

What is the Think Family Approach?

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and as part of your role working with adults, you may come into contact with children, in the same way that children's practitioners may have contact with adults. People rarely live in complete isolation; 'Think Family' refers to the practice of considering the entire family unit when working with an individual, acknowledging that complex difficulties like learning disabilities or physical disabilities within one family member can significantly impact the whole family dynamic, and that a holistic approach to support and intervention across all family members is required. It means being mindful of any issues or needs which extend beyond the individual you are supporting and taking appropriate action to ensure support is received including raising any safeguarding concerns with Oldham's [Adults](#) or [Children's](#) Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). A wider family perspective can help you and other practitioners involved identify potential problems early.

More Information

More details about Think Family are available via [Gov.uk](#) and [the NHS](#). The Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board [Partner Agency Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities Profiles](#) can be used to consider which agencies may be involved with a family, or which agencies to refer to or seek advice from. The [Professional Curiosity Guidance](#) and the [Self-Neglect and Hoarding Strategy](#) include the Think Family approach. The Oldham [Transitions Policy](#) is used to support families when a child is transitioning to adults services.

Local Learning

The [Safeguarding Adult Review](#) in relation to [Lisa](#) identified that a Think Family approach did not appear to have been considered. The role of Lisa's children as carers for her was identified, but due to Lisa refusing support no further referrals were made. Lisa disclosed that she was purchasing drugs over the internet. There was no consideration of Lisa's reliance on medication and how this might be impacting on the quality of life for her children. In [Joshua's SAR](#), it was found that his father was a carer for both Joshua and his mother but there was a sense that Joshua's father's needs went unnoticed to some extent. If a Think Family approach had been considered, it could have led to a carer's assessment and a secure plan for Joshua's adulthood that anticipated the needs of the whole family. In Fahad's SAR, there was a known high level of risk to self and others. Fahad was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and experienced mental and behavioural disturbances due to alcohol and illicit drug use. Fahad was arrested for the attempted sexual assault of an extended family member. It was found that a Think Family approach to discharge care management processes would have considered the needs of everyone involved.

Why is the Think Family Approach Important?

Practitioners should apply professional curiosity, remain open minded about the whole family and the support they may or may not be receiving and not assume that other practitioners are taking responsibility for some aspects of care and support without verifying this. Think Family means securing better outcomes for adults, children and families by coordinating the support and delivery of services from all agencies. Contact with any agency should offer an open door into a system of joined-up support and coordination between adult and children's services. Liaising with other practitioners working with a family is important. All practitioners can contribute their expertise and professional experience. It is a shared responsibility of all involved to address the needs of the family, strengthen the ability of family members to provide care and support to each other, and build on family strengths, recognising and promoting resilience and helping them to build their capabilities.

Adult Vulnerabilities

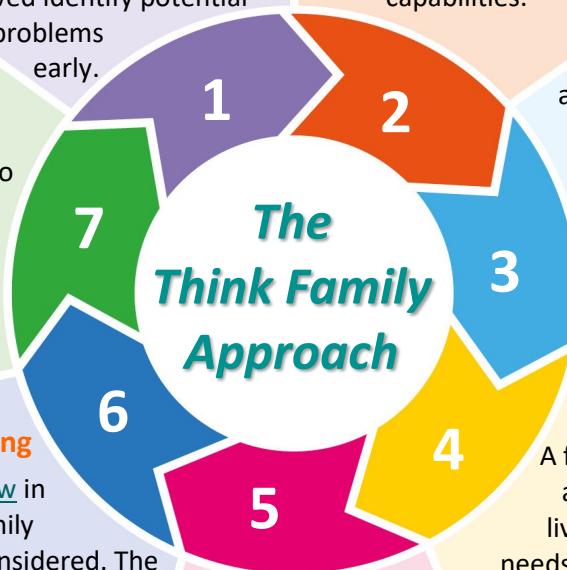
Everyone has a responsibility to take a Think Family approach in the context of safeguarding adults and children. There is an increase of risk and harm to children and adults when they live with an adult with one or more vulnerability factors including mental ill-health, substance misuse, domestic abuse or learning disabilities. Practitioners working with families where these are present should actively consider the impact on any adults and children being cared for.

Good Practice

A family may consist of children and adults, or all adults, such as older parent(s) living with adult children with mental health needs/learning and/or physical disabilities. Each person you work with will have their own understanding and definition of 'family'. This may include close friends and extended family members. Family is what each person defines it as. This should be explored and respected at the outset. Consider who makes up the family and ask questions to understand the role(s) of each member and how these relate to each other. Consider if other family members are in need of support or are at risk. Explore any caring responsibilities within the family. Consider the family's strengths and what is working well for them. Ensure everyone agrees with the plans for support and interventions. The impact of the plans and the results achieved should be reviewed in relation to the individual and the family.

Multi-Agency Working

The Think Family approach means systems and services should be tailored to the whole family's needs and situation from when services first start working with a family and throughout each stage of a family's journey. This involves coordinating all services to achieve the best outcomes for the whole family, whether services primarily work with adults or children, or when services are working with a someone placed outside of Oldham. The [Tiered Risk Assessment and Management \(TRAM\) Protocol](#) sets out a shared commitment across Oldham safeguarding agencies to work with risk and provide holistic support for an individual and their family. The protocol highlights the need to ensure that each agency is clear about their roles and responsibilities with respect to the family and the need to include families in Team Around the Adult (TAA) work.



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