

Self-evaluation for improvement – step by step guide

Childcare agencies



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Getting started

Using the self-evaluation guides

Self-evaluation is a reflective and inclusive process that helps care services understand what they do well, what could be improved, and what matters most for children and families. By looking closely at everyday practice, systems, and outcomes, services can build on their strengths and make changes that lead to meaningful, sustained improvement.

There are two guides available to support your self-evaluation activities. You can use them in whatever way works best for your setting.

- **Use the summary guide** when you want an overview of the whole process.
- **Use this step by step guide** when you need more detail, examples, or support to work through each stage.

Both guides are part of the self-evaluation toolkit and can be used flexibly, depending on your service type and the aims and objectives of your service. Practice examples are included to support reflection and provide ideas. Not every section or practice example will apply to every service, so use the parts that support your self-evaluation activities and adapt them where appropriate.

Both guides complement the [quality frameworks](#), which supports services to assess their performance. Using them alongside the quality improvement framework will help you tailor your self-evaluation activities to your service and build a strong foundation for continuous improvement.

If you already have effective approaches to evaluating your performance, you can continue to use them. This guide builds on what you already do well, provides clarity where you need it, and helps you make self-evaluation a positive and strengths-based part of your ongoing improvement work.

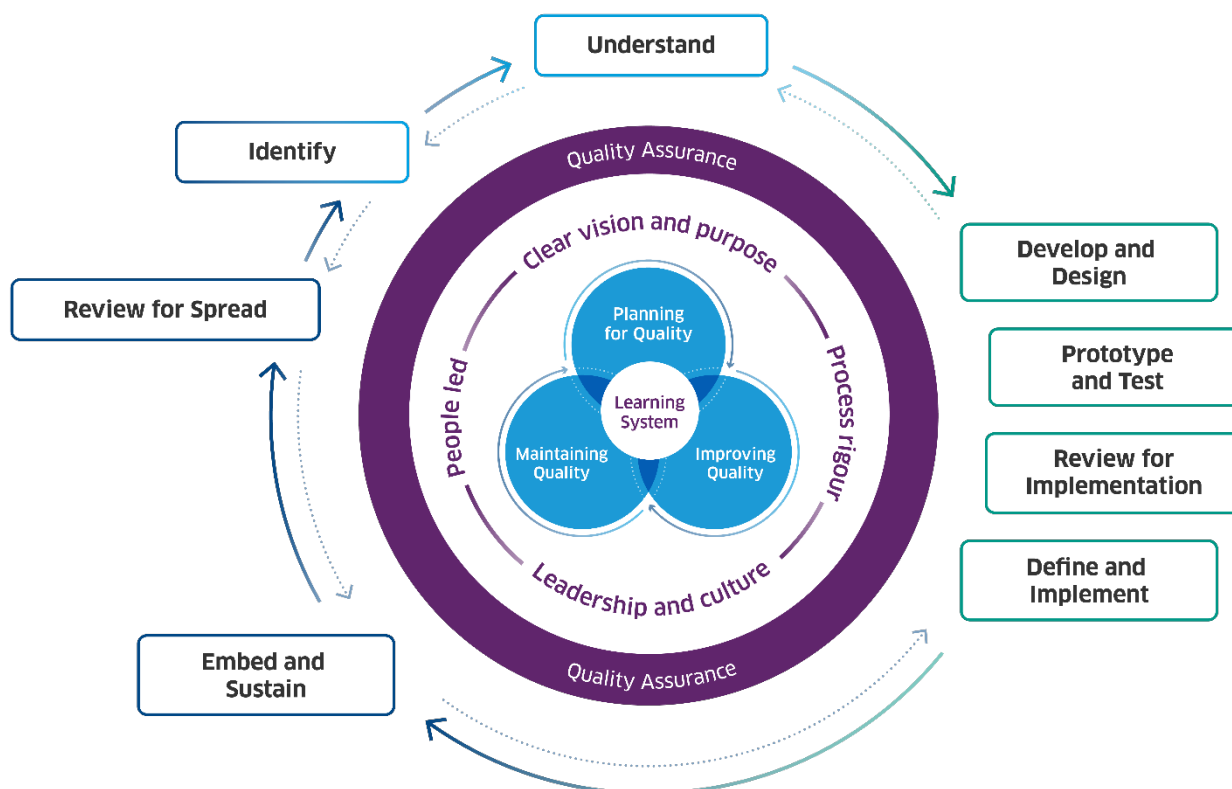
Things to consider

Throughout this guidance, we have included some **things to consider**.

These are designed to support you and your team as you reflect on your self-evaluation journey.

Why does self-evaluation matter?

By providing clear insight into what is working well and what needs to change, the process actively supports the [Scottish Approach to Change](#) – helping services to make improvements that truly matter to children and families.



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Within the **Quality Management System (QMS)** - shown in the purple circle - self-evaluation strengthens the **enablers of quality and change** which include:

- **Clear vision and purpose** - Helping everyone understand what the service is working towards.
- **Process rigour** - Using evidence and structured reflection to guide decisions.
- **Leadership and culture** - Building openness, learning, and shared responsibility.
- **People-led approaches** - Placing children and their families at the centre of improvement.
- **Learning system** – Embedding a culture where everyone can learn and create sustainable change.

Self-evaluation supports the **steps of change** (the outer circle), helping services identify what needs to change and plan, test, and implement improvements. The three self-evaluation questions can be used to help services move confidently through these steps. (Healthcare Improvement Scotland, 2026.)

When used well, self-evaluation ensures that children and families have choice and control in their care and the way that their support is provided. This approach reflects the principles of the [Health and Social Care Standards](#):

- Dignity and respect
- Compassion
- Be included
- Responsive care and support
- Wellbeing

By reflecting on what matters most for children and families, self-evaluation ensures that improvements are meaningful and make a real difference to their lives.

‘Self-evaluation helps us acknowledge the things we do well but also challenge ourselves to consider what we do less well, look more deeply and collaboratively think about how we can make things better for those in our setting.’ (Care Service Manager)

Using the self-evaluation questions

For each focus area, you are encouraged to reflect using the **three self-evaluation questions**. These questions provide a simple, consistent structure for examining your practice and should be used every time you evaluate an aspect of your service.

Self-Evaluation Questions

How are we doing?

How do we know?

What are we going to do now?

Using the three questions will help you to:

- Evaluate how well your service is performing.
- Recognise what is working well and where improvements are needed.
- Develop clear and focused plans to take your improvement ideas forward.

