

# Early Help Guidance for Professionals

Creating change together for children

*Providing the right children, young people and families with the right support, in the right place at the right time.*

June 2025



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## Glossary

<b>Child</b>	Refers to children and young people
<b>C&amp;F Assessment</b>	Child and Family Assessment completed by Children's Social Care
<b>CSC</b>	Children's Social Care
<b>Early Help Plan</b>	Refers to the plan in place to support the child/family as a result of the Early Help Assessment
<b>EHA</b>	Early Help Assessment
<b>EHM (Liquidlogic EHM)</b>	Early Help Module, the online case management system used in Peterborough
<b>Family Action Plan</b>	Refers to the plan set to capture the high levels goals linked to the Supporting Families Programme
<b>Family Valued</b>	Relational practice approach adopted for Peterborough
<b>Gillick competency (Fraser guidelines)</b>	Guidelines to assess whether a child is mature enough to provide consent to engage in services
<b>Lead Professional (LP)</b>	Professional identified to lead and coordinate Early Help support
<b>MASH</b>	Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub
<b>Parents</b>	Refers to parents, carers and others with parental responsibility
<b>RPC</b>	Reducing Parental Conflict
<b>SMART Action Plan</b>	Acronym used to describe an Action Plan that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound.
<b>Supporting Families Programme</b>	A nationally funded government programme which requires Local Authorities (LA) to support and track families with multiple identified needs.
<b>TAF</b>	Team Around the Family
<b>Targeted Support</b>	A targeted intervention for a child and/or family as part of an Early Help support plan

# What is Early Help?

Being a parent, mother, father or carer can be one of the best jobs in the world - but also one of the hardest. Recognising and acknowledging some of the challenges of raising children is important.

Families may need extra support to ensure that children and young people are able to thrive and achieve their potential. Some families may need short or long-term support from outside their existing network with issues that may arise, and child and family's challenges may include development, financial difficulties, education, health or social issues within the family or community.

*“Early help is support for children of all ages that improves a family’s resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. It is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area.”*

**Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023<sup>1</sup>**

As outlined in *Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023*, Early Help is a collaborative approach that aims to provide the right children, young people and families with the right support, in the right place at the right time.

It is not a specific team or service, but a model of working for **all** partners working with children, young people and their families. By supporting children and their families earlier, together we can build on families’ strengths, develop their capacity to make positive change, reducing challenges they are facing and help them to find solutions that will make their lives better in the future.

*“A strong Early Help System is made up of many different types of practitioners and services who operate as one.”*

**Early Help System Guide, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, March 2022<sup>2</sup>**

**Any** professional working with a child or family can be part of the process and all staff should be aware of the local Early Help arrangements and understand their role and responsibility in it.

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<sup>1</sup> [Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023 HM Government](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Early Help System Guide, Dept for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities](#)

# Levels of support

## Universal

Most children's needs are met by their family or universal services that are available to everyone, provided as a right to all children, young people and their families.

## Targeted

Targeted services provide additional capacity and expertise and may use a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach, early help assessment and plan with a Lead Professional coordinating support.

## Specialist services

Specialist services may be required when needs cannot be met via universal or targeted services. You may need a discussion about what is available and how to request it, but this may be Children's Social Care, Youth Offending or specialist Health services.

# Effective Support for Children and Families (Threshold Tool)

The Effective Support for Children and Families document is for everyone who works with children and young people and their families in Peterborough and helps to determine what appropriate response may be required when supporting them, whilst keeping them safe from harm.

It sets out the way we can work together to put the child, young person and their family at the centre of our practice to provide effective support to equip them to solve problems and find solutions at an early stage to prevent situations escalating.

Offering preventative and targeted interventions as part of the Early Help approach is vital to minimise the need for specialist support being required.

See [Peterborough Threshold Document: Continuum of Help and Support](#)

## Family Valued approach

In Peterborough, we have adopted the Family Valued approach, which is part of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) programme set up by the Department for Education (DfE).

*“Family Valued (FV) is an approach that seeks to promote relational (restorative) practice. It is underpinned by fostering a clear set of shared values and practice principles which emphasise the strengths and importance of family and is centred on productive working relationships between workers and families, and beyond that with partner agencies and the wider community.”*

**Social Care Institute for Excellence, Leeds Family Valued**

**Family Valued** is centred on a clear focus on the child or young person and is based on the relational principle of working *with* children and families, rather than doing things to or for them. It is a whole-system approach to changing culture, behaviours, and practice, which leads to transforming outcomes for children that focus on building and maintaining positive relationships. Being centred on the child and their experience, it is underpinned by a belief in families’ strengths and supporting them to find solutions.

## Early Help framework

*“Strong multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is vital to identifying and responding to the needs of children and families.”*

**Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023**

Effective Early Help relies upon local agencies working together to identify children and families who would benefit from support at the earliest opportunity, promoting our local vision that “every child and young person in Peterborough has the opportunity to thrive, succeed and reach their full potential.”

## Consent and Information Sharing

Early Help is a voluntary process and gaining the child and/or family’s consent is crucial. The approach relies on collaboration, with open and honest dialogue with the family and without this are unlikely to gain and/or maintain positive engagement.

When discussing the completion of an Early Help Assessment (EHA)<sup>3</sup> with a child, young person or family, professionals should **always** share a copy of the [Peterborough Privacy Notice](#)<sup>4</sup> with them, which outlines what information will be collected, how this might be used and how it will be stored.

Professionals should ensure the person providing consent has read and fully understood the Privacy Notice and agree to this before proceeding further with the process.

A young person aged 16 or over, or a child under 16 who has the capacity to understand and make their own decisions (Fraser Competence), may give (or refuse) consent for the assessment to take place. You should always encourage children under 16 to involve their mother, father or carer as appropriate.

