

# Early Help Awareness

## E-WORKBOOK



**This e-workbook is designed to increase your awareness of early help**

Name	
Job Title	
Agency	
Date	
Email	

# Contents

By working through this e-workbook you will learn about:

- the national and local guidance for early help and intervention
- the One Family Approach and the North Lincolnshire Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire Document 2020/24
- the definition of early help, what early help does and who can provide it
- when early help should be used
- the early help process
- how to complete the Early Help Assessment and create a plan
- the role of the lead professional
- information sharing
- what makes a good assessment and effective early help

Take your time to work through this e-workbook and answer the questions.

When you have completed this e-workbook, please email it to your manager or safeguarding lead. They will then discuss your answers with you, and will inform the Children's MARS team that you have completed your training by submitting the information from the final page of this e-workbook.



# National and local guidance

Working Together 2018 provides statutory guidance on inter-agency working and outlines how agencies should respond individually and collectively to concerns related to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

It provides guidance about early help and emphasises that providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later.

Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child

In North Lincolnshire, when early help is needed, we know that families want help from people and professionals that they know and trust. The One Family Approach encourages professionals, including those working with adult family members, to act early and provide the help that is needed.

For supporting information, please see the [Children's MARS Policy and Procedure for Assessing Need and Providing Help](#).

# One Family Approach Helping Children & Families Document

## Universal (Self Help and Enablement)

Within the right conditions and local offer, through taking self responsibility, children, young people and families; actively participate in and are supported by their schools and communities; access available information, amenities, settings and services that are accessible to all to help themselves to raise awareness, develop skills and resilience and enable behaviour changes that will contribute to them being safe, well, prosperous and connected, without the need for interventions; actively engage with proactive, preventative, health promoting services and receive the benefits of early intervention and support to maximise their health, wellbeing and resilience, as well as improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities.

*Within specific populations, schools, communities, community hubs and area wide*

## Targeted (Focused and Preventative)

Children, young people and families are entitled to equality of opportunity and through schools, individual agency/multi agency/locality based integrated working, children, young people and families are helped, supported and empowered to enable behaviour changes that will build resilience, enable self help and contribute to them being safe, well, prosperous and connected, preventing the need for more specialist help.

*Within specific populations, schools, communities, community hubs and area wide for those who seek out and/or are identified as requiring additional help via consultation / formulation  
Within specific populations through targeted, intensive home visiting and evidence based interventions*

## Specialist (Protection)

Where there are serious concerns, through early, swift, creative, flexible and responsive agency involvement/integrated working, children, young people and families are helped, supported and empowered to protect themselves and enable behaviour changes around the whole family that will contribute to reducing harm, enabling the family to remain together and independent in their community, leading to them being safe, well, prosperous and connected.

*Within specific populations, schools, communities, community hubs and area wide for those who are identified as requiring help to protect themselves and/or others from harm  
Within specific populations through targeted, intensive home visiting and evidence based interventions*

Enablers – Data, Intelligence, Workforce, Voice

Children, Young People,  
Families, Schools, Communities

[The One Family Approach - Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire document](#) sets out how services support children, young people and families to participate, find help online and in their networks and communities, to be resilient, stay safe and independent.

Our North Lincolnshire organisational model, summarised above, places children, young people, and families at the centre of a system that works for all, where the earliest help is to enable families to access information and self-help, in their communities. For those more in need, targeted early help prevents escalation and enables resilience and independence, to achieve positive outcomes. Where required, specialist agency involvement and protection is swift, responsive, and effective, leaving the child's family and network stronger.

This document provides guidance to professionals about helping and protecting families, providing early help and making decisions about levels of need. It also sets out the principles which unpin multi-agency practice and introduces our One Family Approach Practice model which provides the framework for how the help and protection should be undertaken across the partnership.

