

# Early Help Practice Handbook

## Multi-agency procedures for practitioners

*This handbook is a 'live' document and will be amended as practice develops, therefore practitioners are reminded to refer for the current version via DSCP:*

<https://dscp.org.uk/professionals/early-help>

**For all enquiries where Early Help is needed contact**

**The Early Help Hub 01302 734110**

**[EarlyHelpHub@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:EarlyHelpHub@doncaster.gov.uk)**

**Or**

**Early Help Coordinators 01302 736250**

**[EarlyHelpCoordinator@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:EarlyHelpCoordinator@doncaster.gov.uk)**

### **Note**

If at any stage through early help you have any concerns that a child or young person is at risk of harm, you must follow your agency's safeguarding procedure and make a referral to Children's Social Care Referral and Response Service on:

**Telephone: 01302 737777 (available 8:30am – 5pm Monday to Friday)**

**Telephone: 01302 796000 (outside office hours)**

**Email: [ChildrenAssessmentService@dcstrust.co.uk](mailto:ChildrenAssessmentService@dcstrust.co.uk)**

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## Introduction

### Early Help in Doncaster

Early Help is a simple concept; it is about changing our culture from an often late reaction to chronic and acute need and re-focussing our activities, along with our resources, on the root causes of social problems. By doing so, outcomes for children and families improve and costly statutory interventions are avoided.

The Children and Families Strategic Board (CFB) has defined early help as:

**‘The job of all public, private, voluntary and community services as well as citizens in Doncaster, is to prevent and intervene early with children, young people and families experiencing problems in order to prevent escalation of problems. This will deal with root causes, providing support at an early age and an early stage of problems emerging. We will do this by taking a whole family approach and intervening in a co-ordinated way.’**

In Doncaster we use the term Early Help as the umbrella term that describes our continuum of service response from universal/preventative services to where a team around the child/family is required. The Early Help Assessment processes replace the Common Assessment Framework processes.

This approach supports agencies with their responsibilities under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 as summarised in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015):

*Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the authority, each of the authority’s relevant partners and such other persons or bodies working with children in the local authority’s area as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the well-being of all children in the authority’s area, which includes protection from harm and neglect.*

Working Together 2018 also states that:

*The safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document, which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood.*

This handbook must be used in conjunction with the LSCB threshold guidance, which can be downloaded from this page of the LSCB website

<https://dscp.org.uk/professionals/early-help/when-might-family-need-early-help>

## Purpose of this document

This document has been produced to guide front line practitioners and their managers in using Early Help to support children and families.

## Early Help documents

This handbook provides guidance to support the completion of all documents relating to individual families and the recording of information, whether this is recorded into the Early Help Module (EHM) the electronic case recording system or through Local Solution Groups (LSG's).

It is not acceptable for paper version of Early Help forms to be used or for work to be stored within individual organisations recording systems. Mosaic enables the identified needs of children and their families plus the work undertaken to meet these needs to be recorded into one central place. One recording system ensures effective communication and shared understanding of a child's journey.

If you require further information, help or support refer to page 15 of this handbook.

## Abbreviations and terminology

<b>CAF</b>	common assessment framework (now superseded by the EHA)
<b>Child</b>	refers to children and young people
<b>CSC</b>	Children's Social Care
<b>DSCP</b>	Doncaster Children's Safeguarding Partnership
<b>EHA</b>	early help assessment (which has now replaced the CAF)
<b>EHCP</b>	education health and care plan
<b>EHM</b>	Early Help Module online children case recording system
<b>FAP/EHP</b>	Family Action Plan/Early Help Plan
<b>IAG</b>	information, advice and guidance
<b>LSG/T</b>	Local Solution Group/Team
<b>LP</b>	lead practitioner
<b>LSCB</b>	Local Safeguarding Children Board
<b>MASH</b>	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
<b>Parents</b>	refers to parents, carers and others with parental responsibility
<b>SW</b>	social worker
<b>SOS</b>	Signs of Safety
<b>TAC</b>	team around the child
<b>TAF</b>	team around the family

## Key principles / what is early help?

### Critical features of effective early help

- Early identification of need.
- Child centred, solution focused and strengths based.
- Whole-family, considers and work with the needs and strengths of the whole family unit.
- Holistic, considers the views and experiences of the whole family and practitioners working with them.
- Voluntary, consent-based process, working with the family, empowering them to develop the capacity and resilience to resolve their own problems
- Simple, streamlined online enquiry, assessment and review process.
- Built upon relationship with a trusted lead practitioner who can engage with the child and their family, and coordinate support.
- Access for the family to a multi-disciplinary approach through a team around the family (TAF) or additional support via Single Agency Single Agency Plan.
- Local Solutions Groups for earliest help. Strengths based, solution focused, preventative help embedded within local communities.

Early Help Assessment and TAF Review process is a shared assessment and planning framework which is in use by all agencies across the borough and is employed in similar format throughout the country. It aims to help with the early identification of additional needs of children and promote a co-ordinated multi or single agency response to meet these.

**If you identify a child with additional support needs** at level 2 or 3 of the continuum of need referenced below, and your service is not able to meet those needs, **you must follow the early help pathway**. Families with needs below level 2 not able to be met through your own organisation can be referred with consent into Local Solution Groups.

### Local Solutions Groups:

Local Solution Groups (LSG's) are place-based groups of practitioners from a wide range of organisations that come together to provide targeted support to local residents. The focus is on earliest help, providing swift support through a 'see and solve' response. Local Solution Groups are rooted in place, connecting local practitioners with local people; this enables each group to understand and response to the needs of local communities.

Local Solutions Groups cover all areas of Doncaster:

**South:** LocalSolutionSouth@doncaster.gov.uk

**North:** LocalSolutionNorth@doncaster.gov.uk

**East:** LocalSolutionEast@doncaster.gov.uk

**Central:** LocalSolutionCentral@doncaster.gov.uk

## Continuum of need - Thresholds

The diagram below demonstrates the continuum of needs for children and families. This is the whole continuum of need from universal to statutory intervention.

Universal means a need that all children have, such as education, stimulation and play; or access to healthcare through their GP and universal Health Visiting. Children at the Universal level of need do not require additional support or services.

Level 2 Universal Plus means that a child has additional support needs but these could be met through one agency delivering more than their Universal offer.

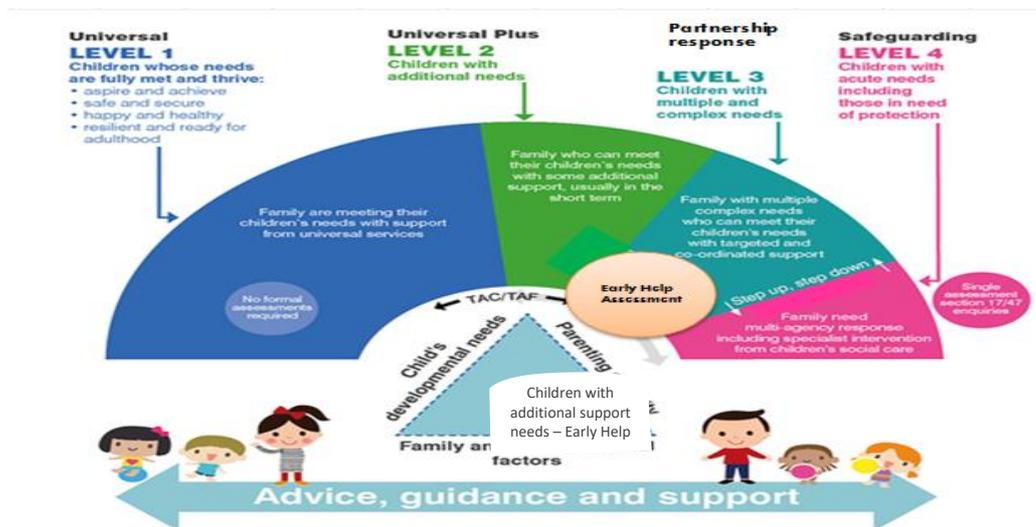
Level 3 Partnership means that a child has additional support needs that can't be met by one agency alone. Several agencies may be involved and family, children, Parents/Carers and professionals need to work together in a coordinated way to meet these needs.