Self-evaluation goes beyond quality assurance. It draws on a range of evidence to help you understand the impact of your service, identify priorities for action, and keep people at the centre of ongoing improvement.

Getting ready for self-evaluation

Before planning your self-evaluation activities, it's important to consider your service's **capacity for improvement**. This means thinking about whether you have the resources, skills, time, and stability needed to carry out your self-evaluation activities, make the changes you identify - and sustain them. This includes reflecting on staff skills and confidence, the time available for planning and learning, and any recent or upcoming changes to staffing or structure.

You should also think about how well your team works together to drive improvement and maintain momentum over time. Being realistic about your capacity helps you prioritise actions, identify where support may be needed, and ensure improvements are manageable, achievable, and meaningful.

Strong leadership plays a vital role in creating a culture where self-evaluation can thrive. Leaders should role model reflective practice and empower staff at all levels to be involved in self-evaluation and contribute to the development of the service. It's important that everyone feels safe to share their views, explore what's working well, and consider what could be better. Feedback from children and their families should be **actively sought and valued**.

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has resources and information to help you develop your leadership skills – [Leadership in social services](#). Our [quality frameworks](#) also includes 'Leadership' as a heading. This recognises the important role leaders have in driving improvement through effective quality assurance, including self-evaluation and quality improvement.

Strong leadership is demonstrated when:

- Self-evaluation and improvement planning are used to deliver meaningful change.
- Feedback and evidence are actively used to inform decisions and shape practice.
- Quality assurance activities highlight key strengths and areas for improvement through effective systems.

- Leaders have the skills and capacity to lead improvement with clarity and maintain momentum over time.



Using the self-evaluation for improvement cycle

This guide takes you through each stage of the self-evaluation for improvement cycle in detail, showing how the steps build on one another to support thoughtful reflection and purposeful action. It expands on the overview in the [summary guide](#) and provides practical examples and ideas to help you apply each stage in your own setting.



Identify your focus

The first step is to identify your focus – what you are going to self-evaluate. If you are unsure where to begin, you could use feedback or insights from your quality assurance activities to guide your decision. Resources such as the core assurances, the quality illustrations in your service's quality frameworks and good practice guidance can also help you identify an area to explore.

You may prefer to start small by choosing a specific aspect of practice or service delivery that you know could be improved. Sometimes your self-evaluation activities may be prompted by other organisations, but it is still your self-evaluation and should reflect the priorities of your service.

Appendixes 2 and 3 include helpful self-evaluation processes you can use when working with groups or reflecting on your own.

Self-evaluation of the core assurances

Experience has shown that when things go wrong in care services, it often relates to a small number of key areas. Research and inquiries into care failures have highlighted these areas as early indicators of risk or harm to children. (Scottish Government, 2014; Hull University, 2012; Francis Report, 2013). Because of their importance to safety and wellbeing, we refer to them as **core assurances**.

In our self-evaluation toolkits, you will find a **core assurances checklist**. This highlights the areas Care Inspectorate inspectors will look at during inspections, and it can also support your own self-evaluation.

Using the checklist can help you reflect on the systems and practices that keep children safe and promote their wellbeing. During self-evaluation, consider whether your systems are working effectively and whether each core assurance is being met.

General	
☐	Registration certificate is displayed and accurate
☐	Insurance certificate is current
☐	Service complies with conditions of registration
Wellbeing assurances	
☐	Protection issues

Our self-evaluation toolkits include a **core assurances template** and a **worked example** for each service type, providing a clear structure to help you evidence your evaluation and identify areas for development.

Things to consider

- Do you currently include the core assurances in your self-evaluation activities?
- How do you **record** and evidence this?
- How do you **involve children and families** in this process?
- How do you take forward the improvements needed, and what do you do to ensure these are **sustained over time**?

Self-evaluation using the quality improvement framework

Our [self-evaluation toolkits](#) are designed to be used alongside the quality frameworks.

The framework is organised into a series of **quality indicators**, and each indicator includes a set of **themes**. These themes highlight the key aspects of practice that matter most for children and families and can help you focus your self-evaluation on specific elements of your service.

Quality indicator 1.1: Staff nurture and support children's care, play and learning

This includes the extent to which children's rights are respected and promoted through the following key areas.

- Staff who support children's wellbeing through compassionate and responsive care.
- Personal planning which involves children and families and reflects their needs and wishes.
- Play and learning activities are fun and are developed in partnership with children and their families.

Using the quality illustrations

The **quality illustrations** within each indicator offer helpful examples of what **very good** and **weak** performance might look like. These can be used as **benchmarks** when assessing your service's performance. A **benchmark** is a reference point or

example of good practice that you use to compare your own performance and judge how well your service is doing.

Quality illustrations for introductory and supply agencies	
Very good	Weak
Children have opportunities to meet staff before they start caring for them to ensure they develop caring and nurturing relationships.	There are limited opportunities to meet staff before they begin caring for children.
The agency considers individual children's needs and staff skills to ensure effective matches will have a positive impact on outcomes for children.	The agency does not always consider children's needs, when matching staff with children and families.
Children's wellbeing and sense of worth is enhanced by staff who are knowledgeable about and value diversity and inclusion.	Some staff have limited skills and knowledge to care for children, including those with additional support needs.

Using the self-evaluation and improvement support toolbox

After each quality indicator in the framework, you will find a Self-evaluation and improvement support toolbox.

Scrutiny improvement and support toolbox

Key improvement resources

Key improvement resources are available on [The Hub](#).

Links to HSCS and UNCRC

- [Health and Social Care Standards: my support, my life gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

Scrutiny and improvement support actions

How well do we listen to and support children to ensure they are safe, secure and protected from harm?

How do we know our staff fully understand our systems to keep children safe?

How often do we review and update our processes to support and keep children safe?

How do we ensure we communicate effectively with all partners to ensure children's safety and wellbeing?

How can we be confident that our children are protected from all forms of abuse when accessing online activities within our service?

How do we ensure staff are up to date and can recognise the signs of online abuse such as, grooming, cyberbullying and sexting?



**Improvement
resources**

The toolbox provides examples of evidence to support your self-evaluation, helping you understand how your service is performing and what this means for children's experiences. These examples are not exhaustive, so you should include any other evidence that demonstrates the quality and impact of care.

The Key Improvement Resources section links to the Care Inspectorate website, where you can access:

- **Standards** and **good practice** guides.
- **Self-evaluation toolkits** for specific aspects of practice.
- **Other good practice materials** relevant to your service type.

These resources help you reflect on what good care looks like, identify areas for development, and ask the right questions. They support you in gathering the most relevant information based on what we know promotes positive outcomes for children.

