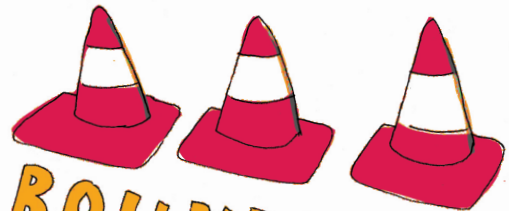
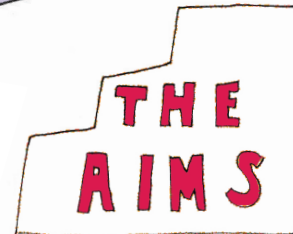




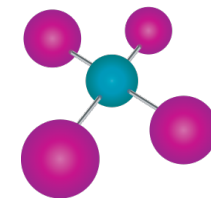
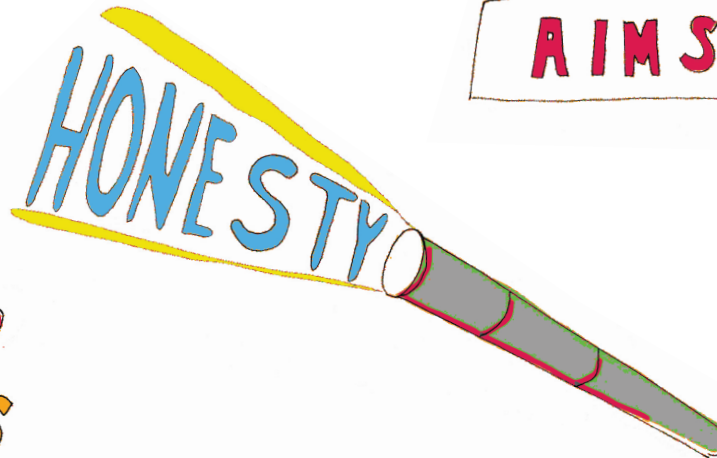
# Relationship-Based Practice



takes



BOUNDARIES



SCRC

South Coast  
Regional Centre for  
Social Work Education

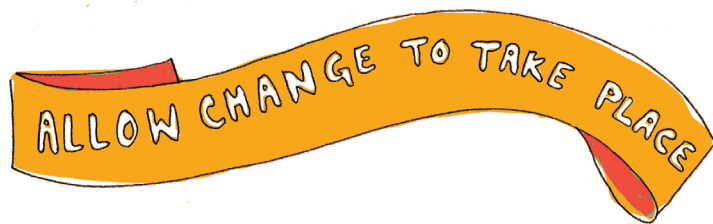
# The Relationship-Based Evaluation Framework was created by families and social workers across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex who are passionate about working together and making positive change.

We have defined relationship-based practice and outlined ideas of who, when, how and what to ask families to understand and improve relationship-based practice. The focus is on relationships between individual social workers and families and the wider Children's Services organisation rather than statistics or process.

The framework and tools help to evaluate and find out:

- What experiences do people have of receiving Children's social work services using a relationship-based approach?
- What is the impact of relationship-based social work practice in Children's Services as perceived by people receiving services?
- What changes do people receiving services think are needed for improving relationship-based social work practice now and in the future?

A consistent message from the project is that finding out about what is going well or not and what needs to change is not enough!



**This framework is only meaningful if it leads to change and action both immediate and in the future.**

# What is Relationship-Based Practice?

Relationship-based practice emphasises the idea that a social worker's relationship with the family is the most powerful tool to help families achieve change.

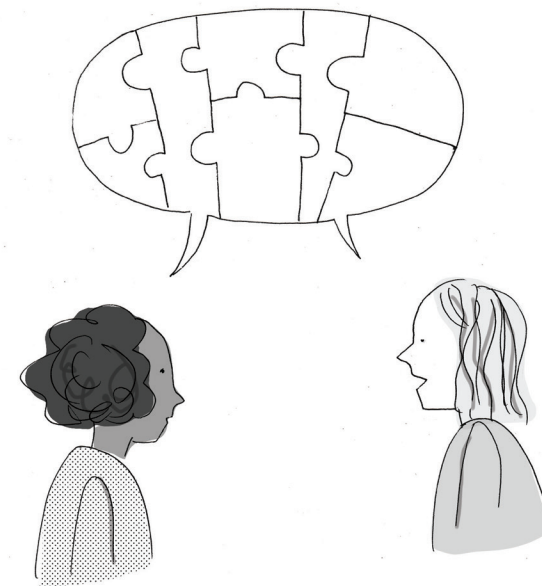
We think that the relationships between social workers and families should be based on trust, empathy, and the compassionate use of authority.

