



i-THRIVE Toolkit: The Five Whys Technique

The Five Whys Technique is a type of root cause analysis. It is useful to use when trying to understand an event, or perhaps a change in behaviour in your system. We use root cause analysis to get to the root cause of a change. The change could either be a problem you would like to fix, or perhaps you need to understand why a positive change has occurred so you can replicate it.

Understanding why something has happened often leads to more questions. The Five Whys Technique suggests that we need to ask 'why?' at least five times to get to the bottom of a situation. See the example below.

System change: decrease in inappropriate referrals from schools

Why have inappropriate referrals from schools decreased?

- Because schools are referring to the right type of support or service rather than to many services.

Why did schools referring behaviour change?

- Because they are better able to identify the right support.

Why are schools better able to identify the right support?

- Because they receive signposting during school outreach visits.

Why are the signposting visits helpful?

- Because they help schools navigate the system.

Why do they help schools navigate the system?

- Because they are regular visits, and all schools are visited.

Root cause of drop in inappropriate referrals: regular visits to all schools.