# What Early Help is and what it does

## Local Definition

*“Early Help is the total support that improves a family’s resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse.”*

Early help is the support offered to children, young people and families at the earliest point to tackle problems early before they escalate or become more difficult to reverse and therefore maximises the chances of happy, safe and fulfilling lives for children and families.

## The Early Help Assessment

An Early Help Assessment is simply a way to identify and record the needs of children and families and make a plan to meet those needs. In North Lincolnshire we have a set of documents and templates to record the assessment information and to write and review the Early Help Plan

## Early Help aims to:

- support children and families to find solutions, using their strengths, to improve outcomes and be independent from services
- prevent issues escalating by being proactive rather than reactive
- reduce the number of children requiring statutory intervention by recognising the signs earlier and delivering smarter interventions
- coordinates communication, ensuring the fewest best interventions



# Who provides Early Help?

All practitioners working with children and their families can provide early help and complete the Early Help Assessment.

The person completing the Early Help Assessment is referred to as the lead professional, you can find more information on the role of the lead professional on the [Early Help page of the Children's MARS website](#).

Early help encompasses all services delivering support for children, young people and families including the police, the voluntary and community sector, schools and health visitors, in addition to North Lincolnshire Council's services including, housing and wider children's services.



# When should Early Help be used?

Early help is there for children who have additional needs beyond those that are met by universal services.

For children and families receiving support from **two or more agencies at a formal level**, there should be an Early Help Assessment and coordinated plan.

An Early Help Assessment should be considered particularly for a child who:

- has very poor school attendance, is frequently excluded or likely to be excluded, is at risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training, or there are concerns around the suitability of Elective Home Education
- has a disability, physical or developmental needs which are not being met
- has special educational needs which are not being met in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (including social, emotional and mental health)
- is an unsupported young carer
- is identified as at risk of, or experiencing sexual, criminal, or pre-criminal exploitation (e.g. trafficking, county lines, radicalisation, gang involvement or association with organised crime groups)
- is experiencing other types of risk outside the home (e.g. child on child sexual violence or harassment, bullying, online abuse, teenage relationship abuse, modern day slavery or harmful sexual behaviour)
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour
- goes missing from home
- lives in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child such as drug or alcohol misuse, adult mental health, domestic abuse or criminal activity
- lives in an environment where there are harmful levels of conflict (frequent, intense or poorly resolved)
- lives in an environment where housing or debt impacts on the family and is a significant concern
- has returned home to their family from care or is privately fostered
- has a parent / carer in custody

# The Early Help process

## **Rights-based**

Families should be supported to understand their rights. The Early Help Assessment and plan process is voluntary, meaning that families have the right to choose to take part or accept support. It may be useful to explain that without agreement and the right information it may be difficult to provide the right advice or service to help the family. Early help should be provided with the consent of, and in partnership with families. The voices of children and adult members should be clear throughout.

## **Online Early Help System**

The online early help system provides the facility to complete the Early Help Assessment, Review Plans and Closure Summary online. Printable versions of all forms can be found on the [Early Help page of the Children's MARS website](#) although the information gathered must then be entered in to the online system.

## **Timescales**

- Initial review meeting to be held within 20 working days after assessment completion
- Review meetings to be held at between 6-12 weekly intervals
- Revised plan (from last review) to be shared within 10 working days of meeting
- Closure summary form completed within 2 working days after reaching agreement to close

## **Help and Advice**

Where there are concerns that progress has not been made or circumstances have declined which presents a risk or significant impact on the child or family it may be necessary to seek advice from the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) on 01724 296500.



# The Early Help process

## Assess

Complete an Early Help Assessment with the family by gathering information from the family and relevant professionals.

Analyse the information gathered to assess the level of need and agree the next steps for support or intervention with the family.

Share a copy of the completed assessment with the child, family and other agencies and arrange the initial review meeting within 20 working days, inviting the family and those who will be actively involved in supporting them.

## Plan

There should be a plan of help aimed at improving outcomes and reducing need. Setting goals with the family, making it clear what needs to change and why, and working out the best way for the family to achieve the goals is vital. Ensuring the goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound (SMART) is essential for a good quality plan.

