

Freedom and Responsibility

1. Putting children first

Because children are at the heart of all we do, whenever we make a decision, we must ask ourselves 'Will this help us to achieve what is best for children and families?'. To help answer this question, we will include the voices of people with experience of care whenever possible, so we continue to benefit from the insight of experts by experience to develop our curricula, evaluate our innovations, teach, quality assure and recruit to our programmes.

We will confidently share and celebrate the positive impact that our participants, leaders and Fellows have with children and families. Those closest to Frontline's front line, have a particular responsibility to share this important work and celebrate the accomplishments of social workers, so everyone in the charity has a deep understanding of our collective impact.

Putting children first means developing great social workers **and** focussing on improving social work systems. Changing culture and conditions in social work requires thoughtful, decisive and child-centred leadership, at all levels of social work. Leadership is needed when making difficult, life-changing decisions, whether as a social worker removing a child from their family or a Director of Children's Services, responding to an inadequate Ofsted outcome. Our job is equipping people with the leadership skill to respond to such deeply challenging situations, while keeping children's needs as the highest context and doing what is right, even when it's hard.



Keeping children at the forefront of decision-making transcends our programmes – there are many opportunities to put children and families first in all areas of our work. This is what led us to overhaul our family leave policies in 2021, so that when needed, team members who are parents and carers, can spend more time with their families.



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Frontline

2. Making diversity and inclusion **everyone's business**

We want the Frontline team to reflect the children, young people and families across England. To be an effective charity we need difference. Difference of race, experience, thought and skill. We will continue our work towards an inclusive and enabling culture that amplifies minoritised voices, assumes good intent, strives to be critically aware and creates opportunities for meaningful learning. This will take time and needs constant work and investment from us all, particularly those in leadership positions.

We know systemic racism impacts young people in a range of ways for example Black Caribbean children are much more likely to go into care¹ and Black people are 9x as likely to be stopped and searched by police, than White people². It is our responsibility to proactively tackle systems and structures that perpetuate and embed racism in society.

We will continue to address this; for example, maintaining:

- our mentoring scheme for ethnic minority employees;
- diversity targets on our programmes
- as well as coaching and career development for fellows from ethnic minority backgrounds.

We are clear on our anti-racist commitment in all we do. That's why when recruiting, we include interview questions to explore how candidates would address anti-racism if successful.

Education and awareness are key to creating a diverse and high performing workforce. The leadership group play a key role in setting and maintaining a culture of inclusion, but everyone at Frontline is responsible for dedicating time to improve their knowledge and show leadership in this area. We need to create an environment where people can make mistakes and are supported to learn whilst acting decisively in response to discriminatory behaviour.



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3. Working as one team

We are all part of the Frontline team and we all play our part in achieving our mission. We have an incredible team at Frontline, who all want to work with other incredible people. To achieve this, we need high expectations of ourselves, each other and of those joining Frontline. Having high expectations means everyone having the right behaviours and skill to do great work.

We must allow room for difference and creativity, whilst also consistently delivering excellent work. When we do achieve amazing things, we need to celebrate and showcase these – when we know what we're doing well, it is easier to keep doing it. To keep improving, we must seek out the ways we can do our work even better, individually, as teams and organisationally. There is room to make mistakes and be curious about our failures – that's how we learn! As an organisation working towards improving social work leadership and practice, we need to keep trying different things and mistakes are key to that.

At the same time, it's important we're honest if mistakes keep happening and if people aren't doing their best, or their best isn't enough, because this makes it harder for others to do their best work. We need to be frank with each other when this happens and support people to leave swiftly and with compassion if they are not able to improve. Giving and openly receiving feedback is key to a healthy culture and core to social work practice, because it helps build trust.

[Radical candour](#) is popular, as are many other feedback models, fundamental to each is the assumption of positive intent. Giving honest feedback is challenging, but is absolutely essential to building strong working relationships, which help us make the best possible decisions and navigate when we disagree with each other.

To create an environment which enables productive, honest relationships, we will continue to invest in learning and development opportunities, training for people managers and dedicated time together to understand each other's work – like our annual in person away days. We all need to keep looking for ways to keep the culture of feedback alive such as the People team revising our formal annual performance appraisal process in favour of an informal approach which ensures people receive more regular feedback and support on their work.

Improving leadership is central to our programmes, so we all need to role model Frontline's [leadership capabilities](#) in all we do. We have great managers at Frontline and they have a particular responsibility to create opportunities to understand their team's perspective and represent their views.

There will be occasions where we choose to consult with everyone directly on particular decisions, but the best way to ensure your voice is heard generally is to be clear with your manager. With a charity of our size, unanimous agreement is a rarity, so provided decision-making at all levels of the organisation draws on different perspectives ([see page two](#)) and is informed by evidence ([see page four](#)) we need to trust each other's knowledge and professional judgement.



4. Making decisions based on **common sense** and **evidence**

Many organisations fall into the trap of adding policy in an attempt to address isolated performance issues, or to create rules rather than trust individual's decision-making. To avoid this trap, we need to continuously remove and avoid unnecessary layers or overly-complicated bureaucracy.

By trusting each others' professional judgement, being clear with each other when we are doing well, or not meeting each other's expectations ([see page three](#)) we will build this trust. We need to be pragmatic, only introducing policy or process when there is a clear, widespread need. When we do introduce a new policy or process, we must ensure it is simple, short and clear.

Key to all good decisions, particularly those which carry risk, is the use evidence and/or intelligence. This is vital in social work and all our work, because it reduces the impact of bias or the reliance on personal perspectives. We should be solution focussed and use data, knowledge and evidence to make sure we're always learning, making sound decisions and changing our approach as we get more information. Data is key to sharing our impact and celebrating our successes.



Some of our work is strictly regulated, which can cause tensions with our aim to keep regulation and bureaucracy to a minimum. We need to balance our freedom to make decisions within our roles, with the responsibility of adhering to the regulation we're accountable to. Making an argument for and against a new process and sense-checking these with your manager and colleagues in different teams, are good ways to test your thinking.



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Turning intent **into action**

These are words on page – they mean nothing if they don't translate into how we work. We all need make our culture of Freedom and Responsibility a reality. Only by working closely together, engaging in constant debate and regularly taking stock of the way we are working together, we will remain aligned with these four themes.

This 5th iteration of Freedom and Responsibility looks very different from the original 2018 version, since then we have grown together as a team – this document reflects that. We all need to seek out ways to bring these themes to life, so we can all drive together towards achieving our mission – to create social change for children and their families by developing excellent social work practice and leadership.



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