**“ At its best, what social work can offer to people in need of help is a supportive and understanding relationship which will enable them to resolve their difficulties and to feel enhanced rather than undermined in the process. ”**

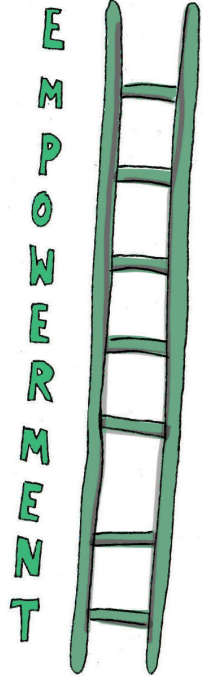
(Gillian Ruch, 2010)

We also recognise that, as organisations, we need to provide support to social workers so that they feel safe and contained as this means they will be able to build supportive relationships with families.

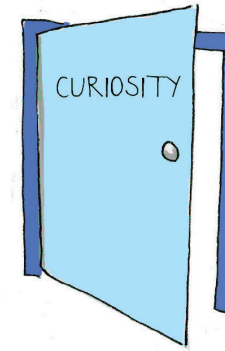
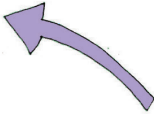
Relationship-based practice is about our values, as workers and organisations, and our way of being. Relationship-based practice recognises that each individual, and each relationship is unique, and that all of us are shaped by our experiences – acknowledging that our experiences influence our behaviours.



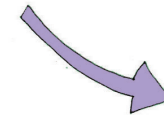
Relationships that promote trust, collaboration and empower are key to supporting families and children. Trusting relationships provide a context in which to have conversations about safety and allow change work to take place. Social workers need to understand and approach relationships with parents compassionately and understand how they have developed into the adult they are today, based on the experiences they had in their own childhood. One of the dilemmas often brought up about this way of working is whether workers can really gain the trust of a family while also having to implement statutory processes, such as going into care proceedings. However, we believe that this kind of working relationship is possible if social workers are transparent about expectations around change, what their role involves, and what might happen if change cannot be achieved. A social worker can never completely get rid of risks to children and there is no single way to practice social work.



EMPATHY



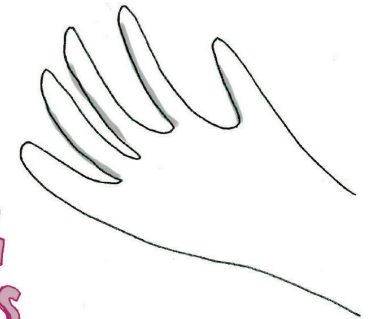
# WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP BASED PRACTICE?



