NSPCC

Reunification Practice Framework

Making the right decision for looked after children
An evidence informed framework

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EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Messages from the research

The cost to children

Elaine Farmer and colleagues study of **180 return home cases from across England**

90% of whom were thought to be maltreated before being taken into care

46% were abused or neglected in the two years after they returned home from care

Ellaway (2004) and Sinclair (2005) similar findings

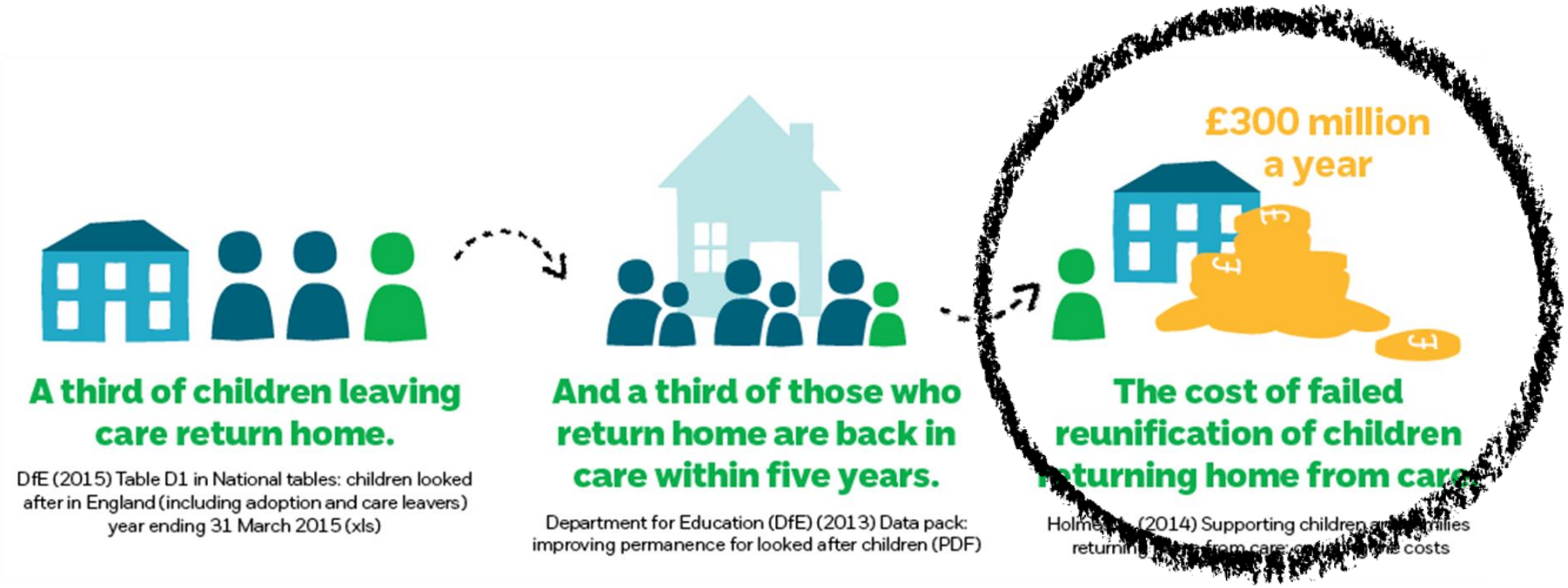
The cost to children

Multiple Breakdowns

Third of children in study experienced **2 or more failed returns (Farmer et al, 2011)**

Strongly related to **further return breakdown** and **poor outcomes** for children.

Cost to authorities



The Reunification Practice Framework

What is the framework?

