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**Social Services
Knowledge Scotland**

www.ssks.org.uk

Finding evidence to inform your practice:

a guide for social workers

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Select a topic that meets your needs

Contents of this guide

Where to look for evidence to inform your practice - Introduction

This guide aims to help you find evidence quickly and effectively.

The decisions you take, and recommendations you make are based on your professional judgement which is a mix of knowledge of the evidence, your experience and understanding of the context. There are times when you will want to check the latest evidence, research and practice examples to enrich your knowledge and help your decision making.

Where to start?

We can often feel overwhelmed with information and it can be very difficult to know where to start when you have a question.

The source, or sources you use should be dictated by the type of question and the purpose of the search. In this guide we focus on

Finding general background information using Google (p 4) and explore how to use an advanced Google search to find policy documents (p 7) plus Google Scholar for articles (p 9)

The sources to find evidence summaries to support decisions, 'What to do' questions (p 5)

When to use journals and books on the SSKS Library Search (p 8)

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Recommended sources for information to give to clients and service users (p 13)

Using Google

Increasingly when we need to find information we use the Internet. Google can be a good starting point if you are looking for background information on a topic or to direct you to sources to then explore in more depth. Here are some tips to help you search and feel confident about the quality of the results.

Hints for searching

- Be clear what question you are trying to answer, it is easy to get side-tracked!
- Think about the words to describe your question
- Use AND to combine terms (often entered in capital letters)
- Use OR to get either term
- Use quotation marks to search for a phrase e.g. "social media" to find only the two words together

Quality assuring results

Finding accurate and up to date information is important for all searches but is especially important to consider when searching the Internet. Here are a few questions to help you evaluate and feel confident to use the information.

What

Relevancy: does the information help to answer your question?

When

Is it up to date – is there a date on the website?

Who

Source: Is it a trustworthy source or is it trying to sell a product or a point of view? Do you recognise the name of the organisation? Are there adverts? Check the 'About ' section of a website. Is it a blog or social media site – consider if this might affect the reliability.

Bias: has the author given both sides of the story or do they seem to be trying to force a particular viewpoint on the reader?

Looking at the url of a website can help e.g.

.gov.	Government info
.ac.	Academic (UK)
.edu.	Education (non-UK)
.uk	Location

Finding evidence to inform practice

Frequently social workers have "What to do" questions to support decisions and inform their practice. These can be related to legislation, how to implement policies in a particular setting or how to deal with a complex situation.

Questions about how to implement legislation and policy can be tricky as you will often need to find the local interpretation of the national policy.

For national policy information use

- Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) **www.sssc.uk.com**

Evidence summaries are a useful place to start. Evidence summaries outline the current evidence and suggest how this affects practice. They are produced by experts after reviewing all the available information from research and experience.

Tips

Go to **www.ssks.org.uk** and select the 'Evidence-informed Practice' Tab

You will find links to a range of organisations that produce summaries, such as IRISS **www.iriss.org.uk**

Many of these organisations are academic institutions which specialise in a topic, often called Centres of Excellence e.g. CELCIS.
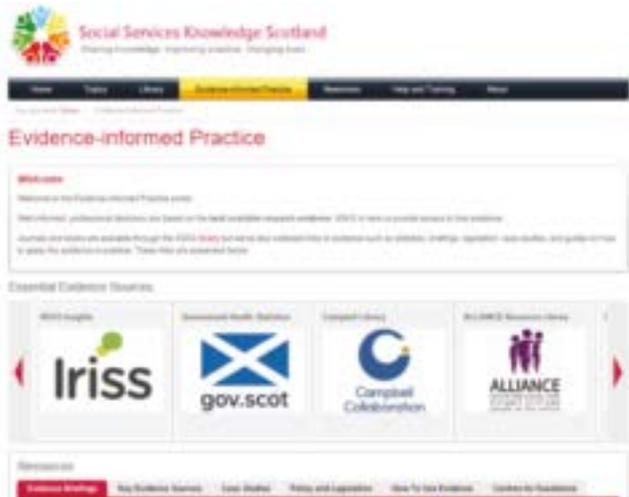
Finding evidence to inform practice

Example question

"What measures have been implemented to ensure a seamless transition of young people into adult services?"

What have other people done?

Case studies and stories of 'lived experience' provide powerful examples of the practice in other areas and settings which can help inform your practice. Professionals can relate the experiences to their own context and learn lessons. See examples of case studies relating to Self-directed Support **www.ssks.org.uk/selfdirectedsupport**.

