

Healing Starts here: A Trauma-Informed Commissioning Guide for Children's Social Care

Supporting children and young
people affected by domestic abuse





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Introduction

This guide has been authored by [Dr Asha Patel](#), Clinical Psychologist and CEO of [Innovating Minds](#), whose pioneering work in trauma-informed practice has shaped national conversations around early intervention and mental health support for children and young people.

As local authorities navigate the evolving landscape of **children's social care reform**, the need for **evidence-based, trauma-informed interventions** has never been more urgent. With over **400,000 children** identified as 'in need' across England, and domestic abuse remaining a leading cause of intervention, **commissioners are uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change**.

Drawing on clinical expertise and real-world implementation across councils, this guide offers a practical framework for embedding scalable, trauma-informed support within existing systems. It introduces key principles of trauma-informed commissioning and showcases the [Healing Together](#) programme, a proven model that empowers frontline practitioners to deliver early help to children affected by domestic abuse.

Whether you're a **commissioning manager, transformation lead, or director of children's services**, this guide will help you make informed decisions that prioritise **prevention, healing, and long-term impact**.



[Dr. Asha Patel](#) is a Clinical Psychologist and the founder and CEO of Innovating Minds, a multi-award-winning social enterprise dedicated to early intervention in mental health. Drawing on her expertise in forensic mental health, Dr. Patel launched [Innovating Minds](#) in 2016 to bridge the gap between access to clinical expertise within education, health and social care.



Why This Matters

In 2021, children were formally recognised in law as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. Today, over **400,000 children** across England are identified as 'children in need', with **domestic abuse** remaining one of the leading causes of local authority intervention.

Despite this, support remains inconsistent and fragmented.

The current children's social care reforms present a vital opportunity to embed **early, trauma-informed interventions** that prevent escalation and promote healing.

This guide supports commissioners in embedding **effective, scalable trauma-informed approaches**, such as the **Healing Together** programme, into local systems.

10,001 Reasons to Keep Going

Because there's always one more child affected by trauma who needs comforting — healing starts with early help.



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What Does a Trauma-Informed Intervention Look Like?

With the rise of “trauma-informed” language, it’s essential to distinguish **genuine trauma-informed practice** from generic behavioural or cognitive based approaches.

Key principles include:

1. Grounded in Neuroscience & Relational Theory

True trauma-informed practice is rooted in understanding how trauma affects the brain and the body. Approaches based solely on behavioural or Cognitive Behaviour Therapy models often miss the physiological and relational dimensions of trauma.

2. Avoiding Re-traumatisation

Effective interventions do **not** require children to recount or relive traumatic experiences. Trauma is processed through the body, and healing must prioritise feelings of safety and co-regulation.

3. Flexible & Safe Delivery

Children should be able to **opt-in** to sessions. Delivery must be flexible—**1:1 or group, in-person or online**, and accessible in settings like **schools, family hubs, or homes**.

4. Inclusive & Accessible

Domestic abuse affects all communities. Interventions must be inclusive of **gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability**, and designed to support children with **SEN, neurodiversity, hearing difficulties**, and available in **multiple languages**.

5. Evidence-Based & Independently Evaluated

Commissioners should seek interventions backed by **robust, independent evidence**. Review evaluation methods, sample sizes, and whether data has been peer-reviewed or externally validated.

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Integration into Existing Systems & Pathways

Interventions that integrate into existing systems increase accessibility and sustainability. Commissioners often prefer models that **do not sit outside core services**.

Training **existing frontline practitioners**, in early help teams, schools, family hubs, and community settings, ensures children receive support from **trusted adults**.

Real Impact: Warrington Council trained schools and early help teams to deliver the **Healing Together** programme, embedding it into their **Tier 1 service** for children affected by domestic abuse.

👉 [Read the impact report](#)



Alignment with Current Service Models

Trauma-informed interventions do not align with services using **behavioural or punitive based approaches**. Commissioners should assess whether the commissioned intervention complements existing practices and team capabilities.



Line Management Commitment

Success depends on **line manager buy-in**. Managers must understand the training and delivery model, assign relevant cases, and provide supervision to support practitioners.

Real Impact: Manchester City Council's Early Help Team Leader assigns families to trained staff, boosting practitioner confidence and enabling children to access early help. This model has helped children **on the edge of care** remain safely with their families.

👉 [Read the impact report](#)



Staff Support & Development

Frontline practitioners are key to long-term success. Commissioners should ensure the commissioned provider offer **ongoing support**, including:



1:1 and group
coaching



CPD
opportunities



Access to clinical
supervision

Proven Impact:



95%

95% of practitioners trained
in **Healing Together** apply
trauma-informed principles
across their wider work.

Conclusion

Commissioning trauma-informed interventions is an investment in **prevention, healing, and long-term change**. Embedding programmes like **Healing Together** within existing systems empowers practitioners, strengthens families, and ensures children receive the right support at the right time.

Together, we can build a system that not only responds to trauma—but actively helps children **heal and thrive**.



Next Steps for Commissioners

If you're exploring sustainable, trauma-informed interventions that:

- Support children affected by domestic abuse
- Empower your existing workforce
- Integrate seamlessly into current systems
- Are backed by evidence and real-world results

Contact us to discuss scalable options and receive impact reports from councils already achieving change.

Book a call with Dr Asha Patel

