

Supporting Children
Young People
and Families



Children and Young People's Mental Health Services: Competency Framework

April 2025





Updated Competency Framework for Staff Working in Children, Young People and Families Mental Health Services

Staff working in children's services hold a vital responsibility: to offer care that is safe, ethical and effective. At the heart of this work is a commitment to building trust; with children, young people, families, colleagues, and partner agencies. That trust is fostered not only through what we do, but how we show up: with integrity, humility, and respect for the lived experiences of others. It calls on us to actively model the behaviours we want to see, collaboration, empathy, and accountability, while firmly challenging those that harm psychological safety, such as ignorance, exclusion, blame, bullying, and harassment.

This framework sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed by professionals delivering mental health support to children, young people, and families. It integrates developments since the original [CAMHS framework](#) (NHS Education for Scotland and UCL, 2011), which [even in its name - use of 'CAMHS', which is being replaced by CYPMH] is outdated; updating it to ensure integration of the principles of [CYP-IAPT](#) (NHS HEE, 2014), the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) commitments (NHS England), the [THRIVE Model](#) (Anna Freud and Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, 2014), as well as the latest guidance from [NICE](#), [CORC](#), and other specific relevant guidance such as updated guidance for all mental health practitioners [Staying Safe from Suicide](#) (NHS England, 2025).

This updated framework reflects the move away from a tiered service model towards a needs-led, person-centred approach, ensuring that children, young people and families receive the right help, in the right place, at the right time from a system that works together across health, education, social care and VCSE organisations, rather than siloed approaches.

Who is this framework for?

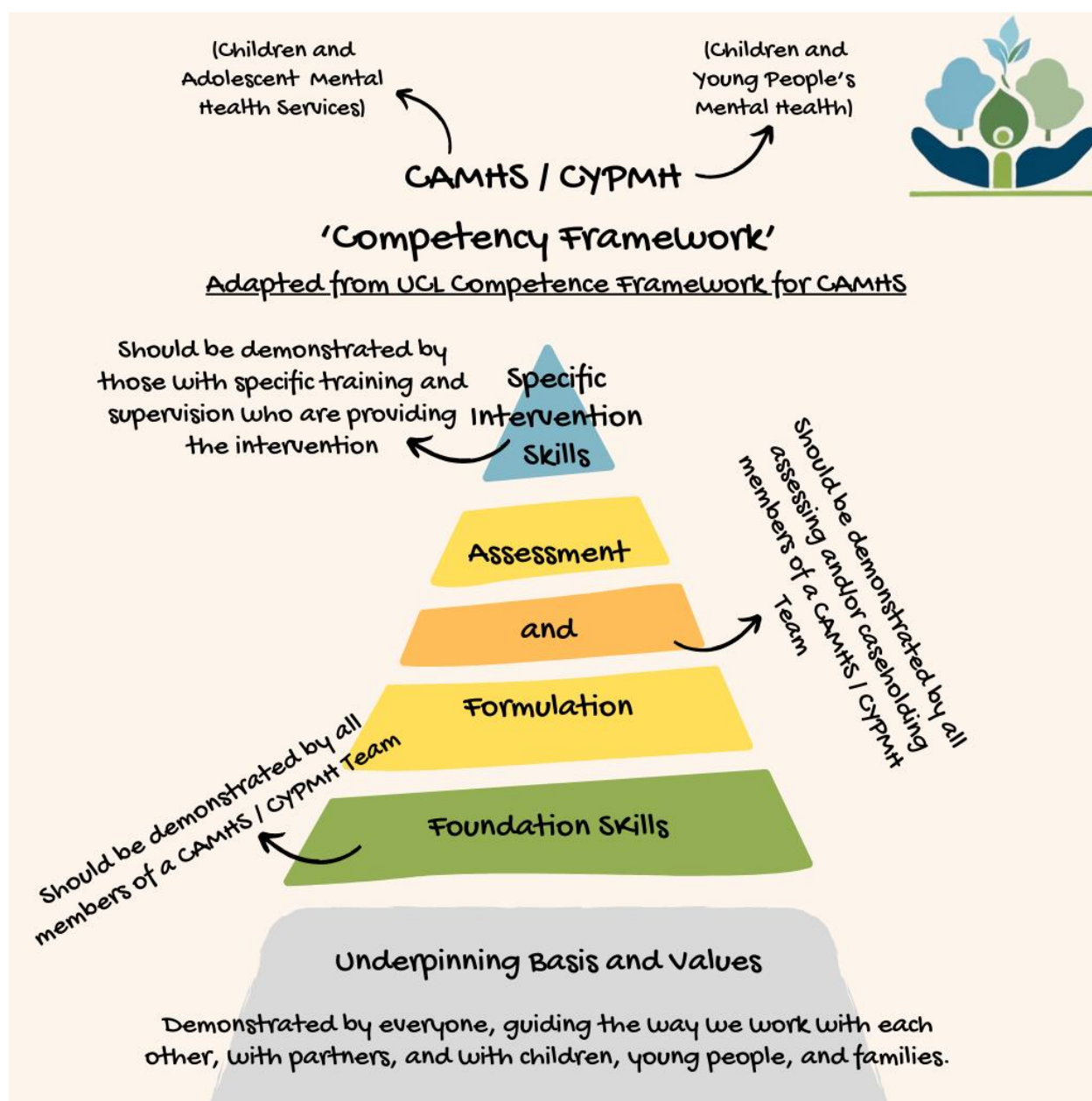
This competency framework is designed for:

- All staff working in Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services
- Practitioners supporting children and young people's mental health
- Clinical and quality leads seeking assurance and to help evaluate and improve services
- Operational and Workforce leads seeking to review team capacity, plan training, induction and CPD
- Strategic System Management, Heads of Service, Commissioners and ICS leads designing services and ensuring alignment with national standards



Levels of Competence in CYPMH Teams

This revised framework brings together competencies into broad groupings that can be applied across different services and teams. While the 2011 Framework included 'meta-competencies', these are no longer presented as a separate category. Instead, their content has been integrated into a new section alongside other key *Underpinning Basis and Values*. It's important to note that competencies are not one-size-fits-all, they vary depending on the nature of the role, the level of training, and the specific responsibilities an individual holds.





Underpinning Basis and Values

Shared values and behaviours are the foundation of safe, inclusive, and effective services. These capabilities apply to us all, from clinical and support roles to administrative and leadership positions, and they reflect how we show up every day to provide meaningful support to children, young people, and their families. They enable us to create environments where staff feel safe and teams grow, meaning that children thrive and families feel supported. These are not just guiding principles; they are everyday practices essential for delivering compassionate, collaborative, high-quality care.

Foundation Competencies: Working with Children and Young People

These competencies underpin safe, collaborative, and developmentally appropriate work with children, young people, and their families. They reflect the essential knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed across all settings; including understanding development, mental health, multi-agency working, and effective communication with children, families, and carers. These foundations are vital for building trust, promoting engagement, and ensuring that care is responsive to each young person's context and needs.

Foundation Therapeutic Competencies

These core therapeutic skills are applicable across modalities and roles, supporting the delivery of effective, person-centred care. They include maintaining your own emotions, as well as establishing therapeutic relationships, managing endings, and using supervision and outcome measures meaningfully. These competencies are central to delivering relational, reflective, and emotionally intelligent support.

Assessment and Formulation

This domain covers the essential clinical skills required to assess, understand, and collaboratively plan care. It includes comprehensive assessments, risk formulation and safety planning, achieving holistic and meaningful understanding of a young person and family's needs and working with others to communicate and coordinate support. These skills are critical to delivering tailored, person-centred interventions grounded in a shared understanding of need.

Specific Interventions

These competencies relate to the delivery of evidence-based interventions for a range of emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. This includes structured therapies, specialist treatments, and support tailored to specific presentations and diagnoses.



Competency Development

Staff shouldn't be asked to work beyond their competencies, and shouldn't be left feeling that they're losing skills or confidence in an area. Establishing and maintaining the competencies set out in this framework needs to be a continuous process. Staff will develop competencies through:

Core Training

Many staff recruited hold a "core qualification" and accompanying professional registration, such as nursing, social work, or psychological therapy, but not all degree courses fully prepare people for the specific work involved in children's mental health, and academic courses vary significantly, and some include no mandatory training on children's mental health (HEE 2022). It's important not to assume that someone's qualification means they're already competent to deliver everything in this framework. Research highlights that many professionals, including those with core qualifications, often feel underprepared to address the mental health needs of children and young people (Banwell, 2021).

