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# A Guide to Early Help

Information for parents and carers



# What is Early Help?

Any services that are in contact with children, young people and families have a responsibility for safeguarding.

Many people understand that safeguarding is about child protection, but it is more than this.

It is also about ensuring that there is no impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, and taking action to enable all children to have the best life chances.

This means that any service may be able to offer you early help to enable your child to have the best life chances.

Early help means taking action to support you and your family as early as possible when a problem emerges that may affect your child. It can be required at any stage in your child's life from pre-birth to adulthood, and applies to any problem or need that your family cannot deal with or meet on their own.



This means families seeking help will have differing needs. To help identify who is in need, what those needs are, and how services may be able to help, the service you approach is required to work with you, your children and family, and sometimes professionals from other services, to complete an Early Help Assessment.

This means that if you have worries about your family, then you can ask a professional who's already working with you or your children, for an Early Help assessment. Also, a professional connected to your family who has concerns may suggest to you that together you do an Early Help Assessment to see how your family can be supported. We know that you would prefer to work with services and people you already know and have a relationship with, but if these services and people do not have the resources to carry out an assessment themselves, they will seek your permission to ask for a Children's Services family support worker to help.

# Early Help Assessment

An Early Help Assessment is a way of noting down what is going well in your family, what the worries are, and what needs to happen to help things improve.

You will need to give your permission to be involved in an early help assessment. If you have any worries or concerns about the Early Help Assessment, talk them through with the worker. They should be able to reassure you about the process and provide you with



further information about what may happen after the assessment. If you refuse Early Help without having these conversations with the worker, they may be worried that your child may struggle, and things may get worse. In some circumstances this can mean they will have to consider if there is a need to seek further support from Children's Services. However, if you are able to explain your concerns and share information with the worker, you may also be able to clearly explain how your child's needs can be met in a different way that is agreeable to you all.

The worker will talk to you and your child, and sometimes other family members who are involved in your child's care or supporting you. They will want you to share what is or has been going well in your family, and what worries you may have.

They will then discuss with you if there is the need to talk with other agencies to gather further information. Who will be contacted, and the information sought will be discussed with you, and this will be added to the assessment. Once all of the information is gathered, the worker will share this with you and will start to identify what needs to happen. It may be useful to hold a meeting and invite people from agencies who may be able to help with this.

## During the assessment

The worker will discuss with you who will be invited and where the meeting should be held. You will be fully informed and supported to participate in the meeting, as your views and wishes are important. **The meeting provides you with the opportunity to be able to:**

- give your views about what is happening
- ask your questions
- say what help you think your family needs

You may wish to have help with an interpreter if you speak a different language, or you may have special requirements.

Please tell the worker if you do, so that arrangements can be made to help you. Your child's views and wishes are also important, and depending on the consideration of their age and understanding, your child may also wish to attend the meeting.

The meeting should provide an opportunity to share important information from the assessment about what is working well and what the worries are, and to provide the opportunity for discussion about what needs to happen to improve the situation. From these discussions an action plan can be drawn up outlining who is expected to do what, by when and what the outcome is expected to be.

You should receive a copy of this plan, and at the meeting you will agree a date to meet again to review how things are going.

At the review meeting you will all discuss what contributions have been made to meeting the actions within the Early Help plan, and if there are any further worries that have been identified or issues arisen since you last met.

As all families will be seeking Early Help for different reasons, there is no specified length of time that this process should take, however this should be discussed and outlined for each individual family as part of the plan. Some children may need longer term support, for example in relation to a disability, so it may be necessary to consider if the child is a Child In Need.



# The outcome

## The outcome of a review could be:

- That your child is no longer requires Early Help, as there are no concerns
- That your child continues to require Early Help to progress the actions in the Early Help Plan;
- There has been no progress for your child and there is concern that without more expertise things may become worse, so a request will be made to children's services for a family support worker.
- That your child is identified as a child in need under section 17 of the Children Act, so a referral is made for a Child In Need assessment
- There are concerns that things have got worse for your child and they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, so a child protection referral will be made to Children's Services.

If you are unhappy with an individual agency, their performance and the provision or non-provision of services you should follow the relevant agency's complaints procedure.

For independent information you may wish to contact:

Solihull Citizens Advice— general advice queries **0808 2787 976** open Monday - Friday 10am-2pm

Family Rights Group— A free telephone advice line **0808 801 0366** open Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 3pm (excluding Bank Holidays).

For Textphone dial **18001** followed by the advice line number. Or you can visit their website on <https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice/>