Worked examples in our [self-evaluation toolkits](#) show how to gather, analyse, and evaluate evidence using the key areas from the framework. These examples are designed to inspire and guide you, helping you feel confident in your approach and focused on what matters most - improving outcomes for children.

Things to consider

When planning your self-evaluation, think about:

- **What are you focusing on?** Are you evaluating a full quality indicator, a theme, or a specific aspect of practice? Which approach would work best for your setting and the outcomes you want to achieve for children?
- **How broad is your focus?** Are you starting with a wide area or beginning small with a specific aspect of service delivery and its impact on children's experiences?
- **Who will you involve and how?** Which voices need to be included, and what methods will you use to gather their views?

Gather your information and evidence

After identifying your focus, the next step is to gather the information and evidence that will help you build a clear picture of your service. This section explores what counts as evidence, where you can find it, and how to use a range of sources - including people's views, observations and quality assurance processes - to ensure your self-evaluation is robust and well-informed.

What is evidence?

Evidence is anything that helps you understand and show what's really happening in your service. It can be something you see, hear, experience, read, or are told - anything that gives you reason to believe that something is true or has taken place. Evidence helps you understand how well your service is performing and gives you insight into the lived experiences of the children and families you support.

What might evidence look like?

Some useful sources of evidence could include:

- The **views** of children and their families.
- **Feedback** from other professionals and stakeholders.
- **Observations** of staff practice and children's experiences.
- The **data** and **information** you gather about how well your service is doing.
- **Records** showing engagement and decision making.
- **Data and stories** that show improvement over time.

Tips for measuring data and information:

What to measure	How to measure it over time
What you can count	Keep simple weekly or monthly totals such as children attending, activities offered, or support approaches used.
How often things happen	Use quick tallies to track how often key events or behaviours occur.
Quality of experiences and outcomes	Track change using observations, pictorial or visual check-ins, count the number of positive comments or concerns shared, use rating scales for feedback, and repeat the same tools over time.

Services told us they use a wide range of evidence to support their self-evaluation:



Things to consider

What types of evidence do you currently have available in your service?

- What could you **use, adapt, or build on** to support your self-evaluation activities?
- What standards, good practice guidance, or quality illustrations could you use to **benchmark** your findings?

How will you measure your information and data?

- Measure what happens, how often it happens, how well it happens, how people feel, and what difference it makes for each child.

Involving people

“Find the best, most relevant ways of involving all stakeholders” (Care service manager)

Feedback helps you understand how your service is performing from the perspective of the people who matter most – children, families, staff and key stakeholders. It can be gathered in many ways and should reflect people’s needs, communication styles, and preferences.

When involving children, it is important to consider their ages, stages of development, and communication needs. Children communicate through actions, emotions, play and behaviour as well as words. This is why observations of children’s experiences are a vital part of self-evaluation.

Using appropriate [communication tools](#) can also help children and families share their views meaningfully.

To help measure your performance you may find it helpful to use a rating scale - such as the [six-point scale](#) or a visual scale like the example shown below.

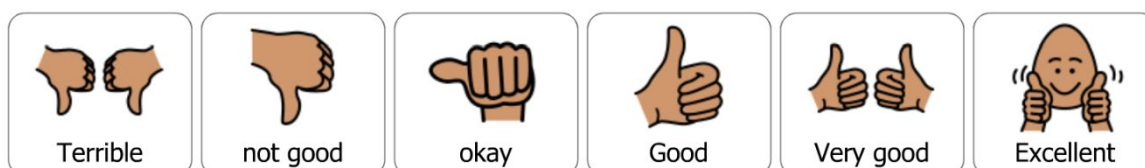


Image: <https://goboardmaker.com>

Practice example

‘In September we found that only 25% of people felt that communication with the agency was good. This was identified as an area where we needed to make improvements and incorporated it into our action plan. We decided to provide a monthly newsletter for parents and carers, and we increased our use of social media and our digital app so that we could make sure that people using the service were kept up to date with what was happening in the service. In April we completed the self-evaluation again and this time we found that 80% of people felt that communication was either good or very good. This showed us the impact that the improvement activities had made to people, building genuine connections with families.

Using questionnaires to support self-evaluation

If you have previously asked questions relevant to the area you are evaluating, use that information rather than creating something new. Where needed, adapt your questions to gather additional detail and create a clearer picture. This approach saves time and ensures your evaluation reflects both past learning and current practice.

Our [self-evaluation toolkits](#) include templates and example questionnaires designed to help you gather meaningful feedback across key areas. These are based on the **quality illustrations** in the [quality frameworks](#) and can be used flexibly to suit your service. They provide examples of how you might structure your questionnaires, but they are just examples. You should tailor them to reflect the needs of your service and the information you want to gather. You might choose to incorporate some of these questions into an existing questionnaire or create a one-off version to explore a specific area in more depth.

When we talk about questionnaires, this does not always mean something long or formal - it could be just a few short questions, or even a single question asked in the moment. A simple approach like this can make it easier to hear directly from children and their families, whether through casual conversations or by inviting responses during drop off and pick up times.

Practice example (childcare agencies)

Staff carried out activities with children during sitter sessions as part of our self-evaluation. We completed 10 sessions in total, involving 12 children who use the service regularly. The activities focused on children's wellbeing and explored whether children felt staff knew their interests, likes and dislikes. Staff spoke with children during the sessions and supported them to complete a child-friendly questionnaire, using visual prompts to help them share their views.

The feedback showed that 58% (7) of children felt staff knew their interests, likes and dislikes, while 42% (5) said they were not sure. 50% (6) children told us they had completed an 'All About Me' form but found it boring. All children who took part said staff made them feel safe.

Our 'All About Me' forms were intended to help children share their interests, likes and dislikes, but the feedback showed they needed to be more engaging. We agreed to involve children in designing new versions that better captured what was important to them. We also agreed that staff would regularly discuss and update the forms when children's interests or preferences changed.

Questionnaires are just one way to gather feedback. Participation toolkits, such as [We Are Here](#) or [Voice of the Infant](#), can provide helpful ideas and resources to support meaningful involvement. The key is to create space for open, respectful conversations that help you understand what's working well and where you can improve.

Services told us these are some of the ways they gather feedback to support their self-evaluation.



Things to consider

- **People should always have the choice to remain anonymous**, or to share their details if they would like a response to any comments or concerns.
- **Set a clear deadline for responses** and offer different ways for people to take part - whether that's by email, post, or in person.
- **Tailor the questions to suit your service and the children and families you support.** This might mean adjusting how questions are presented, using tools like talking mats, pictures, or symbols to support communication for example, resources like [Boardmaker](#).
- **Consider if you need to translate information to reach a wider audience.** Remaining aware of the needs of children and families will show you are taking a respectful, equitable and inclusive approach.

