



# BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST

## **Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS)**

### **Service Description**

Birmingham Children's Trust's (BCT) Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS) is the emotional wellbeing service for children in care and care leavers. Its purpose is to promote the health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people (0-25 years) and to support those who have responsibility for their care. TESS operates on the same practice principles as the wider Birmingham Children's Trust, which is grounded in the relationship-based tradition and heavily influenced by systemic, strengths based, restorative and trauma-informed approaches. TESS work closely with social work colleagues in Children in Care (CiC) and Safeguarding teams, fostering teams, the children with disabilities teams, and care leavers service. We also work closely with our local CAMHS service provision for children in care which is Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB).

TESS advocate that the first intervention regarding children and young people referred to the service should be an 'Initial Team around the Child or Young Person Meeting'. This is because we do not believe that the difficulties our children and young people face are primarily located within them but originate from their adverse experiences and the circumstances around them. Adults within the care system around a child all play a role in finding solutions, it is therefore important to draw together those around a child or young person and develop a shared understanding of the difficulties they face.

The TESS model has a focus on the development of a shared understanding of the child and young person's attachment and trauma experience and related difficulties through a systemic, attachment and trauma lens. This means having a focus on the development of primary care relationships (for our under 18s in care) that support children and young people through their journey of self-discovery and recovery from past trauma.

### **TESS aims:**

- Support young people and care leavers to build resilience.
- Promote secure attachments and support placement stability for children in care.
- Promote connections, support networks and develop healthy relationships for our care leavers
- Address the impact of developmental trauma.
- Provide interventions grounded in relationship-based and trauma informed practice.

TESS offers a service through three key approaches:

- 1) support to professionals and teams via an advice & consultation model
- 2) to offer therapeutic support to primary carers of our children in care
- 3) to offer direct therapeutic support to children, young people, and care leavers

TESS is a multidisciplinary service made up of Therapeutic Social Workers and Clinical Psychologists. Our team are trained in system family psychotherapy, play therapy, counselling, dyadic developmental psychotherapy (DDP), Non-Violent Resistance (NVR), Video-Interactive Guidance (VIG), and all take a relationship-based, attachment focused approach.

Many of our team have formal therapeutic training requiring registration with a professional governing body e.g. British Association of Play Therapist (BAPT), Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (AFT), and (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)).

## **Who TESS Supports:**

The service supports children and young people (0-18 years old) placed on an Interim (ICO) Care Order or placed in local authority care under Section 20 of the Children Act. The service also offers support to care leavers up to the age of 25 and to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people where Birmingham Children's Trust holds care responsibility.

There is no exclusion criteria or threshold of presentation to meet to access to our service. Each request for support is explored with the referrer, care network, and young person, so we can help identify a suitable plan of support to match a young person's emotional wellbeing and relationship needs. Young people with an enduring mental health need would need to be referred to the local CAMHS service.

## **BCT Services we support:**

- ▶ Children in Care Social Work Teams
- ▶ Safeguarding Teams
- ▶ Children with Disabilities Social Work Team
- ▶ Edge of Care Team
- ▶ Care Leavers Service
- ▶ Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (USAC) Teams
- ▶ Fostering Service
- ▶ Birmingham Children Trust Children Residential Homes

## **Pre referral support: TESS Advice & Consultation Service:**

A consultation and support service are offered to BCT teams, Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers. We offer a linked TESS Team Manager and Senior Practitioner to each service area management team, and the wider TESS service offer a consultative service to the wider care system.

These consultative sessions are designed to offer a space for reflection on the care and support offered to children and young people and to support the development of a trauma-informed parenting and care approach. These sessions create a reflective space for collective thinking to inform assessments, care plans, and consider the relationship dynamics, emotional wellbeing, and mental health presentation of our young people. The sessions are designed to help the care network to identify the emotional support and mental health need and influence the care planning process. The consultation sessions can take several forms; this can include discussion forums for specific children, exploring presentation and wider themes, offered individually or as a group. Our managers and senior practitioner support where there is a higher level of complex emotional need to support care plans, reviews and decision making.