*“If a family does not consent to an early help assessment, practitioners should seek to understand why this is the case, so that they can provide reassurance to the family about their concerns.”*

### **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023**

It is important to explore a family’s reluctance to engage in the Early Process and how any fears or concerns they might have can be addressed. Often these link back to previous experiences or fear of judgement from others and via relational practice, can often be alleviated.

Where this can’t be achieved, practitioners should explore how else the need may be met via universal services to prevent escalation and continue to offer support, where appropriate.

**Where you have concerns of the immediate safeguarding of a child, young person or adult please follow your organisation’s Safeguarding procedures without delay. Please use the [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board](#) for further information**

## **Gillick Competency and Fraser guidelines**

Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines help people who work with children to determine whether a child is mature enough to make decisions about things that affect them and understand the implications of those decisions. This is often referred to as whether the child is 'Gillick competent' or whether they meet the 'Fraser guidelines'.

*“..parental right yields to the child's right to make his own decisions when he reaches a sufficient understanding and intelligence to be capable of making up his own mind on the matter requiring decision.”*

### **Gillick vs West Norfolk, 1985**

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<sup>3</sup> [Early Help Assessment \(EHA\)](#) – an holistic children and family assessment and planning tool

<sup>4</sup> [Peterborough Corporate Privacy Notice pages](#)



Both of terms of ‘Gillick competency’ and ‘Fraser guidelines’ originate from a legal case in the 1980’s relating to contraceptive and sexual health treatment to children under 16, without parental consent. However, it is the Gillick competency that is used in a wider context to help assess whether they are able to make informed decisions about their lives.

Whilst there is no defined assessment when considering Gillick competency, professionals working with children should consider a child’s capacity to consent, including:

- The child’s age, maturity and mental capacity
- Their understanding of the issue and what it involves - including advantages, disadvantages and potential long-term impact
- Their understanding of the risks, implications and consequences that may arise from their decision
- How well they understand any advice or information they have been given
- Their understanding of any alternative options, if available
- Their ability to explain a rationale around their reasoning and decision making.

As best practice, professionals should always aim to involve parents in conversations about their child and encourage young people to tell their parents about decisions they are making.

However, there may be times where a young person does not want to involve their parents in decisions. Where this occurs, professionals should explore the reasons for this and, if appropriate, discuss ways you could help them inform their parents or carers. For example, you could talk to the young person's parents or carers on their behalf.

In circumstances where parents refuse to engage in support and a young person, deemed to be Gillick competent, wishes to proceed with the Early Help approach, the EHA can be completed with the young person directly.

If you don't think a child is Gillick competent or there are inconsistencies in their understanding, you should seek consent from their parents or carers before proceeding.

## Whole family working

In Peterborough, we promote a whole family approach of “one family, one assessment, one plan” to aim to provide the most holistic and inclusive support as possible.

If you are considering completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA), it’s important to explore with the family who the children are living in the home with, what their individual needs are and how these impact one another. Where possible, the EHA should be completed collaboratively for all children in the family, where there is appropriate consent to do so, to ensure the needs for the whole family are considered.

All family members should be invited to contribute to the assessment and their voices should be evident throughout.

## Early Help Assessment (EHA)

The Early Help Assessment (EHA) is a holistic assessment and planning tool completed collaboratively with a child, young person and their family to identify and coordinate support required, particularly where a multi-agency response is needed.

It assesses the current situation for a child, young person and/or their family and not only helps to identify their needs and support they might need, but also highlight strengths and resilience factors for both the children and the adults in the family.

The EHA is a shared tool that all agencies can use to develop a coordinated response, improve multi-agency working and ensure that the child and their family are getting all the support that they need, from wherever they need it.

It aims to resolve any challenges experienced by the family in the early stages and therefore minimises the need for specialist interventions, such as Children's Social Care (CSC).

An Early Help Assessment should consider the following:

- The needs of all family members, where they may be relevant to the needs of the child/young person or impact on them.
- Underlying causes of the need/concern and past experiences that could contribute to this e.g. trauma, additional needs, environmental factors etc.
- The family members' strengths and resilience factors, and how these might be used to find solutions to the problems identified
- Support already available from within the family's own wider support network e.g. grandparents, friends, neighbours
- Support accessed previously and what impact this had
- Extra help and support needed from your own or external agencies
- Presenting differing views - you may have different opinions on the areas of concern to that of the family, always be honest and transparent and give an evidence base to your perspective, whilst recording and respecting the views of the family.
- What realistic changes can and cannot be positively achieved

## Best Practice approach when completing an EHA

### **Finalise the EHA in a timely manner**

As with all assessment processes, the EHA should be completed in a timely manner, ideally **within 3-4 weeks** from the point of initiation. Allowing too much time to complete the assessment, can lead to the information collated no longer being relevant or provide an up-to-date picture of the life for the child and family.

### **Collaborate with other professionals**

Always aim to liaise with other professionals working with the child and/or family. Where there is appropriate consent to do so, make contact with other settings siblings may attend or people who can contribute to the assessment to capture a holistic view of the child and family's circumstances.

### **Share the assessment with the family**

Always aim to maintain transparency when working with children and their families and remember the EHA is *their* assessment. Ensure you share a copy of the completed assessment with them and ensure they are happy with the content before finalising.

### **Aim to empower the family – do with not to**

Professionals should always aim to foster an environment where the families are encouraged to problem-solve themselves and decide how they can best make progress. Always '*do with*' families and not to - this not only empowers the families to develop their skills and independence but also reduces reliance on professionals facilitating or having to control the process.

### **Keep the EHA up to date**

Aim to review and update any completed EHA every 6 months to ensure it is relevant to the current needs for the child and family. This is important should you wish to seek additional Targeted Support.

## Team Around the Family (TAF) and Action Plans

A Team around the Family (TAF) is a meeting to discuss and plan support following completion of an EHA, which has identified unmet additional needs.

The TAF aims to bring together the family and professionals who are working with them, to agree and coordinate support and interventions.