Observing practice and children's experiences

One of the most valuable ways you can understand the quality of care and support you provide is by **observing what's happening in practice**.

Observations offer direct insight into children's lived experiences and helps you reflect on whether your service is supporting positive outcomes. They do not need to be formal or time-consuming. The important part is that they focus on what matters most to children – their wellbeing, rights, choices, and day to day experiences.

When observing children's experiences and staff practice, consider:

- Whether children feel safe, secure, welcomed and included.
- How they communicate their needs, preferences, emotions, and choices.
- Whether staff respond in ways that are warm, consistent, and rights-based.
- How the environment, routines and interactions support or limit children's comfort, engagement, and independence.
- Whether staff recognise when children need support and respond appropriately and sensitively.
- How confidently and consistently staff apply training, policies and procedures in real situations, such as administering medication, infection prevention and control, safe moving and handling, supporting transitions, and communicating with children and families.

Observations should help you understand whether children are receiving responsive care that meets their needs and supports good outcomes.

These observations can form part of your **quality assurance processes** and be used as **evidence in self-evaluation**. When combined with feedback from children, and families, staff, and other sources, they help you build a well-rounded understanding of your service and identify areas for improvement.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance plays an important role in helping you understand how well your service is performing and where improvements might be needed. It forms a core element of your **Quality Management System (QMS)** and supports the **enablers of quality and change** described in the [Scottish Approach to Change](#) (Healthcare Improvement Scotland, 2026).

By having effective systems in place, you can ensure children and families consistently receive high quality care and support - and **use your learning** from these systems to meaningfully **inform your self-evaluation**.

The [quality frameworks](#) especially **Key Question 2: How good is our leadership and staffing?** offer helpful guidance on what effective quality assurance looks like. They include examples of **very good** and **weak** practice, along with details on where to find further information to support your approach. These can help you benchmark your performance and reflect on what needs to improve.

Services told us they use a wide range of quality assurance approaches, including:

Audit and review activities

- Service development / improvement plans, PDSA cycles, lessons learned reviews.
- Evaluations of planning for children's play and learning.
- Reviews of policies, procedures and contingency plans.
- Internal audits e.g. medication, safe staffing, personal plans, nappy changing records.
- Meeting minutes and action plans.

Records and reporting

- Strategic plans, vision, values and aims documents.
- Accident / incident records.
- Protection concerns.
- Risk assessments and checklists.
- Children's chronologies.
- Oversight matrices and quality assurance calendars.

People and practice

- Observations of children's experiences.
- Staff supervisions, appraisals and development plans.
- Induction, training and staff registration records.
- Staff competencies and reflective accounts.

Involving people

- Care experience discovery conversations using the CEIM Experience Improvement Model.
- Records of children's involvement in planning and evaluation e.g. floorbooks.
- Consultation / communication records with children, families and key stakeholders.
- Feedback from surveys, meetings, votes, polls.
- Compliments and complaints.

Recognising the evidence you already have can help you see that self-evaluation does not need to be a new or complicated process - it's about strengthening and making the most of what you already do.

This practice example shows how a care service used its **existing quality assurance systems** to support their self-evaluation, rather than creating a separate or new process.

Practice example

We decided to review how well we kept children safe through robust child protection procedures. To do this, we:

- Reviewed our child protection policy and procedures, including the flow chart that sets out the actions staff need to take when making a referral.
- Asked staff to complete a questionnaire about child protection procedures and training.
- Sampled the training records for five staff members.
- Reviewed our induction process.
- Reviewed children's chronologies to check that they followed national child protection procedures and showed that staff took prompt action and followed this up to protect children.

We collated the evidence and used **National Child Protection Guidance** and the **Care Inspectorate's chronology guidance** to benchmark our findings.

Overall, we found our child protection policy and procedures were in line with national guidance. All staff had completed induction, which helped them feel confident using the policy. However, two of the five staff training records were not up to date. Lead staff recorded information in children's chronologies when needed, but the quality and consistency of recording prompt action to support and protect children and families needed to improve.

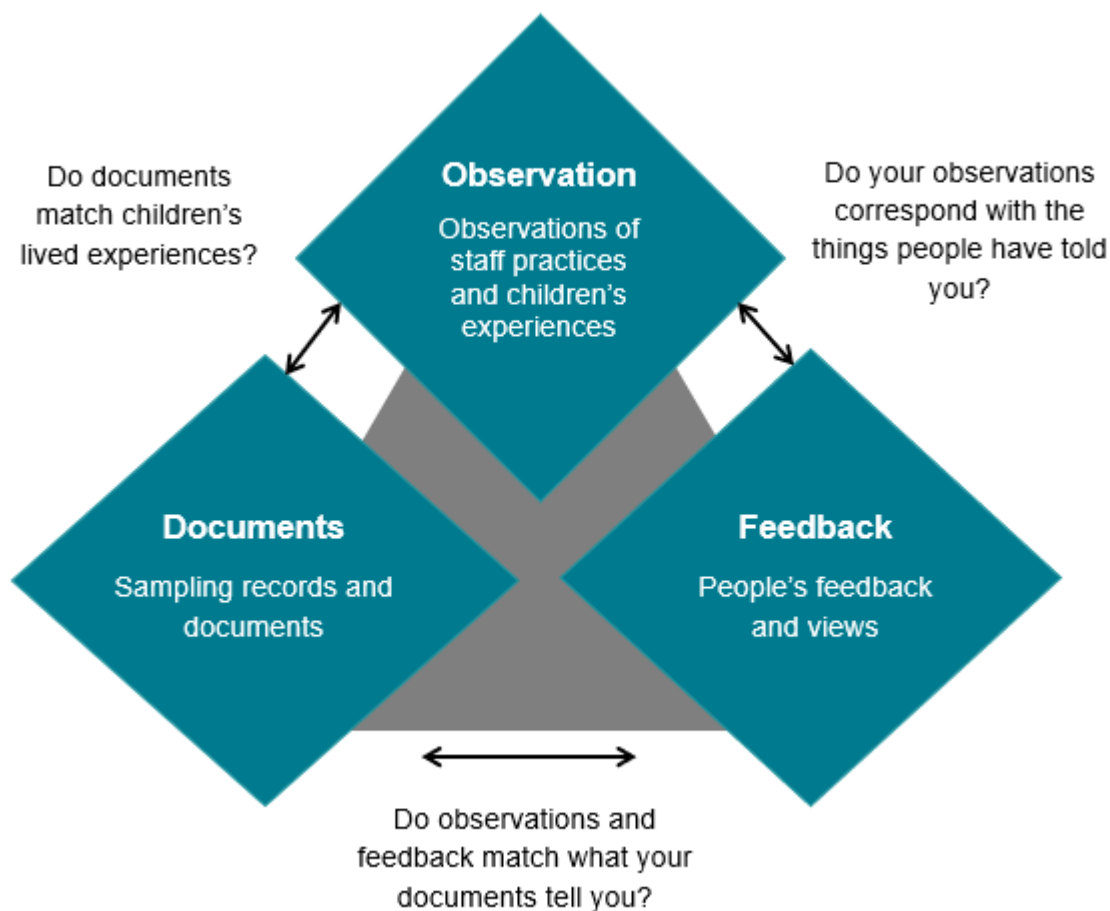
We included this as a priority in our self-evaluation improvement plan. We set out actions to strengthen how we audit child protection training and to provide lead staff with further training and support around chronologies.