### **Step up to Fostering Program:**

TESS have offered a tailored package of intervention to the 'Step Up to Fostering' programme since 2022. This is designed to support those children and young people in residential care to move into family settings (foster care). This program follows the ethos of a 'mockingbird' model' with a focus on building resilient and caring communities and systems around children and young people. The aim being to layer support that creates a 'golden thread' of therapeutic parenting principles informed by Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. The primary aim of TESS involvement within this remit is to help build and maintain stable and successful placements for children and young people, by supporting the development of safe and trusting relationships between children and their primary caregivers.

### **TESS Access Point (TAP):**

The TESS Access Point (TAP) service is run by our experienced Senior Practitioner and Social Work team. Each referral has an expected response time of no more than 48 hours. This includes making direct contact with the referrer, or care leaver if they have made a self-referral. This would include a triage process and agreeing the route to support.

### **TESS Direct therapeutic approaches for children, young people, and their carers:**

TESS advocates that children, young people, and care leavers often display a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. As a result, complex presentations for children and young people can be seen as a means of surviving and adapting to their adverse childhood experiences. As a result of complex trauma, children and young people will often be highly anxious and hypervigilant in response to real or perceived threats.

It is our role in the therapy journey to support young people to be heard and understood by those that care for them. To understand their trauma experiences and assist the care network, parents and carers, and young people as they journey through their experiences to achieve stability in their care relationships.

TESS offer a variety of relationship-based approaches to support change where the carer is an active part of the therapy process. This includes:

- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)
- Theraplay informed interventions
- Systemic Family Therapy
- Non-Violence Resistance (NVR)
- Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems (BUSS)
- Video Interactive Guidance (VIG)

Where appropriate and safe to offer individual interventions, TESS offers:

- Play & Art Therapy
- Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Resilience-based approaches.

## **Foundations for Attachment Group:**

The Foundations for Attachment Group (Golding, 2017) is a 6 week, DDP informed therapeutic parenting programme. The group runs every half-term and is offered to foster carers, connected carers and birth parents who are caring for their child under a care order. The programme has 3 objectives:

1. To gain an understanding of the challenges of parenting with relationship difficulties.
2. To explore ways of building emotional connections with children whilst also providing support for behaviour.
3. To explore the importance of looking after yourself and ways to do this.

A monthly support group has recently been set up to help carers to embed their learning from the group and support their therapeutic parenting journey.

## **TESS Care Leavers service:**

TESS has established a dedicated team to support care leavers aged 18+. This small team of qualified therapeutic social workers, link closely with the wider TESS service and offer our care leavers a tailored and supportive therapy provision.

TESS aim to help our carer leavers address and manage past traumas and current challenges. TESS understands the vulnerabilities of this group of young adults as they move towards greater independence without the safety net of foster care. TESS supports care leavers to develop coping strategies to help lessen the impact of their emotional difficulties in their day to day lives and improve their emotional functioning and wellbeing.

When our care leavers feel they are ready to access support, we look to match with a TESS practitioner with a view to offering a tailored therapeutic intervention. All our

approaches are underpinned by a trauma informed and relationship-based perspective. TESS also offer a regular drop-in afternoon for care leavers to visit and seek help or to just hangout and connect with the team.

### **Our links with local Mental Health Specialist Support:**

TESS is not a mental health or crisis support service and therefore not in a position to offer diagnostic or specialist mental health support and urgent care. Where we support young people and care leavers who may be experiencing higher mental health risk, such as self-harm and suicidal ideation, and where the level of care sits outside of our TESS skill, knowledge, and expertise, we assist young people and care leavers to access Birmingham's local CAMHS service, Forward Thinking Birmingham, so that they can receive the care and support they require.