Level 4 Safeguarding means that a child needs access to specialist statutory Social Care services.

Early Help should be undertaken to support children with additional support needs at Level 2 and 3 as shown in the centre two portions of the diagram.

More details of what constitutes 'additional support needs' can be found in Doncaster's threshold document, which can be downloaded from this page of the DSCP website:

<https://dscp.org.uk/professionals/early-help/when-might-family-need-early-help>



## When is it Early Help?

### Early identification of need

The Early Help process has been designed to help practitioners explore children and their family's needs at an early stage; and then work with the child, their family and with other practitioners and agencies to meet these needs. More information about Early Help is available within the Working Together 2018; this is Government guidance that sets out clear what is expected from all professionals and organisations. Working Together 2018 can be accessed through the following link: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779401/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard-Children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf)

Doncaster Early Help Strategy sets out how organisations in Doncaster will work together to meet the needs of Children and their Families, it is available through Doncaster Safeguarding Children's Partnership website at:

<https://dscp.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Early%20Help%20Strategy%20Revised%202017%20to%202020%20Final.pdf>

Early Help is identified in the two central sections of the Continuum of Need overleaf (page 7); the lower section is named Level 2 Universal Plus and the upper section is named Level 3 Partnership.

Level 2 Universal Plus means additional support needs have been identified; these can be met by one agency and does not require multi agency working. An Early Help Assessment and Team around the Child/Family meetings are not required; however it is important the specific need is identified and a single agency plan is created and managed by the Lead Practitioner to ensure this need is addressed in a timely way.

Level 3 Partnership response means that a multi-agency approach is required to explore the family's needs through a holistic Early Help Assessment with the plan coordinated by the Lead Practitioner through the Team Around the Child/Family Review meetings to enable effective communication.

'Introduction to Early Help?' training is bookable through

<http://buy.doncaster.gov.uk/Search/introduction%20to%20early%20help>

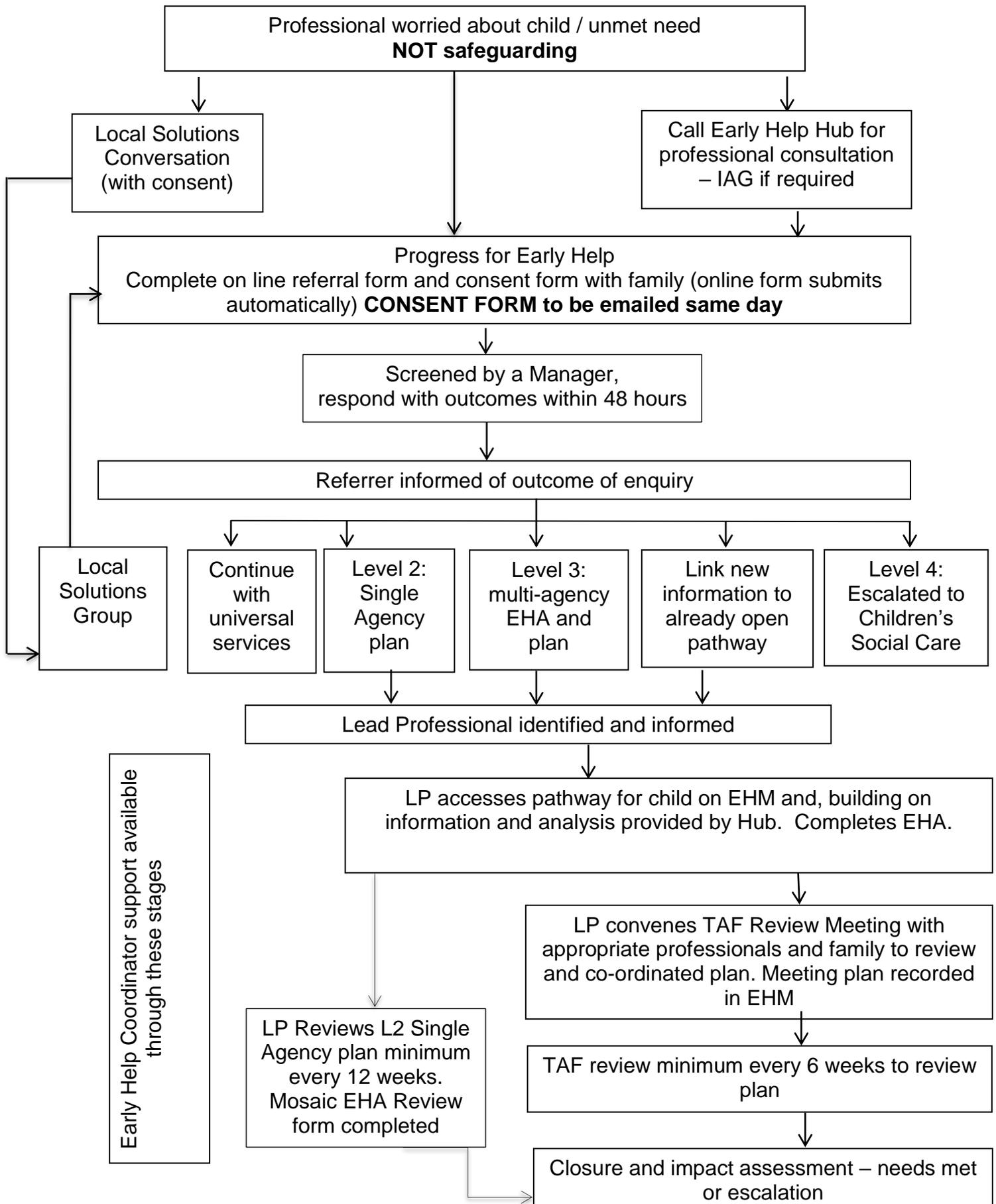
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### Examples of when to consider Early Help

- The child's needs are unclear, or broader than your service can address alone.

