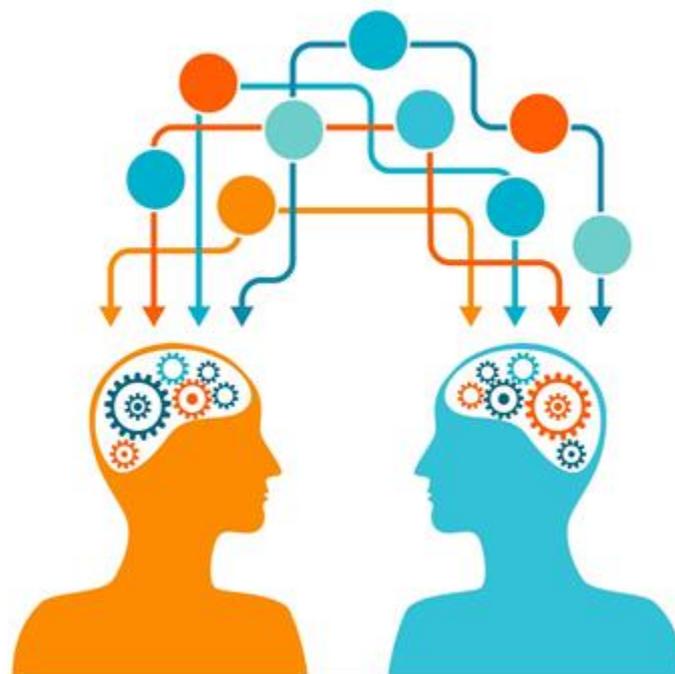


Framework to support the implementation of the communication toolkit '*Fundamentals of good communication: How to have effective everyday conversations*' in Tusla



April 2024

Table of contents

Background to project.....	3
Supporting the implementation of the toolkit across Tusla	4
▪ Developing an action plan or 'roadmap'.....	6
▪ Examining contextual factors.....	7
▪ Effective communication pathways	8
▪ Ongoing monitoring	9
▪ Long-term evaluation	9
Next stages for implementation of the toolkit.....	9
Appendices.....	11

Purpose of the document

This document sets out key learning from each stage of the collaborative process of developing the communication toolkit, *Fundamentals of good communication: How to have effective everyday conversations*.

Based on this learning, the document sets out a number of important factors that can help Tusla to support successful implementation and sustainment of the toolkit in practice.

Background to project

HIQA has developed Draft National Standards for Children's Social Services to drive improvements in the quality and safety of care for all children. Throughout the development of the standards, HIQA engaged extensively with stakeholders including children, young people, families, foster carers and staff working in children's social services, to understand the barriers and facilitators* to implementing the standards in practice. One significant area identified was that children, young people, families and foster carers, as well as staff, indicated that when communication went well between them and Tusla staff, it helped them to feel supported and heard in their care journey. However, evidence indicated that, at times, a lack of effective communication existed between these groups. This often led to confusion for children, young people, families and foster carers, delays in accessing care and support, and lack of trusting relationships between these groups.

To support effective communication, HIQA and Tusla committed to work in collaboration to co-produce tools to support and enhance communication across Tusla's response pathway.

The project was overseen by a Steering Group. Membership of this group is set out in Appendix 1. A small project team[†] with representatives from HIQA and Tusla was formed to run this project. This team worked with a cross-sectoral Working Group, to develop a communication toolkit entitled '*Fundamentals of good communication: How to have effective everyday conversations*'. Membership of this group is detailed in Appendix 2. This toolkit aims to support Tusla staff when they are communicating with children, young people, families and foster carers, in order to improve the experience and outcomes for these groups.

To assess its acceptability and adoption by Tusla staff, the toolkit underwent pre-implementation testing in Tusla. A total of six children in care teams from different

* This involved asking stakeholder groups what is working well in children's social services and also what is not working as well in these services.

