Delivering Early Help, Guidance for Professionals

1. Early Help – Everyone’s Responsibility

All practitioners in universal services in the children’s workforce need to be alert to the unmet needs of children and their families and to be ready to put in place the appropriate Early Help response either as a single agency or as part of a multi-agency approach.

Working Together to Safeguard Children, March 2015

Working Together, March 2015 also states:

- Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility; for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part.

- A child-centred approach; for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.

What is Early Help?

Early Help is … “Taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, as soon as it emerges.”

Right Service Right Time, 2015

“Early Help is provided to prevent or reduce the need for statutory or specialist interventions wherever possible…. It seeks to meet the need, resolve the problem and prevent it becoming entrenched.”

Strategy for Early Help in Birmingham, 2015-17
Working together with Families in Birmingham

In Birmingham all organisations that work with children/ young people and families are committed to identifying and providing Early Help (EH). This commitment enables families to receive timely and appropriate support. Central to this commitment is the understanding of the differing roles and responsibilities that professionals undertake both within their organisation, and when working with a range of professionals to support a family with needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Who delivers?</th>
<th>What do they do?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Unmet Needs</td>
<td>All professionals</td>
<td>Have strengths based conversations that enable identification of unmet needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiation of Early Help Assessments</td>
<td>All professionals (some organisations may appoint dedicated staff)</td>
<td>Use the Signs of Safety and Wellbeing (SoSW) framework to complete the EH assessment with the family and liaise with other partner agencies to complete: access support from Local EH Panels as required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead Professional</td>
<td>All professionals (some organisations may appoint dedicated staff)</td>
<td>Work with the family to coordinate the EH assessment and plan, liaising with other partner agencies, access support from Local EH Panels as required. Register the EH assessment with the Early Help Support Team.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributor to the Our Family Plan</td>
<td>All professionals</td>
<td>Work with the child/ young person/ family and liaise with the Lead Professional to ensure all work and outcomes are included in the Our Family (O.F) plan. Attend O.F plan meetings.</td>
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| Advice and Support to Initiate Early Help assessment and ongoing support to Lead Professional | Local Early Help Panels | 1. Talk through anonymised cases/ support to initiate E.H assessment  
2. Gather multiagency information to inform the E.H assessment, with consent  
3. Support to engage partner agencies with the O.F plan  
4. Broker partner agency intervention e.g. access to children’s centre services  
5. Casework advice for partner agencies  
6. Support to escalate cases to Think Family / Children’s Social Care services |
2. Early Help Process

What does the EH process look like?

- Concern identified for a child / family from a professional

- Professional identifying the concern initiates an Early Help conversation with the family. Together the family and the professional decide the next steps

Universal Plus / Additional needs

- Professional identifying needs initiates EH assessment with the family and liaises with other partner agencies to complete: access support from Local EH Panels if required. Register assessment

- Initiator of assessment agrees with partners the Lead Professional role to coordinate Our Family Plan meeting.

Additional Needs and meets Family Support /Think family intensive threshold and criteria

- Continue to support the family as appropriate and complete Request for Support form

Complex and Significant

- Continue to support the family as appropriate

Lead professional and partner agencies to meet with family and complete Our Family plan.

- Partner agencies unable to attend the meeting should still contribute to the plan

- Support to initiate Our Family Plan and subsequent work with the family can be obtained from Early Help Panels

Lead Professional and partner agencies to continue to meet with family until all the needs are met and the Early Help episode can be closed.
3. Process Guidance and Tools; from Assessment to Planning, Review and Closure

To support you to deliver Early Help to families “early in the life of the problem” the new EH process links into Birmingham’s Signs of Safety and Wellbeing Practice framework. Across the children’s workforce a SoSW framework has been adopted to enable a seamless approach across all Right Service, Right Time levels of need. To ensure assessments and interventions are purposeful and inclusive a range of practice tools are available. www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/index.php/early-help/signs-of-safety-and-wellbeing

Family Early Help Conversation Tool – Starting the Early Help Conversation

Broaching the subject of Early Help with families can sometimes feel a little awkward. The Family Early Help Conversation tool will support you and the family to decide if an Early Help assessment is the correct next step.