- A significant change or worrying feature in a child's appearance, demeanour, behaviour or health has been observed.
- A significant event in a child's life has occurred, or where there are worries about the parents or home.
- Where a child, parent or another practitioner has raised a concern or requested an assessment.
- Parental elements e.g. substance misuse, domestic violence, physical or mental health issues or criminality.
- Missing developmental milestones or making slower progress than expected in their learning.
- Health concerns including disability, physical or mental ill health, regularly missing medical appointments or a sudden change in the child's health.
- Child presenting challenging or aggressive behaviours, misusing substances or committing offences.
- Undertaking caring responsibilities.
- Bereaved or experiencing family breakdown.
- Bullied or are bullies themselves.
- Disadvantage for reasons such as race, gender, sexuality, religious belief or disability.
- Homeless or being threatened with eviction and those living in temporary accommodation.
- Becoming a teenage mother / father or is the child of teenage parents.
- Not being ready to make the transition to post-16 services.
- Persistent absence from school or risk of permanent exclusion.
- A child or family seeks help.

## Early Help pathway in Doncaster

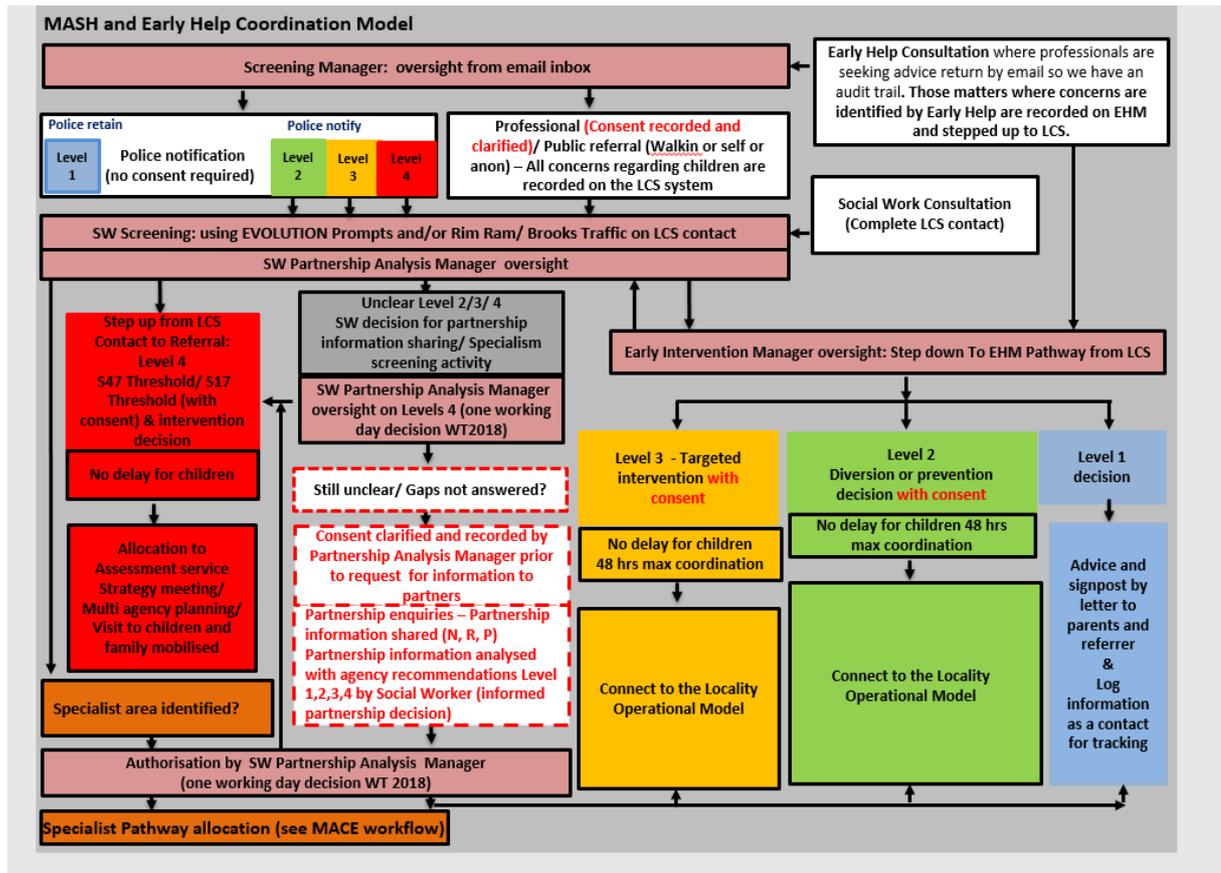


## MASH and Early Help Coordination

### Connected pathways into Early Help

All contacts received for Early Help will be seen by the Screening Manager before being passed to the Early Help Hub.

This diagram shows the partnership front door and connected pathways into Early Help.



## Early help infrastructure support

### Early Help Hub

The Early Help Hub has been established to improve communication, information sharing; and to support more effective delivery of services where there is a need for multi-agency response.

The Early Help Hub is a multi-disciplinary team with two main functions:

1. Providing information, advice and guidance to professionals who have queries about children who made need a coordinated early help response.
2. Progressing all early help enquires forms to ensure an appropriate level of response for the child and family.

The team is available from 8.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday, and telephone messages will be responded to within one working day.

Telephone: 01302 734110

Email: [earlyhelphub@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:earlyhelphub@doncaster.gov.uk)

If you believe that an early help assessment (EHA) or single agency support is needed, contact the Early Help Hub to discuss your concerns. After discussing your concerns, if it is agreed this is a case for early help, you will be asked to complete an on line enquiry form and email a consent form which you have with the family.

DSCT Receiving Manager will screen all early help referrals and then pass the referral the the Early Help Hub to progress the case and inform you of the action required. This could be:

- If an EHA has already been completed or there is an existing TAC/F, you will be asked to share your information and join the TAC/F
- Single agency response for a specific piece of work – Lead Practitioner identified
- EHA required – lead practitioner identified
- No further action
- Escalation to Children’s Social Care if this case is already known to them or the information gathered during screening indicates escalation is required.

The Early Help Hub does not replace the existing ‘front door’ arrangements for children’s social care in Doncaster. If at any stage you have any concerns that a child is at risk of harm you must follow your agency’s safeguarding procedure and make a referral to Children’s Social Care Referral and Response Service on:

Telephone: 01302 737777 (available 8:30am – 5pm Monday to Friday)

Telephone: 01302 796000 (outside office hours)

During this telephone call you will be asked to follow up by completing an online referral form the same day.

Email: [ChildrenAssessmentService@dcstrust.co.uk](mailto:ChildrenAssessmentService@dcstrust.co.uk)

## Locality based Early Help Coordinators

Each locality has two or more Early Help Coordinators, who champion Early Help. Their main function is to champion Early Help and to improve confidence and skills of staff across agencies and services to embed the Early Help arrangements through quality local delivery. They can support you with:

- Supporting professionals taking on the role of lead practitioner
- Supporting professionals undertaking an Early Help Assessment
- Supporting professionals with arranging a TAC/F
- Support with any EHM issues.