[†] The project team includes Maria MacInnes, Service Improvement Manager, Tusla and Deirdre Connolly, Programme Manager for Health and Social Care Services, HIQA

service areas took part in the testing. Feedback from a total of 25 staff who had the opportunity to test the toolkit was positive, with good acceptance of the toolkit across managers and frontline staff involved in testing. These teams also provided feedback on how the toolkit could be implemented in practice within Tusla. See Figure 1 for further detail. This feedback was used to revise the toolkit, where necessary, and to inform this framework to support Tusla to implement and scale-up use of the toolkit in practice.

Figure 1: Feedback from pre-implementation testing phase



Supporting the implementation of the toolkit across Tusla

The project team involved in developing the toolkit has developed this framework to guide Tusla staff who are leading on the implementation of the toolkit across Tusla.[‡] This framework sets out a number of important factors that can help support the successful implementation, scale-up and sustainment of the toolkit in practice. These factors are based on what we have learned throughout each stage of the project. This includes our learning from the following processes:

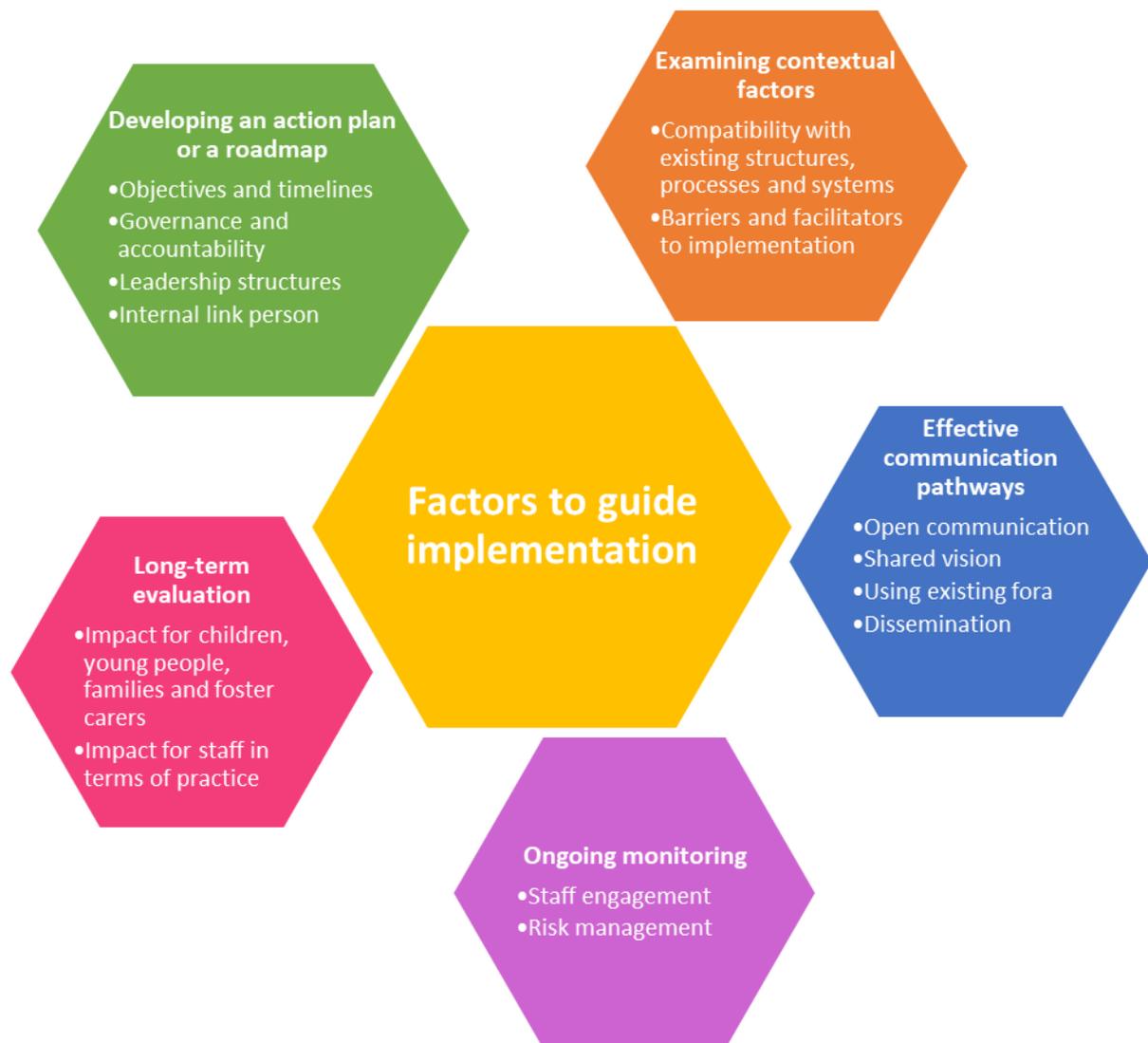
- Initial review of structures and systems in place in Tusla that help to support and sustain initiatives

