



LINK Stronger Families Service

“Essentially the Stronger Families Service provides a container for the family, whilst they are building a container for their child.”

Stronger Families Therapist

The **Barnardo's LINK Service** offers a wide range of specialist therapeutic support services to adoptive families, as well as services for kinship and foster families and families where a child is placed under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

Stronger Families is based on LINK's trauma-informed Attachment Focused Therapy model, which enables parents and carers to adopt and maintain a therapeutic parenting approach, acknowledging and understanding the child's or young person's emotions and behaviours.

The Stronger Families Service was developed in response to feedback from commissioning social workers. They told us that they wanted therapeutic support to be available to families prior to placement. While parents and carers will have had general training and preparation during their assessment, the focus is not on the specific child/ren being placed. Similarly, parents and carers have shared feedback with us indicating their wish that support could have been offered before the children were placed, to have had a better understanding of the impact on their own lives.

We have listened to Social Workers and families and designed the Stronger Families Service that can be accessed in the crucial time between linking, matching panel and placement.

“I see families who have been through their adoption training during their assessment, and who suddenly are able to have a real child to think about and hold in mind – suddenly the light bulbs go on and all that training in assessment starts to make sense and become real.”

Adoption Social Worker

Working with the adults, a Stronger Families therapist will assist adoptive parents/Special Guardians/Foster Carers to:

- Consider their own personal history of developing and maintaining attachment relationships both as a child and as an adult.
- Gain a deeper understanding of their child's history, recognising the potential effects on behaviour
- Identify and prepare for possible trigger points
- Look at strategies to promote achievable therapeutic parenting techniques at the start of placement
- Promote self-care and open communication at this sensitive time

Service Specification:

- 2 x 1 hour therapist planning and preparation – to include reading PAR/ CPRs and discussion with referring social worker.
- 6 x 1 hour therapy sessions to be held between matching panel and early placement, to be planned in consultation with parents and commissioning social workers.
- 1 x hour report writing – report will include summary of work undertaken, any risks identified, recommendations to include further therapeutic support if required.

(Please note, in cases where further attachment-based work is recommended, we will strive to ensure the same therapist can continue to work with the family, if this is appropriate and desirable.)

“ We received additional support through the Stronger Families Service and found it extremely worthwhile to be able to discuss how we were feeling at that crucial time approaching intros and placement. We felt that it was helpful to have someone independent that didn't know us and had come in with fresh eyes and could see/ pick up any concerns that others may not. Our therapist was very approachable, warm, and considerate and structured the meetings very well in a relaxed manner. We felt very at ease. We got to chat to her one to one which was really useful, especially as we didn't always have the same opinion regarding each parenting task, so it was good to have that middle person to help us unpick this and guide us along the right path. It was reassuring to be able to share our feelings at the early stage following placement as we both found this time very overwhelming. Our therapist's knowledge and guidance were invaluable at that time as she was able to give us advice, help and reassurance. We would definitely recommend this service to all adopters. ”

Adoptive parents



Our Clinical Governance

Barnardo's has robust governance arrangements in place to ensure that the charity delivers services safely and effectively. Barnardo's Clinical Governance Strategy sets out our commitment to delivering the highest quality of services to our service users, through a clear focus on the safety, effectiveness and the experience of that care and interlinks closely with the following:

- Barnardo's National Counselling Services Forum (NCSF) Minimum Standards for Counselling-based Services – these ensure safe, effective and ethical counselling practice within the organisation across the UK. These standards are based on current national guidelines within the counselling professions and apply to all Barnardo's services providing specialist support as a primary service or as part of the broader mental health and wellbeing offer.

- Barnardo's organisational membership of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the requirement for all relevant staff to be registered with the relevant professional body and working towards accreditation, if eligible. Additionally, there are minimum qualifications set out in the NCSF Minimum Standards for counsellors/therapists and managers of counselling services.

Clinical supervision

As outlined in Barnardo's Supervision Policy, clinical supervision is required for the relevant personnel to ensure professional standards are being met. Depending on the service and therapist, clinical supervision might be provided internally by qualified counsellors, or sourced from external professionals and should be delivered in line with BACP guidelines. All counsellors delivering services for Barnardo's work in line with Barnardo's arrangements and commitment to quality.



For more information about this service and other therapeutic services, please contact Link.Referralhub@barnardos.org.uk