

# **Early Help**

For all who need it



October 2023

# 1. Introduction

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 teenage years. Central to our early help offer is the early identification of children and families who would benefit from early help and a co-ordinated early assessment and response to prevent abuse and neglect of children and young people and improve outcomes for children and families as a whole.

Our commitment to early help is central to our Children and Young People's Plan with 'Early help for all who need it' cutting across our five priority areas:

- Early Identification and Support
- Protecting Children and Young People
- Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Striving for Excellence
- Navigating the Future

Early help supports the broader council priorities of promoting health and well-being and protecting the vulnerable and additionally offering value for money by working preventatively to reduce future spend within specialist services.

Our early help offer recognises the crucial role that all family members – not just mothers and fathers, but step-parents, grandparents, siblings and other extended family members and carers – play in influencing what children experience and achieve as well as the consequences when families are in difficulty.

## 2. Identifying children and families who would benefit from early help

The effectiveness of early identification is underpinned by professional responsibility both of the referring and of the receiving agency to ensure that if a family does not meet the thresholds for specific services, that action is taken to prevent the lower-level needs escalating, whilst also being alert to identifying children who without support will not reach their full potential.

Our early help offer therefore puts the responsibility on all professionals to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children and families, irrespective of the whether they are providing services to children or adults. Professionals working mainly in universal services may be best placed to identify children or their families, who are at risk of poor outcomes. These will be in health services, such as health visitors, GPs and school nurses, or in Children's Centres, or in education provision at any age from early years onwards.

Professionals should be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs



- is a young carer
- is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence and / or
- is showing early signs of abuse and / or neglect and / or sexual exploitation

Early help services are also integral to ensuring continued support from community based services following a period of statutory intervention.

### 3. Who can access support?

Children and family needs are constantly changing and at different times in their lives they will have differing levels of involvement from a range of services, from universal, early help and specialist support services.

- Universal services are available to all children, young people and families, working with families to promote positive outcomes for everyone, by providing access to education, health services and other positive activities. Practitioners working in these services should identify where children and families would benefit from extra help at an early stage.
- **Early help services** focus on children, young people and families who may need support either through a single service or through an integrated multi-agency response. They work with families where there are signs that without support a child may not achieve good outcomes and fulfil their potential. However early help services are also critical in preventing escalation into specialist services, and will also assist with continued support once a statutory intervention is no longer needed.
- Specialist services focus on families with individual or multiple complex needs, including where help has been requested through Section 17 and Section 47 or where a specific disability or condition is diagnosed.

What is important is that professionals work together effectively to ensure that families experience smooth transition between services and that all services supporting the family remain focused on the needs of the child.

It is also critical that all professionals remain aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and protecting children, with regards to families who have an Early Help Assessment (EHA).

### 4. How to access early help

Early Help can be accessed through a range of community based support services by children and families and professionals.



Where child and family needs cannot be met by a single agency or service, there needs to be a co-ordinated response with local agencies working together to support the family. The Team around the Child (TAC) model is used locally to bring together a range of different practitioners from across the children and young people's workforce and sometimes from adult services to support an individual child or young person and their family. The members of the TAC develop and deliver a package of solution focused support to meet the child and family needs with a lead professional identified to co-ordinate the support and act as the key point of contact for the family and professionals / services. Decisions about who should be the lead professional should be taken on a case by case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.

To ensure that the best possible support is provided to children and families there needs to be an early assessment of need. Locally this assessment is undertaken through usage of the Early Help Assessment (EHA).

Working Together states that for an early assessment to be effective:

- the assessment should be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents/ carers. It should involve the child and family as well as all the professionals who are working with them.
- if parents and/or the child do not consent to an early help assessment, then the lead professional should make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate. If so, a referral into local authority children's social care may be necessary.

It is paramount that the needs and views of children are central to the assessment process and that the interests of adults are not put ahead of their children

In some cases a professional will be able to identify a specific need, but will not be in a position to provide appropriate locally sourced support. In this instance the Early Help team will work with the lead professional to identify the appropriate help and support.

## 5. Our Early Help Offer

Our early help offer focuses on some key service areas including

- Start for Life services through Children's Centres
- Access to Early Years Education and Childcare
- Parenting programmes and advice
- Positive activities for children and young people including the Holiday Activities and Food Programme
- Emotional wellbeing support
- Reducing risky behaviours
- Supporting family relationships and reducing parental conflict
- Domestic Abuse support
- Welfare and benefits advice



The above is not an exhaustive list of the support available for children and families, as the service landscape is constantly changing to meet the emerging needs and to fill gaps in provision.

## 6. Further information

Our Integrated Front Door can be contacted on 0300 300 8585

[AccessReferral@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:AccessReferral@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Our online Family Information Directory [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/familyinfodirectory](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/familyinfodirectory)

Our [SEND Local Offer](#) website.

