referred to Social Work immediately by the chair and Child Protection Procedures followed and this step should be recorded as an action from the meeting. Chairs must be familiar with Interagency Child Protection Procedures and single agency guidance.

The Resilience Matrix is a very helpful tool and is included in the Child's Plan. It is particularly good to use it in more complex cases or where there is an accumulation of concern. It allows us to carefully analyse and assess levels of vulnerability and risk. A good chair would often use the Resilience Matrix to understand a child's personal resilience and to inform risk assessment as part of developing a multi-agency Child's Plan.

2.4 SMART Planning

Any support provided through Child's Planning processes must be outcome focused and linked to the overarching GIRFEC Wellbeing Indicators (SHANARRI). Carefully consider the differences an intervention will make to the life of the child or young person.

i) Outcomes

- Outcomes are not actions or resources
- Outcomes are things that matter to an individual
- They are specific changes, benefits, learning and effects that actually happen or are expected to happen as a result of our activities and interventions.

More information and guidance on writing outcomes can be found on the Ayrshire GIRFEC website.

<https://www.girfec-ayrshire.co.uk>

Remember the outcomes written in the Child's Plan should be 'SMART'. They should be:

Specific

- What is the outcome for the child or young person—is it well defined and clear?
- What exactly are people going to do? ("Meet Kiera twice a week in school to discuss progress" is specific, but 'Monitor Keira' is unclear and not specific)
- With/for whom?
- At the end of the planned activities, what will have changed for the child or young person/children or young people/parents/carers/family?

Measurable

- How will you know when the outcome has been achieved?
- How will you measure progress towards the outcomes e.g. through self-reporting/exercises or tools/observations of behaviours/feedback/discussions?
- If you can't measure progress towards your outcome you may have to rewrite your outcome

Achievable

- Can you realistically get this done in the timeframe/within available resources?
- Outcomes should not be beyond a person's or service's capabilities

Realistic

- Is the outcome relevant and proportionate?
- Is it within reach and possible?

Time-limited

- By when do you want to achieve change
- Set specific timescales for each stage for completion
- Set specific timescales for review
- Avoid the use of 'ongoing' or 'ASAP'
- Timescales should always be considered in relation to the health, development and wellbeing of the child
- Consider impact and consequences if progress not being made

ii) Some examples of outcomes

Safe	Katy is free from exposure to physical abuse and violence within the home
Nurtured	Sarah receives regular praise and encouragements
Active	John is physically active and engaged in social activities
Included:	Daniel lives in a well maintained, safe and secure home environment

iii) Some examples of things that are not outcomes and why

'Katy's Dad attends alcohol counselling sessions'

-Outcomes should be child focused. This is an action for the parent.

'Ryan is healthy'

-This is far too broad and vague. It is also not SMART.

'Connor achieves his full potential'

-How will you know when this happens? How would you measure this?

'John attends swimming club once a week'

-This is an action not an outcome.

-The outcome is what John gains as a result of going - John is physically active

2.5 Setting goals and agreeing outcomes and actions

i) Positive language and focus

It's very important to state goals using positive language. This is because we tend to get what we focus on. When a goal is stated in the negative say for example 'I will not lose the race', attention is focused on the negative of 'losing'.

ii) Questions to ask to clarify what we hope for the future

These questions help people to think generally about a preferred future. Parents/carers, children and professionals can contribute their ideas, without the constraints of being specific at this stage.

- If the problems you have been experiencing disappeared, what would be different?
- How will you know when all the problems are solved?
- Imagine you wake up tomorrow, and all the difficulties that brought us to these meetings have gone, what do things look like now?
- What do you hope for in the future?

iii) Questions to ask to clarify long term outcomes

It is critical to identify long term outcomes for the child that will go into the plan and may take up to a year to achieve. This discussion will help define some of the detail from the broader goals above.

- If we didn't need to be meeting anymore, what would things look like in a year?
- From the goals we have talked about today, what three or four things are most important for the child?
- How will we know this has been achieved? What will we see, hear, feel?
- How will you know when you have arrived there?
- You said you want (child) to be happier – what will he be doing that tells you he's happier?
- We said that we want (child) to achieve well in school, what will things be like in a year's time if that is happening?

iv) Short Term Outcomes

It is equally crucial to identify some short term outcomes for the child that will go into the plan and usually take 6 to 8 weeks to achieve. It is, however, ok to vary the interval according to the child's needs. However long they take every short term outcome needs to be a step towards one of the long term outcomes you have recorded and as a result should be specific, observable and measurable.