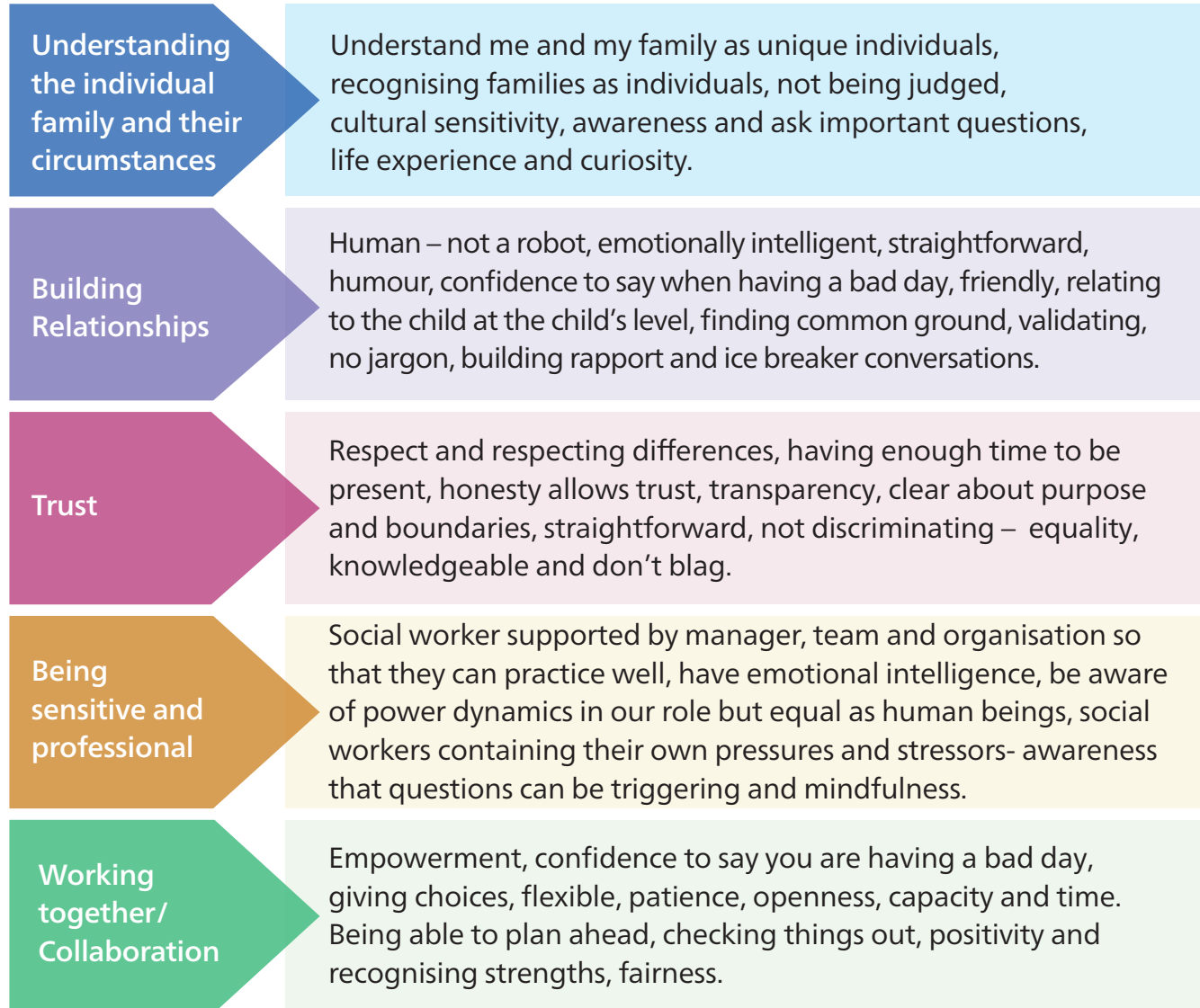
COMPASSIONATE  
USE OF CURIOSITY



TRUSTING  
RELATIONSHIPS



## Relationship-Based Traits, Values and Behaviours Defined by Parents with lived experience and Social Workers:



The young people and practitioners created a list of the most important characteristics/indicators of a supportive social work relationship.

The top 5 are listed below.

(Please see Appendix 2 Food Matters Output report for more information).

### Top 5 relationship-based practice characteristics:

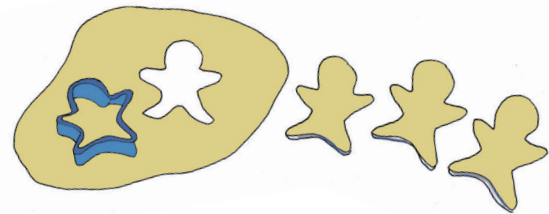
**A supportive social work relationship.....**

- **Is one where I feel respected**
- **Is one that empowers me and enables me to make decisions for myself**
- **Is built on mutual trust**
- **Is where I feel listened to, understood and heard**
- **Is one that makes me feel safe**

# The Framework

For families there is no cookie cutter approach to evaluating relationship-based practice. We need to be flexible and responsive to individual needs to maximise participation and make the process meaningful.

The project has developed a variety of ideas to evaluate relationship-based practice.