The meetings are coordinated and chaired by the Lead Professional (LP) and the initial TAF should be held within 4 weeks of the EHA being completed and held every 6-8 weeks (or more frequently if required) thereafter to monitor progress, review the support plan and consider any emerging needs. The TAF should be organised, as far as practicably is possible, to facilitate parent/carer and/or the child or young person's attendance.

Practitioners should ensure child/young person, and the parent/carers can share their views during the meeting and are captured and recorded within the meeting record. When a person is unable to attend the meeting, the Lead Professional should make every effort to ensure their input is sought and advocated during the meeting.

A written record of the meeting should always be produced, to capture a summary of the discussion and include a SMART<sup>5</sup> action plan that supports the identified needs of the child/young person and their family.

A copy of the meeting record and action plan should be shared with all relevant parties.

## SMART Action Planning

When setting any plan or goals, whether personal or professional, consideration should always be given as to *why* the change is required, *what* this might look like, *how* it might be achieved and *who* needs to be involved. Early Help plans and support undertaken with children and families should adopt the same principle.

Early Help plans should be family-led and evidence the voice of the child, as well as parents/carers. The family should be involved in identifying their goals and agreeing actions together with the people who will be supporting them, to increase the chance of achieving them.

Professionals are encouraged to develop SMART Action Plans when working with children and their families in both Early Help as well as Children's Social Care.

SMART Action Planning is a widely used tool using 5 characteristics to plan and achieve goals/targets. It helps to create clear, attainable and meaningful goals whilst motivating those involved to work together to achieve progress.

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<sup>5</sup>SMART – approach to develop effective and objective action plans that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imebound.

<b>S</b>	<b>Specific</b> Plans should specifically identify <b>what</b> the need is, <b>what</b> action is required to address this, <b>why</b> is it important, <b>what</b> resource/support is needed to achieve this and <b>who</b> is responsible for taking this forward.
<b>M</b>	<b>Measurable</b> Agreed plans should be <b>measurable</b> , so it is possible to see progress being made or quickly identify where parts of the plan isn't working. The goal should consider <b>how</b> will you know it has been achieved.
<b>A</b>	<b>Achievable</b> The plan agreed with the family should be <b>realistic</b> and <b>achievable</b> with the resources and time available.
<b>R</b>	<b>Relevant</b> Agreed outcomes should always reflect the needs identified via EHA and TAF process. The plan should work to objectives that the child and family are <b>willing</b> and <b>able</b> to work towards and that are <b>meaningful to them</b> , as well as professionals supporting them.
<b>T</b>	<b>Timely</b> All actions/outcomes of a plan should have <b>definitive timescales</b> for completion attributed to them that are within agreement with the person responsible for them, including the family. This helps to keep things on track and avoid drift.

## Lead Professional (LP)

The Lead Professional (LP) is a fundamental element of the Early Help process and is responsible for the coordination of TAF meetings and support, whilst acting as a single point of contact for the family through the Early Help process.

The best place person to take on the Lead Professional role is usually those with the best relationship with the family, or the person who is the most relevant based on the agreed support plan, however, it can be any practitioner working with the family.

The child, young person and their family should be consulted and involved in the decision on who is identified as the Lead Professional, and this should be determined by the end of the initial TAF meeting.

The Lead Professional is responsible for

- The co-ordination and chairing of TAF meetings, inviting all professionals working with the family
- Supporting the family to engage in the TAF meetings
- Chairing TAF meeting to ensure they remain focussed, providing opportunity for all family members and professionals to share relevant information and updates
- Maintaining appropriate case recording on EHM

As the needs and relationships with the family change, there may be times that the Lead Professional role needs to transfer to another professional, for example when a child/young person move school setting or the intervention changes. Where this occurs, engagement and consent should be sought from the family to facilitate this.

## Early Help Module (EHM)

In Peterborough, Liquidlogic EHM is used to record all Early Help activity in the city within an *Early Help Episode*. EHM is a web-based case management recording system provided by System C, hosted by the Local Authority.

All EHAs and TAF meetings completed with families should be recorded on EHM to evidence support being delivered, the impact of this and the Local Authority to coordinate strategic support and service provision.

Partner access to this system is available and encouraged by all professionals working with children, young people and their families via the Early Help approach, particularly those working in Early Years, Education and Children's Health providers. It is recommended that there is always at least one or more active users for each provider, and we strongly encourage Managers/Leaders/Designated Safeguarding Leads to also have access, in order to appropriately support their staff and provide case supervision where required.

More information and details on how to request access can be found on the [Peterborough City Council website](#) or via contacting the Peterborough Targeted Support Service.

## The Stages for the Early Help process

When it is identified that an Early Help approach is appropriate to support a child or family, whether that is part of a single or multi-agency response, you can follow the following steps:

### Stage 1: Exploring early intervention and offering support

This means building the initial relationship with the child, young person and/or their family, which is fundamental to fostering meaningful engagement. Depending on your role in the family's journey, this could take some time, but is time well spent to achieve the best chance at achieving positive change.

- Be supportive, open and transparent
- Clearly explain the purpose of Early Help process, how this will aim to help them and what support they might be able to access
- Explore and try to alleviate any worries or concerns they may have about the process
- Gain consent to complete an EHA for the family
- Share the Early Help Privacy Notice

## Stage 2: Completing the EHA

The EHA should always be completed collaboratively with the family and look holistically at the whole family, not just one child in isolation. Some of this information you may already have, and other information might be gathered over a series of meetings and discussions with the family and other professionals.

Your conversations with the family should explore

- What life is like for the child, young person and family
- The concerns/difficulties for the child, young person and/or family, both from the professionals and the family's perspective
- The family's strengths and resilience factor – what is going well
- Impact seen/felt on wider family members (see [Whole Family Working](#))
- The family's existing support network (see [Family Networking](#))
- All professionals/services already working with the family and information they may be able to contribute
- Previous interventions and support accessed by the family
- What support the family may benefit from and be happy to engage with

Information gathered from these discussions should be collated onto the EHA Form on EHM and shared with the family, to ensure they are happy with the content of their assessment, before being submitted to the Early Help Gateway.