- In a year we hoped that, what will be the first step we need to take towards that longer term outcome?
- How will (parent, child, social worker, teacher) know when we have taken that step?
- Who needs to help for that first step to happen?
- How will taking that first step make a difference?
- If we are to move toward the longer term outcome of, what do we need to do next?

v) Identifying Actions

Once the outcomes have been established, a good chair will follow a process of identifying a whole range of possible options of what people 'could' do then ensuring a good list of possibilities is on the table before they finally pin people down to what they 'will' do. Potential barriers to actions being carried out can also be explored here. The chair needs to establish whether the agreed actions are achievable.

The 'could' step allows people to explore options before giving a firm commitment to action and helps everyone round the table to consider how they may be able to contribute to a set of actions that will support change.

vi) Some good 'what could you do' questions are:

- What are you already doing that's working towards these outcomes?
- What are you doing that may be getting in the way of these outcomes?
- What are your options?
- What else?
- What has worked in the past?
- If there were something else you could try, what would it be?
- Is there anything else?
- How can others help?

vii) Some good 'what will you do' questions are:

- Which of these actions will help us move towards the goals and outcomes we have discussed?
- Is that an action you can commit to?
- Is that a stretch for you?
- That was difficult in the past, what can we do to make it work this time?
- How often?
- Who can give you support?
- When will you do that?
- How will we know it has happened?

2.6 Summarising the meeting

i) Ending the meeting well

There are a number of elements that come together to make a meeting end well. How the chair conducts this phase is critical to the success of the process. The chair has to pull everything together in a meaningful and honest way and end things as positively as possible.

The chair should

- Summarise the outcomes and actions
- State what happens next
- Set the review date
- Describe any contingency plans
- Thank people for contributions

This final phase of the meeting can include what might be considered to be compliments in a solution oriented framework. The chair can have a very powerful influence here by ending the meeting on a positive note with the summing up. The last thing people hear will be a powerful influence on how they feel about the meeting, process and plan so positive endings are particularly important.

What the chair says at this point needs to be a true reflection of what has been achieved and what needs to be done rather than an unrealistic 'rose tinted lens' statement to keep everyone 'sweet' or a fast summation to get everyone out of the room as quickly as possible. This final phase will afford an opportunity to close the meeting in a meaningful way, if it has been conducted in a focused way and managed well in achieving its objectives.

It is worth remembering that the child and parents'/carers' co-operation with the plan is absolutely critical to its success. In the small number of cases where a child or a parent/carer might not agree with some elements of the plan such as the analysis, outcomes or actions it is essential to get them on board as far as possible. Any dissent or disagreement should be clearly recorded in the Child's Plan.

ii) Before concluding the meeting ensure you:

- Get everyone to sign an attendance sheet to confirm their presence at the meeting?
- Get everyone's verbal acceptance of the plan
- Tell everyone who will receive a copy of the Plan (AYRshare/email etc)
- Make sure you have everyone's contact details – email, phone and address
- Direct child and parents/carers as to how they will sign up to the plan (it will be typed up first)
- Set review date, time and place arranged there and then to avoid any 'drift'.

3. After the Meeting

i) A continuous process

Planning for children's needs is a continuous process. The meeting is not an end in itself. Neither is the production of a Child's Plan. They are simply part of the continuous process of planning, doing and reviewing. What happens after the conclusion of the meeting is only the next critical step in the process.

As chair of the meeting, it falls to you to lead by example. Follow up on each of your action items as soon as you can, to set the tone that you are accountable to do what you say you are going to do. Here is a helpful checklist for you to use.

ii) Everyone who is a partner to the plan should receive a copy of the Child's Plan.

Partners to the plan will be named on the Child's Plan and will have a contribution to make to its success in achieving outcomes. They will require a copy to be clear about what they and all other partners have agreed to do and by when. It should be uploaded to AYRshare for the members of the TAC to access. For any members of the TAC who do not have an AYRshare Account the plan should be e-mailed securely or posted to them.

If you receive a request for a copy of the Child's Plan or feel it would be useful to share the Child's Plan with another agency working with the family, it is essential that you seek permission from the child (over 12 years) and/or parents/carers before sharing anything.

If you are uncertain, seek advice from an appropriate person with an advisory role for GIRFEC before sharing the Child's Plan with anyone other than the partners to the plan.

iii) Post meeting checklist

Item	Action required
Have I had a post meeting discussion with the child?	
Am I confident the child felt listened to and included?	
Am I confident the child understands what has been agreed?	
Have I recorded the child's views on the plan?	
Have I had a post meeting discussion with the parents/carers?	
Am I confident the parents/carers felt listened to and included?	
Am I confident the parents/carers understand what has been agreed?	
Have I recorded the parents'/carers' views on the plan?	
Have I made arrangements to have the plan typed up?	
Has the plan been typed up?	
Have I made arrangements to have the plan distributed asap?	
Has the plan been distributed?	
Have I made arrangements to have the plan signed asap?	
Have I communicated the review meeting date, time and place to people who couldn't attend the initial meeting?	
Have I booked the venue for review meeting?	
Has the signed plan been distributed to all partners? (AYRshare where possible)	
Have I checked that everyone sent a copy of the plan has received it?	
Have I lodged a copy of the completed and signed plan in the relevant files?	

