

Guidance for completing a Family Early Help Assessment

Introduction

The Early Help Assessment for Children and Young People is one of the elements of integrated frontline service delivery. Along with the Social Care Single Assessment it is also a key feature in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013. In April 2014 the early help assessment (EHA) replaced the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

The EHA is a shared assessment for use across all children's services in Derby City and Derbyshire. It aims to help the early identification of children and young people's emerging needs and promote coordinated service provision to meet them. The assessment is a family based assessment; this means that each child's needs / strengths can be captured within one assessment.

The aim is to help children and their families by:

- Encouraging and promoting practitioners to understand children and their family within their own, unique context.
- Recognising the importance of early and outcome focussed planning in interventions.
- Aiding relationship building in our practice and acknowledging that relationships can be an agent for change.
- Helping us articulate why we are intervening in children's lives to children themselves, their families and to other involved practitioners.
- Promoting sustained improvements to the quality of the lives of children and their families.
- Engaging the child, young person and/or parents/carers and support them to participate in and take responsibility for their contribution to a collaborative assessment. The voice of the child /young person is listened too and recorded throughout the assessment process.
- Supporting the child, young people and parent / carer to adopt a self determining, solution focused approach.
- Ensuring accessibility for all concerned, including the efficient use of time and access to the means needed to undertake an assessment (e.g. equipment, interpreter);
- Being transparent with families so that the purpose of the assessment is clear, the discussion is open and honest and there is no hidden agenda.

If an early help assessment is refused and you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child you should follow Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Boards' Safeguarding Children procedures. Lack of consent should not prevent practitioners meeting if the child's welfare needs are evident and the criteria for Social Care are not met.

Agencies and practitioners must refer to the Derby City and Derbyshire Thresholds Document to help them in their decision making about thresholds for early help services and Local Authority Children's Social Care. **If at any time during the course of the assessment a child has been harmed or abused, or is at risk of being harmed and abused, you must follow safeguarding children procedures. These can be found on www.derbyscb.org.uk or www.derbyshirescb.org.uk.**

Commencing an Early Help Assessment

This guidance outlines the early help assessment process which is encompassed within 7 sections and includes guidance about the team around the family (TAF). It aims to help practitioners to effectively complete the assessment and accompanying action plan.

Practitioners do not need to complete an **Early Help Pre-assessment Checklist and Request for Support** prior to commencing the EHA. The early help pre-assessment checklist has been designed to identify and document low level needs or help decide if an EHA may be needed.

In cases where there are only low level needs the early help pre-assessment checklist single agency action plan, or an agency action plan, must be completed and reviewed as appropriate. Where involvement is required from one other agency, a completed early help pre-assessment checklist and request for support form should be submitted, to the agency able to provide the requested support. This must be done with the consent of the family.

Where there are emerging needs and the child or parent are likely to require co-ordinated support from a range of early help services, or where there are concerns for a child's well-being or a child's needs are not clear, not known or not being met, practitioners should take the necessary steps to progress an early help assessment.

The use of the early help assessment must be discussed with the child and /or their parents/carers and their consent obtained to progress the early help process. It is important that the family are involved in the assessment as well as the development and review of any plans.

Section 1: Your family household

You will need to ensure each family member's details are recorded within this section. It is important to capture information on other significant family or friends living in the household or elsewhere; ensure these details are correct, particularly dates of birth and the spelling of names. It may be helpful to complete a genogram (family tree) with the family, particularly as this is a useful tool to engage a family.

Ascertaining who has parental responsibility for each child should be recorded. In general all birth mothers and most fathers have legal rights and responsibilities as a parent; this is known as parental responsibility. For more information on this please see www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities/what-is-parental-responsibility

You will need to consider the communication needs of the child and their family to ensure they are able to fully participate in the assessment. It is important that you plan and prepare to address these needs.

You may wish to undertake a risk assessment detailing any concerns in relation to the assessment; for example domestic abuse, aggressive pets or access issues. This information can be shared with other agencies who are working with the family.

Section 2: Reasons and understanding about your assessment

Family members who have contributed to the assessment

All family members should be asked to contribute to the assessment, including those not living in the household. It is important that that fathers and male carers are involved in the assessment. Remember to note those who haven't been involved and if not, why not.