Triangulating your evidence

Meaningful self-evaluation relies on gathering and analysing evidence from more than one source. Looking at just one type of information can create an incomplete or biased view. Using different sources - such as feedback, observations and records - helps you form a clearer, more balanced understanding of your service.

This process is known as **triangulation** and ensures that your conclusions reflect children and families lived experiences, not assumptions.

Triangulated evaluation of evidence



Why triangulation matters:

- **Builds a fuller and clearer picture** - You gain a deeper understanding of children and families experiences and the quality of practice.
- **Reduces bias** - Including a range of perspectives ensures your evaluation is balanced and fair.
- **Strengthens confidence** - A well-rounded evidence base makes your findings more trustworthy and easier to share with others.
- **Deepens understanding** - Looking at your service from different angles can help you to see the fuller picture and highlight areas to explore further.
- **Supports meaningful improvement** - Triangulated evidence shows where change is most needed and helps prioritise action.

Things to consider

- How are you gathering and using **feedback** from children, families, staff and key stakeholders to understand their experiences and views?
- How well are your **observations** of children's experiences and staff practice helping you understand what is working well and what needs to improve?
- Are your **quality assurance systems** helping you identify strengths, areas for development and the impact of any changes you make?
- Are **audits and checks** leading to meaningful improvements in practice, and are any issues identified being followed up promptly?
- How do you use the quality improvement framework, along with relevant standards and guidance, to benchmark your performance?
- Are you drawing on a balanced range of evidence - such as feedback, observations and records - to **triangulate your findings** and build an accurate, well-rounded picture of your service?



“ Everyone should be involved in the self-evaluation, not just the service manager.”
(Care service manager)

Make your assessment (evaluation)

Once you have gathered your evidence, the next step is to analyse and reflect on your findings. You should do this in collaboration with children and their families, staff and other key stakeholders to ensure your evaluations are meaningful and reflect people's views.

You will then be ready to answer the first self-evaluation question.

How are we doing?

To support consistent, transparent and measurable evaluations, you may find it helpful to use the **six-point scale** to describe your performance. The scale provides a shared language and a benchmark you can refer to when reviewing progress with children, families and staff.

6	Excellent	Outstanding or sector leading
5	Very Good	Major strengths
4	Good	Important strengths, with some areas for improvement
3	Adequate	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
2	Weak	Important weaknesses – priority action required
1	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses – urgent remedial action required

The full descriptors can be found in the [quality framework](#) for your service type.

Things to consider

- What does your analysis of the evidence tell you about how well the service is performing?
- How consistently have you used the six-point scale and relevant benchmarks to support your evaluation?

Which key strengths and areas for development are emerging from your assessment of the evidence?

Evidence your assessment

The next step is to answer the second self-evaluation question.

How do we know?

Start by describing what you did as part of your self-evaluation. This should briefly outline the methods you used, who you involved and the sources of evidence you gathered.

You should then describe what you found. This is where you use **evaluative** and **quantitative** language to explain the evidence that informed your evaluation.

Your response should clearly show how you arrived at your answer to the **How are we doing?** question, including the evaluations you selected using the **six-point scale**.

To support your response, you should also include:

- Key findings based on the evidence you have gathered.
- Clear evaluative statements that give an overall picture of performance.
- Key strengths and areas for development.

To be confident in your evaluation, ensure it is based on robust evidence rather than assumptions. Use your reflections and analysis to explain why you reached your conclusion. Benchmarking against the quality illustrations, the Health and Social Care Standards and relevant good-practice guidance can strengthen your assessment.

Evaluative language

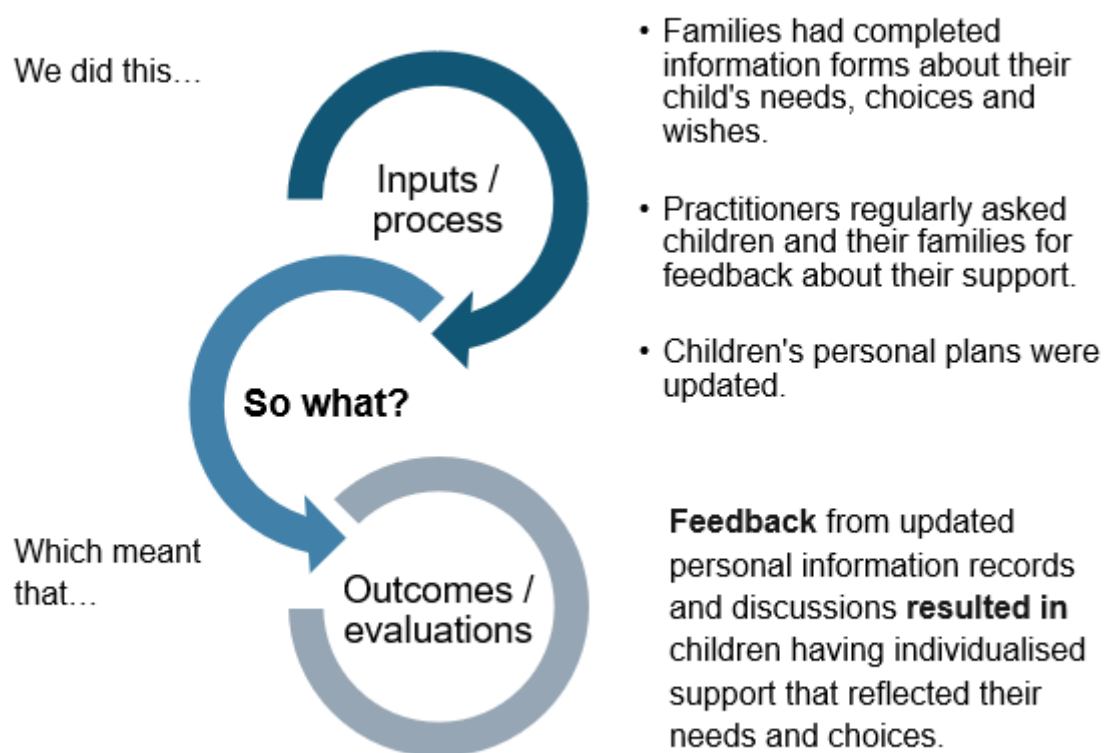
Using the ‘So what?’ question helps you to move beyond describing what you found to understanding its impact on children and families’ experiences. This shift from descriptive to evaluative writing makes your conclusions clearer and more meaningful.