## Your Early Help Coordinator Team

### North:

Natasha Watts (07738 888 218) [natasha.watts@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:natasha.watts@doncaster.gov.uk)  
David Hamilton (07776 454 318) [david.hamilton@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:david.hamilton@doncaster.gov.uk)  
Cherry Beedle (07974602033) [Cherry.Beedle@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:Cherry.Beedle@doncaster.gov.uk)

### East:

Lindsey Swain (07717 320 478) [lindsey.swain@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:lindsey.swain@doncaster.gov.uk)  
Gemma Sneddon [gemma.sneddon@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.sneddon@doncaster.gov.uk)

### South:

Toni Tomlinson (07773 227 893) [toni.tomlinson@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:toni.tomlinson@doncaster.gov.uk)  
Sarah Taylor (07971 121 710) [sarah.taylor@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.taylor@doncaster.gov.uk)

### Central:

Christian Brownless (07810 153 716) [christian.brownless@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:christian.brownless@doncaster.gov.uk)  
Paula Holland (07970 967 647) [paula.holland@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:paula.holland@doncaster.gov.uk)

### MASH:

Rebecca Holmes (07970 431 598) [rebecca.holmes@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.holmes@doncaster.gov.uk)

### Early Help Coordinator Duty phone and email lines:

Telephone: 01302 736250 Email: [earlyhelpcoordinator@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:earlyhelpcoordinator@doncaster.gov.uk)

Lead practitioner support sessions take place across the four areas weekly in a range of venues. To book on, please contact your Early Help Coordinator on the above numbers.

### **Early Help online system: Early Help Module (EHM)**

All Early Help support will be captured and coordinated through the online case management system, known as Early Help Module or EHM.

If you need access to EHM and/or training to use the system, contact the DIPs Support Team

Telephone: 01302 737688

Email: [DIPSSupport@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:DIPSSupport@doncaster.gov.uk)

## How to guides

### Consent

The Early Help Assessment and TAF is a voluntary process and consent from the child and family is required before the information is shared outside your agency.

Consent to share information must be discussed with the family before submitting an online enquiry into the Early Help Hub, the family should be given a copy of the Privacy Notice to ensure they know how their data will be used. Once signed consent has been gained the online Enquiry Form can be completed and the signed consent form uploaded to the form.

Written consent should be gained from families to contact their GP to gather information during the Early Help Assessment process (see page 26).

### Stronger Families

#### How is a family a Stronger Family?

The criteria for families to be eligible for the programme have been widened by the Government to include the following strands:

1. Parents and children involved in **crime or anti-social behaviour**.
2. Children who have not been **attending school** regularly.
3. Children who need **help**.
4. Adults **out of work** or at risk of **financial exclusion** and young people at risk of worklessness (**NEET**).
5. Families affected by **domestic violence and abuse**.
6. Parents and children with a range of **health** problems.

#### Possible additional resources available for Stronger Families

Stronger Families checklists are embedded with Early help Assessment; Early Help Plan; and Single Agency forms on the Early Help Module (EHM). It is important to identify if a child or family member meet two or more of the Stronger Family strands as they will become eligible for extra resources and help for example:

- Workers can access the innovation fund held by each Communities Area Manager: these are small amounts of funds to help overcome barriers and issues that families experience.
- Stronger Families funds some additional EWO posts to provide more intensive support to families around school attendance.
- Stronger Families joint funds the Moving On Together for families experiencing issues around alcohol and substance misuse.
- Workers can seek extra capacity if appropriate from Communities' Services officers in supporting families as part of the whole family action plan.
- Access to family passes for DCLT leisure services across the borough.

- Specialist DWP employment advisors to help families explore options for getting into work or on to a support programme towards work.

Stronger Families is coordinated in localities by the Communities Area Teams. To let them know about a family who you think are eligible after you have checked the criteria, please send their details and yours to [StrongerFamiliesProgramme@doncaster.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:StrongerFamiliesProgramme@doncaster.gcsx.gov.uk) and someone will get back to you on the details you provide to discuss the family with you.

### Short breaks for families with disabled children in Doncaster:

#### Universal Local Offer:

Doncaster's local offer provides information for children and young people with special educational needs (SEND) and their parents or carers in a single place. Including leisure activities and transport support.

<http://www.doncasterchildrenandfamilies.info/thelocaloffer.html>

#### Together Information Exchange

All children with disabilities, including special educational needs are able to access the universal short breaks offer, they do not need a lead practitioner or early help assessment to do so. However Lead Practitioners should support families to access the universal short breaks offer as part of their family plan.

To access the universal short breaks offer families must be registered with the Together Information Exchange (TIE). Doncaster's voluntary register of children and young people with a disability. The register is administrated by the short breaks team, which enables them to support families to access the local offer including holiday activities.

TIE members receive:

- Access to the afterschool and weekend clubs funded by the short breaks service
- The holiday activity timetable run by the short breaks service which disabled children can book onto during the school holidays
- A free TIE membership card to receive discounts at various places including Yorkshire Wildlife Park, The Dome Leisure Centre, Vue Cinema and much more
- Regular information either through the post or via email alerts on events and holiday activities taking place

The TIE registration form is on EHM and LCS for practitioners to complete on behalf of families.

Families can also apply directly themselves:

Application forms to join TIE are available from the Short Breaks team by -

- Calling us on - 01302 735237 to request one
- Emailing us at - [TIE@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:TIE@doncaster.gov.uk)
- Message us through our facebook page - [www.facebook.com/Together-Information-Exchange](http://www.facebook.com/Together-Information-Exchange)

### Targeted:

#### Targeted support can be:

1. Daytime care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere.
2. Overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere
3. Educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes.
4. Services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.

### Eligibility:

- The child or young person will have special educational needs and/or disability regardless of whether the child is at SEN Support managed by the setting or has a Statement of SEN or an Education Health Care Plan issued by the Local Authority
- Children and young people whose need cannot be met by universal provision
- Family are in receipt of disability living allowance
- Needs of the whole family assessed by their named lead professional using the early help assessment (EHA) or social care child and family assessment
- The EHA of C&F identifies that the child or young person has high support needs and taking into account family context targeted short breaks are necessary to meet their needs.

### Access:

Prior to a referral to Short Breaks, you may want one of the team to attend your Team Around the Family to discuss options.

- Lead professional can refer the child or young person to short breaks via the EHM system.
- In the first instance the child's paperwork will be reviewed and if considered to be an appropriate referral then the short breaks team will undertake a Resource Allocation System (RAS) to assess levels of need within the household and potential funding required to meet this need.
- Where the EHA has indicated a range of family needs, including the need for a short break the family should continue to receive an early help service as described in the early help handbook. When the families wider needs are meet:
  - If the child continues to require multi agency support to meet their needs this should continue an EHA or C&F however reviews can move from 6 weekly to yearly in line with their EHCP.

- Where the family's needs are met and significantly reduced by the delivery of a short breaks service the pathway should be 'stepped down' from a C&F to EHA and EHA to a single agency response, with a named lead practitioner and the short breaks package is reviewed at the child's SEN/EHCP review. It is expected at single agency the lead practitioner will be the SENCo or health visitor.

Please note the Short Breaks team will be happy to discuss any child's needs with you as Lead Practitioner and attend Team Around the Family meetings.

**Contact:**

- Calling us on - 01302 737448 to request one
- Emailing us at - [shortbreaksteam@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:shortbreaksteam@doncaster.gov.uk)

## Using Tools to explore the Child and Family Needs:

The Signs of Safety approach is embedded throughout all Mosaic Early Help forms. The Outcome Star tool is embedded with the Early Help Assessment with the ability for this direct work to be scanned and attached to the assessment form.

The Young Carers and Neglect toolkits gives practitioners a structure for understanding the extent and impact of their carers role or the Neglect experienced by a child so they can ensure the plan meets needs and make informed decisions about the Threshold of Need to ensure the appropriate service provides support (see page 20). These assessments can be scanned and uploaded into Mosaic assessment or review forms or into the child's documents file.