Induction

Following recruitment, (*note: job descriptions and person specifications should clearly set out what competencies are expected*) the induction period is a key time to understand what skills a new staff member already has, and where they might need support. A well-structured induction is key (DfE 2025) and should include time to assess core competencies and set clear, practical goals to build any areas that need development.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Training

In order to provide good quality children's mental health intervention staff should have regular opportunities to grow in their roles and build confidence through ongoing training and CPD (March 2022). It's important that this learning is:

- Relevant to their role and responsibilities
- Evidence-based, not just popular or well-marketed
- Structured and part of a coherent professional development plan that builds upon an individual's existing knowledge and skills

Supervision and Reflective Practice

Good supervision is essential and has been shown to improve staff confidence, reduce burnout, and lead to better outcomes for families (Tobin 2023). It helps staff stay safe, build new skills, and grow in their roles. Regular supervision sessions should:

- Provide space for reflection
 - Support skill development
 - Keep practice grounded in evidence and ethics
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Foundation Competences Working with CYP		Foundation Therapeutic Competences	Assessment & Formulation	Specific Interventions	
Child and Family Development	Knowledge of Mental Health Interventions	Completes comprehensive assessments	CBT for Depression, Anxiety, OCD, PTSD	TF-CBT for PTSD and Complex Developmental Trauma	
Children’s Mental Health	Establish and Maintain Therapeutic Relationship	Ability to formulate	IPT-A for Depression	EMDR for PTSD, single event trauma	
Multi-Agency Working	Self-Regulation / Emotionally Robust	Risk Formulation and Safety Planning	Psychodynamic Therapy for Depression	FT-AN for Anorexia	
Engage and Communicate with CYP across developmental stages	Manage Therapeutic Endings	Ability to assess functioning and severity across contexts	Family Therapy for Anxiety, Depression, Self-Harm	CBT-ED for Eating Disorders	
Engage and Communicate with Families, Parents/Carers	Deliver Group Work	Able to collaboratively agree and communicate the care plan	MST for Severe Antisocial Behaviour / Conduct Disorder	Parenting Support for ADHD, ODD, Conduct Disorder	
Professional / Legal	Use Routine Outcome Measures	Able to co-ordinate support across agencies	DBT for Emotional Dysregulation and Self-Harm / Suicidality	Early Intervention and Prevention	
	Ability to make good use of supervision	Able to complete a diagnostic assessment	Pharmacological Treatment	Guided Self Help, Promotion in Schools/Community	
Underpinning Basis and Values					
Aware & Understanding, Clear Communication, Collaborative, Compassionate, Curious, Empowering, Ethical, Evidence-Based, Honest & Trustworthy, Inclusive, Learner, Listens to & Involves Others, Non-Judgemental, Reflective, Relational, Respectful, Safe, Strengths-Based, Transparent					

Competency Self-Assessment Checklist for staff

This self-assessment tool is designed to be used to enable ongoing development, it can be used to support an individual during: supervision, appraisal, job planning, induction, evaluation, or at service level by collating responses to enable workforce planning and review, or as part of governance and audit. It is important, to remain valid, for the tool to be used as a supportive mechanism to genuinely improve staff's confidence and abilities in their roles, ensuring they are acquiring or developing in required competencies, in order to achieve improved outcomes for children and families, and not seen as punitive or shaming (which could discourage honesty and openness in its completion). An editable version of the checklist only (not part of the whole competency framework) can be [downloaded here](#).

1. Strongly Disagree	5. Strongly Agree
Underpinning Basis and Values	
Aware & Understanding I am conscious of how my words, actions, and the systems I work in affect others. This includes recognising power dynamics and systemic inequality. I aim to challenge bias, reduce harm, and respond sensitively to what each individual brings.	1-5 Rating
Clear Communication I share information in a way that is open, clear, and developmentally appropriate. I avoid jargon, secrecy, or ambiguity that might cause confusion or distress, and I build understanding and trust through honesty and consistency.	Rating
Collaborative I work with others across roles, teams, and services to deliver joined-up support. I avoid siloed working, competition between services, or gatekeeping, and instead promote shared goals and integrated partnership working.	Rating
Compassionate I respond with warmth, care, and understanding — even in difficult moments. I don't dismiss or minimise distress; instead, I seek to understand and support others with empathy and patience.	Rating
Courageous I speak up when something isn't right, challenge injustice, and lean into difficult conversations when needed. I don't ignore harmful behaviours or avoid hard truths, and I lead with integrity and moral purpose.	Rating
Curious I approach challenges with interest and a desire to understand, not assumptions. I avoid judgment, and instead ask thoughtful questions to better understand situations, behaviours, and systems.	Rating
Empowering I support people to make informed choices and have their voices heard. I avoid disempowering behaviours such as controlling decision-making or failing to include those affected by my work.	Rating
Ethical I act with fairness, integrity, and accountability. I reflect on how to 'do the right thing' in complex situations, guided by professional and moral principles.	Rating