EHA's should be reviewed and updated every 6 months to ensure the information remains relevant to the needs and circumstances for the child and family.

## Stage 3: Coordinating an initial TAF Meeting and reviews

Once the EHA has been completed, an initial TAF meeting should be arranged and held within 4 weeks.

All attendees should be discussed and agreed with the family prior to invites being extended and should be sent in advance to maximise opportunity of appropriate professionals being able to attend.

TAF meetings should not be held without representation from the child, young person and/or the family. The initial TAF should consider:

- The identified needs highlighted in the EHA
- Any changes since EHA completed
- What changes do the family want to achieve and support they may need to do this
- How might the family's existing support network be able to help facilitate change
- What professional support might the family need
- Where relevant, a plan should the family encounter a crisis (see [Safety Planning](#))

A record of the TAF meeting and agreed SMART<sup>6</sup> action plan (see [SMART Action Planning](#)), linked to the needs identified in the EHA, should be shared with the family and professionals. TAF Review Meetings should be held every 6-8 weeks to review progress, emerging needs and the action plan adapted as appropriate.

## Stage 4: Targeted Support interventions

On occasion, families may need a more targeted intervention added to their support plan. This might be a Family Worker or Young People's Worker to complete a bespoke period of support to address specific areas of need that cannot be easily met from universal and community support.

The request can be made in the EHM system via the *Request for Targeted Support* Form. See [Requesting Targeted Support](#).

## Stage 5: Early Help Closure

When the child, young person and/or family reach a stage where there are no further unmet needs; their needs are now being sustained and/or met by universal services or the family no longer wish to engage in the Early Help process, the Early Help episode should be closed.

Support can continue to be provided to the family via universal services, however if there is no longer an active Early Help plan in place that is being regularly reviewed, there is no need to keep the Early Help Episode open. Prior to closure, all appropriate information should be recorded with the EHM Early Help Episode to reflect the current circumstances and support offered.

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<sup>6</sup> SMART – approach to develop effective and objective action plans that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imebound.



## Best Practice guidance for the Early Help process

### **Explore needs for the whole family**

To ensure any EHA is holistic, the needs for the whole family should be explored and not just that of the child you might be working with. Often one child's needs have a direct impact of other members of the household and their needs may be missed if not considered within the wider support plan.

### **Collaborate with other professionals**

Always aim to liaise with other professionals working with the child and/or family. Where there is appropriate consent to do so, make contact with other settings siblings may attend or people who can contribute to the assessment to capture a holistic view of the family's circumstances.

### **Hold regular TAF meetings**

The initial TAF should be held within 4 weeks of completing the EHA and then held every 6-8 weeks thereafter. The agreed action plan should be regularly reviewed and where required, adjusted to suit the needs and capacity of the people involved.

Where this doesn't happen, implementation of the support plan is vulnerable to drift and lead to disengagement of the family and/or services.

### **Ensure regular case recording on EHM**

It is vital that Early Help Episodes open on EHM are regularly updated to reflect the current circumstances for a child, young person and/or their family. In the main, this will be captured via the TAF Meeting Records, however interim updates can also be captured via the *Case Notes* functionality.

## Examples of when it is Early Help

There are a wide range of circumstances when a child and family may benefit from Early Help. Not all require an Early Help Assessment, however, should be considered to enable a holistic picture to be obtained for the child and family's life to build an appropriate support plan.

The list below are some examples of where the approach may be appropriate, however it is by no means exhaustive.

- The child's needs are unclear, or broader than your service can address alone
- A significant or worrying change observed in a child's appearance, demeanour, behaviour or health
- There are emerging worries about the parents or homelife
- Where a child, parent or another practitioner has raised a concern or requested help
- Parental elements e.g. Parental Conflict, substance misuse, domestic violence, physical or mental health issues or criminality (where not deemed an immediate safeguarding risk)
- Child is 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 or at risk of committing offences
- Persistent absence from school or risk of permanent exclusion
- A significant event in a child's life has occurred e.g. bereavement or family breakdown
- Child is undertaking caring responsibilities
- Child is experiencing or perpetrating bullying behaviour
- Family being homeless or being threatened with eviction and those living in temporary accommodation
- Becoming a teenage mother/father or is the child of teenage parents

## Refusing Early Help

Early Help is a consensual process, and a child or family have a right to refuse to an Early Help Assessment or subsequent support plan if they wish to do so.

Where this occurs, the professional should try to determine whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate to a level likely to cause *significant* harm. If so, a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) (see [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub](#)) should be considered.

It is important to review the [Effective Support for Children and Families](#) and where required, contact your Early Help Support Officer for further advice.

Keeping a chronology of your concerns and the impact on the child, along with what support has been offered to help the child and/or family can be useful to support contact into the MASH.

## Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The Peterborough MASH is a multi-agency environment with involvement from Children's Social Care, Police, Health, Education, Early Help, Domestic Abuse Services and a number of virtual partners, such as Youth Offending, Probation and Housing.

The MASH receives all contacts submitted to Children's Social Care from professionals and members of the public that raise a safeguarding concern for child. The team initially triage the information received and determine one of the following outcomes

- No further action (NFA)
- Provision of advice and information
- Progress to Early Help Hub Enquiry
- Progress to Children's Social Care for C&F Assessment

In some circumstances, a MASH enquiry may be completed to help inform the decision. This involves the family and all relevant agencies being contacted to discuss the concern and share information. Depending on the level of concern raised, a decision will be applied within 72 hours.

## Lived Experience of the Child

In all assessment processes, it is vital to involve children their views, wishes and feelings in a bid to identify what life is like for them. This often differs from the parent's perspective and brings to light levels of need that might not have otherwise been identified.