## Signs of Safety:

Signs of Safety is a strengths based; solution focused; and safety-organised approach to working with children and their families. It was developed in Australia in the 1980's by Social Workers Australia by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards. The approach has spread world-wide and is now being embedded in Doncaster.

The approach is centred around building meaningful partnerships with the child, parents and colleagues; identifying the parent and child as the expert in the difficulty and solution. A key feature of the approach is the use of simple and jargon free language so everyone can clearly understand what is happening and what needs to happen.

Case Mapping identifies 'What We Are Worried About'; 'What Is Working Well' and 'What Needs to Happen Next'. The family situation is scored from 0 to 10; 0 being so worried the child can't remain in the family home and 10 being everyone agrees things are so good the family don't need any more help. The use of Danger Statements helps the parent to fully understand what the worries are; why these things are worries; and what will happen if the situation doesn't change for the better. Safety Goals help parents to understand what better will look like, so they know what changes they need to make and can plan how to achieve this. Parents develop their Safety Network of family and friends to help them make and sustain changes; and children know who their Safety People are so they can get help if they need this.

The approach uses practical tools to ensure the voice of the child is clearly heard; such as 3 Houses (House of Worries; House of Good Things and House of Dreams); and Fairy and Wizard. Words and Pictures is a tool used with parents to help them to tell the story of the family situation to their child through a few pictures; it helps parents to understand and accept the impact of the situation on their child and generates motivation for change.

Training to develop understanding of the Signs of Safety approach is booked through [www.buydoncaster.co.uk](http://www.buydoncaster.co.uk)

### **Outcome Star:**

The Outcomes Star is a unique tool for supporting and measuring change when working with families. The practitioner and family use the 'Outcome Star' tool together to explore and measure their level of functioning over a range of areas of need; these are the Early Help Assessment areas. These scores inform the Early Help Plan. The Outcome Star tool is embedded within the Early Help Assessment and Plan; Team Around the Child/Family record; and Single Agency Planning and Monitoring. The 'My Star' captures the voice of the child by exploring their lived experiences; needs; and wishes. The Outcome Star is reviewed with family and child every three months this helps keep everyone focused on the changes needed; generates motivation and resilience; and enables the family and practitioner to track progress. The stars build over each other to map progress made.

Outcome Star training is booked through [www.buydoncaster.co.uk](http://www.buydoncaster.co.uk)

### **Young Carers Toolkit:**

The Young Carers toolkit is embedded within the Early Help Assessment form; it can be accessed when it appears the children may be Young Carers. The tool is a child-friendly approach to exploring their unique family situation to help practitioners gain the child's voice about what they enjoy and what upsets or worries them about being a Young Carer. This enables the practitioner to tailor bespoke support for the family.

### **Neglect Toolkit:**

Neglect is defined as persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Triggers and symptoms of Neglect can be identified through Early Help; understanding and addressing the causes of Neglect can prevent cases deteriorating to the point where Social Care involvement is necessary.

The Neglect toolkit uses the Graded Care Profile to explore how well a child's needs are met from 'All Child's Needs Met' through to 'Essential Needs Entirely Unmet' over the four areas of Physical; Safety; Love; and Esteem Needs.

The Neglect toolkit enables practitioners to understand the extent and impact of Neglect experienced by a child; enabling them to make informed decisions about the Threshold of Need; and develop a plan to meet these needs. Any practitioner who knows the family and is concerned Neglect may be present can use the toolkit; parents should be aware of your concerns and have consented to the tool being used. If practitioners are not able to visit the family home they need to work in

partnership with practitioners that can. Outcomes should be shared with the parent so they develop solutions to meet needs; and be recorded onto the Early Help Module as a document. If the tool demonstrates significant Neglect concerns it should accompany a referral into Children's Social Care.

The Graded Care profile was adapted from the work of Dr Polnay and Dr Srivastava from Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust and is used nationally. Neglect training is booked through [www.buydoncaster.co.uk](http://www.buydoncaster.co.uk) and the DSCB Neglect Strategy is available on the Doncaster Children's Safeguarding Board website at <http://www.dscp.co.uk/neglect>. The Neglect Strategy and Tool kit are available on Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board at <http://www.dscp.co.uk/neglect>.

### **Developing a Single Agency Plan:**

Using the information gathered and analysed by the Early Help Hub during the screening process, complete the Single Agency Plan on the Early Help Module (EHM). This will identify 'What we are Worried about?'; 'What is Working Well?'; and 'What Needs to Happen Next?'. Scale the current situation from 0-10 (0 being so poor we would be worried about the children remaining at home; and 10 being so good there is no need for any additional support) using information gained through the Outcome Star Family activities. The Single Agency Plan must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited). Training is available in the Signs of Safety approach, Outcome Star; and Assessment and Plans, booking via [www.buydoncaster.co.uk](http://www.buydoncaster.co.uk)

Communities teams will access the Single Agency pathway to complete a Communities plan, this is very similar to the Single Agency Plan but asks additional questions from their Rapid Review process.

Single Agency or Communities plans should be reviewed every 12 weeks to monitor and manage the family's needs. Once needs are met the case is progressed to closure stage.

### **Completing an Early Help Assessment at Level 3 Multi Agency:**

Level 3 Early Help Assessments should be a detailed and holistic exploration of the child and family needs to include the impact of current as well and past experiences. The Mosaic Early Help Assessment (EHA) form uses the Signs of Safety case mapping framework to identify past harm and complicating factors, along with existing wellbeing and strengths.

The assessment framework (page 25) should be used as a guide to fully explore a child and family's situation, these findings can then be mapped against the SOS framework. It is essential that the child's views about their experiences are understood, alongside that of the parents/carers and other professionals.

Using tools (pages 20 and 21) with the child and family members will help to explore the situation and gain their views. Signs of Safety Scaling and Best questions can help to elicit further information.

High quality assessments are:

- Child and family centred
- Evidence based – founded on critical analysis of information gathered
- Outcomes focused
- Holistic in approach, looking at the strengths and needs of all family members

- Carried out in partnership with the family and other professionals working with them
- Clear about actions to be taken, by whom and by when, and how this will be reviewed with the family
- Undertaken with the consent of the child and their family.

If parents and/or the child do not consent to an Early Help Assessment, then the lead practitioner should make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate to a level likely to cause significant harm. If so, a referral to Children's Social Care Multi Agency Access Point (MAAP).

When undertaking an Early Help Assessment (EHA) with a family, remember:

- Complete the EHA in discussion with the child and parents
- Use 'user friendly' language avoiding professional jargon and acronyms
- Focus on strengths as well as needs – if there is no problem in an area of the EHA, record what is going well
- Identify issues
- Agree actions with parents – one action may be to convene a TAC/F.

