

RELATIONAL SYSTEMS: GIVING, SHIFTING OR SHARING POWER?

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Introduction

Children's social care is a sector which is widely regarded as being under strain – where pressures are felt most by children and families. While we know that resources are essential to be able to provide what families need, 'how' we work alongside children and families is equally important to consider.

Children's social care is unique. We safeguard and we support, we have different roles to play and there is a balance to be struck. There is power to be negotiated, and how this power is exercised can often be changeable. There is, however, a move towards a different way of thinking. Relationship-based practice is back – and with a bang. Many will feel it has always been here, but its resurgence is related to a change in our culture and our relationship with risk and power.

Power is at the core of social work and social justice. As social work practitioners, our job is to hold power and navigate our relationship with it, ensuring that it is used well. The very nature of social work – where the state may intervene in a child's life and decisions are made on their behalf – means that it is important to ask 'How much power do children and families have?' We can still keep children safe, but can share, shift and give power to children and families.

Power is at the heart of co-production. Co-production involves children and families playing an active part in developing and designing services alongside professionals. To do this successfully, power has to be considered; who normally has power, who doesn't and how can this be changed.

I will start by thinking about the context around power and co-production in children's social work. I will move on to think about how a change in context has allowed for progress. I will consider what progress looks like and what this might mean for the future.