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Evidence-Informed I use the best available evidence, balanced with professional judgment and lived experience. I avoid practices that are outdated, harmful, or not supported by research and evaluation.	Rating
Honest & Trustworthy I build trust by being truthful, transparent, and consistent. I don't withhold information unnecessarily, and I am reliable in my actions and commitments.	Rating
Inclusive I create spaces where everyone feels valued, respected, and able to belong. I actively challenge exclusion, discrimination, and microaggressions, and celebrate diversity.	Rating
Learner I commit to ongoing development and improvement. I reflect on feedback, embrace growth, and acknowledge when I don't know something — avoiding defensiveness or complacency.	Rating
Listens and Involves Others I make time to listen and act on what others tell me. I don't speak for others without understanding their views, and I involve them meaningfully in decisions that affect them.	Rating
Non-Judgemental I respond with openness, empathy, and acceptance. I avoid making assumptions or allowing personal biases to impact how I view or treat others.	Rating
Reflective I regularly think about my own behaviours, decisions, and impact. I take responsibility for my actions and mistakes, learn from them, and continuously strive to improve my practice.	Rating
Relational I build trust-based relationships grounded in safety, connection, and consistency. I avoid impersonal or transactional interactions and instead foster genuine, human connection.	Rating
Respectful I treat everyone with dignity, recognising their experiences, preferences, and needs. I do not tolerate bullying, exclusion, or belittling behaviour — and challenge it when I see it.	Rating
Safe I help create environments where people feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically secure. I avoid harmful behaviours such as shaming, blaming, gossiping or creating fear.	Rating
Strengths-Based I focus on what's strong, not just what's wrong. I recognise and build on the strengths, capacities, and resilience of individuals, families, and communities, rather than defining them by challenges or difficulties.	Rating
Transparent I am open about what I'm doing and why, helping others understand decisions and processes. I avoid secrecy, misleading information, or behaviours that break down trust.	Rating

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<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No competence – I have no knowledge or experience in this area. 2. Basic awareness – I know what this is and when it might be useful (e.g. I could signpost someone to it). 3. Supported delivery – I can help deliver this with guidance or supervision from someone more experienced. 4. Independent delivery – I'm fully trained and confident to deliver this on my own. 5. Supervision/leadership level – I can teach others to deliver this well, supervise them, and help improve or lead the work. 	
Foundational Competences for Working with Children, Young People and Families	1-5
Child and Family Development Demonstrates understanding of typical and atypical child development, attachment, and family systems. Able to apply this knowledge to assessment, formulation, and intervention across the age range.	Rating
Children's Mental Health Has sound knowledge of common and complex mental health presentations in children and young people. Able to recognise signs and symptoms, understand trajectories, and consider the impact on daily functioning.	Rating
Multi-Agency Integrated Working Able to work collaboratively with education, social care, health, and voluntary sector partners. Skilled in sharing information appropriately, aligning support, and contributing to joined-up planning around the child or young person.	Rating
Engage and Communicate with CYP across Developmental Stages Able to adapt communication style, language, and approach to suit different ages and developmental stages. Skilled in using verbal and non-verbal methods to build rapport and ensure understanding.	Rating
Engage and Communicate with Families, Parents/Carers Able to engage families with empathy and respect, recognising their expertise and role in supporting change. Skilled in managing complex dynamics and maintaining clear, collaborative communication.	Rating
Legal Frameworks, Capacity and Consent, Child Protection and Safeguarding Understands relevant legal and ethical frameworks, including consent, capacity, and information sharing. Able to identify safeguarding concerns, take appropriate action, and contribute confidently to safeguarding processes.	Rating

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Foundational Therapeutic Competences	1-5
Knowledge of Mental Health Interventions Demonstrates sound understanding of a range of evidence-based interventions, their theoretical underpinnings, and appropriate use. Able to select and adapt approaches based on presenting difficulties, formulation, and clinical guidelines.	Rating
Establish and Maintain Therapeutic Relationships Able to build and sustain safe, collaborative, and respectful relationships with children, young people, and families. Skilled in using empathy, consistency, and professional boundaries to support therapeutic engagement and change.	Rating
Emotionally Robust Individual who is Self-Aware and can Self-Regulate Able to remain emotionally present and composed in challenging situations. Demonstrates insight into personal responses and uses reflective practice to manage impact on therapeutic work.	Rating
Ability to Manage Therapeutic Endings and Avoid Therapeutic Drift Skilled in planning and facilitating purposeful endings to therapy. Able to maintain focus and direction throughout the intervention, preventing sessions from losing structure or clarity of goal.	Rating
Deliver Group Work Able to plan, facilitate, and evaluate structured therapeutic groups. Skilled in managing group dynamics, encouraging participation, and adapting content to meet developmental and clinical needs.	Rating
Use Routine Outcome Measures Confident in selecting, administering, and interpreting outcome measures to inform practice. Able to integrate feedback into ongoing assessment, care planning, and service evaluation.	Rating
Make Good Use of Supervision Engages proactively in supervision to reflect on practice, manage risk, and ensure safe and effective care. Open to feedback and able to use supervision to support development and clinical decision-making.	Rating