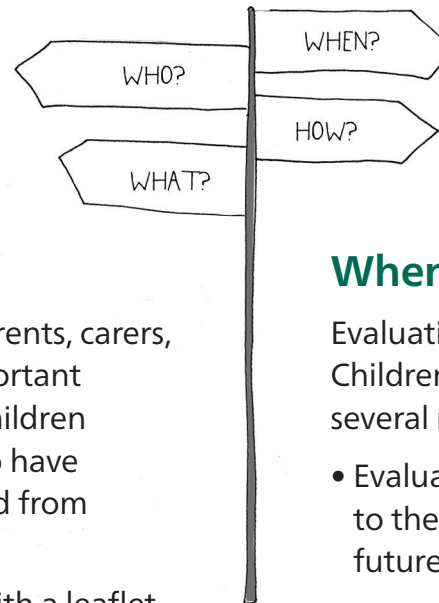
INDIVIDUAL  
NEEDS

## Who?

Any family member (parents, carers, extended family or important friends [kinship care], children and young people) who have a social worker allocated from Children's Services.

Families are provided with a leaflet (electronic or hard copy) and told about how and why the feedback is sought, including some of the benefits, at the beginning of Children's Services involvement.

Families should be signposted and encouraged to evaluate relationship-based practice, but we need to be balanced so no one feels pressured. Families have the choice.



## When?

Evaluation should take place throughout Children's Services involvement for several reasons:

- Evaluations should make a difference to the here and now – not only for future families.
- Evaluations throughout the involvement of Children's Services help to track change in real time.
- Evaluations with individual families can inform wider system change.
- Families should be able to feedback after Children's Services involvement because sometimes time to let things settle is important.

Intervals of when families are encouraged to evaluate relationship-based practice are determined by time rather than process stage, e.g. assessment, Child Protection or Child In Need.

Families said:

“ You’re gonna build up the relationship over time and it changes, so the timing of when this [evaluation] is done is more important than whether it is Child in Need or Child Protection – you might bounce backwards and forwards in the system. You are looking at the relationship, not the process. ”

We suggest that families are reminded/ encouraged to evaluate relationship-based practice at the beginning and then every 2 -3 months to track changes, however this will not be appropriate for everyone and flexibility in view of individual circumstances is key.

## How?

Families can choose to be anonymous or not when evaluating relationship-based practice through an online survey or interview. The benefits and shortcomings of each method are explained here:

- Giving your name – The evaluation can be used to monitor and improve current working relationships between families and workers. The evaluations (positive or negative) will be reviewed in supervisions between workers and managers so that examples of good relationship-based practice can be celebrated, and workers are supported in creative ways when matters are raised. For example, offering meetings between worker and family, training or review of workload.
- Giving the social worker’s name only – This will not identify you directly but ensures that your information is shared with the social worker and manager and reviewed in supervisions. Krystal raised issue where as a black woman she may be the 1 in 100 not treated well.

- Remaining anonymous – This will assist in wider service development and inform focus groups and organisational action plans for change.

Families can choose to complete an online survey or interview – the questions will be the same through either method. The questions for parents and young people will be different as developed by those with lived experience.

If families prefer an interview, they are given a choice of expert by experience and/ or practitioner completing the interview. Local Authorities will need to consider how to sustainably resource including providing training, support and adhere to data protection. The practitioner completing the interview will share a confidentiality and data storage statement with the family, to provide reassurance to those who wish to remain anonymous.

## Online Survey

An online survey will be shared with families using a web address link or QR code clearly shown on the leaflet (proposed above) but can also be texted or emailed to the family.

Families completing the online survey may need further explanations for what is meant by terms like “trust”, because everyone’s interpretation of this term will be different. The project suggested that there is a function where participants can hover over the word to see the definition as defined by the project (see page 5).

Importantly, the online survey has details about how individuals completing the survey can access support both practically and/or emotionally. The allocated social worker should be one option but other options should also be presented. The support offered will need to be clearly set out by Local Authorities. The surveys are centrally collated to be analysed by the Quality Assurance teams in each Local Authority, who are not involved in direct social work or decision-making related to the people providing the

feedback. If families have provided their own and/or the social worker’s name, the information will still be centrally collated before being sent to the social worker and manager to consider in supervision. Each Local Authority will need to consider how to resource this.

Please see Appendix 1 for questions for parents/carers and Appendix 2 for Dials questions for children and young people.

Positives	Potential limitations
Can be completed in person’s own time.	No prompting questions or chance to clarify questions if this is needed.
It gives people time to think about their responses (less pressure) than an interview.	No immediate emotional support if needed.
It ensures that the responses are accurately recorded	Technology poverty – families may not have access to the internet or laptops.
Signpost to support if needed	
Might feel more anonymous.	