[‡] It is anticipated that those responsible for leading the implementation of the toolkit in Tusla will include representatives from the Quality Improvement Team, Regional Professional Support Managers, Principal Social Workers, Team Leads and also representatives for frontline staff.

- Engagement and feedback from the high-level Steering Group with oversight of the project
- Engagement and feedback from the cross-sectoral Working Group
- Feedback from the testing of the toolkit.

Drawing the learning from each of these processes, we have identified a number of important factors that may contribute to the successful implementation and sustainment of the toolkit in Tusla. These factors are not set out sequentially, as there are elements within the factors that can be applied on a continual basis throughout the implementation process. These factors are set out in Figure 2 and are then detailed for consideration.

Figure 2: Factors to guide implementation of communication toolkit



➤ **Developing an action plan or 'roadmap'**

One of the key factors that can help to support successful implementation of a new initiative, such as the introduction of the communication toolkit, is to develop an action plan or 'roadmap' to guide and support its implementation.

During the development and testing of the toolkit, we found that it was important to have clearly defined objectives, timelines, governance and communication processes documented. Having these set out helped to ensure there was a clarity of purpose for everyone involved in the project. The Working Group who was responsible for developing the toolkit also collaboratively developed a document which set out the purpose, principles, practices and processes of how the Working Group would operate, including the actions each member would take to develop the tool and how the tool would be tested once it was developed. This document helped to ensure

that we were working towards a shared vision. This document is set out in Appendix 3.

When we got to the testing phase, the important role that leaders play in the implementation process of a new initiative and practice change was clear. We found that it was important that the people who were leading on driving the development and testing of the toolkit had the necessary authority or were supported by senior personnel to make decisions during the project. Having leaders that can navigate internal systems can help to galvanise the implementation process across the organisation. Throughout all stages of this project, we found that having a key link person within Tusla to support the progression of the project through each stage was very important. This was particularly valuable when identifying leaders to support the implementation of the toolkit.

In addition, having leaders at all levels that have an understanding of the organisational context and communication systems, and who have good reach across the organisation can also help the implementation process. These leaders can help to drive the implementation of the toolkit across their teams and the wider organisation. In Tusla, these leaders may include Regional Professional Support Managers, Principal Social Workers and Team Leaders.

As Tusla takes on the implementation and scale-up of the toolkit, these leaders will play a key role in raising awareness of the toolkit, ensuring it is disseminated appropriately, and promoting its intentional use among staff in a way that is meaningful and part of everyday practice.

➤ **Examining contextual factors**

Another key factor that can help support successful implementation of the toolkit into practice, is to ensure that the implementation process is compatible with existing structures, processes and systems within Tusla. During the early stages of developing the toolkit, we mapped a framework of existing good practice in Tusla that supported effective communication and information sharing. We wanted to ensure that the toolkit would be compatible with contextual factors within Tusla and we also wanted to see if any factors could be harnessed to support the implementation and use of the toolkit.

