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# EARLY HELP PRACTICE GUIDANCE 2024

FOR *every*  
PRACTITIONER

SOUTH TYNESIDE FAMILY HUBS



## Introduction to Early Help

This practice guide has been developed to assist professionals who work with children, young people and families in need of early help. The aim is to support professionals in providing early help intervention and work in a coordinated way to secure better outcomes for families.

Every professional that comes into contact with families, children and young people, has a responsibility to engage and assist families in gaining the right support and interventions as early as possible.

Early Help describes all support available to children, young people and families up to the level of statutory intervention (Children's Social Care), from pre-natal stages up to the age of 18 years (25 years for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). It includes information and advice, universal services, more intensive targeted support for children, young people and families who need extra support.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2018) is the statutory guidance which details the vital role of effective early help intervention for children at risk of poorer outcomes. It emphasises that all agencies have a collective responsibility, to identify, assess and provide effective targeted early help services. It asserts:

"Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years"

**Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to:**

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help;
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child.

## Understanding Levels of Need

The Framework for decision making: Right Conversations, Right Help, Right Time (South Tyneside Threshold Guidance) provides guidance around four levels of need, to assist in planning and the provision of services to best support children, young people and families.

The levels of need are not rigid and should be considered as a continuum with flexibility across all levels to ensure children and young people receive the correct help at the right time and level to help them meet their full potential.

### Universal:

Families have the capacity to support themselves, or their needs can be met by universal services.

### Additional:

Children, Young People and Families are experiencing additional needs which need some support to reduce the likelihood of the situation becoming worse.



### Acute:

Children and Young People where their need is having a major impact on their expected outcomes and there are serious concerns about their safety.

### Complex:

Children, Young People and Families have complex needs which are having an impact on their expected outcomes.

## The Wheel

The “Wheel” is a solution focused practice tool designed to support practitioners working with families to identify their needs.

The tool can be used as a conversation starter to help families identify the areas that are important to them.



## The role of the Lead Professional



The lead professional is the named person who is the family’s main point of contact. They can be someone the family already knows, trusts, and has a good relationship with.

The lead professional acts as a single point of contact, supporting the child or young person and their family in making choices and navigating various pathways for support.

Any professional working with the child and/or young person can take on the role of lead worker and needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis with consideration of the child and/or young person’s views and wishes

The lead worker is responsible for:

- Being a single point of contact for children, young people and families to ensure there is clear communication around support being offered and to share progress and worries
- Completing the Early Help Assessment with the family (if required)
- Co-ordinating multi agency meetings (Team Around Family meetings) and ensuring actions agreed are acted upon in a timely manner and that the plan around the family is reviewed and updated
- Being a single point of contact for professionals working with the family
- Ensuring there is no overlap in service provision

Through the course of the intervention and support, it may be appropriate for the lead professional to change, depending on what the child, young person and family needs and their wishes are.

## Early Help Assessments

The Early Help Assessment (“EHA”) is a consent-based assessment to be completed by the lead professional for the child/young person, where they have been identified as having low risk and/or vulnerable to being at risk of harm and need a coordinated response.

The Early Help Assessment incorporates strengths based, solution focused scaling questions to help the family and professional identify:

- Who is in their family, friends and community network?
- What is going well and the strengths within the family?
- What the carers, children / young person and/or others are worried about?
- What needs to change and what are their goals?
- What help do they need to achieve their goals and sustain the changes?

The assessment helps to recognise current unmet needs and develop family goals to create a plan of support and intervention that can be discussed and reviewed through Team Around Family (“TAF”) meetings.

It is highly encouraged that the lead professional completing the EHA incorporate children and young people’s views and wishes into the EHA through direct work (such as the Three Houses, or ‘Magic Wand’) and for them to contribute to the family goals and express the support they want.

All assessments should be shared with parents/carers and young people (where age appropriate), as well as professionals who are a part of the Team Around Family.

The EHA can be used to share information across agencies.



## Team Around Family Meetings

Team Around Family (“TAF”) Meetings are held to bring the parents/carers together with professionals involved in their children’s lives to agree and review the family plan first identified in the EHA.

The purpose of the TAF meeting is to:

- Share information between the family and professionals, recognising the strengths within the family, as well as the worries
- Ensure the child/young person’s views and wishes are well known and understood amongst the professionals and parents/carers
- Discuss any worries of what will happen if the family do not make changes and the impact this will have on the children / young person
- Agree an action plan, detailing the goal, who will do what and by when



- Review the action plan to discuss positive progress, but also any barriers to change

During TAF Meetings, it is important to recognise and highlight progress made with the plan, but to also be transparent where there has not been progress and where any additional worries have arisen. Where a plan may not be working, exploring alternative interventions or ways of working maybe effective in progressing change. The plan should be reviewed and updated at each TAF meeting to reflect progress made within the family.