

# 7 Minute Briefing

## Early Help Best Practice



### 1 When is an early help assessment and plan required?

For families receiving or requiring coordinated early help **from two or more agencies at 'targeted focused'** level the needs and strengths of the **whole family** should be captured in an Early Help Assessment and plan. Where a single agency can respond to identified needs, this may be via the agency's universal offer or through a single agency plan (sometimes called an informal early help plan). If the identified or emerging needs are considered and reviewed through another process or statutory plan such as SEN Support or Education, Health and Care Plan and there are no wider family needs, then an early help plan may not be required.

### 3 Family led, SMART plans

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 this change is vital in creating a plan that works. **S.M.A.R.T plans have specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound** outcomes and actions. Following the S.M.A.R.T system helps to break down vague ideas into concrete plans with easy-to-follow steps and actions. If a plan is not S.M.A.R.T it is difficult to identify when success is achieved or when there is drift. This often means a plan remains open with no end in sight, as aims and actions are unclear or are not achieving the desired effect. Words such as 'continue', 'monitor', 'consider', 'feel', 'understand' are not specific enough and may indicate a target is not S.M.A.R.T. More specific words such as 'attend', 'write', 'go', 'provide', 'read' are more specific and can be measured.

### 5 Whole family

Early help is a **whole family approach** which means plans include all children in the home and the needs of the parents or carers are addressed which in turn will positively impact children's lives. It is vital that we enable families to build resilience by involving wider family and friends and utilising the resources available in the local community to address the key issues such as education, early years development, mental and physical health, substance misuse, family relationships, abuse and exploitation, crime, domestic abuse, housing and financial difficulties.

### 7 Further information

- [Children's MARS website – Early Help](#)
  - Guidance – Early Help
  - Guidance – Role of the Lead Professional
  - Guidance – Children with Disabilities and SEND
  - Early Help Assessments – Leaflet for children and families
- [One Family Approach – Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire document](#)

### 2 Child's voice

Children and young people's wishes and feelings should be routinely sought and recorded throughout the early help process. It is important to understand what the daily lived experience is for a child and whether the support offered is **making a difference**. Assessments and plans should be written in plain English, avoiding professional jargon and reflecting the words and level of understanding of the family. The plan belongs to the family and by using their own language we can encourage ownership which in turn empowers families to achieve the change they want.

### 4 Informed decision making

The North Lincolnshire Early Help Assessment is based upon the Six P's framework of formulation, which is a simple way to use information to develop a better understanding of the family's experiences and what it might mean for the future in terms of need and risk. This approach enables the development of a plan which **addresses the underlying causes** rather than just the immediate presenting concerns, which is essential for achieving long term sustained change. Any intervention must be linked to specific improved outcomes and should be the **least intrusive and most effective** method.

### 6 Measuring the impact of early help

Formal early help is recorded via the online portal which includes the assessment, review plans and closure form. A clear, focused, S.M.A.R.T early help plan 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. Our approach aims to build resilience and help families to become independent of services, to avoid keeping them in a cycle of referral and intervention without successful outcomes, which can be confusing and overwhelming for families.

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