## Interview

The leaflet will provide an email address/telephone number to contact which will enable the family to request an interview to evaluate relationship-based practice.

Please see Appendix 1 for outline of questions and format for parents and Appendix 2 for children and young people questions.

Those completing interviews, will have some training and support – these are likely to be Experts by Experience and practitioners.



We all need different things..

Positives	Potential limitations
Support (practical and emotional) to explain the evaluation framework, questions and offer emotional support in case the person is affected?	Potential delay due to availability of practitioners or Experts by Experience. The time needed to commit to an interview could also be a disincentive.
Opportunity for clarification and more information.	Potential for person conducting and recording the interview to misinterpret responses and speaking to a stranger may be difficult for some.
Sharing experiences can make families feel heard and understood immediately.	Interviews require more resources than online surveys.
Potential for higher feedback numbers as appointment to provide feedback is set up (less likely to forget)	

## Focus Groups

We propose bi-annual (every 6 -12 months) focus groups to evaluate traits/ behaviours of relationship-based practice as defined by the project (see pages 2-3) and themes that have emerged through online surveys, interviews, audits and quality assurance processes.

The focus groups are facilitated by Experts by Experience, Practice Leads and Senior Management Team and in consultation with existing parent and carer forums. The practitioners have skills in facilitating group discussions.

The symbolic nature of facilitators across the service including senior staff and Experts by Experience was felt to be essential to maximises engagement, illustrate the importance of the evaluation and future action plans.

Families invited to the focus group may be working with social workers across the organisation including Children's Disability services, youth justice/youth support and adolescent services etc. Families invited are representative of those working with our services, so diversity needs to be considered.

We believe that focus groups will also be great opportunities to build relationships, co-production and reflect relationship-based practice. Providing lunch and reward and recognition is essential to demonstrate the importance and value we place on the evaluation and what families think about our services.



## What is asked?

The questions in the survey and interview are the same and extract information that helps us understand how relationship-based practice is reflected in people's service experience, as explained by this project. The focus is on questions that gain a qualitative response from both parents/carers and young people because this fits best when trying to understand the quality and nature of relationships. To enable a visual representation and for quantitative monitoring scaling questions have also been incorporated. All questions have been developed by the project including parents, young people and practitioners with support from Jeri Damman and Food Matters.

## How will the information be used?

If families provide their name and details, the evaluation will be shared with their social worker and manager to celebrate good practice and identify potential areas for development. More broadly, themes from the feedback given through surveys, interviews and focus groups will be collated and themed by the Quality Assurance teams in each Local Authority. The information will then be shared with important groups such as parent advisory boards and children's consultation groups for further comments, reflections and so that actions can be recommended. These will then be shared with senior managers to inform action plans. We will need to create a feedback loop so that families and practitioners are informed of what changes are being or have been made.

# Appendix 1: Questions for online survey and interview

This set of questions was created by families and social workers across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex who are passionate about working together and making positive change. We would like to learn about your experience of your relationship with your current social worker (or most recent if you no longer have a social worker). It is really important to hear your views so that we can understand the relationships we have with families and improve them wherever possible.

You can choose to remain anonymous, give us your name and your social worker's name, or you can just give us your social worker's details.

Here are some things to think about when making this decision:

- Giving your name –  
The evaluation can be used to monitor and improve current working relationships between families and workers. The evaluations (positive or negative) will be reviewed in supervisions between workers and managers so that examples of good relationship-based practice can be celebrated, and workers are supported in creative ways when matters are raised. For example, offering meetings between worker and family, training, or review of workloads.
- Giving the social worker's name only –  
This will not identify you directly but ensures that your information is shared with the social worker and manager and reviewed in supervisions.
- Remaining anonymous –  
This will assist in wider service development and inform focus groups and organisational action plans for change.

I have really appreciated the relationships that we have built with each other



**You do not have to answer all the questions if you don't want to, but please answer the ones that are important or relevant to you.**

1. Can you briefly tell me what the current situation is with your family in terms of social work involvement (hover or prompt), and what team you are working with. How long has the social worker been involved?
2. Parents and professionals have worked together to come up with the following characteristics of good social work practice. Is this your experience of your relationship with your social worker? Please score each attribute from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.  