The Family Early Help Assessment

It is very important to consult Birmingham’s multi-agency thresholds document ‘Right Service, Right Time’ (RSRT). RSRT contains details of the kind of evidence which would indicate that a child may have needs at Universal Plus or Additional Needs level that would be best addressed through an Early Help assessment.

http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/index.php/delivering-effective-support

Taking a whole family approach through an assessment means that;

- all aspects of life – home, work, school/ college, social/ community, health and wellbeing are taken into account
- the whole person/ whole family situation and what matters most to them is understood
- the impact of what’s not working well on all family members is understood
- a family’s strengths are recognised and built on
- families are encouraged to access community resources and support independently
- the Early Help assessment can be used to coordinate support from partners as part of the agreed plan
- one form can be used for the whole family
Sometimes, a family member’s view and a professional’s view of the level of need may differ at the assessment stage. The Family Early Help assessment helps the professional and the family work together to align their views, and get things going well again.

A multi-agency approach should be taken in completing the EH assessment so that all partner agencies are involved right at the start of the EH episode. The Family Early Help assessment can be used to coordinate support from partners contributing to the subsequent Our Family (O.F) plan.

**Our Family Plan**

Our Family plans must always be written with families so it is clear what matters most to them and how able and ready someone is to make changes. It also helps identify what is required.

The Our Family Plan meeting needs to be convened within 15 working days from completion of the assessment.

The SoSW Early Help Conversation tool and the EH assessment are designed to bring together all the information you need to put together an effective multi-agency plan for the whole family.

Partner agencies unable to attend the meeting should still contribute to the plan to ensure that the key worker has all the relevant information. This will enable them to develop an informed and relevant plan with the family.

If the Lead Professional (LP) is unsure about which agencies can support the family, guidance can be obtained from Local Early Help Panels.

Throughout the process Local Early Help Panels can support you as a key worker to:

1. Talk through anonymised cases/ support to initiate EH assessment
2. Gather multiagency information to inform the EH assessment, with consent
3. Support to engage partner agencies with the O.F plan
4. Broker partner agency intervention e.g. access to children’s centre services
5. Casework advice for partner agencies
6. Support to escalate cases to Think Family / Children’s Social Care services

**Our Family Plan Meeting**

In the majority of cases this meeting should be held with the parent/ carer in attendance and the child/ young person as appropriate. The family sometimes may be unable to attend, but with consent the meeting can continue, a plan can be completed and then shared once agreed and signed by them.

The plan can only include an action for an agency that isn’t present, if this has been agreed between the relevant professional and key worker prior to the meeting.

If a LP has not been identified then this needs to happen at the first meeting. It is their responsibility to keep a signed copy of the plan, send a copy to the Early Help Support Team and distribute copies to the family and all professionals involved in the plan.
Plans are reviewed with the family until
1. All the needs are met and the EH episode is closed, or,
2. Circumstances develop that escalate needs to a level that would be best met with the involvement of BCC family support or children’s social care

Timeline for Early Help Process

4. Process Guidance for Lead Professionals

The lead professional is identified after the assessment has been completed and the full picture of a family’s needs is known.

Factors in choosing the LP will include the predominant needs of the child and family, the level of trust built up, and the existing or potential relationship with the child or family.

The predominant role of the LP is to be the first point of contact for the family enabling the coordination of the Our Family plan. It is important to note however that the Lead Professional is not responsible for the actions of other professionals.

Circulating the Our Family Plan

The action plan should be completed and circulated to the parent, child/young person and all practitioners involved within three working days of the O.F plan meeting with the family.

- A copy should be retained by each practitioner contributing to the Our Family plan
- A copy of the completed plan needs to be sent to the Early Help Support Team

The LP will convene further Our Family Plan meetings as often as necessary, but at a minimum of every 3 months. The family can request a review at any time as can any practitioner involved in the family.
Storing Early Help information and paperwork

In order to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the 1998 Data Protection Act, all EH documents produced need to have a security classification. Because the completed EH forms hold information that would cause ‘distress to an individual’ if revealed without consent it falls into the security categorisation of ‘PROTECTED’.

