

Family Space Evaluation

Across Q3 2025-2026, our Practice Assurance Team completed nine Learning Episodes (case audits) specifically focused on evaluating the impact of Family Space. The nine families received a Family Space intervention between 2024-2026 across different service areas. The review evaluated the impact on outcomes for children by reviewing children's records, interviewing families, social workers and family therapists involved in the interventions.

Findings: At-a-Glance

Across nine in-depth Learning Episodes covering children aged 9–18, families in crisis, reunification planning, looked-after children, edge-of-care situations and foster placements, Family Space consistently demonstrates transformative impact on relationships, communication, emotional understanding, and multi-agency collaboration.

Despite variation in levels of complexity, risk, and family histories, several powerful themes emerge:

Cross-cutting strengths

- Families repeatedly describe feeling heard, respected and understood in ways they have *not* experienced elsewhere.
- Social workers report that Family Space is often a turning point in their change journey, unlocking progress when systems feel stuck.
- Family Space reliably supports reunification, sometimes enabling return home that otherwise “may not have happened” (family quote).
- Sessions create safer emotional environments inclusive of people's identity, race, trauma, neurodiversity and culture.
- The model increases professional empathy and curiosity, influencing ongoing practice long after sessions end.
- Families consistently ask for more sessions, describing the intervention as unique and highly beneficial.

Across Learning Episodes, Family Space emerges as a high-impact, relationally-intensive, systemic intervention that directly contributes to improved outcomes.

Relationship Repair & Reunification

Strong evidence of successful reunifications

Family Space directly contributed to multiple reunifications, including:

- A teenage boy of Mongolian ethnicity returning home, where without Family Space “he may have remained in care until he was 18.” (Reviewer)
- A teenage girl of Black British ethnicity returning to her mother's care, with sustained stability and improved communication.

- A White British teenage girl returning to her mother's care, with improved emotional expression, identity confidence, relational repair, and strengthened parenting.

Repairing relationships previously thought irreparable

- Parents often develop new understanding of children's emotional worlds, including trauma, identity, school experiences and neurodiversity.
- Children learn to hear parents' stories, experiences of migration, racism, loss or hardship, enabling mutual empathy.

Strengthening attachments

Learning Episodes consistently note:

- Increased parental emotional availability
- More regulated interactions
- More attuned responses to distress
- Children feeling "safer" and "able to share feelings"

Family Space supports a powerful shift from conflict to connection, even in high-risk or highly fractured relationships.

Impact on Children's Emotional Wellbeing & Identity

Children becoming more regulated, confident and expressive

Across reviews:

- Children became calmer, more expressive and more able to articulate feelings.
- Emotional literacy improved (e.g. using mood cards, play-based tools, systemic questions)
- Children moved from avoidance to cautious engagement

Family Space supports:

- Exploration of race, culture, migration and belonging
- Exploration of neurodiversity, with children gaining pride and language for self-advocacy
- Exploration of gender, sexuality, and queerness in respectful, attuned ways.

This demonstrates Family Space's specialist capacity to work safely with complex, intersecting identities.

Family Space as a Safe & Transformational Therapeutic Environment

Families feel genuinely heard

Examples include:

- "We are really grateful for this service; they were with us during the most difficult times." – Parents of a child reunified through Family Space

- “It was a good experience with the right level of support.” – Mother of child reunified through Family Space
- “Family Space was brilliant... it helped us understand each other.” – Foster carer
- “This service is amazing. We’ve been held so lovingly, compassionately... It’s allowed us to grow and become a mother and daughter from being best friends. It’s given us tools to have healthy conversations. I know it’s now time to stand on my own two feet” - Mother of a daughter in foster care

Unique format creates impact

Families consistently praised:

- Reflecting team model
- Neutral, safe space
- Visual and systemic tools (sculpting, mapping, outsider witness practices)
- Therapeutic letters
- Multiple perspectives without judgment

The structure creates safety for honesty, which directly contributes to change.

Professional Development, Better Planning & Better Social Work

Social workers describe Family Space as practice-changing

Examples include:

- “A game changer for my practice.” – Social Worker
- Social Workers adopt systemic techniques learned in Family Space (circular questioning, scaffolding conversations, naming patterns), which strengthens their practice outside of Family Space

Strengthens multi-agency collaboration

Family Space often:

- Clarifies care planning through systemic formulation
- Improves professionals’ understanding of family needs
- Provides emotional containment for SWs managing high-risk or high-conflict family contexts

Enhances assessments

Family Space gave Social Workers deeper insight into:

- Parenting capacity
- Promoted father inclusivity
- Emotional safety and reunification readiness
- Hidden narratives and high-risk interactional patterns

This evidence directly shaped decisions in CIN, CP and CLA plans.

Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Practice

One of the strongest cross-case themes is Family Space's role in making visible the stories systems often miss.

Explicit, safe conversations about racism & oppression

Examples:

- A child and his parents explored racism experienced in school, migration and cultural identity which proved healing and connecting.
- A mother received a supportive space to explore the impact of racism suffered across multiple professional contexts and this helped improve her working relationship with the Social Worker.
- Family Space consistently raises issues of class, gender, religion, and identity in sessions.

Countering system biases

Family Space challenged:

- Mother-blaming and pathologising narratives
- Deficit-based views of neurodiverse children
- Risk-only narratives around marginalized families

The model is consistently anti-shaming and anti-pathologising.

What Families Say They Value Most

Families highlighted:

- Reflecting team
- Feeling safe and understood
- The space to speak openly
- Visual tools
- Curiosity and empathy
- Non-judgemental approach

Specific changes at home

Common outcomes:

- Better communication
- Reduced conflict
- More quality time that strengthens relationships
- Parents understanding children's behaviour through a trauma-informed lens
- Families often wanted Family Space to continue at the point of ending

Challenges & Learning Themes

- Need for clearer alignment and communication between social work and Family Space (notably in high-complexity CLA contexts).

- Some families need more sessions than current capacity allows.
- Children sometimes cannot attend due to scheduling constraints (school hours).
- A small number of LEs demonstrate the limits of systemic work when external pressures, trauma or safeguarding needs dominate.

These themes strengthen the case for more family therapists and expanded capacity.

Key Summary Points

The audits demonstrate that Family Space delivers consistently high-impact, relationship-changing and system-shifting outcomes.

It is rare for a single intervention to achieve:

- Successful reunifications
- Increased stability for looked-after children
- Better emotional outcomes
- Stronger parenting
- Reduced conflict
- Anti-racist practice
- Better professional collaboration
- Improved social work quality
- Increased insight for care planning
- Strong family satisfaction

Family Space does all of these.

It is clear from the evidence that:

1. Family Space fills a gap no other service currently fills.
2. Demand, complexity, and statutory escalations are increasing across services.
3. Families and professionals consistently call for *more* sessions and *greater* capacity.
4. Expansion would have direct impact on:
 - Reduced care entry
 - More successful returns home
 - Improved placement stability
 - Better outcomes for adolescents
 - Greater staff confidence and retention
 - Stronger commitment to anti-oppressive practice
5. Family Space offers a unique opportunity to embed family-led practice through strengthening systemic and therapeutic approaches to helping families to change.