My social worker...

  - Understands my family and our unique circumstances
  - Is skilled at building relationships?
  - Acts in ways that allows me to put my trust in them
  - Practices sensitively and professionally (e.g. is present and focused when with me, is aware of how their words and actions impact on me)
  - Works alongside me.
3. Did your social worker explain your rights (including how to make a complaint), and what to expect from having social work involvement? Tell me about your experience of this and anything else that would have helped you to understand what was happening.
4. How has the relationship with your social worker made an impact on you and your family?  
Please consider both positive and negative impacts.
5. What is your feedback about other people you have had contact with in Children's Services?  
E.g. communication with reception or admin staff, social work manager or independent reviewing officer?
6. If you could change one thing about the service from your social worker what would it be? If you have more than one, please include. This could be right now for you and your family, or in the future to help other families.
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## Appendix 2: Co-production workshops with care experienced young people and social workers

Appendix 2 can be found online at:  
[www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/rbp-evaluation-framework-appendix-2](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/rbp-evaluation-framework-appendix-2)

This project has involved 10 parents and 12 young people with lived experience, and 13 practitioners from Children's Services in Brighton & Hove and East Sussex.

Additional professionals who have contributed include from

Recovery Partners,

the University of Sussex,

Reframe Collective,

East Sussex Children in Care Council,

Brighton & Hove Children in Care Council,

Food Matters,

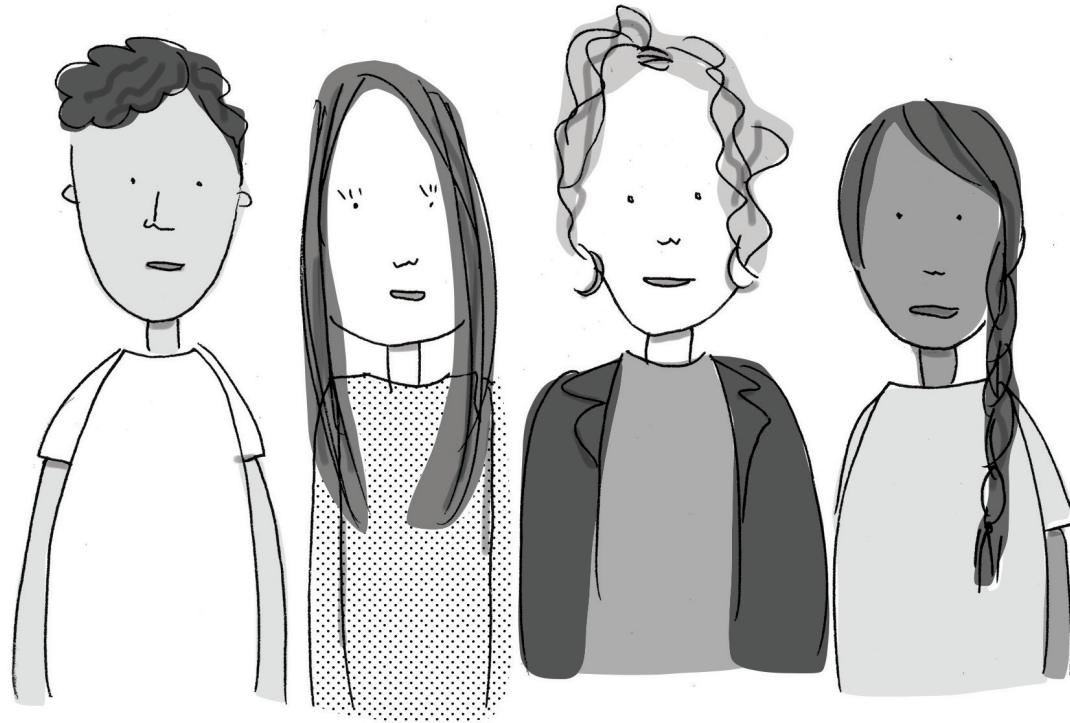
and Eliza Fricker (Illustrator).



GIVEN  
CHOICE

AVAILABILITY

ENCOURAGED  
TO EXPRESS  
MYSELF



VALUED

EQUAL TO OTHERS

BELIEVES IN US



# Relationship-Based Practice



takes

