**Solihull Early Help Procedure**

*These procedures should be read with the Local Safeguarding Partnership Early Help Guidance*

**Why early help is important?**

Early help can offer children the support needed to reach their full potential. It can improve the quality of a child’s home and family life, enable them to perform better at school and support their mental health. Research suggests that early help can:

* protect children from harm
* reduce the need for a referral to child protection services
* improve children's long-term outcomes

Children, Young people and families are far more likely to make progress if the issues they face are identified and addressed early and where help is offered by professionals and organisations they are already familiar with.

Some professionals may feel that the complexity of trying to provide early help in addition to their own professional responsibilities is too time consuming and complex. However where children and young people’s needs are not addressed early, they are often unlikely to achieve their full potential; this mean they are likely to require extra time and resource from the professional in their role, but are less likely to make the expected progress as the cause for the extra demand has not been met. Unmet needs can then often spiral which can mean there are likely to be considerable time and resource implications not just through the life of the child but onwards into adulthood. This means that time invested at the earliest opportunity can not only lead to better outcomes for children, young people and their families, but can also help the professional to deliver their responsibilities and reduce demand and the need for more extensive and costly resources.

**Who can offer early help?**

Any universal or specialist service can offer early help, including community and voluntary sector organisations. The person who starts the process will not necessarily go on to be the lead professional, as this needs to be decided with the family and all involved at the team around the family meeting, so any professional should be able and prepared to start the process. Quite often wider family members and friends are also able to offer early help, so it is always important to think about the whole family and not just the immediate people seen to be living in one household.

**When should early help be offered?**

As soon as an unmet need is identified for a child/ young person consideration should be given to providing early help. If the need is level 2 of the LSCP threshold then an early help assessment may be beneficial, if the need is level 3 of the LSCP threshold, then an early help assessment should be undertaken.

* Discuss and agree a way forward with your manager.
* Working with the child and family, complete the ‌Early Help Assessment Form ‌as far as you can; this will help decide the next steps.
* If a multi-agency response is needed, agree with the family to arrange a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting to bring together other agencies so that the range of support can be coordinated to meet the child's needs.
* The Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting ‌can help you to plan and record what is agreed.
* Review progress- this should happen at least every 12 weeks, more often if the needs are more pressing. If progress has not been made after 5 reviews, then consideration should be given to the impact on the child and what action needs to be taken; this may be seeking support form Children’s social care.

**Solihull Early Help Flow Chart**

**All needs met** **Early Help process can be closed** recognise achievement made & **notify MASH of closure**

**Check LSCP Threshold Guidance**:

Level 2 consider Early Help assessment

Level 3 Undertake Early Help assessment

(Level 4 refer to Children’s Social care)

Discuss with your manager & **check with MASH to see if there is already an early help assessment or case is open to social care** *Record decision in line with single agency policy*

**An unmet need for a child/ young person is identified** *this should always be recorded in line with single agency policy*

**Professionals’ case learning meeting**

Threshold Level 3 and a co-ordinated response from existing Services have been unable to meet needs **– referral to children’s social care** *with copy of assessment & plan*

Threshold hold of need has increased to level 4 – **referral to MASH** *with copy of assessment & plan*

**Review** should be held at least every 12 weeks; it can be more frequently if needed. Revisit ground riles and working agreement, agree a chair and complete the family support plan review. *Save a copy of the assessment plan on child/young person’s file in line with single agency policy.*

Each individual should **carry out actions** *recorded in line with single agency policy*

At the team around the family meeting, agree ground rules for the meeting and a working agreement of expectations for those involved. Complete the early help family support and assessment plan. Agree a review date and a lead professional. *Save a copy of the assessment plan on child/young person’s file in line with single agency policy.*

**Work with the child/young person/ family** to empower them to decide which agencies need to be involved and invited to a **team around the family** meeting; support them to plan and invite people; including family members; help them to decide who they would like to chair the first meeting (this could be a member of the family), and think about the strengths and concerns they wish to raise. *Record any contacts with family and other professionals in line with single agency policy.*

With the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) it is no longer necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child, whether that be for the purposes of providing early help, assessing need or child protection. **It is however good practice to inform the parents / carers, and the child if they are mature enough, that you are sharing information so as to be open and transparent, work cooperatively with them, and retain their trust and support**. They should also be told the purpose for which you are sharing, processing and storing that information. This should be done unless to do so would place a child or adult at risk of harm or prejudice the prevention or detection of a serious crime.