If you do not find an evidence summary, try some of the options described on page 8 about sources of Research.

Using Google to find government policies

If you need to find or check legislation and policy documents the best place to look is the Scottish Government website.

Using the Advanced search on Google can help you focus your search and get better results

1. Go to Google

2. Type a word or phrase in the search box

3. Click Settings and select Advanced

4. Select Region if needed

5. In Site or Domain, enter the address of the website you want to search, e.g. for the Scottish Government website type .gov.scot

If you are looking for UK government documents then type .gov

[When using a mobile device search for Google Advanced then enter your search terms]

Example question

"What legal protective measures are in place for children adopted from overseas?"
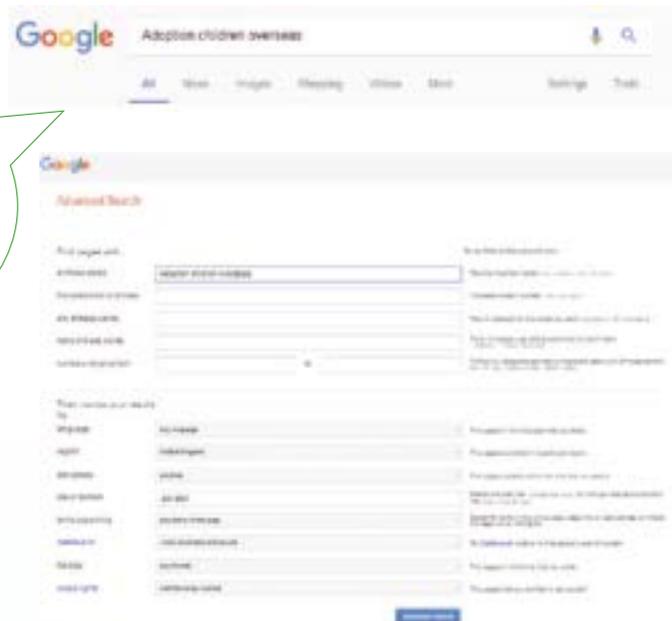
Finding Research – Books and Journals

When you need to find background information on a topic or to explore a topic in more depth it's a good idea to look in books and journals.

Ideal starting point is the 'Library Search' on Social Services Knowledge Scotland (SSKS) **www.ssks.org.uk**. From here you can find all the ejournals, articles, ebooks and books available to all health and social service workforce in Scotland.

To use these resources you need to register for an **NHSScotland OpenAthens username.**

You can do this easily by clicking 'Register' on the SSKS website.
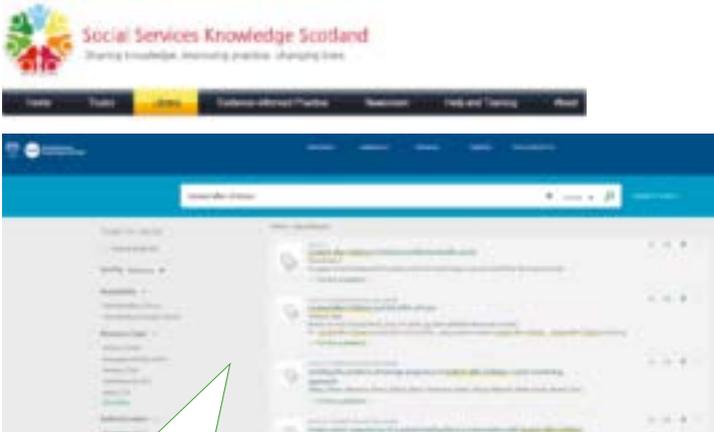
- From the Library Tab you can search the Library

- The search will open in a new window

- The screenshot shows a search of available full text journal articles

Example question

'What is the ideal frequency of contact between 'looked after' children with their parents and family?'

Use the 'Help' section for more information about using this service including how to save your search and set up alerts.

For information

SSKS is part of The Knowledge Network **www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk** developed by NHS Education for Scotland to support all health and social services staff in Scotland to find and use knowledge to inform their practice and learning.

Finding Research – Databases and articles

Databases are indexes of journal articles and other material relevant to the topic or theme of the database. The advantage of searching a database is that you can use the tools provided to help narrow down your search. Always have a look at the 'Help' pages to get some tips.