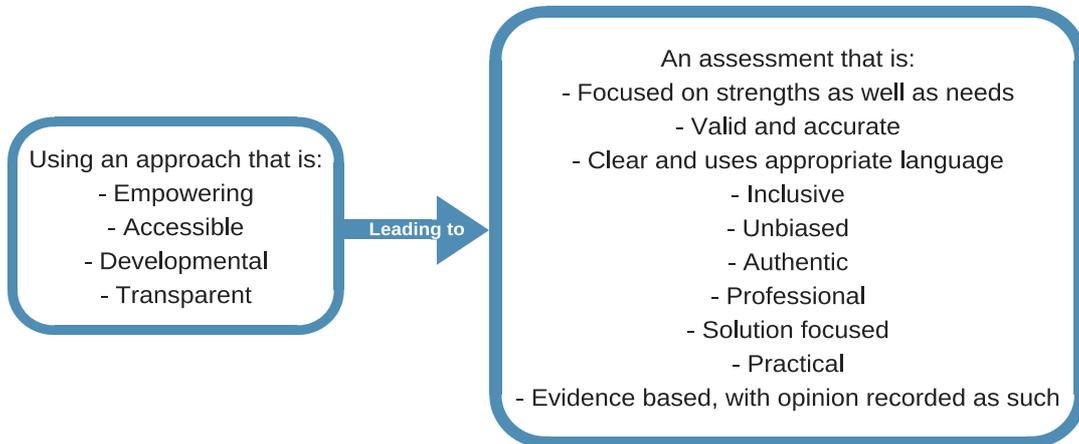
When undertaking an Early Help Assessment (EHA) with a family, remember:

- Complete the EHA in discussion with the child and parents
- Use 'user friendly' language avoiding professional jargon and acronyms
- Focus on strengths as well as needs – if there is no problem in an area of the EHA, record what is going well
- Identify issues
- Agree actions with parents – one action may be to convene a TAC/F.

**A good assessment conversation should:**



**A good Early Help Assessment should:**

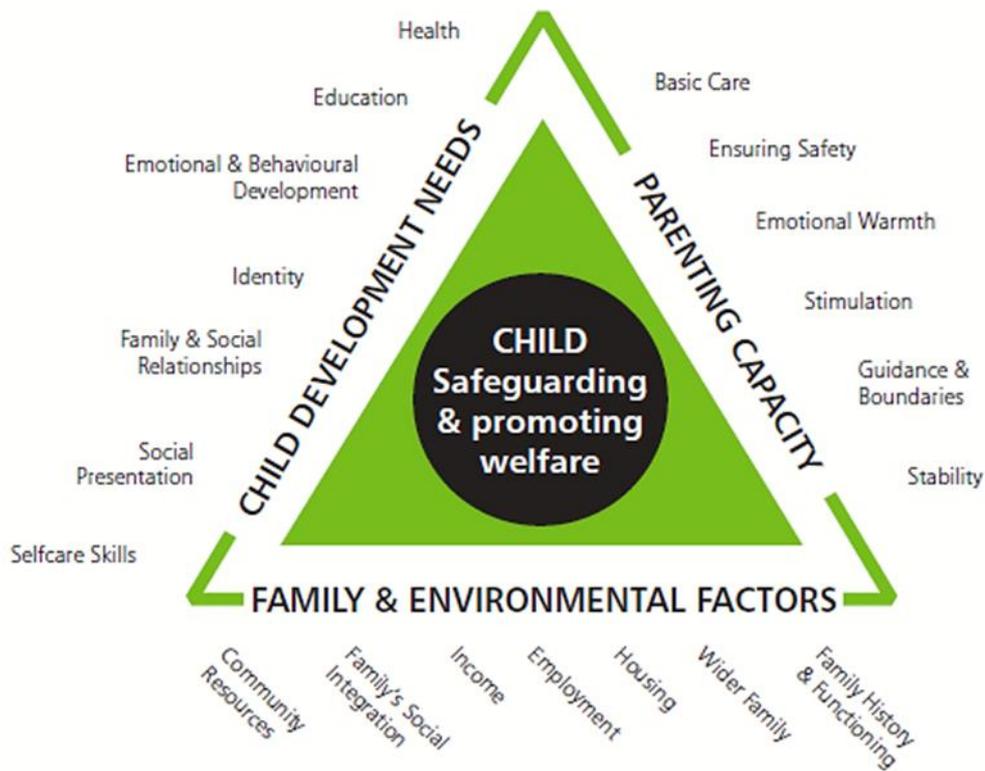


## Framework for assessment

The assessment framework involves gathering and analysing information in three domains:

- Child development needs
- Parenting capacity
- The impact of the wider family and environmental factors on parenting capacity and children.

The assessment framework focuses on areas of strength and need. Whilst the headings in the EHA differ slightly from those illustrated below, all are covered in the assessment.



## Notifying GPs where a child is the subject of an Early Help Assessment (EHA), Team around the Family (TAF)

GP services are a crucial partner to protective and early help services, as such the information they hold is vital to any assessment and care planning process.

Following the Serious Case Review (SCR) for Child A it has been agreed by DSCB that all Lead Practitioners should adhere to this guidance:

An agreed process to ensure GPs are informed when children are supported by Child in Need or Early Help Assessment and Team around the Child/Family meetings. It is the responsibility of the lead professional or allocated social worker to:

- Gain written consent
- Send the letter to the GP informing them of your involvement
- Record the receipt from the GP in case records

There is a clear method by which the GPS will inform and feedback into the Child in Need or Early Help Assessment and Team around the Child/Family meetings. It is the responsibility of the lead professional or allocated social worker to:

- Contact the GP should they indicate they have information to share.
- Send invitations so GPs can contribute to any TAF/CIN meetings taking place.
- Send the GP a copy of the TAF/CIN minutes after every meeting.  
The full procedures are attached below alongside corresponding letters to be sent to GPs.

The full procedures are available on DSCB website:

<https://dscp.org.uk/professionals/policies-and-procedures>

A copy of the template GP letter is available in the appendices of this document (page 50) or on the DSCP website.

## Taking on the role of the lead practitioner

### The roles of a lead practitioner

During the screening process by the Early Help Hub, if there is a requirement for a Single Agency response or an EHA, a lead practitioner will be identified. This may be the professional who made the initial enquiry or another professional identified by the family / hub as the best person to take this role.

Level 2 Universal Plus -Single Agency Lead Practitioner will:

- Identify the families specific support needs using Signs of Safety approach
- Review and update the plan with the family a minimum of every 12 weeks
- Closure completion on EHM or
- Step up to a Level 3 Partnership assessment or Level 4 Social Care as required.
- This all Early help is recorded into Mosaic

Level 3 Partnership- Coordinated Approach Lead Practitioner will:

- Act as a single point of contact for the child and parents so the family are kept well informed and can discuss their progress and any concerns with one person that they can trust
- Act as a single point of contact for other professionals to report back to
- Undertake the holistic and detailed Early Help Assessment and lead the subsequent process with the family
- Co-ordinate the delivery of actions agreed in the Assessment Plan
- Lead TAF Review meetings and ensure that the package of support is regularly reviewed and monitored and EHM is updated.
- Reduce any overlap and inconsistency in the services received
- Support the child and family to ensure that a careful 'handover' takes place if it becomes more appropriate for someone else to be the lead practitioner.
- Ensure all Early Help is recorded into EHM.

