**‘Team around the child and family: working together to support the child**

**Some questions/ideas to think about:**

* Which other professionals work with your setting? Find out if you are not sure.
* What do you understand by the ‘team around the child’ approach?
* Why is it important to think carefully about the language you use when speaking with parents and carers?

The importance of working in collaboration with other professionals to support the child and family. This may be referred to as ‘integrated working’ or ‘multi-agency working’. The ‘team around the child’ approach has developed over many years and is considered good practice for supporting children with SEND and their families.

The EYFS states that: ‘Practitioners must consider whether a child may have a special educational need or disability, which requires specialist support. They should link with, and help the families to access, relevant services from agencies as appropriate’. The SEND Code of Practice (chapter 5) reinforces this by stating: ‘Where a child continues to make less than expected progress, despite evidence-based support and interventions that are matched to the child’s area of need, practitioners should consider involving appropriate specialists....... who may be able to identify effective strategies, equipment, programmes or other interventions to enable the child to make progress towards the desired learning and development outcomes. The decision to involve specialists should be taken with the child’s parents.’

The team around the child (TAC) approach has evolved over many years and is based upon the work of Peter Limbrick and a project known as ‘One Hundred Hours’. This approach was developed by the Early Support programme. The TAC approach has several features (Peter Limbrick 2005):

* the family and child are central to the support that they are offered
* the support is coordinated
* those involved meet on a regular basis to focus on the child and family’s priorities
* there is an identified ‘keyworker’ who is the main point of contact for a family and is primarily responsible for coordinating intervention
* families are equal and valued members of the TAC and are involved in all aspects of decision-making and intervention
* support is continuous and seamless

Many Local Authorities use a TAC approach and have also adopted early support as a way of working together. You may find it useful to find out what approach your Local Authority uses, as there are variations of the model.

Since the initial development of the TAC approach and the early support programme, the importance of coordinated services and child- and family-centred services has become a key priority. As part of the SEND Code of Practice, ‘support should be family-centred and should consider the individual family’s needs and the best ways to support them.’ (Early Years Guide to the Code of Practice (2104) p.15)

Therefore, as an early years practitioner, you may become part of a ‘team around the child’ in your role supporting the child and family. This could involve attending meetings and providing observations, to contribute to the understanding of the child. Along with the parent, you may be the person who sees the child most and knows about their learning and development, so you will have important information to contribute.

It is important to understand that when working with children with SEND, there is likely to be a range of professionals who are already involved or who become involved with the child and family. Children who may have been identified from birth as having a disability, health needs or a sensory impairment may have already had contact with other professionals before they join an early years provider. If this is the case, as part of the registration process and getting to know the family and child, it will be vital to get as much information about who is involved as possible, including contact details and the permission to contact these professionals if necessary.

Another core belief of approaches such as ‘team around the child’ and early support is that the knowledge and understanding that parents have about their child is key information which can help practitioners and others to meet their child’s needs. Enabling parents to share their knowledge and engage in positive discussions builds confidence that their contribution is valued. For this to be successful, it is important to use clear, jargon-free language in all communications with parents. As practitioners, it is easy to slip into using familiar and common abbreviations, especially in relation to SEND. This can become a barrier to parents becoming engaged and involved and prevent them from developing confidence put their views forward. Try to ensure that any abbreviations used have been explained to parents and carers; ideally, you could offer a ‘crib sheet’ which sets these out.

It is best if the parent can share with you as much information as possible, but remember, it may still be early days on their journey and you will need to build a trusted relationship in order for parents to feel confidence in you and develop a strong working partnership. Where children’s needs are identified over the time they spend with you, then it may be your role, alongside the SENCO, to think about who else may be able to support and advise you as a team. This advice should help you to increase the range of approaches you use to work towards improving practice, so that you can support the child’s development and learning more effectively.

In order for this type of partnership to develop, the clarity and openness of communication is vitally important. There are many ways to communicate with parents, and parents may have indicated how they prefer you to be in contact with them. When discussing sensitive issues and aspects relating to individual children, doing this face to face is crucial. You can find more out about working in partnership with parents in webcast 7 (‘Working with parents, families and carers’).

There may be a number of other professionals who are involved in supporting the child and the family. Although you may not have direct contact with all of them, there may be reports, advice and strategies which you will need to read, interpret and implement. One of the important things to be aware of, is that there can often be a range of different terms and phrases used by different professionals which can make this a challenging task. The SENCO in the setting will be able to offer support to other practitioners to use the information and advice and, if there is an area SENCO or someone with a similar role, they should be able to support the SENCO. As you work more closely with the parents, the SENCO and others, you will gradually become more confident and build relationships which help you to have a better understanding of the roles of other professionals and how your knowledge and skills contribute to effective work with children and their families.

Health, Social Care and Education are all described as ‘agencies’ and each agency has a range of professionals who work within them. Who is involved or becomes involved depends upon the individual child and family. This may include professionals from health, such as a health visitor, General Practitioner, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, Speech and Language Therapist, or from Social Care, such as a social worker or family support worker. There may also be support from a voluntary organisation such as Homestart, or other professionals from education such as a specialist teacher of the blind, or the deaf, an Educational Psychologist (EP), a specialist teacher for physical impairment, an area SENCO, inclusion advisors and others.

Each professional within each agency has a different role and professional skillset. It is useful to get as much information as you can about what each professional can offer you, to help you support the child and family.

Other sources of information include:

Early Support: An Integrated and Person Centred Approach

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/our-work/whole-child/practice/early-support-integrated-and-person-centered-approach>

Information about useful contacts and organisations

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/updated-information-about-useful-contacts-and-organisations.pdf>

Developing key working

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/developing-key-working>

The Team Around the Child approach as a whole system intervention

<http://www.tacinterconnections.com/index.php/tacmodel>

**Reflection questions and activities:**

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| **Question/activity** | **Response** |
| Which other professionals work with your setting? Find out if you are not sure. |  |
| What do you understand by the ‘team around the child’ approach? |  |
| Why is it important to think carefully about the language you use when speaking with parents and carers? |  |