Appendix 1 - Skills and Qualities of a Good Chairperson

A confident and well prepared chairperson achieves positive outcomes for children and young people. They do this in a positive and inclusive way which leads to an effective Child's Plan being developed, agreed and taken forward by everyone involved.

A good chairperson reflects on what helps meetings to go well. They think about the kinds of things they should be doing and the things they should avoid doing. They consider how a meeting is experienced by everyone around the table. They learn from observing other people chairing meetings effectively and adopt these successful approaches.

i) Non-verbal cues

Be aware of non-verbal behaviour. Much of human communication is non-verbal. Observing the body language of people at a meeting can provide a chairperson with important clues as to how people are feeling and what interventions the chair might need to make. Paying attention to body language and facial expression will alert a good chairperson to respond in a particular way such as proceeding to further discussion, providing additional explanation, asking individuals for contributions, checking people are okay or offering reassurance.

ii) Jargon

There is nothing more off putting than being at meeting and not understanding what people are talking about. Often people will sit confused and say nothing about it because they are embarrassed about admitting they don't understand. It is a major part of the job of the chairperson to ensure acronyms, abbreviations, job titles, organisation names or anything that someone at the meeting might not know of or be familiar with are explained. Make sure everyone is aware of what is being discussed. Never take anything for granted in this area.

If in doubt explain things. Don't check the meeting's understanding by saying 'I assume everyone is familiar with ...' or 'everyone knows what the OPSG is?' and look for people to nod. People will nod even if they don't understand. A good chair ensures everyone understands everything and would say 'I'll just explain ...' or 'Could you just explain that ...' or OPSG stands for Outwith Placement Steering Group. Inclusion requires complete clarity.

iv) Important do's and don'ts

It is easy to think you don't ever lapse into bad practice when chairing a meeting, especially if you don't get the time to think about how you performed. However, the 'Don't' list below is made up of things that professionals have reported they have seen or done so it's really important to reflect on your practice.

Do:

- speak clearly and succinctly
- have an ability to respect confidences
- be sensitive to other people's feelings
- be impartial and objective
- listen for exceptions to the problem
- note existing skills and resources
- look out for what is already working well
- record agreed actions and outcomes
- show interest in members' viewpoints
- have sound knowledge of GIRFEC
- actively seek solutions
- start and finish on time
- be approachable
- be tactful
- show enthusiasm
- be able to delegate

Don't:

- let the meeting drag on
- make all the decisions
- cut people out of decisions
- use jargon
- get cross or lose your temper
- be the person that speaks most at the meeting
- allow one or two people to dominate
- make people feel foolish or useless
- allow the meeting to become unproductive
- become stuck talking about the problems
- decide the outcome of the meeting before the discussion has taken place
- assume everyone understands the purpose of the meeting

We are only human and we all make mistakes, particularly when we are new to something. That said, it is important to be aware that effective professionals don't make the same mistakes repeatedly. Effective professionals reflect change and reflect again.

If you recognise you've made a mistake during a meeting it's alright to acknowledge it and rewind to correct it. In fact you will be more positively regarded for behaving like this than if you ploughed on disregarding your error. It's better to reflect and change than to keep doing the 'Don'ts' repeatedly.

v) Identify who can help and support you

If you are chairing your first meeting and you're anxious or nervous, ask someone who is experienced in chairing TAC meetings to help you out. There is always someone willing to give advice, to coach or to co-chair until you are confident.

Be honest. People are generally forgiving if you make it clear you are new to a process. If you don't know something, you can say that you will find out and get back to people or you can open the question to the other people in the meeting to see if they can help. It is perfectly acceptable for you to admit that you don't know something or don't have particular information to hand. However, you have to be able to find out or get the information afterwards. In the main, it is better to be open and transparent about your limitations than to perform an action that causes difficulties for the people in the meeting or the planning process in the long-run.

