



## Making change happen

### KEY CONCEPT

#### Dynamic balance

Dynamic balance here refers to two foci for new meanings or interpretations of the world. These relate to what counts as normal, focusing on parents or children, specific issues in relation to the big picture, and the dance between trusting the child and taking charge as parents. Dynamic balance does not mean equal parts, but, shifting the emphasis between two aspects, depending on the context.

### Summary

We found that positive outcomes for families were built through an evolving, expansive and non-linear process. Impacts didn't happen in one big event but through multiple smaller steps, an example of small things with big effects (see Pages 8–9). These are most effective when each step:

- Has an effect bigger than the work done to get there
- Has an effect that endures
- Enables other steps to be taken
- Moves forward (advancing on something that matters to parents) and outward (expands what is possible)

- Works like a ratchet – moving the process forward, but also providing a safety net to stop sliding backwards.

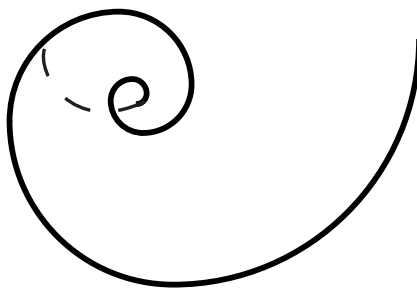
The changes we studied all involved four kinds of smaller steps that met the criteria above. These are explained below, and are conceptualised in terms of an expanding spiral – a companion to building impactful partnerships (see previous Section) and working at the frontier (see next Section).

The steps shown along the spiral can potentially have positive contagious effects. This means that the benefits of accomplishing one of them can keep going and helpfully affect other aspects of change.

The significant benefits of the seemingly small steps described below explain why investing in them is so important, even if their impact is not immediately obvious.

### An expanding spiral

Just as with building impactful partnerships, it is helpful to think of these findings in terms of a spiral. The main line is the change happening for families. Facilitating this process is an evolving art (see Pages 8–9), meaning it requires nuanced judgement in context, unfolds differently each time, and cannot be reduced to a fixed formula.



Smaller steps can be marked on the line. They all link back to one or more aspects of the essence of impactful partnership: help, challenge and possibility. The fact that the spiral loops around the centre more than once illustrates how change processes may involve revisiting similar problems or strategies several times. This is expansive rather than repetitive if each return involves coming at the problem in a new way, from a new space (as

parents, helpers, and as a partnership). As with building impactful relationships (see Pages 22–25), this process may be disrupted, for example when things don't go according to plan, or when things that worked previously seem to become less effective.

### Making sure families feel listened to and respected

Our study showed that there can be a difference between helpers listening to and respecting families, and parents feeling respected and heard. It takes special kinds of work to achieve the latter.

## Many stories of major change began simply by asking parents to tell their story.

Many stories of major change began simply by asking parents to tell their story, listening attentively and without judgement. Helpers had to resist the urge to leap in and solve problems. Processes where this step was missed or done too quickly tended to be less successful.

Effective ways of making families feel listened to and respected included:

- Saying nothing when parents pause – giving them a chance to start again
- Reflecting eg. 'I can see that is very important to you'
- Asking parents to say more about something.

Practices like these had the effect of signalling to parents that their story, told on their terms, matters – not a rushed agenda imposed by someone else.

### NOTES

“I think validation is one of the important things, that somebody listens and validates, then helps to tap into the resources, referrals to other services or inner resources within a family or individual, to help them build back up.”

(Helper)

When parents feel respected and heard there is a contagion and a ratchet effect – it opens up possibilities for other kinds of change, and acts as a safety net as the relationship evolves.