### Support available to you as a lead practitioner

Early Help Coordinators are available in each locality to support you through the process. Contact details can be found on page 27. The Role of The Lead Practitioner training is bookable through:

<http://buy.doncaster.gov.uk/Search/role%20of%20lead>

## Undertaking a team around the family (TAF)

The TAC/F brings together the child, family and range of different practitioners to support the family following to meet the needs identified in the early help assessment. If you think, as lead practitioner, a TAC/F meeting may be appropriate, identify the people who should be invited, through the assessment process and in discussion with the family. This may include friends and relatives of the family and voluntary agencies as well as professionals. Early help Coordinators can help you to identify who to invite.

The family should be at the heart of the TAC/F meetings. The meeting should be planned carefully, and the lead practitioner should consider who and how many people should be at the meeting. Some families will be comfortable with bigger groups and some may find the presence of a large number of practitioners threatening or undermining. The aim should be to keep the TAC/F meeting as small as possible while meeting the family's needs. Note parental preferences for date, time and venue of TAC/F meeting if appropriate.

Work should be undertaken with the children and parents to help them engage in a meaningful way, for example being supported by family friends, just coming for a part of the meeting, or through writing down their feelings or drawing a picture. If a child chooses not to attend a meeting the lead practitioner should gather their views, needs and wishes ahead of the meeting and share these at the meeting on behalf of the child.

If a practitioner cannot attend a meeting it is important to find out what assessment or update information they have and what support they have provided or can offer the family; this should be shared at the meeting by the Lead Practitioner.

**The members of the TAC/F take joint responsibility to develop and deliver a package of solution focused support to meet the needs identified through the Early Help Assessment.**

Each practitioner in the TAC/F is responsible and accountable to their home agency for the services they deliver to children and their families. They are also jointly responsible for:

- Developing and delivering the early help plan
- Delivering the activities they agreed to carry out
- Keeping the other members of the team informed about progress in their area of responsibility, providing reports promptly and attending meetings
  
- Contributing to recording the child's plan, chairing meetings and taking on other tasks as necessary

- Supporting the lead practitioner by providing information, offering guidance and advice
- Contributing actively and positively to solving problems or resolving difficulties
- Ensuring that if the child is not present, the meeting remains child focused and their views are included.

### Completing the Family Action Plan and Single Agency or Communities Plan

Developing; delivering; and co-ordinating services is undertaken with the child and their parents through the TAF meeting, and a clear multi-agency plan. Level 2 Universal Plus -Single Agency help is planned and monitored through the Single Agency or Communities Plan and review process.

The Family Action Plan is for those cases requiring Level 3 Partnership multi-agency response following the completion of the early help assessment. It should be completed at the end of the Early Help Assessment and reviewed through the TAF meetings. All participants in the TAF, including parents and the young person, should be given a copy of the Early Help Assessment and Family Action Plan.

The Family Action Plan is a key document for the family and practitioners involved; it will state what action is to take place and who will carry out that action. Children and parents can have actions to carry out as well as other service providers. It is important that these are realistic targets and support the needs that have been identified. Children and parents need to be involved and to understand the family action plan.

### Review meetings

The Early Help Assessment Plan should be reviewed on a regular basis, therefore Team Around the Child/Family (TAC/F) meetings should be held about every six weeks.

The purpose of the review meeting is to:

- Monitor progress
- Confirm that actions in the family action plan have been completed (if not, why not?)
- Identify and address new worries or concerns
- Celebrate successes.

The lead practitioner must ensure the plan is updated and includes parents' and child's views.

## Early Help Step Up to Social Care

When a family's needs are not able to be met through Early Help it may be necessary for them to 'Step Up' into Children's Social Care. This should only happen when the child's needs reach the threshold for Child In Need (also known as Section 17); it's clear that every effort to prevent this has been made through Early Help processes and pathway; and the family consent to this.

The Lead Practitioner should update the Early Help Assessment and Plan Review and discuss the family's needs with their locality Early Help Coordinator. Once agreed the case requires Step Up, the Lead Practitioner should choose the action of 'Step Up to Children's Social Care' within the Early Help Assessment and Plan (or Review) within Mosaic. The case will then be reviewed by Early Help Pathway leads and a decision made to make the 'Step Up' into Children's Social Care One Front Door where usual screening processes will apply.

If a child does not reach threshold for Children's Social Care the Early Help Pathway Lead will not accept the Step Up request, the locality Early Help Coordinator will provide ongoing advice and guidance to the Lead Practitioner.

Early Help cases should not be closed until they have fully progressed for assessment by Children's Social Care.

## Early Help Closure

### The decision to close an Early Help case

Early Help may no longer be appropriate for a number of reasons, including:

- All identified needs met
- Issues have been resolved
- Universal services now meeting all identified needs
- Family has requested closure or withdrawn consent for TAC/F
- TAC/F is no longer viable e.g. family moved out the area
- Children's Social Care taking on full responsibility for the case.

During the final Review Early Help Assessment and Plan the decision to close the case should be agreed by the child, family and any other practitioners

Closure forms for both Level 2 Universal Plus -Single Agency or Communities Plan and Level 3 Partnership Early Help Assessments should be documented by completing the Closure Record on EHM and should contain information about:

**Outcome Star:** Update the Outcome Stars with Child and Parents/Carers to provide information about the areas of progress at point of closure.

**Reason for closure:** Record all factors relating to the decision to close the TAC/F.

**Effectiveness of plan:** Summarise the help undertaken with the family and the outcomes. Update the service evaluation form or Outcome Stars with Child and Parents/Carers to provide information about the areas of progress at point of closure.

**Child's views:** Record comments made by the child and observations of them to inform about the readiness for closure. It is essential the child's views are explored, understood and recorded in the closure form; this can be verbally expressed or observations made by lead practitioner about the child's experiences and interactions, identifying any progress made, barriers experienced, current needs and wishes.

**Parents' views:** Record the comments made by parents. If they have explicitly requested closure or withdrawn consent this should be clearly stated, together with any reasons given. Identify their understanding of their child's needs, any progress made, barriers experienced and their current needs and wishes.

**Professionals' views:** What work has been undertaken, what has been successful and what is the impact for the child and family? What were the barriers, how successfully were they overcome, what is the readiness for closure; and what are the current needs of the family?

The closures of all cases requested through the Mosaic Early help Closures tray. Managers within DSCT will authorise closures from their teams. Partnership closures will be authorised by the Early Help Coordinators.

**Next Steps:** The family should be written to let them know their early help has now ended and provide information about how to access help in the future. The closures of all cases are sent to the Early Help Hub through EHM. Managers within DSCT will authorise closures from their teams. Partnership closures will be authorised by the Early Help Coordinators.

## Early help and TAC/F FAQs

### **If I do an early help assessment, do I have to be lead practitioner?**

You will be the lead practitioner until the first meeting, and then discussion should take place with the child and family as to who is best placed to take this role on an on-going basis. There is a range of criteria that can help inform the decision, based on the predominant needs of the child or family; the wishes of the child or family; or a previous or potential on-going relationship with the child. The other professionals will have an important contribution to make in delivering their agreed actions.

### **Can I fill in an early help assessment and share it with the family later?**

No. The early help assessment should always be filled in with the child and/or family.

### **What do I do if a family won't agree to the process?**

Continue to support the child and family from within your own agency, and continue to discuss the benefits of accessing support via a TAC/F. Assess the risk to the child, and if you believe there is risk of significant harm, make a safeguarding referral and inform the family you are doing so.