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Assessment and Formulation Competences	1-5
Complete Comprehensive Assessments Able to conduct in-depth assessments that explore mental health, neurodevelopmental, physical, and social factors. Skilled in using validated tools and clinical interviews to gather a full picture of needs, strengths, and context.	Rating
Ability to Formulate Skilled in developing biopsychosocial formulations that integrate presenting issues, underlying mechanisms, and contextual influences. Able to use formulation to guide intervention planning and communicate it clearly to others.	Rating
Risk Formulation and Safety Planning Able to assess and formulate risk across domains (e.g. self-harm, suicide, exploitation, harm to others). Skilled in collaboratively creating safety plans that are specific, realistic, and responsive to changing levels of risk.	Rating
Assess Functioning and Severity across Contexts Able to evaluate how mental health difficulties impact functioning across home, school, peer, and community settings. Skilled in using clinical judgment and standardised tools to inform level of need and intervention planning.	Rating
Collaboratively Agree and Communicate Care Plan/Next Steps Able to co-create care plans with children, young people, and families that reflect goals, preferences, and clinical priorities. Skilled in clearly communicating next steps, roles, and expectations across the care team.	Rating
Co-Ordinate Support across Agencies Skilled in multi-agency working, including sharing information, aligning goals, and coordinating roles. Able to navigate systems to ensure timely, joined-up support that avoids duplication and gaps in care.	Rating

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Specific Intervention or Therapeutic Competences	1-5
Diagnostic Assessment Able to undertake structured assessments to identify mental health disorders in line with diagnostic frameworks such as DSM-5 or ICD-11. Skilled in gathering and synthesising information from multiple sources, formulating diagnoses, and clearly communicating outcomes and implications to young people, families, and professionals.	Rating
Early Intervention and Promotion (e.g Whole School Approach) Understands the importance of early help and universal support. Able to design, deliver, and embed mental health promotion and prevention initiatives across settings such as schools and communities.	Rating
Pharmacological Treatment Thorough understanding of pharmacological interventions in children's mental health. Able to recommend, initiate, titrate, and monitor medication — including physical health checks — while clearly communicating with the care team, child/young person, and their family.	Rating
CBT Competent in delivering structured CBT interventions for depression, anxiety, OCD, and PTSD. Able to collaboratively set goals, use evidence-based techniques, and adapt approaches to developmental need.	Rating
IPT-A Trained in IPT-A for adolescent depression. Able to identify interpersonal problem areas and support young people to build healthier relationships and improve mood through focused, time-limited intervention.	Rating
Psychodynamic Therapy Skilled in applying psychodynamic principles to explore unconscious processes and relational patterns. Able to work at depth with emotional material and maintain appropriate therapeutic boundaries and containment.	Rating
Systemic Family Therapy Able to deliver family-based interventions that address relational patterns contributing to distress. Skilled in engaging families, managing dynamics, and supporting change through inclusive, non-blaming approaches.	Rating
Multi-Systemic Therapy Trained in MST and able to engage intensively with young people at risk and their networks. Skilled in working across systems (home, school, community) to reduce antisocial behaviour and promote sustained change.	Rating
DBT Able to deliver DBT-informed or full-model interventions for emotional dysregulation and self-harm. Skilled in balancing acceptance and change strategies, including crisis planning and skills coaching.	Rating
TF-CBT	Rating

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Trained in trauma-focused CBT. Able to provide phased interventions that include psychoeducation, coping skills, and trauma processing, tailored to the developmental stage and needs of the child or young person. For PTSD and/or Complex Developmental Trauma	
EMDR Qualified to deliver EMDR for children and young people. Skilled in assessment, preparation, and reprocessing phases, with sensitivity to trauma history and developmental needs.	Rating
FT-AN for Anorexia Trained in Family Therapy for Anorexia Nervosa. Able to support families to take an active role in recovery, provide meal support, and manage eating disorder behaviours in a structured, supportive way.	Rating
CBT-ED for Eating Disorders Able to deliver CBT-ED for anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. Skilled in addressing maintaining factors, supporting behavioural change, and promoting body image flexibility and recovery.	Rating

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