What are the reasons for starting this assessment?

As the practitioner commencing the assessment, you should outline clearly and succinctly the reason for undertaking the early help assessment. It is important that you also explain to the child/ young person, and parent/carer why you are recording information and what will happen to it.

Section 3: Your family support, history and safety

Services working with you and your family

As part of the assessment you are gathering information about services working with the family, this includes the details of the universal and other services working with the family i.e. GP, midwife, school nurse, health visitor, school/nursery, children's centre or voluntary sector agencies. In order to complete the early help assessment you will want to contact these services to contribute to the assessment and action planning.

Relevant previous agency involvement and any completed assessments

It is important to identify whether there have been any other previous agency involvement and assessments undertaken with the family in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of the child / young person and their family. This can include a previous CAF or early help assessment. To find out if a CAF or early help assessment has been completed, please contact the following:

- Derby City via your relevant Locality Single Point of Access (SPA) Clerk
 - **Locality 1 & 5:** 641324 or email vcm1and5@derby.gov.uk (via secure email only)
 - **Locality 2:** 641011 or email vcm2@derby.gov.uk (via secure email only)
 - **Locality 3 & 4:** 641148 or email vcm3and4@derby.gov.uk (via secure email only)
- Derbyshire via Call Derbyshire: 01629 533190

Other assessments and or interventions that may have been completed include health or development reviews, education and learning assessments, speech and language assessment, OT assessment, social care single assessment (which may result in a child in need plan or a child protection plan), mental health and /or psychological assessment, drug and/or alcohol assessment/treatment, assessment relating to offending or anti-social behaviour i.e. ONSET or ASSET, CAADA DASH risk identification checklist (which may have included presentation at a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) or housing/homelessness assessment.

It is important that you incorporate any current or previous agency involvement and any other assessments within Section 4: Your families profile and story. This will help to contribute towards developing a holistic perspective of the family.

Significant events and their impact

You can use this section to explain any significant family events and their impact on each family member; this might include separation, divorce, redundancy or bereavement. Completing this section will help to support understanding of the family's current situation.

Your family's safety advice

These questions have been compiled from lessons learned from serious case reviews. If "no" is answered to any of these, please ensure the relevant advice is passed onto the family and this is considered as part of the assessment. A family safety advice guidance document has been developed to support practitioner's to effectively complete this section. The guidance document is available on the EHA page of www.derbyscb.org.uk.

Derbyshire schools only – next steps

At this stage you may wish to obtain further information which will contribute to completing the early help assessment.

Section 4: Your family's profile and story

This section covers three domains:

1. Child's profile and story
2. Parents and carers profile and how they look after the children
3. Family, home, community and support networks

You should explore areas around your immediate concerns so as to look behind the presenting issues and come up with a more holistic view. Wherever possible you should base the discussion on evidence not just opinion, and indicate what your evidence is. You may wish to use an engagement or assessment tool to help you with this. Examples of these include genograms (a family tree), ecomaps (a map of family and support networks and relationships), development or learning assessments, CAADA DASH risk identification checklist (RIC) for domestic violence or to assess the risk to children the domestic violence risk identification matrix (DVRIM) or graded care profile (neglect).

Child's profile and story

Within this section each child / young person in the family can be commented upon. Consider the child or young person's health, physical development, learning and behavioural development, emotional and social development, identity, self esteem and family & social relationships. Remember to include consideration of gender, race, culture, identity, disability issues or if the child is a young carer. Strengths and needs of each individual child / young person should be identified. It is essential that the child's narrative or understanding of their situation and life is articulated in this section. With younger children or unborn babies the child's story should be based on the presenting family issues. Useful tools to ascertain the child's perspective, wishes and feelings will help you to complete this section. Be creative.

Parents and carers profile and how they look after the children

This section is to consider how well parents / carers are able to support their child / ren's development and respond appropriately to their needs. The assessment is to consider basic care, guidance and boundaries, emotional warmth and stability whilst ensuring safety. It is important to identify both strengths and needs of the parents / carers ability to look after the child / ren. Consider if either parent has health issues, a physical disability or

learning needs / disability that may impact on parenting. If they are a carer of a disabled child they may require a carer's assessment.

