

## **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 (including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) & care leavers. Its purpose is to promote, support and meet 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 other social care 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 the Virtual School and our local CAMHS service provision for children in care within 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'. A significant proportion of children and young people referred to TESS will have experienced significant childhood adversity, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, early developmental trauma, attachment disruption and/or loss. An important aspect of the work in TESS is to understand children's needs and presentations in context of their environment, experiences of early adversity, parenting/caregiving and /or disadvantage or inequality. Therefore, as well as offering direct support to children and young people, we often work together with parents, wider family, carers or other important people within the young person's professional or community support network.

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 caregiver(s) or other significant relationships that support children and young people through their journey of self-discovery and recovery.

### **TESS aims:**

- Support children, young people and care leavers to build resilience.
- Promote attachment security and 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) therapeutic support to primary carers of our children in care
- 3) direct therapeutic support to children, young people (including family based & dyadic approaches) and to care leavers

TESS is a multidisciplinary service made up of Therapeutic Social Workers and Clinical Psychologists. Our team are trained (to various levels) 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 therapeutic Social Workers have professional registration with a therapeutic 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 is in the Team:

TESS is a well-established and highly regarded service, who strive to offer high quality support and are continuously looking to develop our therapeutic offer to meet the needs of children, young people and their families in the care of Birmingham Children's Trust.

The therapeutic team is comprised of:

- Head of Service for HSB and TESS
- 4 TESS Team Managers (3.8 WTE)
- 2 Principal Clinical Psychologist (1 Vacancy) (1.8 WTE)
- 1 Clinical Psychologist (0.6 WTE)
- 5 Senior Social Work Practitioners (4.7 WTE)
- 17 Senior Social Workers (1 vacancy) (15.3 WTE)

## 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.

Each request for support is explored with the referrer, care network and/or young person (as appropriate) to help determine level of need and which professional agency might be best placed to meet the need. TESS is not a substitute for a secondary mental

health service; it does not operate a crisis or out of hours service and does not have access to psychiatric or other multi-disciplinary support. However, where this level of need is required, we will work together with the local CAMHS service to try and ensure no child or young person falls through the gaps. TESS is also not able to provide support for children in care, living within Birmingham, but who do not come under the statutory responsibility of Birmingham Children's Trust.

### **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.

### **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 consultation service to the wider care system.

These consultation sessions are designed to offer a space for reflection on the care and support offered to children and young people to:

- help the care network to identify and formulate emotional wellbeing, relational dynamics &/or mental health needs of the child/young person &/or family/caregiver(s).
- inform assessments, analysis, care plans and support plans to best meet needs.
- support the development of trauma-informed parenting and care approaches.

Our managers, senior practitioners and Clinical Psychologists support where there is a 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 Direct therapeutic approaches for children, young people, and their carers:

Care experienced children, young people and adults have typically experienced significant adversity, relational disruption, dysfunction, trauma and or neglect, including in utero exposure to chronic stress or harmful substances that can impact child development, emotional wellbeing, mental health and/or relational functioning. It is therefore important that we 'look beyond behaviour' and understand and explore presenting difficulties in context. Rather than pathologizing distress, TESS seeks to support children, young people and care leavers to be heard, to develop a shared understanding of their difficulties and to work together with them and their support network (where appropriate) to best meet these needs.

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 therapeutic social workers, link closely with the wider TESS service and offer our care leavers a tailored and supportive therapy provision.

TESS aim to support our carer leavers with their 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. 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.