Think about:

- What does the evidence tell you?
- What difference has it made?
- What needs to happen next?

“Take time to focus on self-evaluation and the importance of the ‘so what?’ aspect” (Care service manager)

An example of using the 'So what?' question:



This approach helps you move beyond descriptive writing and record your findings as **evaluative statements**. Examples of evaluative writing include:

- Because of... this meant that...
- The impact was...
- Evidence from... told us...
- Feedback from... resulted in...
- This ensured that...
- Observations showed us we are very good at...

Quantitative language

Using quantitative language further strengthens your evidence by showing scale, patterns, and measurable changes you can use to benchmark your performance.

These are some top tips providers shared with us:

Say how many people were involved • Give the actual numbers so readers can understand the scale. • "We spoke with 12 children and 9 families."	Include response rates • Include the response rate so it's clear how many people took part. • "We invited 60 people and 42 responded (70%)."	Use percentages to make results easy to compare • Include the actual numbers alongside percentages to show how representative the results are. • "59 % (7) children told us staff knew their interstes, likes and dislikes."
Quantify themes from comments • Group your comments into themes and say how often each theme appeared. • "Eight people shared positive comments about our staff (65%)."	Use proportional terms • Use everyday words to show how common something is. • "Most families (18 of 22, 82%) felt involved in developing their child's support plan." • "Some children (4 of 22, 18%) said they were bored during the activity."	Compare changes over time using numbers • Use numbers to measure the effectiveness of your improvements. • "Accidents and incidents involving children reduced from 6 to 2 per month (a 66% decrease)."

You can find more helpful examples of evaluative statements and quantitative language in the **worked examples** in our [self-evaluation toolkits](#).

Things to consider**Are your findings evaluative - not just descriptive?**

- Are you making clear statements about how well your service is performing?
Have you used quantitative language?
- Is it clear what evidence has informed your evaluation using the six-point scale?
Are you identifying strengths as well as areas for improvement?

What does your evidence really show?

- Are you just describing what you did, or have you made it clear what impact your service has had on children and families' experiences and outcomes?
- Have you used the '**So What?**' question? What does your evidence and evaluation tell you about children and families lived experiences and outcomes?

Are outcomes for children and families improving?

Reflect on whether your work is leading to better, safer, or improved outcomes for children and families. How do you know?

“We do not learn
from experience...
we learn from
reflecting on
experience.”

— John Dewey

Identify your areas for development

The next step is to answer the third self-evaluation question.

What are we going to do now?

By answering the first two questions, you will gain a clear understanding of what is working well and where change is needed. This reflective, learning-focused approach helps you to identify and prioritise improvements that matter most for children and families.

Some improvements may be simple and quick to implement, while others will require a more structured and thoughtful approach. Your plans should be realistic, purposeful and achievable.

Things to consider

What needs to change?

- Based on your evaluation, which areas clearly need improvement?
- Are there any **quick wins** you can act on now?
- Are there existing strengths and skills you can build on to promote positive change?
- Which areas require a more structured, longer-term change approach?

What matters most?

- Prioritise improvements that will have the greatest impact on children and families' experiences and outcomes.
- Focus on changes that promote children's rights, choices, and wellbeing.

Are your ideas realistic?

- Consider the resources you have available - time, staffing, budget, and support.
- Choose improvement actions that are achievable and sustainable.

The [Scottish Approach to Change](#) provides helpful information about developing and designing different options for change, which you may find useful at this stage.

Plan your changes

Once you know the improvements you want to make, the next step is to plan your changes. These should clearly link to the **vision and purpose** of your service and what you are working towards.



Improvement planning

Not every improvement means changing systems - sometimes it is simply about getting things back on track. These situations might include:

- **Quick wins** that can be implemented easily.
- Tasks that are already part of standard practice or processes but have fallen behind.

In these cases, you may not need to redesign systems or test changes. Instead, an improvement plan can help ensure essential tasks are prioritised, resourced, and completed in a structured, effective way.

Using an improvement plan helps you to:

- Prioritise the areas for improvement you have identified.
- Focus on ideas that are achievable with the resources you have.
- Take actions that are most likely to support better outcomes for children and families.

Your **plan** should include:

- The **outcomes** you want to achieve.
- The **actions** you will take.
- **Who** will carry them out.
- A **timetable** for implementation.
- A way to **review progress** and identify where further action may be needed.



“Make an improvement plan that has a small number of achievable tasks” (Care service manager)

As you develop your plan, start by recognising what you already do well and how those strengths can support further improvement. Approaches such as [appreciative enquiry](#) can help you build on what works well. Involve children, families, and key stakeholders in shaping your plan. Use guidance, research, good practice examples, and improvement support to inform your approach.

If you are not sure where to start, our [self-evaluation toolkits](#) include template improvement plans that you can use or adapt to suit your service.