*Record decision to share/ not share and information provided to the family in line with single agency policy*

**Discuss the unmet need with the family and offer early help**. Think about the whole family; there may be important parents/carers that do not live in the same home as the child/ young person, but should still be considered. *Record your discussion and offer in line with single agency policy*

**The whole family**

Every family is unique, with its own culture, personalities, personal dynamics and history. All families come up against problems from time to time. Some more difficult situations may need some support from services, but they can also be sorted out with help from relatives and friends. Even when members of a family don’t live together or always get on, they can often come together to do what is needed for children and young people. It is always important to consider the whole family; it is not unusual for grand=parents and extended family to be involved in the child care provision needed for busy working families, if a grandparent’s health then deteriorates this can have a huge impact on the family, so considering any assistance that can be accessed through adult services may not only help the grandparent, but could also have a positive impact on the rest of the family including children and young people.

**Team around the family meetings**

The more the family can be empowered to take part and lead the process the more likely it is to succeed; after all the children, young people and family members are the experts in their specific family circumstance and dynamics, so it’s important that professionals work in partnership with them and actively listen and practice professionals curiosity to understand what is happening and what may be needed.

Ground rules and working agreement; these will help the group agree how they wish to work together, and what is required of each person involved. Group members should work as a team, sharing tasks like booking rooms and arranging meetings and not just leaving this to one person.

Chairing the meeting; the chair of the meeting can change for each meeting, the role can be carried out by members of the family of professionals.

Lead professional; the family should be able to decide who they want to be the lead professional who will help them co-ordinate what is needed; this could be a family member if they chose to. The lead professional should not be responsible for everything. Each individual has responsibility for recording and carrying out their own actions, and there is no reason that note taking for each meeting cannot also be rotated, and preferably not carried out by the person who is chairing; The early help assessment and plan and review and plan provide a template to capture the key points form the meeting, in most circumstances these will provide good enough information to capture the discussions of the meeting without the need for verbatim minutes.

**Professional case learning meetings**

Case learning meetings should be used by multi-agency professional groups to support reflection and promoting successful outcome of the Early Help/ Child In Need or Child Protection Plan. The meeting cannot change the plan as the family are not present, it enables professionals to;

* Reviewing how the professional partnership of the group is working to achieve the outcomes of the Plan;
* Identifying, and reflecting upon possible solutions to, any key issues and barriers to the promoting successful outcomes of the Plan. This might include:
* How the professional network works together to progress the plan;
* Understanding how the engagement of parents (and other carers if applicable) in the Plan is impacting on the outcomes and aims of the plan being achieved;
* Reflecting on how the group is identifying, and understanding, change that is required to ensure a successful discontinuing of  the plan;
* Appraisal and reflection on the suitability of the outcomes of the plan, including timeliness for the child of any required changes.

There is an agenda and recording template for case learning meetings.

**Example ground rules for a Team Around the Family**

Be aware of time; arrive on time, be succinct so that everyone can give their input

Be present in the meeting; turn mobile phones off/onto silent

Be sensitive to other people’s individual style of communication

Use plain English and avoid jargon where possible. If necessary, explain terminology.

Refrain from gossip – focus on the facts and stick to the Information Sharing Protocol.

Respect peoples’ right to an opinion, even though you may not agree with them

If you disagree with someone, you have a right to challenge them respectfully.

Concentrate on the issue and family being discussed

Focus on outcomes and benefits for the child/young person

Take responsibility for your own decision to contribute or not contribute

Use ‘I’ and speak for yourself.

Stay calm and non‐defensive

Show integrity and confidentiality

Present sensitively and clearly your professional opinion about needs, strengths, issues and ways forward, recognise this may be uncomfortable for others to hear.

Avoid making judgements about people – you may only be seeing one side of a person.

**Example of things to be covered in a Working Agreement for a Team Around the Family**

The working agreement gives all members of the team around the family an outline of what is expected.

* Core team members, contact email and phone number- what are expectations in relation to attendance at meetings – this may include things like how many people need to attend in order for a meeting to go ahead? Will submitted reports be accepted? If someone needs to cancel the meeting who will rearrange- is it the person who can’t attend/ cancels etc.
* What are each members professional roles, responsibilities and remits
* Who will chair/ record the meeting (should be 2 different people and can be rotated at each meeting) when will notes be shared
* How to communicate – who should be contacted is someone is on annual leave/or sick days
* When and where will meetings take place
* Expected behavior during those meetings- this may be covered in ground rules
* Expected behavior following meetings; carrying out actions, communication etc.
* Who will be lead professional- expectations of this role
* What happens if someone does not follow what is agreed/ carry out their actions; consider use of professional disagreement/ escalation procedures