## Do

This is the implementation stage which happens between meetings. It is the action, support and intervention taken to progress the plan. The lead professional coordinates future meetings, monitors progress and acts as an advocate for the family.

## Review

At each review meeting:

- the plan will be reviewed and progress against the actions recorded
- minutes of the meeting are not required, however any significant events since the previous meeting can be noted
- the date of the next review meeting will be set, or the plan will close if professionals and the family are in agreement that the issues have been addressed and no further meetings are required

# Completing the Early Help Assessment

The Early Help Assessment is where we capture the conversations we have with families about their needs and strengths. The information is used by the family and those helping them to develop a plan to meet the needs identified.

Any professional can complete the assessment with the family.

Information is gathered from the family and relevant others such as professionals who are involved in helping or who may have been involved previously. This information is then recorded on the online early help system.

**The Early Help Assessment encourages practitioners to explore six key factors:**

- **Protective - what are the positives and strengths?**
- **Presenting - what is happening right now that is causing concern?**
- **Precipitating – what triggers things?**
- **Perpetuating – what keeps the issues going?**
- **Predisposing – family history, challenges and vulnerabilities**
- **Predicting - what could happen if things don't change?**

The assessment should consider the needs of the whole family using the three domains of the assessment framework including child developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors and should include an outcome focused plan.

Should concerns emerge during the assessment or planning process that indicate there may be significant safeguarding concerns that require specialist help and protection then the lead professional will follow the guidance in the Children's MARS Policy and Procedures for Assessing Need and Providing Help and with their agency's Designated Safeguarding Lead or manager, consider if a referral to Children's Services needs to be completed.

# The Early Help Plan

The Early Help Review Plan is a plan of action and is developed based on the analysis of need and information in the Early Help Assessment.

The plan is the tool used by the family and the professionals at early help meetings to ensure that progress is being made and outcomes are improving. This includes monitoring that tasks have been completed by those involved.

S.M.A.R.T goals are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time bound

Following the S.M.A.R.T system helps to create a clear, focused Early Help Plan which allows the family and practitioners to easily identify whether outcomes are achieved and if life is improving for the child and family at each review stage.

The Early Help Plan should address the identified priority needs. For example, if outstanding dental hygiene has been identified as a need, then there should be a corresponding action within the immediate next steps.

Where there is a difference in opinion between professionals or where a professional or agency are not fulfilling their responsibilities the [Children's MARS Policy and Procedure for Escalation and Resolution](#) provides information on how to address this.



# Role of the Lead Professional

A lead practitioner should undertake the assessment, provide help to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and co-ordinate the delivery of support services.

Anyone can be the lead professional including a GP, family support worker, school nurse, teacher, health visitor or special educational needs coordinator.

Decisions about who should be the lead practitioner should be taken on a case-by-case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.



## **Case Study:**

**Eve—lead professional**

Lisette's Mum is very ill with cancer and she may not be able to fully care for Lisette anymore. Lisette's Dad has remarried and she doesn't see him very often.

Since Lisette is also very quiet and withdrawn in school, her needs are being met by multi-agency services.

At the initial meeting between the relevant agencies to discuss Lisette's circumstances, Eve Fenton offers to be the Lead Professional.

Eve is Lisette's teacher and has a good relationship with Lisette and she knows Lisette's Mum. Lisette is happy with this decision as she likes her teacher.

Eve has the skills to lead the group and confidently coordinate the other services. Working 15 years as a teacher also mean she's worked with a lot of the other agencies and understands what support systems are available.

# Case Study: Meet Mark



Mark and his family needed multi-agency support to keep him safe and help the family to achieve positive outcomes.

Mark is 15. Over the last year he has often played truant from school. If he turned up, he was often rude and angry to everyone which resulted in regular exclusions.

The school contacted Mark's mum several times but she has problems with alcohol use and low mood so she rarely responded.