*“Article 12 says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This principle recognises children and young people as actors in their own lives and applies at all times throughout a child's life.”*

**Right to Participation, UNICEF<sup>7</sup>**

The phrases 'voice of the child' or the 'lived experience of the child' are referred to regularly throughout Early Help, Health, Education and Social Care processes. Essentially, they are the same thing, however that it is not just about 'the voice' of what a child can communicate to professionals. The 'lived experience of the child' is what a child sees, hears, thinks and experiences on a daily basis that impacts on their personal development and welfare.

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<sup>7</sup> [Right to Participation](#), UNICEF

As professionals, we need to actively give opportunity for children to participate and *hear* what they have to say or communicate, not only in their words, but in their body language. Even non-verbal children communicate through their bodies, interactions and play.

Professionals should take opportunities to observe what they do in different contexts, hear what family members, significant adults/carers and professionals have said about them, and to think about history and context.

*“Ultimately, we need to put ourselves in that child’s shoes and think ‘what is life like for this child right now?’”*

**Lived Experience of the Child Guidance, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough LSCB<sup>8</sup>**

There are a multitude of tools available to facilitate activities and conversation with children, such as the My Star or Youth Star, which provide frameworks for open and meaningful conversations with children you are working with. See [Outcome Star](#).

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<sup>8</sup> [Lived Experience of the Child Guidance](#), Feb 2025, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough LSCB

# Outcomes Star

In Peterborough, we actively promote the use of the Outcomes Star, and it is used to support and measure our Targeted Support interventions.



## What is Outcome Star?

Outcomes Star is an evidence-based tool to both support and measure change with people professionals are working with across a variety of sectors and has been used to evidence distance travelled within Early Help in Peterborough since 2013.

It not only supports identifying needs, but also a person's recognition and motivation to achieve change in different areas of their lives, to achieve meaningful outcomes.

The values that inform the Outcomes Star are like those of **person-centred, strengths-based** and **collaborative** approaches and there are multiple Stars that can be used across different sectors, depending on the individual or family's needs.

The Outcomes Star places importance on the service user's perspective and priorities and the holistic assessment offered by the Star focuses on aspects of life that are going well in addition to areas of difficulty.

There are a variety of Outcomes Stars which can be used, including the Family Star which can support with the completion of an Early Help Assessment and formulating a SMART action plan with the family.

Other Outcomes Stars can be used, for example My Star or the Youth Star, which can be used when supporting children and young people 1:1. The Outcomes Star can be used as a stand-alone tool or alongside an Early Help Assessment and to help to inform any support plans.

Professionals using any of the Stars must complete the licensed training before using the tool to ensure consistency and fidelity of the evidence base that underpins to tool.

For more information on Outcomes Star, please contact [targetedsupport@peterborough.gov.uk](mailto:targetedsupport@peterborough.gov.uk)

## Engaging Fathers

Often due to structures of services right from the point of conception, professional support is often geared to mothers and as their children grow and transition into education, for a lot of families we support, it is mothers who we interact with the most for daily tasks such as School runs, appointments etc.

Whilst there is of course, nothing wrong with this and part of life for lots of families, male carer givers are frequently overlooked by professionals and not approached to engage in conversations as part of the Early Help Assessment process or invited to attend or contribute Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings.

*“Men remain peripheral to service design and to operational service delivery in antenatal care and early family support. Opportunities for engagement and efforts to enable men to be the best fathers they can be are not maximised: far greater proportionate effort and attention is given to enable mothers to be the best parents they can be. Men can get lost and become bystanders.”*

**The Myth of Invisible Men, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021)**

During any Early Help engagement with families, it is vitally important to ensure professionals make every effort to include Fathers (or male care givers) in conversations and obtain their views and thoughts. Best practice should try to accommodate their availability for meetings to discuss their children and where this isn't possible, provide an alternative way for their views to be obtained.

## Family Networking

All families have ups and downs. When times are tough asking for help from family and friends is an important way of looking after your children and yourself.

Sometimes this support comes from specialist services and the professionals and volunteers who work for them. This can be important but in the long run we know that most of us get the best support from the people who care about us most; our friends, families and the community we live in. This is what is known as our 'Family Network'.

At an Early Intervention/Universal level, using the Family Network approach forms a framework for conversations to take place with parents/carers alongside the Early Help Assessment.

It helps professionals understand the network around a child, young person and their family that could be called on to support them in times of need and enable a 'team' approach to help make a positive change. This could be as simple as someone to help with collecting the children from School to allow a parent/carers to access a support programme or providing respite care in more complex situations.

Creating a collaborative plan can support a child/young person and their family to engage with support and foster change that is more sustainable.

See the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board's [Tools for Gathering and Recording Family Composition](#) for some examples of tools available to help explore a family's network.

## Safety Planning

Whilst Safety Planning is often a term associated with high-risk situations for families, the principles can have a role within the Early Help approach to allow families to know how to respond in particular circumstances when their first reaction may be to contact a professional for support or direction.

Where there are needs identified that may result in a sudden deterioration in circumstances at home, having a Safety Plan in place to support the family to respond in the best way they can utilising their own support networks, can be vital in empowering them to sustain changes.

Examples of where this might be a useful approach could be how other children in the home need to respond, such as a place of safety if a sibling become very dysregulated and potentially aggressive, or an emergency contact if a parent/carer becomes unwell from a known condition e.g. Diabetes or Epilepsy.