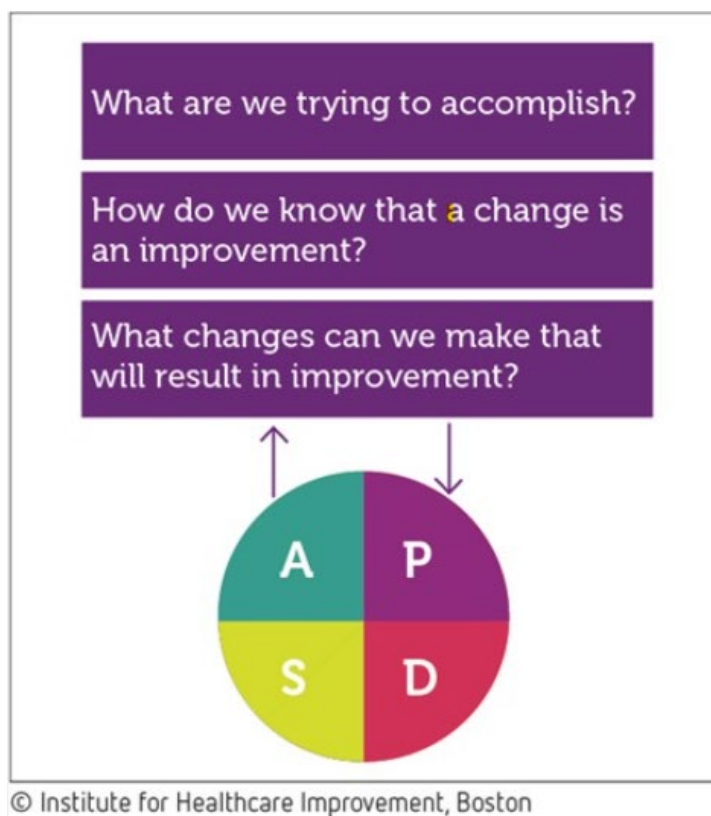
Remember to make good use of the leadership capability in your service – at all levels and roles. Having effective **leadership** and a **culture** where people feel empowered and trusted will contribute to shared ownership and make your plan meaningful and effective.

Things to consider

- Who needs to be part of shaping the changes to build shared ownership and support?
- How will you keep sight of progress and stay informed about actions being taken by others?
- What measures will you use to check whether your planned changes are having the desired impact on children and families' experiences and outcomes?

The Model for Improvement

The [Model for Improvement](#) is a helpful way to plan, review, and sustain changes over time. It provides a clear structure for trying out ideas, learning from them, and understanding whether the changes you make result in improvement.



The Model for Improvement has two key parts: **Three fundamental questions** – the ‘**thinking part**’:

- What are we trying to accomplish? (Aims)
- How do we know that a change is an improvement? (Outcome, Process and Balancing measures)
- What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

These questions help you clarify your purpose, understand the impact of your work, and identify improvements that will make a meaningful difference for children and families.

The **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)** cycle - the ‘**doing part**’:

- **Plan** your idea for change.

- **Do** - test it on a small scale.
- **Study** the results and what you have learned.
- **Act** - decide whether to adopt, adapt, or abandon the change.

You may find the **Model for Improvement** helpful when:

- You need to change how work is done.
- Your ideas are uncertain and need testing before implementation.
- You want to use PDSA cycles to refine ideas.
- You want to measure the impact of changes over time before spreading improvements.

You can find links to improvement tools in the [Useful Resources](#) section at the end of this guide.

Assess your impact

Although this is the final step in the cycle, it is not an endpoint. Assessing your impact helps you understand what is working well, what needs to change, and whether your actions are making a difference. **Self-evaluation and review** should happen regularly and meaningfully over time, becoming part of the day-to-day running of your service and your wider self-evaluation and quality assurance cycle.

How often you review your improvement plan will depend on your circumstances and where you are in your improvement journey. If several areas require significant change to improve outcomes for children and families, you may need to review and adjust your plans more frequently to maintain progress and respond to emerging challenges. What matters most is taking time to pause and reflect on whether the actions you have taken are leading to improvement.

Remember to involve children, families and key stakeholders in reviewing your plans and change ideas so their voices shape how you measure progress and understand impact.

Keep using the 'So what?' question to help you interpret the difference your actions are making and guide your next steps. What difference did the changes make? Should you adopt, adapt or abandon them?

'The improvement plan can be changed - it's ok if you don't achieve what you set out. Plans can change based on different circumstances within the setting.' (Care Service Manager)

Things to consider

- What **positive changes** are you beginning to see, even if they feel small? What can you celebrate?
- Are you giving yourself the time and space you need to pause, reflect, and understand your progress?
- Who could you **involve** in helping you gain a fuller picture of how things are going?
- Do you need to **adjust your approach** as you move forward? Are there any aspects of the cycle that you want to revisit?

Continuing the cycle

As the cycle shows, **assessing your impact** naturally brings you back to **identifying your focus**. You may choose to begin a new cycle to explore issues that have emerged, or revisit earlier steps to measure the impact of the changes you have already made.



Returning to the cycle with deeper insight and understanding helps ensure your self-evaluation activities remain meaningful, manageable, and centred on improving outcomes for children and families.

Things can change quickly in services, and plans do not always unfold as expected. When this happens, be kind to yourself - return to the work when you can and keep moving forward with the learning you've gathered along the way.

Useful resources

Care Inspectorate	Quality frameworks
	Self-evaluation toolkits
	Quality improvement tools and resources
	Quality framework - six-point scale for evaluation
	ELC improvement programme
The Scottish Government	Health and Social Care Standards
	Realising the Ambition: Being Me
Healthcare Improvement Scotland	Scottish Approach to Change
	CEIM Experience Improvement Model
	Participation toolkit
SSSC	Leadership in social services
	Effective communication
	Appreciative Inquiry Resource Pack
TURAS Learn	Model for Improvement
	Quality Improvement Zone
	Leadership and management programmes
Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS)	Partnerships & CO conversation openers
	Everyday leadership from the frontline

Other resources to support your self-evaluation:

[UK GDPR guidance and resources](#)

[Making sense: Analysing qualitative information](#)

[Lundy model of participation](#)

[Talking Mats](#)

[Communication tools](#)

[Boardmaker](#)

[Charter for involvement](#)

[Voice of the Infant](#)

[We Are Here](#)

[Meaningful Participation and](#)

[Engagement of Children and Young](#)

[People](#)

Appendix 1 - Simple ways to get started

We understand that some settings may feel overwhelmed or unsure where to start with their self-evaluation. These simplified steps will help you to make progress with your self-evaluation journey, even when time and resources are limited.

They aim to:

- Help you identify immediate areas for improvement that will improve outcomes for children and families.
- Help overcome barriers to engagement.
- Ensure the process remains meaningful and beneficial.



“You don’t have to self-evaluate everything at once”
(Care service manager)

- **Prioritise the core assurances**

Begin with the **core assurances**, as they can help you identify the most important issues or concerns in your service and highlight where immediate attention may be needed.

- **Focus on one key area**

Choose a **single aspect** of service delivery to evaluate. Starting small helps keep the process manageable and meaningful - you don’t need to evaluate everything at once.

- **Use existing information**

Make good use of your **quality assurance processes** – such as audits, incident reports, feedback from children and families, staff and key stakeholders. Take time to reflect on what this information is telling you and use it as valuable evidence to support your self-evaluation.