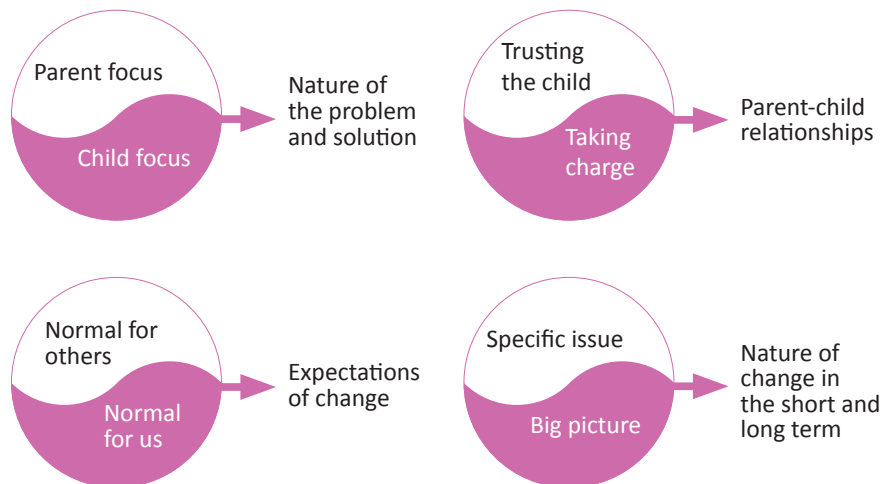
### Making families’ strengths visible

The idea of strengths-based approaches is not new. However, our data showed that for maximum impact, it simply isn’t enough for helpers to build on strengths they have spotted in families.

What worked best was when helpers made those strengths visible. This means that they are shared explicitly with parents. Often this also needed to be backed up with something concrete, to convince parents these are legitimate and real – not just compliments to make them feel better.

Listening carefully to parents’ accounts of the past and watching carefully what is happening were fertile grounds for achieving this.

For example, one nurse heard a mother’s story of changing countries and jobs, and used it to point out how resilient the mother had been. In another example, a home visitor took a short video using the mother’s phone, showing the mother how much her child made eye contact and smiled with her, to highlight the strong attachment between them.



### Using dynamic balance to re-imagine

The best examples of change happened when helpers struck an appropriate dynamic balance between contrasting aspects.

This balance was different in every case, and changed during the course of work with particular families. Common to all was that shifting between pairs of features enabled parents to re-imagine things in significant ways.

One helper used the term ‘exquisite balance’. The idea of ‘exquisite’ is useful in capturing how special this balance can be, and the skill involved in achieving it. We use the term ‘dynamic balance’ to stress how this isn’t a fixed target for all relationships, or even for one relationship, but is a changing feature – another aspect of the evolving art of impactful partnership (see Pages 8–9).

The most effective helpers remained attentive to each aspect, playing a role in ensuring optimum balance. And regardless of the focus, the significant effect is always that parents re-imagine something. In doing so, they take crucial steps along the expanding change spiral.

“I always knew I had Molly’s support. My friends would be like, oh yeah, he’ll grow out of it. I’m like, yeah, but I’m in the here and now, I need something now.”

(Parent)

The four bubbles show the different pairs that need to be in dynamic balance, and the aspect of positive change in families that they relate to.

### Enabling parents to take new action

All the previous steps build towards enabling parents to take new action. Consistent with the mind-expanding view of partnership as a learning process, changing interpretations (ways of making meaning or making sense) are important in themselves, but also as a basis for acting differently.

Taking new action is not easy. Even what may seem like small changes can feel risky, daunting. The ratchet effect of being heard and respected, recognising strengths, and re-imagining can give parents the courage and confidence they need to try new actions.

These actions can relate directly to their interactions with children, but can also involve accessing help from other sources, and committing to self-care.

When new actions contribute to desired impacts, and their connection with those impacts is clear to parents (see Pages 42–45 [Noticing sequence] for details of how this is achieved), then this can produce a helpful contagious effect, as parents may feel confident with expanding the contexts in which they apply a particular new action or trying out other new actions. One small change in interpretation may expand into a new action which may expand into new interpretations or actions.

## FRAMING IDEAS FOR Impactful Partnership

Diverse impacts  
Small things with big effects  
Mind-expanding  
Intimate outsiders  
Evolving art

### Revision

Making change happen is an expansive, evolving process. It involves advancing on an issue that matters to parents as well as outward movement through new possibilities. Impact for families happens through seemingly small changes that have larger, enduring effects open up new options and provide a safety net for families in the change process.

For more information on the key concepts and findings relating to this worksheet see: [creating-better-futures.org/](https://www.creating-better-futures.org/)

To claim a certificate on completed worksheets see: <https://www.creating-better-futures.org/claim-your-certificate/>

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### 1. Key concepts – check your understanding

In your own words, explain what each of the ways of making change happen means and who it applies to, and make connections to the framing ideas for impactful partnership where you can:

Making sure families feel listened to and respected:

Making families' strengths visible:

Using dynamic balance to re-imagine:

Enabling parents to take new action:

### 2. Linking ideas to practice

Now you have the concepts in mind, the next step is to connect them to your practice:

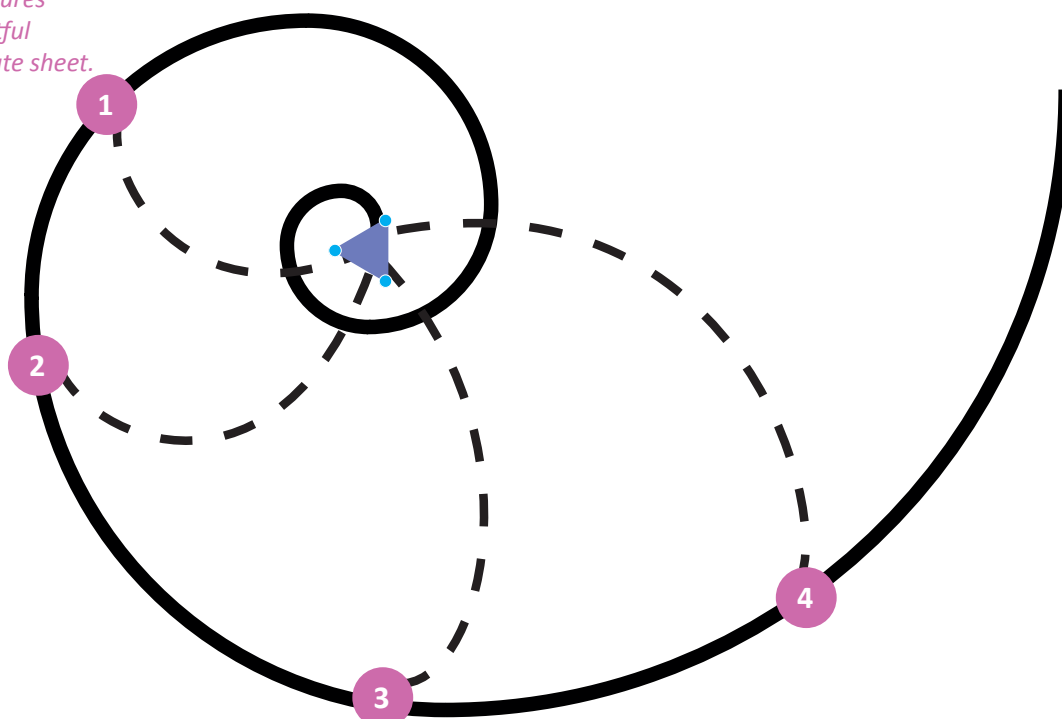
Concept	How it relates to my practice
Making sure families feel respected & listened to	
Making families' strengths visible	
Using dynamic balance to reimagine	
Enabling parents to take new action	

### 3. Understanding the diagram

The spiral represents making change happen as an expansive, evolving process. At the centre is the essence of partnership – help, challenge and possibility (see Essential ingredients of partnership). The outward movement of the spiral links to the idea of partnership as mind-expanding (see Living partnership practices).

The spiral loops round, showing that the helper and parent never visit the same issue twice with exactly the same interpretations and actions at their disposal.

*If this diagram doesn't make sense to you, draw something that captures how change happens in impactful partnership is built on a separate sheet.*



### 4. Working with the diagram

Think of a family you have worked with recently and map the issues you addressed along the spiral to represent the evolving process in which change happened as partnership was built.

### 5. Enhancing your practice

On a separate sheet:

1. Choose two of the *Questions for reflective practice* (see right) and write your answer on a separate piece of paper. If they don't quite work you can adapt them.
2. Look at the *Questions to adapt and ask with parents* (see right). Think of a family you are working with or have recently finished working with. Choose two questions you think you could use or adapt to ask the parents, and explain why these might be important, and what you think they might say in response.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- What have I done to make sure this family feels listened to and respected?
- What have I done to share the strengths I see, and help parents accept these as legitimate?
- What have I enabled parents to re-imagine?
- How did I judge the balance between different aspects in the past? (eg support/challenge, talking/listening)
- What worked well to help other families balance trusting the child and taking charge?
- What can I do to move us forward along the change spiral?
- Which of the features might need a different balance in my future work with this family?
- What new actions do the changes accomplished so far make possible?

#### QUESTIONS TO ADAPT AND ASK WITH PARENTS

- Is there something important that you'd like to share, given what we have done together?
- If you watched a video of yourself over the past days/ weeks/ months, what strengths would you see?
- What do you see differently now, and why has that changed?
- What is helping you most in terms of making decisions relating to...? (eg. trusting child and taking charge)
- What is your sense at the moment of what the solution to the problem might look like?
- How do you see the things we have been working on as making a difference in the longer term?
- What aspects of the bigger picture for your family do we need to take into account moving forward?
- What do you think we should tackle next?

## Creating Better Futures: Practice Handbook for Impactful Partnership

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# CREATING BETTER FUTURES

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