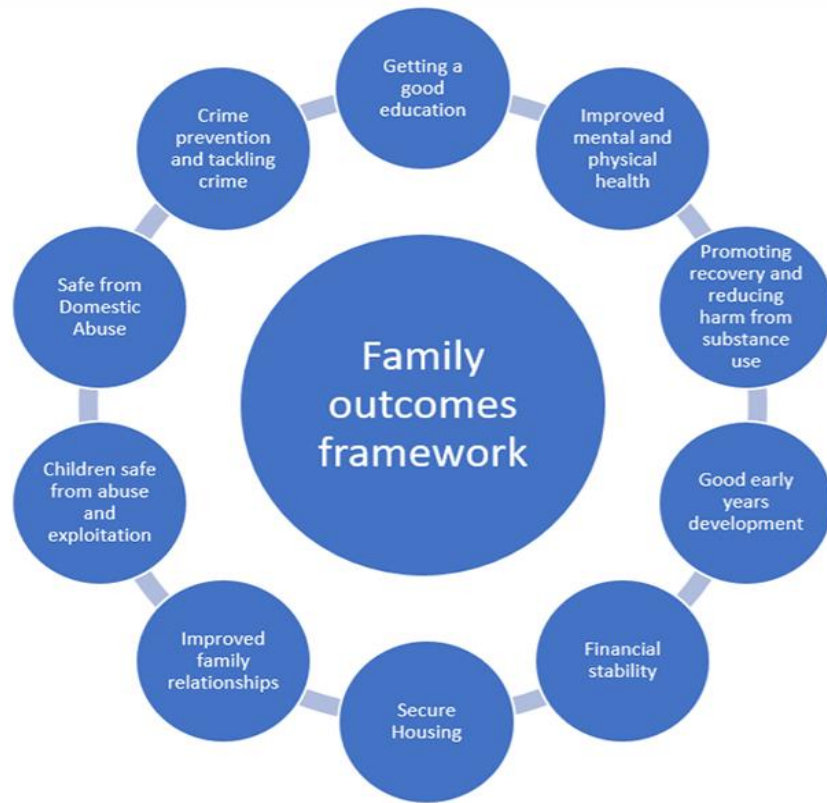
## Supporting Families Framework

Supporting Families (SF) was a nationally funded government programme which required Local Authorities (LA) to support and track families with multiple identified needs.

Funding from the programme was used to provide services and resources to children and families within Early Help. This programme came to an end in March 2025 but there have been many positive outcomes for Children, Young People and Families during this time.

The programme was structured around 4 principles for families to qualify for the programme, and this is something Peterborough will continue to adopt. The four principles are as follows

- A whole family assessment
- A Family Action Plan (FAP)
- An identified Lead Professional (LP)
- Demonstrate a minimum of three needs from the Outcome Framework (see diagram)



## Supporting Families Employment Advisor

The Supporting Families Employment Advisor (SFEA) is employed by the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) and works in collaboration with Peterborough City Council to provide 1:1 support to families engaged with Peterborough Early Help and Family Hubs. By joining services, we ensure families have access to early and coordinated support.

Discussions can include:

- Benefit queries
- Rent arrears and debt concerns
- Preparing for work
- Support to source childcare
- Confidence building



## Family Information Service (FIS)

Peterborough City Council operate a Family Information Service, which collates information on a wide range of local services, advice and guidance available to families in the city. This includes Early Years and childcare options, clubs/activities right through to Special Educational Needs and Health and Social Care.

See [Peterborough Family Information Service \(FIS\)](#)

## SEND Information Hub (Local Offer)

Peterborough's SEND Information Hub (which is also called the Local Offer) is a digital website and is intended to provide better support and services for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities and their families.

In this one place, you can find information about providers of the following services:

- Special educational provision
- Health services
- Social care services
- Other educational provision
- Preparing for adulthood, including housing and employment
- Leisure and social opportunities

See [Peterborough SEND Information Hub \(Local Offer\)](#)

## Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC)

Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships and family life. Conflict can be present between parents whether they are together or separated and can range from a lack of warmth and emotional distance, through to swearing and shouting.

Not all conflict is damaging, and it only starts to become a problem when conflict between parents is frequent, intense and poorly resolved. Parental conflict is a known risk factor for poor child outcomes including emotional, behavioural, social and academic development.

Parental conflict and domestic abuse, although can look similar, are very different and it is important to identify which is happening where present for children and families you might be working with to respond and support them appropriately.

Peterborough has available a [Domestic Abuse and Relationship Conflict Screening Tool](#) that can be completed with people you may be working with to help you do this.

There are also a number of programmes and resources available for parents who are experiencing conflict in their relationship, for which details can be found on the [Peterborough City Council website](#).

# Parenting Support

Being a parent or carer can be challenging at times and there are variety of free courses to help parents and carers support their child at every stage. Some courses are online and can be done at you're their own pace, while others offer the opportunity to meet other parents, share stories and build informal support networks, whilst learning new skills and strategies.

## [Course for Parents in Peterborough](#)

There may be times that a family may benefit from a more targeted approach to access parenting support, and this can be requested following the completion of an Early Help Assessment. See [Requesting Targeted Support](#).

# Targeted Support

Sometimes families might need additional Targeted Support to help them make changes in their lives. This might be a period of direct 1:1 support with a family member, for example, a parent to develop and implement routines and boundaries in the home or support for self-esteem and resilience for a young person.

The Peterborough Targeted Support Service have a small team of Family Workers and Young People's Workers and work in partnership with commissioned providers to offer families this additional support where it might be needed.

## Family Support

This includes delivery of evidence based parenting programmes, developing parent/carers to establish routines, boundaries and maintain a family home, support to manage challenging behaviour and accessing appropriate childcare.

## Staying safe

This includes support around child criminal and sexual exploitation (CCE/CSE), staying safe in the community and online, resilience building, healthy relationships and understanding the impact of domestic abuse and/or parental conflict.

## Establishing support networks

This includes improving and/or developing relationships with professionals, identifying and strengthening the existing family network and signposting to relevant community and/or specialist support services.

## Emotional wellbeing, aspirations and NEET<sup>9</sup>

This includes support for emerging emotional wellbeing needs for children and young people, raising aspirations and prevention of young people becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training).

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<sup>9</sup> NEET – Young People **not in education, employment or training** by the time they leave School aged 16.

## Requesting Targeted Support

Where it is felt the family would benefit from a Targeted Support intervention, the Lead Professional is able to request this on the family's behalf.