In this mapping exercise, we identified specific initiatives, policies, practices and structures and looked at what factors have helped to sustain and embed these initiatives within Tusla. We found that initiatives that were working well within Tusla were supported by a number of similar factors. We found that having endorsement and support by senior management, dedicated teams to support implementation and opportunities for wide dissemination across Tusla helped these initiatives to become embedded within practice. Examples of two initiatives that have become embedded

within Tusla’s practice and the factors that we found that support this are set out below.

Initiative	What supports this to work well within Tusla?
Signs of Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dedicated team within the Office of the National Director for Practice Change to support implementation ✓ Dissemination through regional Participation Leads ✓ Ongoing training ✓ Range of supporting materials
Empowering Practitioners Practice Initiative (EPPI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supported by Office of the Chief Social Worker ✓ Disseminated through Tusla hub

Ensuring that the implementation process considers and aligns with some of these contextual factors can help to facilitate the implementation and sustainment of the toolkit in Tusla.

➤ **Effective communication pathways**

Effective communication is important to the successful implementation and sustainment of the toolkit in Tusla. Throughout the project, we found that having clear and open channels of communication can help to motivate staff towards a shared vision for developing, testing and adopting the toolkit. Open channels of communication helped to foster readiness among staff with regard to testing the toolkit.

Feedback from staff involved in developing and testing the toolkit indicated that, in order for the toolkit to be adopted into routine practice across Tusla, information on the toolkit should be woven into internal systems, policies and processes and be easily accessible to staff in a central location. Feedback indicated that information on the toolkit, and support on using the toolkit on a day-to-day basis should be included in the following systems, policies, processes, and practices:

- Induction
- Training
- Team meetings
- Supervision
- Reflective practice
- Communication with children, families and foster carers.

Learning from the pre-implementation testing phase of the project identified the need to allow sufficient time to communicate information across all levels of Tusla. We found that we needed to consider a process that could effectively and efficiently cascade information on the toolkit across different levels within Tusla. A number of

existing fora within Tusla helped to support the dissemination of information to different levels of staff who played a key role in championing the toolkit during the pre-implementation test phase. These included:

- Regional meetings with RPSMs, where the project team asked RPSMs to nominate PSWs from within their region to participate in the pre-implementation testing phase.
- Meetings with PSWs and Team Leads, where the project team outlined the pre-implementation testing plan and what would be required from PSWs and Team Leaders during the testing phase.

➤ **Ongoing monitoring**

Another important factor that can help support successful implementation of the toolkit is to establish a process for monitoring the toolkit on a continual basis. During the pre-implementation testing phase, we monitored the usability and acceptance of the toolkit in practice. We sought feedback from staff involved in the testing phase and used this feedback to revise the toolkit. We found that seeking feedback from staff on an ongoing basis and responding to this feedback helped to foster momentum for the use of the communication toolkit. Obtaining feedback from staff on a regular basis during the implementation process, and beyond into the sustainment of the toolkit in practice, can help to identify if any contextual factors are impacting the implementation of the toolkit. These factors can then be considered in risk management strategies.

➤ **Long-term evaluation**

It is also important to evaluate the long-term impact of the toolkit to examine whether it has made a difference in terms of improving communication and information sharing between Tusla staff and children, young people, families and foster carers. Feedback from staff who were involved in developing and testing the toolkit indicated that one way of measuring the long-term impact of the toolkit would be to look at the number of complaints that are received in relation to communication between Tusla staff and children, families and foster carers and measure whether there has been a reduction in these since the implementation of the toolkit. Impact can also be assessed by engaging with staff to see if they have adopted the toolkit in their practice and also engaging with children, young people, families and foster carers to assess if there has been any change to their experience and outcomes.