Ensure you have considered domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse / dependency and the impact of these on the parents / carers ability to parent, as well as the impact on each child or young person.

Family, home, community and support networks

This section is to consider the impact of wider family and environmental elements on the children's development and on the ability of the parents / carers to look after the children. The following are to be considered: family history and relationships, wider family, housing, finances and useful resources available in the community. An ecomap may be a useful tool to help you to complete this section.

Section 5: Child, family and practitioners views

Child / young person's views

Whilst undertaking the assessment the child / young person's wishes and feelings must be sought and included in this section. Where possible this should include all children / young people in the family. Their views on what needs to change, and why, as well as what needs to stay the same, and why, must be captured.

Family views

Each parents / carers views on what needs to change, and why, as well as what needs to stay the same, and why, must be captured.

Practitioner views

This is where you begin to reflect on what needs to remain the same or change and why and is the initial stage of your analysis.

Section 6: Practitioner's analysis

This is the section where you make your professional judgement and analyse the information collated in the assessment resulting in a clear understanding of the children and families situation. It will help you to begin to formulate an action plan with the family and other agencies. Worries / risks should be clearly recorded and the impact (or possible impact) of these on the child and their family. Family strengths should be recognised and built upon. Differences of opinion with the family's views need to be explored, reflected on and taken into account.

Being clear about how the child, family and practitioners will know when things are better (the desired outcome achieved) will help ensure that progress, or the lack of progress, can be identified and drift avoided.

The analysis of the child and family situation is complex and discussions with your line manager and team may help you to reflect on what is or might be happening. Ensuring your assessment is evidence based and considers learning from serious case reviews will help you analyse the information and form a professional view. It may also be helpful to refer to the DSCB Thresholds document located on the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board website www.derbyscb.org.uk or www.derbyshire.org.uk.

This will support you in your decision making about the levels of support and interventions required.

As part of your analysis ensure you record how the child's voice was captured and what changed or improved as a result of listening to their wishes and feelings.

Section 7: Identified actions from the Early Help Assessment

Identified actions from the Early Help Assessment

Having undertaken the early help assessment there will be immediate identified actions to put in place. At this point you will decide whether these actions can be delivered by you and the family without requiring any other agency involvement or if a Team around the Family (TAF) meeting needs arranging. Please record these actions in this section.

Each child / young person and parents / carers are asked to comment on the identified actions from the early help assessment.

Who has seen the children? When and where? It is important that during the assessment practitioners see the child, so that their wishes and feelings can be sought.

What might happen if this plan is not followed?

Completing this section will support the family and practitioner to progress plan.

What about the lead professional?

The practitioner completing the early help assessment does not automatically become the lead professional, but is responsible for organising the first TAF where the lead professional is identified.

The lead professional could be any practitioner working with the child / young person and family. The lead professional is responsible for coordinating provision and acting as a single point of contact in providing integrated Early Help services. The lead professional is not accountable for the actions of other practitioners, or services within the TAF.

Information sharing

The assessment aims to support good practice in information sharing about the needs of the families as part of Early Help services. The early help assessment is a voluntary assessment and consent must be given at the start of the process for the assessment.

Opportunity must be given to the parent or young person to discuss the content of the assessment, and where appropriate a copy given.

Once the assessment has been undertaken the parent / carer or young person will be required to sign the document to ensure they understand how the information will be stored and shared.

If emerging needs are identified by the completion of the early help assessment and it is likely that services are needed from other agencies, then the assessment and action plan can, with the consent of the family, be submitted to the agencies requesting their input.

The local authorities have a duty to capture data on early help assessments. In Derby practitioners' must complete and submit a monitoring form once the assessment has been

completed (either before or after the first TAF) and on assessment closure. The monitoring of early help assessments in Derbyshire will be undertaken as part of the formal quality assurance arrangements which exist within Derbyshire County Council's Children and Young People's Department.

Team Around the Family (TAF) Meeting

The team around the family (TAF) is a model of multi agency service provision. The TAF meeting will bring together a range of different practitioners from across both adults and children's services, along with the family, in order to offer appropriate support via a multi agency action plan. This should usually be within 4-6 weeks of completing the early help assessment.

TAF members are jointly responsible for developing and delivering a package of solution focused support to meet needs of the family identified through the early help assessment.