This is requested via the submission of a *Request for Targeted Support* Form via EHM following the completion of an Early Help Assessment (EHA).

The EHA must have been within the last 6 months, which clearly evidences the needs that the request is seeking support for. Additional consent will also need to be sought from the family before the request can be submitted, which confirms their agreement for the support to be request but also the sharing of their information with relevant organisations to progress the support.

## Multi-Agency Support Group (MASG) Panels

As part of the Targeted Support offer, Peterborough operate Multi-Agency Support Group (MASG) Panels, which is a panel of key sector partner representatives who consider complex needs for children, young people and families being supported via the Early Help approach.

Panel meetings are held virtually, every 2 weeks and include representatives from the following sectors/services:

- Targeted Support Service
- Early Years
- Children's Centres
- Emotional Health & Wellbeing Service/CAMHs
- Police
- Children's Social Care
- Residential Social Landlords (Cross Keys Homes)
- Healthy Child Programme (Health Visiting & School Nursing)
- Drug & Alcohol Services
- LA Attendance Service

Families discussed at MASG will be determined following a triage process of the *Request for Targeted Support* submitted by the Lead Professional. Where it is felt the needs are complex, or would benefit from a wider multi-agency discussion, the request will be discussed at the next available MASG Panel.

Lead Professionals will be contacted to advise the panel slot allocated and invited to attend to be part of the case discussion.

## Stepping down from Statutory Services

There are times where, following an assessment or period of support by Children's Social Care (CSC) or a specialist statutory service, it is determined the family would benefit from a further period of coordinated support within the community. In these circumstances, the family may be 'stepped down' to Early Help.

This means the specialist intervention would be closed and, where appropriate consent in place from the family, the assessment and support plan completed by the closing service utilised in place of an Early Help Assessment (EHA).

This information would then be used to identify a new Lead Professional and ongoing support plan via the Team Around the Family (TAF) process.

Where required, this may be supported via a discussion at the Multi-Agency Support Group (MASG) Panel. See [Multi-Agency Support Panels \(MASG\)](#).

## Supporting Young People into Education, Employment and Training

Every young person should be given the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications that enable them to progress on to higher education, employment and adulthood.

It is a legal requirement that all young people leaving Year 11 and Year 12 have an offer of learning in the following September. The Local Authority have a statutory duty to monitor and track which young people receive an offer of learning.

This requirement does not mean that school leavers must continue with their Post 16 education in Secondary school. Post 16 education options include:

- Full or part time college
- Work based learning with a training provider
- Apprenticeships
- Traineeships
- Sixth forms
- Volunteering with part time study for an accredited qualification

The Peterborough NEET Team provide information and support to young people aged 16 to 18 who are identified as NEET, to assist them back into education, employment or training. This might include access to the Weekly Work Club, assisting with CV writing, completing applications and interview skills or supporting job, training or apprenticeship searches.

# Peterborough Early Help & Targeted Support Service

To support the Early Help activity across the city, Peterborough City Council has a dedicated early Help & Targeted Support Service.

## ▪ Early Help Support Officers

Our Early Help Support Officers provide advice, support and guidance to professionals to implement and embed Early Help approach into their organisations. They are available to provide case discussions, EHM advice and practical support for processes such as Team Around the Family meetings (TAFs). Our Early Help Support Officers also provide training and development opportunities both in group and 1:1 capacity.

## ▪ Early Help Hub Coordinators

Our Early Help Hub Coordinators form our Early Help Hub, which sits within the Children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This team is responsible for completing the safeguarding and quality checks on all completed Early Help Assessments (EHAs), as well as completing Early Help Hub Enquiries in response to Children's Social Care Contacts that have not met threshold for statutory interventions, where relevant.

## ▪ Family Researchers

Our Family Researchers sit within the Supporting Families Team. This team is responsible for the tracking and monitoring activity to gather evidence to inform the Supporting Families programme and obtain funding into the service.

## ▪ Family Workers

Our team of Family Workers provide targeted family support intervention to children, young people and families being supported by the Early Help process in the community. They also support the delivery of courses for parents as part of our universal offer.

## ▪ Young People's Workers

Our team of Young People's Workers provide targeted group and 1:1 interventions to 11–19-year-olds and their parents/carers. They also support the delivery of parenting courses for parents and carers as part of our universal offer.

## ▪ Diversion Team

Our Diversion Team is made up of Youth Workers, who provide targeted group and 1:1 interventions to 11–19 year-olds (up to 25 with diagnosed disabilities) and their families being supported by the Early Help process in the community, with the aim to reduce the risk of them from entering the criminal justice system.

In addition, they also work with children (10-18 years) who have been referred to the Youth Justice out of court panel.

# Local Risk Assessment Tools

## Exploitation screening tools

Screening tool to be used where there are concerns for Child Criminal and/or Child Sexual Exploitation.

[Contextual Risk Screening Tool | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board \(safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk)

## Neglect screening tools

Screening tool to be used for children, young people and families where there are concerns for Neglect.

[Graded Care Profile Tool | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board \(safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk)

## Domestic Abuse screening tools

Screening tools to be used for children, young people and families where there are concerns for domestic abuse.

[Barnardo's Domestic Violence Risk Identification Matrix \(DVRIM\) | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board \(safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk)

[Dash risk assessment resources for professionals - SafeLives Child Neglect](#)

## Child Sexual Behaviour tools

Screening tools to be used for children and young people who are displaying sexualised behaviour.

[Child Sexual Behaviour Assessment Tool | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board](#)

# Training and Development

As an Early Help service, we offer a variety of training to support both our internal and external partners. These include webinars to support the use of the Early Help Module (EHM), best practice relating to completing an Early Help Assessment, holding a TAF and closing completed Early Help episodes.

## Early Help Practice Workshops

These sessions provide a focus on key practice elements of the Early Help framework.