‘Gather evidence along the way.’ (Care Service Manager)

- **Address known issues using the self-evaluation questions**

Use the **three self-evaluation questions** to explore issues you are already aware of. Begin shaping your improvement plan using the information and insight you already have.

- **Set up a small working group**

Involve staff who are passionate about improvement and driving positive change. Create welcoming opportunities for participation and leadership across all levels and roles so everyone feels valued and able to contribute.

- **Use everyday opportunities to gather feedback**

Ask simple, consistent questions during **daily interactions** with children, their families and visitors. Think about how you can record this to refer to as you build self-evaluation processes.

‘Build self-evaluation into routine.’ (Care Service Practitioner)

- **Make feedback easy and accessible**

- Leave out questionnaires and a feedback box for staff.
- Use online surveys, such as Microsoft Forms or Google Forms, to collect and analyse responses.
- Email questionnaires with a shared folder for submissions.

- **Use digital media and apps**

Engage with people using communication apps, polls, voting tools, or social media.

- **Start small**

Choose **one improvement** you can make right away - and celebrate it.

‘We really need to start small and follow a process including everyone to see real results.’ (Care Service Manager)

Appendix 2 – Suggested self-evaluation process (group)

This suggested process is designed to help you begin your self-evaluation journey or complement what you are already doing. It supports a collaborative approach, encouraging teams to reflect together and take meaningful steps toward improvement.

- **Identify your focus**

Start by deciding what you want to focus on. You could consider:

- A specific quality indicator or key area.
- Requirements or areas for improvement from your last inspection.
- Issues highlighted through your own quality assurance activities.
- Feedback from children, their families, carers or key stakeholders.

Think about what matters most to the children and families who experience your service. Remember to start small, keep things manageable and focus on what is achievable.

- **Gather your information / evidence**

Arrange a dedicated team meeting to plan your self-evaluation. Your team could include managers, staff, volunteers, families and carers.

Choose a quiet space and allow plenty of time to:

- Explore the evidence and feedback already available.
- Identify gaps or any additional evidence that you need to collate. This could include adapting evidence you already gather to suit the key area(s) you are going to focus on.
- Assign tasks and set timescales for gathering and reviewing evidence.
- Agree on how the evidence will be collected and recorded.
- Think about how you will measure the data and information you collect so you have a clear baseline (starting point).

Meet again after an agreed and realistic timescale to:

- Hear updates from those gathering and reviewing evidence.
- Compare findings with other sources of information.
- Take a critical look at your evidence:
 - Is it robust and reliable?
 - Does it highlight what is working well and what needs to improve?
 - Are there any gaps that you need to address?

- **Make your assessment (evaluation) / evidence your assessment**

Meet again to review and evaluate your evidence.

Use the relevant [quality framework](#), including the **very good** and **weak** illustrations, as well as legislation, standards, and good practice guidance to benchmark your findings.

Answer the **first two self-evaluation questions** and record your findings.

- Use the [six-point scale](#) to answer the ‘**How are we doing?**’ question by rating your performance in each key area.
- Answer the ‘**How do we know?**’ question using evaluative statements, based on your evidence.
- Remember to consider the ‘**So what?**’ question at this point. What does this mean for children and families’ outcomes?

- **Identify your areas for development**

Celebrate your strengths and think about how you could use these to support improvement. Work together to:

- Discuss the areas needing change.
- Agree on priority actions.
- Identify who will lead planning and testing your changes.

Record your answer to the final question ‘**What are we going to do now?**’

- **Plan your changes**

Work together to develop your improvement plan, considering whether improvement tools could help. A clear plan will help you stay focused, move priorities forward and track progress over time. Your plan should include:

- The outcomes you are trying to achieve.
- The actions you will take and who is responsible for overseeing them.
- Timescales for completion.
- Measures to help you review and measure progress.

- **Assess your impact**

After making changes, review the difference they have made. Use the ‘**So what?**’ question to understand the impact and decide next steps. Keep your plan under regular review, using evidence and feedback to track progress and make changes where needed.

Appendix 3 – Suggested self-evaluation process (individual)

This suggested process is designed to help you begin your self-evaluation journey or complement what you are already doing. It supports a reflective approach, encouraging you to take manageable steps toward improvement, even if you are working alone or in a small team.

- **Identify your focus**

Start by deciding what you want to focus on.

You could consider:

- A specific quality indicator or key area.
- Requirements or areas for improvement from your last inspection.
- Issues highlighted through your own quality assurance activities.
- Feedback from children, their families, carers or key stakeholders.

Think about what matters most to the children and families who experience your service. Start small, keep things manageable, and focus on what is achievable.

- **Gather your information / evidence**

Think about the evidence or feedback you already have.

- Identify any gaps or additional evidence you need to collate. This might include adapting the evidence you already gather to suit the key area you are focusing on.
- Make use of peer networks or groups. Could you work together with other services or providers in your area to get feedback or support your self-evaluation?
- Think about how you will measure the data and information you collect so you have a clear baseline (starting point).

Once you have gathered your evidence, take some time to make sure you have everything you need. Ask yourself:

- Is my evidence robust and reliable?
- Does it show what's working well and what could be improved?
- Are there any gaps I need to fill?

- **Make your assessment (evaluation) / evidence your assessment**

Use the relevant [quality framework](#), including the **very good** and **weak** illustrations, as well as legislation, standards, and good practice guidance as benchmarks.

Answer the **first two self-evaluation questions** and record your findings.

- Use the [six-point scale](#) to answer the ‘**How are we doing?**’ question by rating your performance in each key area.
- Answer the ‘**How do we know?**’ question using evaluate statements, based on your evidence.
- Remember to consider the ‘**So what?**’ question at this point. What does this mean for children and young people’s outcomes?

• **Identify your areas for development**

Celebrate your strengths and think about how you can build on them. Identify:

- Areas that need change.
- Priority actions you can take.
- Any support or resources you might need.

Record your answer to the final question - ‘**What are we going to do now?**’

• **Plan your changes**

The next step is to develop your improvement plan, considering whether improvement tools could help. A clear plan will help you to stay focused, move your priorities forward and track progress over time. Your plan should include:

- The outcomes you are trying to achieve.
- The actions you will take.
- When you will do them.
- How you will review and measure progress.

• **Assess your impact**

After making changes, review the difference they have made. Use the ‘**So what?**’ question to understand impact and decide next steps. Keep your plan under regular review, using evidence and feedback to track progress and make changes where needed.

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