

Early Help *Assess-Plan-Review* and *Schools*

Factsheet

Early Help is a key part of delivering services that are integrated and focused around the needs of children and young people. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), explains that:

‘Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to: identify children and families who would benefit from early help; undertake an assessment of the need for early help; provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child’

Understanding the Assess-Plan-Review process

The Early Help Assessment is a holistic approach to conducting an assessment of a child, young person and family's additional needs which are not being met by the universal services they are receiving. Early Help facilitates the process by which different agencies working with the same child can ‘join-up’ and provides a co-ordinated and timely approach to support this.

The Early Help Assessment is a standardised tool used to conduct an assessment of a family's additional needs and helps practitioners to decide how those needs should be met. It is used by practitioners across children's services in England.

Early Help provides an assessment that is common across services. It helps to embed a shared language; supports better understanding amongst practitioners; and reduces the number and scale of different assessments faced by families.

Early Help and schools

Ensuring that children, young people and families receive support quickly and that additional needs are identified early will need the input of lots of different children's services across the public, private and third sectors. Schools play an important role.

Keeping Children Safe in Education: for Schools and Colleges (2018), DfE, explains that:

‘All staff should be prepared to identify children who may benefit from early help.

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.’

The Early Help Assess-Plan-Review process will help school staff to establish links quickly with other practitioners who are working with a child, young person or family. It will help engage other relevant services earlier and more reliably.

The process, particularly in the context of extended services, will help schools tackle, along with other services, a broader range of social, behavioural and emotional problems acting as a barrier to learning and attainment.

The benefits of the Early Help process

School staff have reported a number of benefits from using these processes including:

- the process has helped them to access services for the child, young person or family quicker
- many have welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with the child’s parents or carers in a different way
- they have been able to develop valuable skills for their own career development.

What should schools do?

Schools should ensure current arrangements are effective in identifying children, young people and families in need of support. This would include emerging emotional distress and health needs. These arrangements should be set up in a sensitive way that ensures confidentiality for the child, young person and family.

These arrangements could include:

- ensuring that every member of staff is clear on their role in the early identification of emerging needs, and knows where they can get support e.g. from a local multi-agency team
- setting up drop-in provision
- participating in a locally convened multi-agency Team Around the Family (TAF) reviews.

Schools must ensure that all staff are made aware of, understand and are carrying out their responsibilities in line with professional standards and current child-related legislation about identifying pupil need, in particular child protection, special educational needs and disabilities.

Staff need to be aware that there will be situations that require, for example, an immediate referral to social services rather than early help. Schools should therefore follow their safeguarding policy.

How can schools further prepare for Early Help?

There are several steps a school can take to make introducing early help more straight forward including:

- raising general awareness with staff about why, when and how early help can be used effectively
- enabling staff to undergo Sefton Early Help (Assess-Plan-Review) training
- building these processes into school procedures for children identified with possible support needs
- schools may decide to link early help to other activities, for example by using the early help plan with universal assessments such as the Foundation Stage Profile and other assessments for older children. This may provide a broader check of a child's progress using internal expertise such as SENCOs, school nurses, learning mentors, attendance officers, pastoral managers, as well as support from other services if necessary, to aid identification of support needs.

Who within a school setting might carry out an Early Help Assessment?

The assessment should be carried out by the person who the school considers to be the most appropriate. This person will need to have undergone local training in early help procedures. Examples of those known to be running early help plans include pastoral staff, SENCOs (or teaching assistants supporting the SENCO), learning mentors, heads of year, teachers and head teachers. Everyone working with children should know about early help and understand who the most appropriate person is within the school to undertake the early help process.

Line management and supervision

It is important that managers of staff carrying running an Early Help Plan also undergo early help training.

Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (Jan 2019, Draft)

New guidance on the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework explains that:

‘Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which:

- the provider has a culture of safeguarding that facilitates effective arrangements to: identify learners who may need early help or who are at risk of neglect, abuse, grooming or exploitation; help learners reduce their risk of harm by securing the support they need, or referring in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help; and manage safe recruitment and allegations about adults who may be a risk to learners and vulnerable adults.’

Early Help Module

EHM provides authorised practitioners throughout Sefton with access to a system which allows them to store and retrieve early help caseload information electronically, across agency and geographical borders where necessary.