Tips

There are databases you might find useful in SSKS. It's a good idea to become familiar with each one so you know which to select when you have a question. You will also need your NHSScotland OpenAthens username for access.

Bibliographic Databases

▶ ASSIA
▶ Learning Exchange (up to 2015)
▶ Public Health Database
▶ Social Services Abstracts
▶ Sociological Abstracts

You can also use Google Scholar to find articles

To get easy access to online journal articles subscribed to by NHS Education for Scotland from Google Scholar, follow these simple steps

• Access the Google Scholar web page and click **Settings**

• In the 'Library Links' section enter 'NHS Scotland' in the search box and click the search icon

• On the results check the box next to the result 'NHS Scotland Full Text' and if there are other boxes ticked, untick them

• Click the 'Save' button at the bottom of the page

• Now when you search Google Scholar you will see an 'NHS Scotland' link when the full text is available. You will need to use your NHS Scotland OpenAthens username

Tips for searching for articles

To help you find relevant information on your selected source or sources here are some tips to help you:

1. Develop your question
2. Hints for searching

1. Develop your question

It is useful to do some planning to identify the main concepts and related key words.

After all, you have to ask the right question to get the right answer!

The more careful you are in wording your question (or search strategy), the more likely it is that your search will find the information you need.

Start by breaking your question down into concepts or component parts, i.e. the setting , the people and the actions in your question.

Think about
• Words which are "key" to each concept
• Consider synonyms e.g. substance misuse vs substance abuse
• Think of other spellings e.g. colour vs color

A bit of planning can save you time, but accept that as you search you will come up with some additional words and concepts as you build up your knowledge of the topic. Remember to keep focused on your question or problem!

Tip: make a table of concepts and key words – this can cut down your search time and make sure you don't miss anything important.
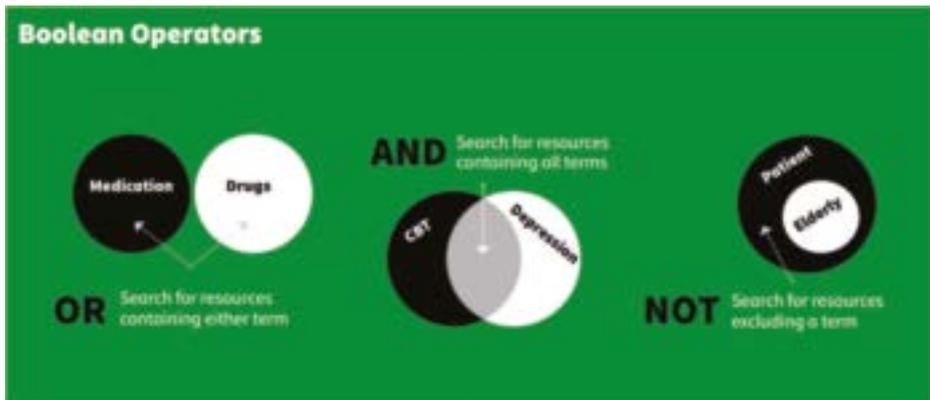
Planning your search - Question

Concepts	Keywords / search terms	Synonyms	Alternative terms

2. Hints for searching

Once you have your concepts and key words to use you need to combine these to find relevant information

- Use AND to combine terms (often entered in capital letters)
- Use OR to get either term
- Use NOT to exclude a term
- Use quotation marks to search for a phrase e.g. "social media" to find only the two words together
- Truncation: use * or ? to search singular, plural and other versions of a term e.g. child* to find child, children
- Use brackets to link concepts e.g. ("social worker*" OR "support worker*") AND ("social media" OR "social networking")
- Filters on search results are a menu of options allowing you to limit or narrow your search results by, for example, date range or country

Boolean Operators

Medication / Drugs

OR Search for resources containing either term

AND Search for resources containing all terms

CBT / Depression

Patient / Elderly

NOT Search for resources excluding a term

It is always useful to look at the help pages on a database as the techniques can vary between databases

Sharing information with colleagues

Bookmarking

There are many social media tools available e.g. Twitter, WhatsApp, Blogs. But sharing your bookmarks and favourites can be an easy way for teams to access resources you have found useful.

You can use your browser bookmarks or favourites to keep a record of sources you have used.

There are a number of free tools on the Internet that you can use to manage your bookmarks with the advantage of enabling you to link up and access from any device. They also allow you to send links to others.