Key features

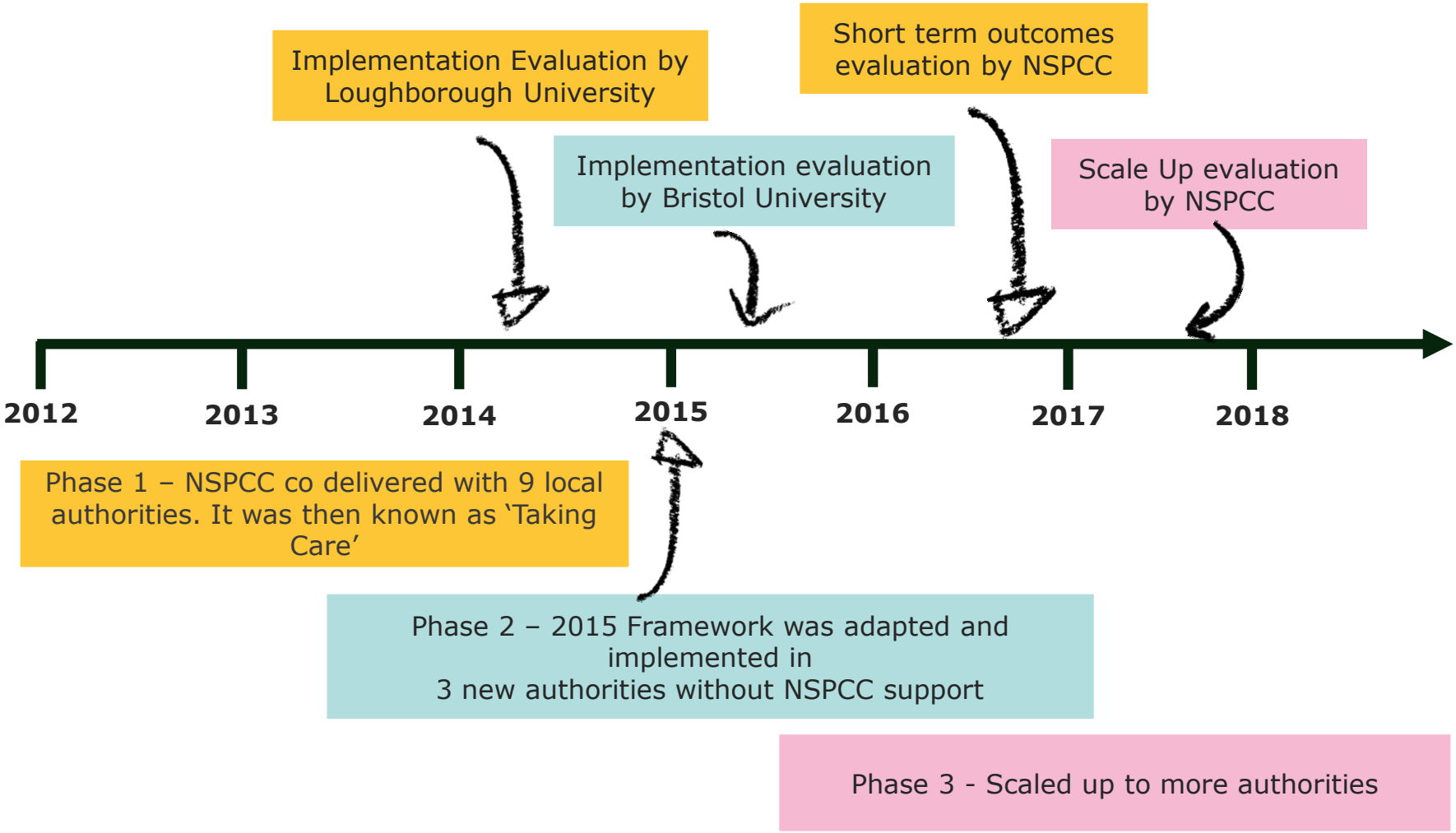
- **Ongoing analysis** of risk and protective factors
- **Analytical chronology**
- **Staged approach** to assessment and decision making
- **Relationship based** social work
- **Aligns with statutory guidance**
- **Written agreements** and **SMART goals**
- **Multiagency support** – **Pre and Post** reunification

Structured professional judgements

Underlying principles

- Reflective supervision
- Child at the centre
- Collaboration
- Child centred timescales
- Diversity
- Relationship based practice
- Ongoing support