### **Can a child under 16 consent to TAC/F without their parents' agreement?**

Yes, if you judge them to be competent and believe they understand what they are agreeing to and the implications for them and/or their family. This does not extend to all information they might share about adults.

### **Can I handwrite the early help assessment?**

Yes. However those with access to the electronic Early Help Module will be required to record this information on the system. We recognise that not all staff or agencies have access to the EHM, in this case a paper form is to be completed and sent to the Early Help Hub. Access and training for the EHM can be arranged through the eSystems team on:

**Telephone:** 01302 737688

**Email:** [DIPSSupport@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:DIPSSupport@doncaster.gov.uk)

### **How long does the TAF process last for?**

There is no limit on the length of time a child can be part of the TAC/F process. The key principle is that the process should support the child to meet their needs and achieve their potential. As long as the process is reviewed regularly and appropriate services are being provided then TAC/F can continue indefinitely until the child reaches 18 years of age. It is good practise to review the early help assessment for cases that remain open over one year.

However professionals within the TAC/F need to assess the impact of the support to the family and come to a view whether the actions being taken are having a positive impact on the child. This should inform decisions whether the risks are at a level which may require statutory social care intervention, or TAC/F can step down to single agency response alongside universal services. Decisions should always be taken in the interests of individual children.

**Is the lead practitioner responsible for delivery of services?**

Each professional remains accountable for their practice. If a service is agreed but isn't delivered then the agency that agreed to provide the service is accountable. The lead practitioner is responsible for coordination, not delivery of another service, but should take responsibility for raising concerns with their own line manager in such circumstances.

## Appendices: forms

### Early help for your family:

A family friendly guide to early help with privacy statement and consent form



014168 DCST Early Help Guide for Families A4 Booklet.PRINT.pdf

The image shows the cover of a booklet titled "Early Help for your family". The title is written in a large, stylized font, with "Early Help" in white outline and "for your family" in yellow. To the right of the title is the "Early Help" logo, which consists of the words "Early Help" in a bold, sans-serif font inside a yellow square, with the tagline "Working together for stronger families" below it. Below the title and logo, there is a photograph of four children jumping joyfully. At the bottom right of the cover, there is a green checkmark icon and the text "Doncaster Safeguarding Childrens Board". At the bottom of the cover, there is a yellow banner with the text "Getting the right help and support for your family at the right time" and "A Guide for Families" below it.

## Reviewed Consent Form:

### Consent Statement

Single Agency support and The Early Help Assessment and TAC/F is a voluntary process and consent from the Child, Young Person and Family is required before the information in this assessment is shared outside of your agency.

<p><b>Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board</b>  <b>Children and Young People's Services</b></p>		
<p><b>Family Consent Record</b></p>		
<p>Informed consent for:</p> <p>Parent/Carer  Parent Carer  Child/young person  Child/Young person</p>		
<p>Consent Dates</p>		
<p>Privacy Notice Issued? <i>(If no, please action this as soon as possible)</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>Consent Decision</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Child can make his/her own decisions and has agreed to the single agency support or an Early Help Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> One Parent has agreed to single agency support or to the Early Help Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Both parents have agreed to single agency support or the Early Help Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Child & Parents have agreed to single agency support or to the Early Help Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Parent (s) have agreed to single agency support but NOT agreed to the Early Help Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Neither child nor parents have agreed to the Early Help Assessment.	
<p><i>If proceeding with enquiry without consent please</i></p>	<p><b>This is mandatory to be completed if consent not sought</b></p>	

<i>specify the reason for this</i>	
<b>Related Person(s) deciding on the consent</b>	
<b>Other Person(s) Deciding on Consent</b>	
<b>Further Details</b>	
<b>Consent Restrictions</b>	
Consent given for ALL departments and user	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Comments</b>	
<b>Signatures of Consent</b>	
<p><b>I agree to single agency support or to an Early Help Assessment taking place.</b></p> <p><b>I understand that the information that is relevant for my child's / my needs will be recorded and securely stored as a paper or electronic file.</b></p> <p><b>I agree that information can be shared with other professionals in order to help provide and co-ordinate support to my family.</b></p>	
<b>Name:</b> Parent / Carer / Child / YP	
<b>Signed:</b> Parent / Carer / Child / YP	
<b>Name:</b> Practitioner	
<b>Signed:</b> Practitioner	
<b>Date:</b>	

**GP Template Letter:**



**DONCASTER  
SAFEGUARDING  
CHILDREN  
PARTNERSHIP**

**Senders own address (please complete)**

Date:

Dear,

I would like to inform you that **[name of child]** and **[dob]** is now subject to an Early Help Assessment, (EHA). This assessment was completed on date and the family are now supported at Team Around the Child process (TAC).

I am the lead professional for the family and would appreciate your acknowledgement of this letter by signing the declaration at the bottom and posting it back to me please at the above address. If you have any information that you feel may be relevant for me to know, please indicate below and I will make contact with you.

I have attached a copy of the signed consent for your records.

Yours sincerely

**[Name]**

**[Signature]**

**[Title]**

-----  
This is a declaration of any information to be shared is to be returned to the above address.

I (Name of GP) declare that I have received this letter in acknowledgement of the above named child and have shared relevant information.

I do / do not hold relevant information in respect to this child or family at this time.

Please contact the GP for all relevant information sharing

Telephone: .....

Email: .....

**Local Solution Group Referral Form:**

## Initial Conversation

Name: Gender:	Contact number:
------------------	-----------------

Address:

Nationality and Ethnicity:  Communication needs:	Disability:
--	-------------

Members of your Family:

What are you Worried About?

What is Working Well?

What do you need right now to make things better?

**Does anyone in the household have COVID symptoms Y/N**

**Has anyone in the household tested positive of COVID and is still self-isolating Y/N**

**Has anyone in the household had a COVID test and is waiting for results? Y/N**

Identified need	Family Plan			
	Self: What can I do?	Family: What can my family/ friends do?	Community: How can my community support me?	Service: How do I think services can help me?

--	--	--	--	--

**Privacy Notice: What we will do with your data**

The information we will be asking you to provide will be used to help us to understand how we can support you and your family. In order to provide you with the most appropriate services(s) we may need to share your information or gain further information from other agencies as required.

We will not re-use your information unless the law allows us to or unless you give us further permission for the re-use of your information. All information supplied will be stored securely in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation. If you have any questions about the collection of your information or if you wish to ask about what rights you have or wish to complain about the use of your information, please visit <https://www.doncasterchildrenstrust.co.uk/privacy-policy>

**Family Consent Statement**

I have read and understood the Privacy Notice in full (found here <https://www.doncasterchildrenstrust.co.uk/privacy-policy> or I read a printed copy) and agree that information about my family can be shared and discussed at the Local Solution Group and other agencies as required to help find me support. I understand that my information will be stored securely in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Please specify any organisation, department or people who information **cannot** be shared with:

**Informed Consent given for:**

	Name	Signature	Date
Adult (1)			
Adult (2)			
Child/Young Person			
Child/Young Person			
Child/Young Person			

Please confirm that family members have been made aware of the request for additional support, that they have been informed of the next steps and that they will be seen by an identified professional if needed to complete and develop a Family Plan

Referrer Name:	Referrer Contact Details and those of colleague substitute	Referrer Role and Organisation	Referrer Signature	Date

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