Sometimes it's good to have support and assistance in the meeting because chairing, populating the plan, listening to contributions and taking notes is much too big a task for any one person. Ask someone who is attending the meeting to do the writing. This support should always be agreed in advance so no one is put on the spot and you find yourself with no takers on the day. Remember to explain why the person assisting is present and what their job will be at the meeting. The chair must be confident in directing the person writing things down. This means actually telling them to write down specific things by saying as 'Let's write this down as an outcome then ...' or 'let's note this point.'

Keeping to time in a meeting can be challenging. If you want to make sure you keep to time appoint a time keeper at the beginning of the meeting. At the start of the meeting make sure you detail all the things the meeting needs to achieve. This ensures that the timekeeper knows how to help you keep to time.

Top Tips

- **If it's your first meeting and you're anxious ask someone who is experienced to help you out.**
- **Don't ignore body language: listen to what attendees are also telling you through their non-verbal behaviour and respond appropriately.**
- **Explain all Jargon.**
- **Use admin support or ask someone who is attending to help by writing the relevant information into the Child's Plan throughout the meeting.**
- **Do check that important points are written as said to ensure that they are captured accurately in the plan.**
- **Appoint a time keeper to help the meeting keep to time.**
- **Acknowledge mistakes – we all make them occasionally so own and correct them.**

Appendix 2 Solution Focussed Meetings

Making your meeting about finding solutions

A solution oriented meeting builds on strengths and competencies and ensures clear goals and outcomes are identified through the discussion. When children and parents/carers are experiencing difficulties and everyone gets together at a meeting, most of the time is often spent describing problems that are already well understood, collecting evidence around the problem and discussing further assessment of the problem. Towards the end of the time available, people may begin to look at planning interventions and agreeing actions. Often this approach does not lead to change. We are much more likely to achieve positive change if we all understand where we want to be and how we can work together to move in that direction.

Getting everyone together in one room can be a real challenge and if you have achieved this then it is important to make the best use of the time available. In most cases, holding a solution focused meeting is the most likely way to identify resources and strengths, establish clear goals and maximize the chance of bringing about positive change that lasts.

The key principles of a solution focused approach

Solution focused approaches are based on a number of key principles and have a focus on empowerment.

A focus on future possibilities and solutions enhances change Research has shown that when we focus on future possibilities and solutions this can help bring about change as we are describing how we would like things to be. Often when we describe our preferred future we then recognize that some elements are actually already happening or have existed at some time in the past.

Language shapes and moulds perception

If we spend all our time talking about the problem, testing its size and weight, looking back to hypothesise how things ended up this way, everyone can become defeated and feel that the problems are too big to solve. With a problem focused approach participants may begin to feel blamed, as if they are being held responsible for what has gone wrong.

When we spend time exploring what works and where we hope to be in the future, we open up possibilities and opportunities for change to occur. In describing in detail where we hope to be, we often hear elements of the preferred future that are already in place. We are also much more likely to recognise when progress is being made if we have a shared understanding of where we are heading.

Try to use language that leads to other possibilities, for example, rather than saying a pupil 'is disruptive in school', say 'At the moment ... is having difficulty following instructions and focusing during some aspects of their learning'. This highlights that the behaviour is an issue now but may not be in the future. It also makes it clear that the behaviour is not an issue at all times.

The problem is the problem – not the person

We need to accept that the problem is the problem not the child, the parent/carers or the school. It is so much easier for parents/carers, children, young people and professionals to work together against identified difficulties rather than everyone finding themselves on different sides.

Trying to change a person is a real challenge whoever we are, but tackling identified problems is much more straightforward. We do not want to be communicating 'there is something wrong with you' to anyone. We want to agree the nature of the difficulties being experienced and consider how we can change behaviours.

People have the resources to resolve their difficulties in their own unique ways

This is a very hopeful approach to meetings that should help set goals while building the confidence and capacity of parents/carers, children and professionals to achieve these goals. Skills, resources and successes are explored to allow everyone to feel confident in working towards shared outcomes. Everyone is in it together! This approach recognises that people have resources to resolve difficulties in their own unique way.

What would work for you as chair may not work for the person most significantly affected by the difficulties being discussed. Throughout the meeting, listen for the many skills and resources that are already there that could be recognized and enhanced to help bring about change. Where meetings are successful, parents/carers and children should leave discussions empowered and believing they have a positive part to play.

Small changes lead to bigger changes

Often the magnitude of the difficulties being experienced can be overwhelming. Focusing on small next steps makes our objectives clear and manageable. At the meeting, everyone needs to be clear about their part in the agreed actions. If these small changes are achieved, this success can lead to further change towards our goals.

It is important to spend time considering if there has been any change in previous patterns of behaviour or circumstances recorded in reports as these changes can be powerful in helping move things forward. For example, a parent/carer may have managed to get their child to school on time in the days prior to the meeting while this had not happened in the past. Rather than just acknowledging this change, it is more likely to become a positive pattern of behaviour if this change is explored and acknowledged as significant.