This means that completed EHA forms should:

- Not be left unattended (on desk tops, printers, in cars etc)
- Not be accessed on shared computers unless accessed through individual passwords
- Computer screens should be positioned so information cannot be read by unauthorised people e.g. looking over your shoulder
- Emailed to either of the addresses stated on the Early Help documents

Any loss should be reported to your line managers and to the Early Help Support team.

Practitioner withdrawal

An episode of Early Help from assessment to closure is on average 9 months. During this time practitioners may either complete their agency intervention or hand over their work to another practitioner. At these key times clear communication with the Lead Professional and the family is very important.

The LP role can only be transferred or terminated following an Our Family Plan meeting, unless transferred to a targeted EH team such as a Think Family provider or statutory service such as social work teams where a statutory assessment is undertaken e.g. a section 47 child protection.

Evaluation of interventions and closing an Early Help episode

As each outstanding need is met the EH process allows for the effectiveness of the intervention to be measured using the SoSW 0-10 scaling.

Interventions should be evaluated with the parents/ young person to enable an agreed scoring.

The assessment/ plan process however should be seen as episodic in nature, and as such will be closed when the needs identified during the assessment process have been met. Closure of the EH episode is with the agreement from the parent/ carer/ young person and all agencies working with the family.

Practitioner Support

If the practitioner is unclear, or wants guidance on what steps to take, then they should discuss the situation with their line manager in the first instance.

At each stage of the EH process support for practitioners is available. The Early Help Support team website (www.birmingham.gov.uk/earlyhelpassessment) should be accessed for copies of the latest forms, details of training events and a range of professional support tools.

Telephone support is available from the Early Help Support Team on 0121 303 8117.

At any time in the EH process professionals can book an appointment at an EH Panel to discuss their case and gain support.
5. Frequently Asked Questions

What if I am not sure about the Right Service, Right Time level of need?
If you are unclear or want guidance on what steps to take, you should discuss this with your line manager or Designated Safeguarding lead. Additional advice can then be sought from the Children’s Advice and Support Service (CASS) by calling 0121 303 1888.

Do I need to speak to the children if I don’t see them as part of my role?
It is vital to ensure that the children included within the assessment have been given appropriate opportunities to contribute to the assessment process and add their views. The EHA is a multi agency assessment and it is often most appropriate for the agency working with the child/ren to complete this part of the assessment process.

If I initiate an Early Help assessment does that mean I am the Lead Practitioner?
EH assessments are normally initiated by the first professional that identifies that the child/family has unmet needs – this usually means they will become the Lead Professional for the family. If the predominant needs after assessment lie within the remit of another agency then it may be more appropriate for someone from that service to be the LP.

If I want a new agency involved can I invite them to the family plan meeting?
To engage new agencies for the child/family, standard referral routes should be followed. Generally agencies will want to have met with the child/young person/parent and have started a piece of work before attending an Our Family plan meeting or contributing to a plan. An action on the family plan could be for you to support the family with a referral to an additional agency.

I am a therapist working with the child/young person and feel that attending a multi-agency meeting will compromise the therapeutic relationship – do I need to contribute to the Early Help assessment or Our Family plan?
Dependant on the nature of the therapy, in particular where a purely psychodynamic approach is being taken, it may be more helpful for your clinical supervisor to summarise your work and contribute to the plan. This will ensure that relevant information is shared both with the family and other professionals and also relevant information is shared with you to enable your therapeutic work to continue under clinical conditions.

Can an Early Help assessment support adults in the family where there are no needs for the children?
Early Help assessments can be undertaken for all members of a family residing in the same household where there is at least one child with unmet needs.

Can I complete the Early Help assessment without the family contributing?
The family must remain central to the assessment process - their contribution is vital to obtaining a meaningful assessment, and consent is needed in order to share information. An assessment cannot take place without the family.

The Early Help assessment and/or the Our Family plan won’t open. Why?
The documents are password protected, please see below
For the EHA- earlyhelpassessment
For the OFP- ourfamilyplan