

Isle of Wight Early Help information sheet- for professionals

What is Early Help?

Early help is the term used by agencies on the Isle of Wight to describe our approach to providing support to potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families as soon as problems start to emerge.

Although research shows that the most impact can be made during a child's early years, early help is not just for very young children, as problems may emerge at any point throughout childhood and adolescence. Children and families are entitled to early help if and when they need it.

The purpose of early help is, through prompt and targeted interventions, to prevent issues and problems becoming acute, chronic and costly to the child, young person, the family and the wider community.

Why is Early Help required?

Universal, Single Agency and Multi Agency support services.

Most children's needs are met by their family or universal services that is, those services that are available to everyone (e.g school, GP). These are provided as a right to all children, young people and their families, including those whose needs are also met within single and multi agency support services.

For those children and families who face more challenges and may have multiple needs, single agency support services provide additional capacity and expertise to work with these families to address their needs. For example Speech and Language therapy is a single agency support.

For children whose needs and circumstances make them more vulnerable, a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach is usually best, based on an early help assessment, with a Lead professional to work closely with the child and family to ensure they receive all the support they require. An example of multi agency support could be when a child in the family receives Speech and Language Therapy, parents receive Housing support and Mental Health services are involved.

How does it work?

We use a range of conversation opportunities to identify appropriate support for the child and their family. Anybody working with children, young people and families, including services for adults for example mental health and housing, is responsible for starting conversations on their behalf.

Where a practitioner feels that a child or young person may need additional support (beyond that available from a single agency) there will be the opportunity to have a quality conversation with practitioners from other agencies to: clarify the nature of the

concerns; identify the needs of the child / young person; and agree the appropriate response and how it will be co-ordinated.

Conversation opportunities include the phone calls and meetings that take place between those people working across universal, single and multi agency support services.

The best time is early in the life of the problem, when it is felt that the child's needs are not being met and something else is needed to improve their outcomes.

As children's needs are met and concerns are reduced, we continue to have quality conversations in order to provide appropriate support for the child and their family until that support is no longer required.

How does an Early Help Assessment Plan get completed?

1. Identify strengths and needs early. A practitioner works together with a child and family to gather information about their circumstances and understand the priorities for change. They then gain consent from parents to refer to MASH to see if Early Help is the right level of support for families, or whether a family will need support from Children's Services Department. Then an Inter-Agency referral form is completed, stating that there is a requirement for an Early Help Assessment and the referrer would like to be made the Lead Professional.

2. Deliver integrated services. If a number of agencies work with a family, their early help activity is captured and registered using an Early Help Assessment form. This is a way of ensuring families have the best possible joined up support and everyone works together on the same agreed goals:

- a meeting will be arranged within one month of the completion of the Early help assessment. The practitioner will bring together the family and the relevant agencies. These people become a Team Around the Family (TAF) and importantly the TAF always includes family members;
- the TAF creates a plan with a long term goal and a summary of actions which identifies who is leading an action and when it will be completed by;
- the Lead Professional sets a date to meet every 6-12 weeks for a review of the identified goals;
- all this information is captured on an Early Help Plan, which is circulated to all the members of the TAF.

3. Review the delivery plan. The Lead Professional organises and chairs a meeting of the TAF to discuss the progress that has been made and decide on the next steps. This is captured on an Early Help Plan. The plan is reviewed as often as required until progress is good enough to no longer need the same level of integrated working.

Lead Professionals co-ordinate the agreed plan and act as a single point of contact for a family. This role is not new to most practitioners and they will be expected to

take on the role as required. The Lead Professional is NOT responsible for services delivered by other people. Each person is accountable through their normal line management and supervision arrangements in their home agencies for fulfilling their commitments to children and families.

If you have a concern about a child or family

Please speak with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

MASH phone number: 0300 300 0901

Link to Inter-agency referral form:

https://forms.hants.gov.uk/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-7e6115a7-b0ba-484d-991f-084c1248ac72/AF-Stage-52cf8e73-0daf-47d4-bb55-0fdad856d3e6/definition.json&redirectlink=/en&cancelRedirectLink=/en