Examples are

• Delicious: **https://del.icio.us**
• Diigo: **www.diigo.com**
• Symbaloo: **www.symbaloo.com**

On the **SSKS Library search** results you can save and organise resources.

• Sign in to the Library using your OpenAthens username and password
• From your search results individual resources can be saved through the 'pin' option to the right of the title
• Go to Your account to group resources saved using the 'tag' or 'label' option found underneath the title
• You can print or email resources to share with others

Case studies

Case studies and stories are very powerful ways to share knowledge and experience. Professionals can relate the experiences to their own context and learn lessons. Always remember that what didn't work is often as useful as what did work. Developing case studies of difficult situations is good practice to spread knowledge and reduce duplication of effort.

Building your personal learning networks using social networking tools is an ideal way to find out and learn from the activities of others, and for sharing your experiences.

Watch this video to find out the benefits and how to get started **www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/pln**

Find information to share with clients and service users

To support clients and service users you might need health and well-being information or to find out what support is available locally. This may be particularly relevant when helping people to implement Self-directed support.

Health information – Start with NHS Inform for trustworthy advice **www.nhsinform.scot**

Key charities also offer excellent information e.g.

Cancer Macmillan **www.macmillan.org.uk**

Diabetes **www.diabetes.org.uk**

Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland **www.chss.org.uk**

Find information to share with clients and service users

To find **local support groups and activities** use these national databases:

Living It Up **www.livingitup.scot**

ALISS signposts support in local communities **www.aliss.org**

Local authorities and local charities have information. Use Google to find them but don't forget your local public library will have a wealth of information about services in the area.

An example : 'On Your Doorstep' Fife **www.onyourdoorstepfife.org**

Sharing information with clients or service users

Health literacy is about people having enough knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to use information, to be active partners in their care, and to navigate the health and social care systems.

As health and social care professionals, when we share knowledge and information with people, we have a responsibility to support health literacy.

People need staff and services to operate and communicate in a way that makes it easier for them to understand and empowers them to be active partners in their care.
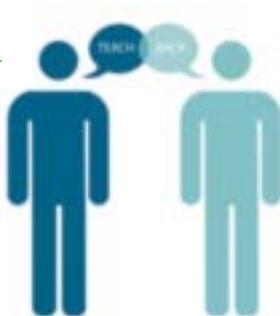

Health Literacy Place www.healthliteracyplace.org.uk

provides information about how you can support communication and understanding. The tools provided in The Health Literacy Place are intended to help health and social care practitioners avoid jargon, give clear and understandable directions, and ensure understanding.

One of the techniques promoted is 'Teach-Back'. This is a process of checking you have explained things properly by asking them to 'teach back' in their own words what has been discussed.
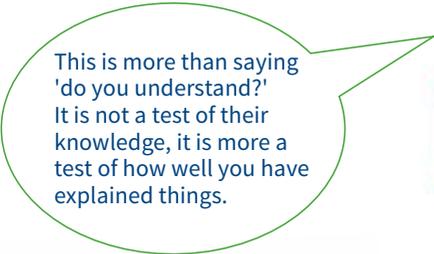
This is more than saying 'do you understand?' It is not a test of their knowledge, it is more a test of how well you have explained things.

See the leaflet 'Making it easy to understand Social Care funded support' **www.ssks.org.uk/topics/self-directed-support/sharing-information** to illustrate how health literacy techniques are useful in social services.

Further sources of help

NHS Education for Scotland, Knowledge Services help desk **knowledge@nes.scot.nhs.uk**

The Knowledge Network Register

Health Management
Online *Supporting healthcare managers in Scotland*

NHS SCOTLAND

Health Management Library

Social services staff can join this library to borrow items and request articles not available online **www.healthmanagementonline.scot.nhs.uk**

Many NHS Libraries are happy to support social services staff. Contact your nearest one to find out more. You will find a list of libraries on SSKS Help pages **www.ssks.org.uk**

Remember Public libraries are a great local resource

Online help

Knowledge into Action Support Centre – although it focuses more on health, you can find a wealth of guidance for finding the evidence – **www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/k2asupportcentre**

Knowledge into Action (K2A)

Guidance and tools to help you FIND, SHARE and USE knowledge in your practice.

K2A SupportCentre

What do you need to know

Where to find what you need

Making knowledge usable

Sharing & Spreading

Evaluating Impact

About K2A