If it works do more of it- if it doesn't do something different

Sometimes we all become stuck in particular patterns, for example having the same discussion with a parent/carer, or using one tried and tested approach. A solution focused approach says, if it works, do more of it; if it doesn't work, do something different. Critical to this is exploring and recognizing what actually works. How will we know what to do more of, if we do not understand what is helping?

Discussion and understanding of the problem is not necessary to make progress

This does not mean that we do not acknowledge and discuss the problem. Often people will need to have their story heard, whether a parent or a professional. Careful listening is paramount to success. Reflecting back the core messages being heard from those contributing will help everyone's understanding and support the process of change to move on. If people become stuck with particular issues it can be helpful to note these and agree how these will be discussed further outside the meeting.

Children and parents/carers can find it very difficult to talk about problems in front of a range of professionals in a formal meeting setting where, despite the best efforts of the chair, they may not feel at all comfortable. As a result of the range of agencies involved in supporting a child, problems are often already well understood. There needs to be a clear and specific reason to explicitly go over the details of problems within the meeting. Discussions can be very successful when there is an acknowledgement that things have been difficult with the focus then being on what we need to do now, how this will be achieved and what we need to do next to bring about change.

Conflict often arises because the focus is on the problem. We will much more frequently find agreement over where we want to be for example, seeing a boy who is settled and happy in school with appropriate behaviour, rather than what has caused the problems to arise. We cannot change the past. There is limited effectiveness in exploring whose fault it is, unless there are Child Protection issues that need to be explored.

There are always exceptions to the problem

There are always exceptions to the problem and often these are missed, or not explicitly explored. Imagine you are driving home from work thinking what an awful day you have had. It is very likely that if you spent time specifically looking, you would find a number of successful elements that have been easy to ignore. Considering why these elements were successful can help you to look at how you could address the more problematic tasks.

It will also make you feel more realistically positive about your day and more optimistic about the next day. In a meeting where a parent states, for example, that, other than last Wednesday, the child has been very difficult, we need to stop and consider last Wednesday in detail. Why was that better? Are there clues there that will help to grow this more positive picture? What was different on that day? Details of exceptions offer a powerful tool to support change.

Collaboration enhances change

In line with core GIRFEC principles, a solution focused principle is that effective collaboration enhances change. When we work together to look for strengths, competencies, exceptions and to identify clear goals we are much more than the sum of our parts, and will be a force to be reckoned with.

Possibilities are infinite

As chair, make best use of the collective wisdom and understanding around the table to build effective solutions that last.

Solution oriented language

Reflecting back the core message – ensuring that people feel heard and confirming to them that you understand what they are saying.

- 'What I'm hearing is that you feel no one has listened to you about your child's needs.'
- 'It sounds to me as if you feel blamed.'
- 'What you are saying is that you feel things are getting better but no one is recognising this yet.'
- 'I think you need to talk about your concerns more outwith this meeting.'
- 'I'm hearing that things at school are still very challenging despite a great deal of support having been put in place.'
- 'It sounds as though there are significant concerns being expressed by everyone and we need to carefully consider this child's safety.'

Setting goals and objectives – allowing clear outcomes to be identified and considering the first steps on that journey.

- 'How will we know that things are starting to change?'
- 'Who will notice?'
- 'How will that make a difference?'
- 'What will things look like once the problems being experienced at the moment are reducing?'
- 'What's the first step we need to take to move towards this change?'
- 'Who will do what / where / when?'
- 'How will we know that this has been successful?'
- 'What will be different then?'

Exploring exceptions – ensuring that the times when the problems are not there or less evident are not missed and capturing information about these times.

- 'It sounds as though things have been better over the last few days / weeks. What have you noticed that shows things have been better?'
- 'Who else has noticed?'
- 'How did you manage that (change)?'
- 'How did that make you feel?'
- 'What does this tell us about what we need to do next?'
- 'What else has anyone round the table noticed?'
- 'When was the last time that you... felt a little less overwhelmed by these difficulties / managed to get ... to school / felt able to get up and make breakfast for the children?'
- 'What was different then?'
- 'What helped at that time?'
- 'What were you doing differently then?'

Appendix 3 Further Reading and Information

Web Links

GIRFEC national guidance, briefing papers and support materials:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright>

Ayrshire GIRFEC protocols, procedures and resources:

<http://www.girfec-ayrshire.co.uk>

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/05/3052/0>

National Risk Framework to support the Assessment of Children and Young People 2012:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/11/7143/1>