Mark often has to fend for himself and he doesn't like to leave his Mum on her own. Recently he has been caught riding a moped that was stolen and there are worries that he is hanging around with older boys from the other side of the town.

Because of Mark's chaotic home life, he needs support from several agencies if his circumstances are to improve. He has been involved in the plan from the start, the people supporting him make sure they ask him and understand what is happening in his life.

The lead professional slowly built up trust and a rapport with Mark's Mum and by including his Auntie who is a positive influence, Mum agreed to work together to get the help they needed.



# Information sharing

Successful outcomes for those children and families with additional needs depends upon effective partnership working and information sharing between services.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children. For more information please see the [Children's MARS Information Sharing Guidance](#).

**Transparency** - Be open and honest with the child or young person and their family from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared. Seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

**Advice** - Seek advice if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.

**Consent** - Share information with consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You must keep a record of when and how consent is obtained, explain why consent is needed, what their information is to be used for, and why and how it may be shared. You may still share information without consent if, in your professional judgement you feel a child may be at risk of significant harm in any way. The decision to progress without consent must be a professional evidence-based decision which you have shared with your manager.

**Safety and Wellbeing** - Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of safety and well-being of the person and any others who may be affected by their actions.

**Recording decisions** - Keep a record of your decision and the reason for it, whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom, when and for what purpose.

# Summary

## **Effective early help is:**

- providing help at the earliest point, rather than reacting later
- about working in partnership with the family
- being alert to needs of all children and particularly vulnerable children e.g. pre-birth – age 2, children with special educational needs and disabilities and young carers
- knowing your role and when to collaborate
- working together with relevant services to respond to assessed need early, using the fewest, best interventions

## **A good Early Help Assessment is characterised by:**

- a professional speaking to the child about their experiences and asking for their thoughts and feelings about their circumstances
- consideration of the whole family, including parents/carers brothers and sisters needs individually
- the participation and consent of parents, involvement of parent's partners and inclusion of fathers, male carers and others who feature in the family's life
- the family's history informing the findings and decisions
- all professionals known to the family contributing to the assessment
- comprehensive information
- needs, risks and strengths being clearly identified
- sound conclusions based on good analysis of information

# Questions

**What is the One Family Approach Helping Children and Families Document?**

**What is early help?**

**Who can do an Early Help Assessment?**

**What are some of the things that might lead you to consider talking about early help with a family?**

**Describe two things that contribute to a good Early Help Assessment?**

**Who and what is the Early Help Plan for?**



# Questions

<b>Where are Early Help Assessments and Plans recorded?</b>	
<b>How often should review meetings be held?</b>	
<b>Describe two things that the lead professional would do?</b>	
<b>Give one reason why an Early Help Plan might close.</b>	
<b>Where can you get advice if the Early Help Plan is not working?</b>	
<b>What should you do if the Early Help Assessment or review information indicates there are concerns of significant harm or risk to a child?</b>	

# Early Help Awareness E-Workbook Completion

Please email this e-workbook to your manager or safeguarding lead who will discuss completion of this training with you. Your manager or safeguarding lead will then confirm that you have completed this training and have sufficient understanding of the topic covered.

Your manager or safeguarding lead will confirm the completion of the e-workbook with the Children's MARS team by filling in the details below and emailing these details to [mars@northlincs.gov.uk](mailto:mars@northlincs.gov.uk)

A certificate of completion will be issued on behalf of the Children's MARS Board. Please retain the copy of your e-workbook for your training records.

Name of E-workbook completed	
Name and email	
Job Title	
Agency	
Date of Completion	

If you do not have access to a computer, you can print and complete this e-workbook and send it to your manager who will fill in the details above and post this page to:

Children's Multi Agency Resilience Safeguarding Board  
Church Square House  
30-40 High St  
Scunthorpe  
DN15 6NL

*If you do not have a manager or safeguarding lead, a peer or colleague can confirm completion of this e-workbook.*