Early Help Assessment Guidance

**Introduction**

Early Help is a provision to provide targeted support at an early stage where problems are emerging for children, young people and their families. Early help support maybe provided at any point in a child or young person’s life. The sooner the family receives the support, the sooner they are able to improve their situation and prevent the need for prolonged support or escalation through safeguarding channels. It is therefore vital that Early Help Assessments are robust and demonstrate a good grasp of the family’s needs, so support can be targeted and effective.

The Early Help Assessment forms a key part of the Early Help Strategy and is a simple way to help identify the needs of children, young people, and their families, supporting the implementation of effective support and planning. It is designed to be a shared tool which can be used by all agencies in Dudley who are delivering Early Help. It is a standardised approach so that all children and families have the same experience of identifying their needs, strengths and challenges. It also means that all agencies and partners are operating the same system which ensures consistency right across the partnership.

**Purpose**

This guidance has been formulated to support practitioners from universal services and the Children’s Services directorate to ensure a consistent approach when completing Early Help Assessments.

Practitioners should understand that the Early Help Assessment is not just a form, it's a process which allows practitioners to assess and understand needs, identify support and check that needs are being addressed as part of a structured approach.

Practitioners should understand that completing an Early Help Assessment will help you and the family understand what is going well and what we are worried about so that families have the support they need to find their own lasting solutions to the challenges they face and are equipped with the resilience to move forward successfully. A good assessment leads to the right interventions at the right time for the family and leads to positive outcomes.

You don’t need to wait for the assessment to be completed to start helping. Helping the family should start straight away, focussing on some of the immediate presenting issues. Helping to tackle these can help to develop a relationship with the family and can lead to a better assessment.

**Pathways of families accesses support via Early Help**

Additional needs (Single agency support):

* Someone identifies that a child or family needs additional support.
* Conversations take place with the child or young person and their family to gain their permission to undertake an assessment of their strengths and needs (using agencies own assessment tool)
* An offer of additional support is provided from within the agency’s own organisation. A single agency early help plan is developed with the family. (Using agencies own planning tool)
* Progress and plans are reviewed with the family.

Multiple and complex needs (multi-agency support):

* Someone identifies that needs of the child or family cannot be met by their own single agency.
* A coordinated multi-agency approach is then required, which is underpinned by an Early Help Assessment.
* The family may need to be considered through the Multi Agency Action Meeting (MAAM), which aims to ensure there is a coordinated approach taken to meet the needs of children and their family members.
* A worker is identified to complete the Early Help Assessment, usually from the agency that already knows the family. The EHA should be completed within 10 working days from the point of referral.
* A lead professional is identified to coordinate the early help plan, which is developed with the family and agreed with other agencies.
* Progress is reviewed with the family and the Team around the Family meetings.

**Early Help Assessments (EHAs)**

The Five Anchors for Assessments are:

* What is the assessment for?
* What is the story?
* What does the story mean?
* What needs to happen?
* How will we know we are making progress?

**Step 1a – What is the assessment for? - how we work with families through their ongoing consent.**

* When you decide to undertake an EHA you'll need to gain consent from the family first.
* Talk to the family about what you are worried about so that they are clear about why you think an EHA would be helpful?
* **Consent** is not only a legal requirement under GDPR but also forms a central plank of our early help approach and practice of how we work **with** families.
* It’s never easy to ask for help when things are not going well, so how we engage with families in this early conversation about what we/they are worried about is critical to helping the family give us permission to offer and accept support.
* The EHA should be completed with the family, with input from other professionals working with the family.
* Assessments should be accessible to children and families and therefore think about the language you use.
* Engagement with some families may require the lead worker to be persistent and assertive. Don’t give up after just one attempt!

**Step 1b What is the assessment for? – How we work with other agencies to become a Team Around the Family (TAF)**

* The Early Help Assessment is a coordinated multi-agency approach that starts with the EHA which then leads to developing a Family Plan which is reviewed through a TAF.
* Talk to the family to agree which agencies need to be involved in the assessment.
* It is not necessary to wait for the full completion of the assessment for an initial Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting to be convened if immediate actions can be taken that will ensure the child and family is supported.
* The first TAF meeting can contribute to the assessment, all agencies are able to share with the family what is going well and what they are worried about.

**Step 2 – What is the story? - gathering information.**

* The EHA should be proportionate to what we are worried about.
* Make sure that the EHA is in as much detail as needed to have a good understanding of the family’s strengths and needs.
* Think about the whole family and how one issue may impact on another. (e.g., parents alcohol use may impact on child’s school attendance)
* Check out with the family that the information you already have is current, does it reflect what the family is thinking?
* Make sure you focus on strengths, i.e., what is going well as much as what is not going well.
* Have you been curious about the 5 W’s? (what? where? when? who? why?)
* Have you checked out information rather than relying on one source?
* Have you spoken to all the children, young people, and parents/carers during this step?
* Have you spoken to all the relevant agencies?

**Step 3 – What does the story mean? - analysis**

* What does the information you have gathered tell you/
* Are there any barriers to change?
* Do you know what the lived experience of the child/ren is like?
* Have confidence in your opinion but be open to challenge.
* Think about how to share your analysis with the family.

**Step 4 – What needs to happen?**

* What has led to the current concerns and what can we do about it?
* Think about what’s going well and build on strengths.
* What has been tried before?
* Keep actions achievable, start small – this will build confidence and motivation.
* Do the family agree with your assessment and what needs to happen?
* Need to get signature from family before completion.

**Step 5 – How will we know we are making progress? – reviewing and updating regularly.**

* An assessment is ongoing; not a one-off event, every contact, phone call, interaction contributes to the ongoing assessment.
* Additional information and understanding can be captured in the regular TAF meetings and used to update/amend the plan.

**Links to other material to support completion:**

1. Support level guidance & framework

<https://dudleysafeguarding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/DSPP-Support-Level-Guidance-and-Framework-March-2023.pdf>

1. Keeping Safe in Education

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f0a68ea78c5f000dc6f3b2/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2023.pdf>

1. Working Together to Safeguard Children

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65803fe31c0c2a000d18cf40/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf>

1. All About Me Worksheet

<https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/All-about-me-direct-work-sheets-and-activities.pdf>

1. Resources to aid obtaining Child and Parent’s voice

   