TAF members should:

- Ensure that children / family members are prepared and supported to attend a TAF meeting – for most children and families this will be a new experience.
- Ensure where a child or family member is not able to attend that their views are incorporated throughout the meeting.
- Be responsible for delivering the actions they have agreed to carry out as part of the action plan;
- Support the lead professional by keeping them informed, attend TAF meetings, and offer guidance and advice;
- Contribute to chairing and minute taking of TAF meetings.

Should parents / carers not attend the TAF meeting, it will continue and the action plan will be reviewed. Parents / carers should be informed of the discussion and given details of the updated action plan as soon as possible after the meeting by the lead professional.

TAF Paperwork to be completed

TAF paperwork is to be used to record the TAF meeting discussions; this is separate from the early help assessment document.

Review notes

The identified actions from the early help assessment should be reviewed at the TAF as they will help form the basis of the multi agency action plan.

The child and the family's comments about the services received should be noted in this section, including what was good, did it help or make a difference and what needs to be improved.

Team around the family action plan

You will need to complete the action plan in partnership with the child / young person and their family. The plan will be a key vehicle through which families, children / young people understand what needs to be changed and how the early help services will work together. The practice principle is the action plan is written for the family and reviewed, by TAF meetings, in a timely manner this will usually be 6 weekly interval's but can be earlier or later depending on the needs of the family.

The plan should be written clearly in a family friendly language and be clear what needs to be achieved in order to make the necessary changes identified by you and the family.

Plans need to:

- Ensure you have addressed the current reason for involvement;
- Ensure actions are achievable, specific and measurable;
- Ensure actions have timescales;
- Encourage what is working well;
- Include the families ideas in order to effect what needs to change;
- Draw on the key people who need to take action (this may include family and friends);
- Be updated and reviewed;
- Be given to the family and practitioners involved.

At each TAF meeting a review of the previous action plan must be undertaken considering what has worked well and what has not been achieved. Any actions either not achieved or not reaching their intended outcomes, should be reviewed. All additional or amended actions must be incorporated into the updated action plan.

There is opportunity to record the child / young person and families views throughout the TAF meeting and develop further action plans, if deemed necessary. Future action plans should recognise and encourage good practice already identified.

It is essential that you record on the action plan what might happen if the action plan is not followed. This highlights the importance of taking forward the actions on the plan.

Can the assessment be closed?

NO - Agree a review date with the family and TAF members. Remember to maintain good communications with family and professional group. Advice and support can be sought via the professional group or other networks. Access to case supervision can also promote effective safe working practices.

In Derby the completed assessment can be submitted to the weekly Vulnerable Children's Meeting (VCM) if:

- a complex package of support is needed, or;
- services are required from a Multi Agency Team (MAT);
- or a none urgent referral to Social Care is required.

This can be done by the practitioner who completed the assessment or the Lead Professional via the Single Point of Access Clerk in the relevant locality (see contact details on page 3). If the child has a significant disability, the assessment and plan should be sent to The Lighthouse Single Point of Access Clerk, 256990 or via secure email to BusinessSupport-LightHouse@derby.gov.uk and noted "for the attention of SPA."

YES - Should all actions be achieved it can be agreed for the assessment to be closed, with no further TAF meetings taking place. Ensure children / young people and families are aware of any continued support after the early help assessment is closed. This can include on-going support from nurseries, schools, voluntary sector services or universal health services. **A discussion needs to take place with the practitioner's line manager and agreement reached for case closure.**

Where there are any differences of opinion in the professional group and these should be resolved using the DSCB escalation policy. This can be found on the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board websites www.derbyscb.org.uk and www.derbyshirescb.org.uk.

In Derby the lead professional should complete the early help assessment closure monitoring form and forward it to the Single Point of Access Clerk in the relevant locality.

Version Control

Version	Author/s	Amendments	Signed off by	Date	Review Date
1.	Multi Agency Task & Finish Group	n/a	DSCBs' Policy and Procedures Group	March 2014	March 2015
	DSCB Policy Officer	Minor amendments to contact details only	n/a	May 2014	March 2015
2.	Multi Agency Task & Finish Group	Updates to ensure consistency with amendments EHA documents.	DSCBs' Policy and Procedures Group	April 2015	April 2018