An evidence informed framework



How it sits with statutory guidance

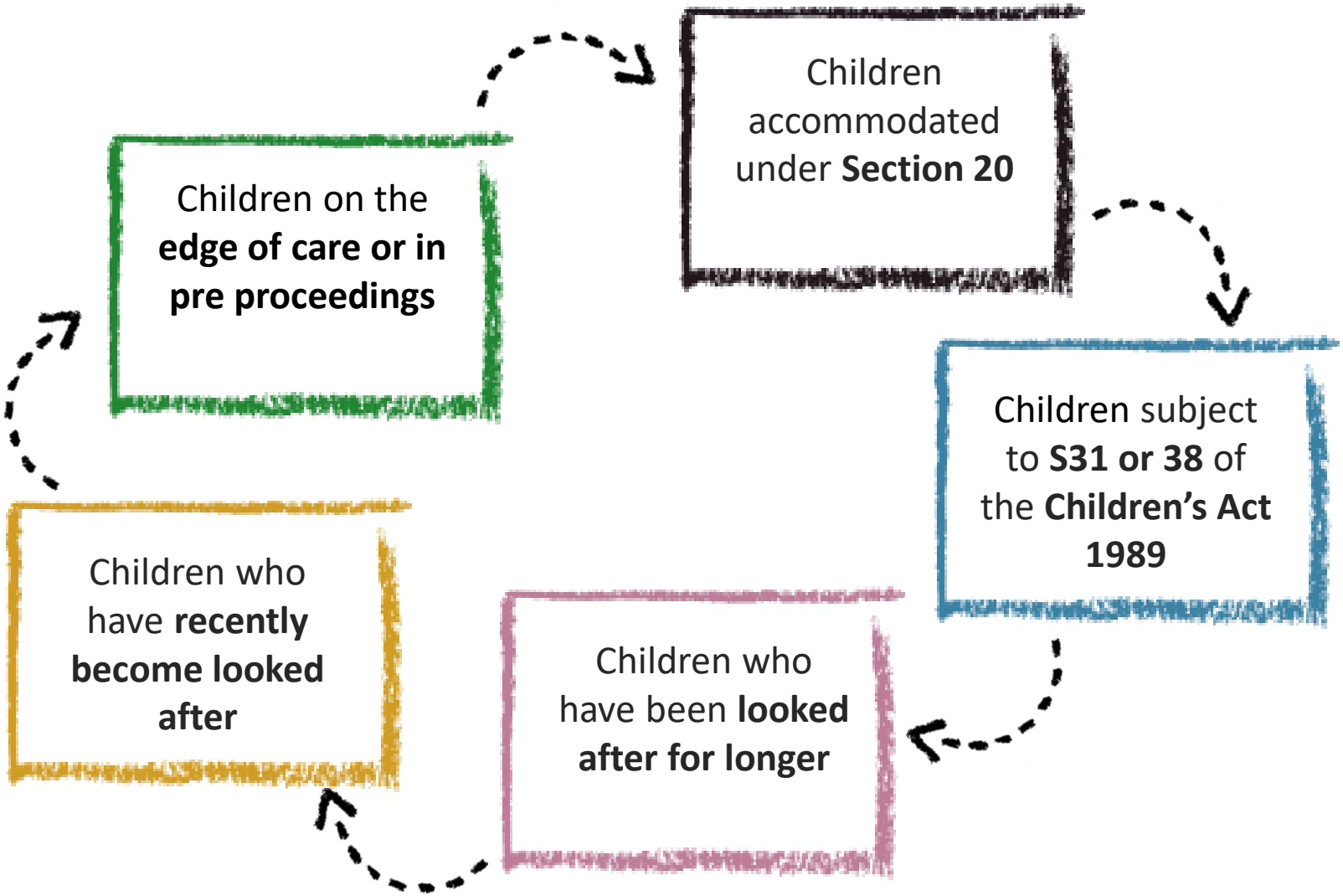
Fits in with **existing local authority practice and procedures** in relation to care and permanence planning for Looked After Children.

Works within existing statutory guidance for children supported as **Children in Need, children subject to Child Protection Plans** or **children classified as care leavers**.