Next stages for implementation of the toolkit

Throughout the development and testing of the toolkit, we identified the potential factors that could help support the implementation, scale up and sustainment of the communication toolkit across Tusla. Consideration of these factors in the

implementation plan can help to support successful implementation of the toolkit and motivate its sustainment and embedding into practice. For the purposes of accessibility, the toolkit will be available on the Tusla webpage and the HIQA webpage.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Steering Group membership

Name	Organisation
Cecil Worthington	Subject Matter Expert, HIQA (Facilitator)
Deirdre Connolly	Programme Manager, Health and Social Care Standards, HIQA
Ger Brophy	Chief Social Worker, Tusla
Julie Ahern	Head of Legal, Policy and Services, Children's Rights Alliance
John Maguire [§]	Acting Head of Practice Assurance and Performance Systems, Tusla
Mark Yalloway ^{**}	Head of Practice Assurance and Performance Systems, Tusla
Maria MacInnes	Service Improvement Manager, Tusla
Mike Corcoran	Head of Registration and Regulatory Enforcement, Tusla
Rachel Flynn	Director of Health Information and Standards, HIQA (Chair)

[§] John Maguire joined the Steering Group in May 2023

^{**} Mark Yalloway was a member of the Steering Group from June 2022 – December 2023.

Appendix 2: Working Group membership

Name	Organisation
Andrew Murphy ^{††}	Advocacy Service Coordinator, Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA)
Bernadette Neville ^{††}	National Services Manager, IFCA
Carol Murray	Foster Carer
Caroline Boyd	Representative, Irish Association of Social Workers
Conor Cullen	Tusla Advisory Group, Tusla
Cathal Smyth	Participation and Partnership Officer, Tusla
Cecil Worthington	Subject Matter Expert, HIQA
Deirdre Connolly (Co-chair)	Programme Manager, Health and Social Care Standards, HIQA
Emma King	Quality Management System Manager, Tusla
Grace Lynam	Inspector, HIQA
Jaqueline Smyth	Principal Social Worker, Tusla
Joanne McAdam	Social Care Leader, Tusla
Maria MacInnes (Co-chair)	Service Improvement Manager, Tusla
Mike Corcoran	Head of Registration and Regulatory Enforcement, Tusla
Patricia Long	Senior Social Worker, Tusla
Roisin Kirwan	Regional Director, Gateway (IASCM)
Sarah Fitzgerald	Project Lead, Health and Social Care Standards, HIQA
Sinead Lynch	QRSI Manager, Tusla

^{††} Andrew Murphy joined the Working Group in January 2024.

^{††} Bernadette Neville was a member of the Working Group from September 2022 – May 2023.

Appendix 3

Purpose, principles, practices and processes of the Working Group informing the development of the communication toolkit^{§§}



Purpose of the Working Group

Collaboratively develop a user-friendly tool(s) that supports Tusla staff to communicate and share information effectively with children, families and foster carers in a child-centred way. These tools will build on existing good practice and frameworks that enable good communication and information sharing.

Principles of the Working Group

- Inclusiveness
- Participation
- Understanding and listening
- Empathy
- Collaboration and sharing of roles and responsibilities
- Nurturing love to challenge fear and anxiety
- Honesty
- Asking hard questions
- Being aware of bias
- Confidentiality.

Practices of the Working Group

- Use evidence-based approaches and analysis of best practice within the area of communication and information sharing
- Identify and agree on who our key stakeholders are.
- Engage with these stakeholders and share findings with the group.
- Avoid jargon in how we communicate with our stakeholders and each other.

Processes of the Working Group

- Hold meetings in person where possible to build a collaborative approach.
- Demonstrate flexibility and adaptability within the group.
- Agree the activities of the group
- Agree actions and clear timelines for tasks.
- Form sub-groups for specific tasks and areas of inquiry and share findings with the wider Working Group.

^{§§} Developed by the Working Group September – October 2022.