Support to fulfil duties for children who return home under recently amended **Care Planning and regulations Guidance**, revised **Working Together guidance** and links with **Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework.**

Recently included in the Care Crisis Review: options for change (2018) as the recommended approach to improve reunification practice across England and Wales

Who is the framework for?



A staged approach

1. Initial assessment

- Assessment of risk and protective factors
- Assessing parental capacity to change
- Analytical case history
- Trusted adult for child

2. Risk classification

- Risk classification
- Initial decision on reunification

3. Parental agreements

- Goal setting and parental agreements
- Coordinate support and services

4. Classify risk again

- Re-classification of risk
- Reunification planning (if appropriate)

5. Return home

- Prepare for imminent return home
- Continue support package
- Monitoring post return
- Reclassify risk at set intervals

Risk Classification

Guides and **structures decision-making** (though not prescriptive)

As a basis for drawing up **agreements with Parents**

As the basis for **planning services** and **interventions**

To **communicate with parents and children** and explain decisions and plans to them

To **monitor and review progress** after the child has been returned home

Used **throughout** the case

Risk Classification Table

Low risk	Medium risk	High risk	Severe risk
Previous risk factors fully addressed. Any other risks are at a low level which can be safely managed.	Risk factors apparent (or not all risk factors fully addressed)	Risk factors apparent (and risk factors not being addressed)	Risk factors apparent (and risk factors not being addressed)
Protective factors apparent	Protective factors apparent	Protective factors apparent	No protective factors apparent
Parents ABLE to demonstrate sustained capacity for actual change	Parents ABLE to demonstrate sustained capacity for actual change	Parents UNABLE to demonstrate sustained capacity for actual change	Parents UNABLE to demonstrate sustained capacity for actual change
Parents and child both want return home	Parents and child both want return home	Ambivalence by parent and/or child re return home	Ambivalence by parent and/or child re return home
Unlikely that abuse will recur if child returned home	Some possibility that abuse will recur if child returned home	Strong possibility that abuse will recur if child returned home	Very strong possibility that abuse will recur if child returned home
Return child home following preparation with reunification plan, parental agreements, support for child and parents and monitoring. (Child In Need Plan/Placed with Parents)	Return child home following preparation with reunification plan, parental agreement, support for child and parents, services to reduce risks and increase protective factors and regular monitoring. (Child in Need Plan/Child Protection Plan/Placed with Parents)	Further interventions and evidence of parental ability to engage and change required before child returned home. Retain Care Order. Begin concurrent planning for possibility of permanent separation	Child remains Looked After. Legal proceedings instigated if required. Plan for permanent separation within timescale appropriate to child's development, needs and wishes
If parents can maintain 'low risks' for a period of at least six* months the case can close.	If parents address all risk factors and maintain the change for at least six months the case can move to 'low risk', where it should remain for a further six months before closing.	If parents develop a capacity for actual change and begin to address risk factors, and protective factors remain apparent this should be sustained for at least six* months before the case can move to 'medium risk' where it should remain for a further six* months before moving to 'low risk'.	If protective factors become apparent and/or parents begin to address risk factors, within timescale appropriate to child's needs, this should be sustained for at least six months before moving to 'high risk'.
If new risk factors emerge/ previous risk factor re-emerge and parents are able to show demonstrable capacity for change and protective factors are apparent the case will move to 'medium risk' for further interventions and monitoring.	If parents are unable to address all risk factors but are making use of interventions to address them and protective factors are apparent the case should remain 'medium risk'. As long as no new risk factors emerge or previous risk factors re-emerge that had previously been addressed.	If parents remain 'high risk' for six months without addressing risk factors the case should move to severe risk with plan for permanent separation.	
If new risk factors emerge/ previous risk factors re-emerge and parents are unable to show demonstrable capacity for change yet protective factors are apparent the case will move to 'high risk' for further interventions and monitoring.	If new risk factors emerge/ previous risk factors re-emerge and parents are unable to show demonstrable capacity for change yet protective factors are apparent the case will move to 'high risk' for further monitoring.	If protective factors are no longer apparent the case should move to severe risk with plan for permanent separation.	
If new risk factors emerge/ previous risk factor re-emerge and parents [illegible] show demo[illegible] for change [illegible] factors are [illegible] will move t[illegible] child will re[illegible] legal proce[illegible] if necessar[illegible]	If new risk factors emerge/ previous risk factor re-emerge		

40 Reunificati[illegible]

Low risk	Medium risk	High risk	Severe risk
Previous risks gone. Any other risks are low	Some risks	Lots of risks	Lots of risks
Lots of protection	Lots of protection	Some protection	No protection
Parents have made lots of changes	Parents have made lots of changes	Parents have not made any changes	Parents have not made any changes
Child and parents want return home to happen	Child and parents want return home to happen	Child or parents may not want return home to happen	Child or parents may not want return home to happen
It will be safe to go home	**It will be safe to go home with some support**	**It will not be safe to go home**	**It will not be safe to go home**

Key elements of practice

In summary

A tool that helps to ensure children are returned home if and **when it is safe to do so**

Supports **strong and evidenced** decision making

Flexible and **credible**

Can be used **across many 'return home' situations**

Child focussed (needs and timescales)

Team **around the family**

Restorative and **strength-based approach**

How we support organisations

Stages of implementation (NIRN model)

The implementation support package for the Reunification practice framework supports adopting organisations through the known stages of implementation (described below). Through training, workshops, check in calls, electronic and printed resources and our community of practice;
you are supported to embed the framework into every day practice.

Start here!

Exploration:
Explore the possibility of implementing the framework within potential adopting site

Installation:
Active preparation for using the framework for the first time, e.g.: systems changes, team structure and training

Initial implementation:
Testing the changes you implemented by using the framework with a small cohort of clients/service users

Full implementation:
New learning has become integrated into everyday practice and processes

Sustainability & innovation:
The framework is embedded enough that it can withstand shift in common external influences

Dean Fixen – National Implementation Network

Site proposed timeline

To be used as a guide only, dates are subject to change

Exploration

- **Early strategic conversation**
- **Pre-Implementation self assessment (PreISA)**
- Contract initiation and completion

Installation

- **Training for trainers training**
- Create steering group
- Communication plan (engage colleagues and partnership)
- Develop implementation plan
- Baseline data and agree child and implementation outcome measures

Initial implementation

- **12 months post training review workshop**
- Initiate full implementation
- Full rollout of training to service and partnership
- Communicate progress with service and partners
- Ongoing review

Pre-contract | **0 – 3 months** | **3 – 6months** | **6 – 12 months** | **12 months +**

- **First strategic workshop**
- Regular monitoring of implementation progress
- Practice groups
- Plan pilot
- Agree QA mechanisms

- **Second strategic workshop and practice surgery**
- Test strategies through pilot
- Review pilot (data and process)
- QA process in place
- Multi agency fora
- Plan wider implementation
- ***Complete ISA (before 3rd workshop)***
- Plan training roll out

Community of practice (online and face to face), follow up calls, needs led support and practice/implementation printed and electronic resources

The framework in practice

My experiences of using the framework

Top tips: Direct work with families

It's all about the **relationships**…

Understanding the adults story: Parents/ carers need to be ok to look after children

Support from **extended family** is key

Expect and plan for **relapse**

Achieving permanence… not linked to legal status… what this means for the child and their sense of security.

“Supporting others to use the framework”

Top tips: Practicalities of using RPF

Understanding how **risk and protective factors interact** with each other- it's not enough to just list them…

Not all parents/ carers can meet a **child's timeframe**

Permanence – what this means for the **child and their identity**

Not underestimating the value of an **analytical chronology**

Importance of clear planning where families are involved and support services do not end abruptly.

In summary

Tremendous opportunity to shape services for Looked After Children and children on the cusp of care

Evidence informed in both **nature** and **approach to implementation**

Tailored implementation support available (through the PreISA and clear understanding of context at the beginning)

Thank you, if you have any questions, please email:

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