Sessions provided:

- Introduction to Early Help
- Completing a holistic Early Help Assessment (EHA)
- TAF Meetings & SMART Action Planning
- Requesting Targeted Support and MASG Panels
- Early Help Episode Closures

We recommend all professionals working within the Early Help arena should complete the Introduction to Early Help as a minimum.

## EHM Webinars

These sessions are for existing Peterborough EHM Users only and provide 30-60 minute bitesize demonstrations of key processes completed within EHM. They can be accessed in addition to mandatory new user training or as a refresher for existing users.

## Outcome Star

This is a licensed training programme for all professionals who are working directly with service users looking to use the Outcome Star tool.

We strongly promote the use of the Outcome Star, such as the Family Star, My Star or Youth Star alongside Early Help activity to evidence progress and obtain the voice of the child and family, however it can be used in isolation and in many sectors.

The Outcome Star is a licenced tool and **completion of the Core Training session is mandatory** for anyone wishing to use the tool.

# Early Help Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## If I do an Early Help Assessment, do I have to be Lead Professional?

You will be the Lead Professional at least until the first Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting, at which point a discussion should be held with the child and family as to who is best placed to take this role on an ongoing basis. The best place person to take on the Lead Professional role is usually those with the best relationship with the family, or the person who is the most relevant based on the agreed support plan, however, it can be any practitioner working with the family.

## How long does it take to complete an Early Help Assessment?

This depends entirely on the relationship in place with the child/family, information already held about them and the number of professionals involved who may be required to contribute. Where there are multiple children to consider as part of the assessment, it may require slightly more time to be dedicated to obtaining a holistic assessment.

However, as best practice, it is advised to aim to complete an EHA **within 4 weeks** of initiation to ensure the information remains relevant and reflective of the family's current circumstances.

## Can I fill in an Early Help Assessment and share it with the family later?

No, the Early Help Assessment should always be undertaken collaborative and agreed *with* the child and family. However, consider what information you already have available that can be collated to help inform meaningful discussions with the child and family. This can not only save time and repetition but also give opportunities to review and update what you may already know as a professional or an organisation.

You may wish to consider completed an Outcome Star with the child or family, which provides a great tool to help structure holistic conversations and gather information. See [Outcome Star](#).

**Always** ensure the child/family have read and agreed to the final version of the assessment before finalising on the EHM system.

## What support can I get in undertaking Early Help or when things get stuck?

The Early Help Support Officers are available for advice, support and guidance to all professionals working within the Early Help framework. They can support you with both case discussions and practical support for processes such as Team Around the Family meetings.

Where appropriate, you may wish to explore a request for Targeted Support for families that may require a more targeted piece of support. See [Targeted Support](#).



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

As Early Help is a consensual process, if the child or family choose not to engage in the process, we cannot force them to do so. However, professionals should continue to support the child and family from within their own agency and continue to discuss the benefits of accessing support the Early Help way of working.

Where the family continue to choose not to engage, professionals should assess the risk to the child, and if they believe there is risk of significant harm, consider making a referral into MASH. See [Refusing Early Help](#).

### **If one parent agrees to the Early Help Assessment, but the other parent doesn't, can I still continue?**

Yes, as long as one parent with PR (parental responsibility) wishes to engage then you can undertake the process for their child. However, every effort should be made to discuss the other parental party's decision to try and alleviate any anxieties they may have about the process and give them opportunity to engage in process throughout.

### **Can a child under 16 consent to Early Help without their parents' agreement?**

Yes, however the professional must be confident that they believe the child to be competent and believe they understand what they are agreeing to and the implications for them and/or their family. See [Gillick Competency and Fraser Guidelines](#).

### **Can I record Early Help without using EHM?**

No, all Early Help activity should be recorded on EHM, the local online case management system for Peterborough. This not only provides a central point for information to be held for Early Help support but also helps to inform future decision-making processes for support that may be provided to a child or family or service delivery planning. See [Early Help Module \(EHM\)](#)

More information and details on how to request access can be found on the [Peterborough City Council website](#) or via contacting the Peterborough Targeted Support Service.

### **How long does the Early Help process last for?**

There is no limit on the length of time a child and family receive Early Help support, however Early Help Episode should only remain open where there is an active TAF Plan in place, that is being regularly reviewed.

Professionals within the TAF group should 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 and/or family. This should inform decisions whether the risks are at a level which may require statutory social care intervention or can close to Early Help and be supported at a universal level.

### **Is the Lead Professional responsible for delivery of services?**

No, the Lead Professional is responsible for the coordination of TAF meetings and support plan, whilst acting as a single point of contact for the family through the Early Help process.

Each professional remains accountable for their practice and interventions offered to a child and/or family. If a service is agreed but isn't delivered, then the agency that agreed to provide the service is accountable.

However, the Lead Professional should take responsibility for raising concerns with their own line manager and the Targeted Support Service in such circumstances. See [Lead Professional \(LP\)](#).

### **What are my organisations responsibilities for helping me undertake Early help and providing supervision?**

Organisational managers with responsibility for staff providing Early Help, such as Schools Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) or Senior Leadership Teams are encouraged to have access to EHM, the Early Help online case management system.

This allows Managers have management oversight of all open Early Help Episodes allocated to their staff and provide case supervision. The Early Help Support Officers offer regularly check-ins with locality-based Lead Professionals to offer case direction, where required.

### **How can I access Early Help training?**

The Peterborough Early Help & Targeted Support Service offer a range of learning and development opportunities, including Practice Workshops, EHM Refresher Webinars and Outcome Star training. See [Training and Development](#).

### **What services are available to support children and families in Peterborough?**

The support offer across the city is vast and ever changing. Professionals are encouraged to utilise the [Family Information Service](#), [SEND Information Hub \(Local Offer\)](#) for information on community resources available.

The [Early Help Support Officers](#) are also available for case discussions where required, to assist in signposting to appropriate services. Where the need cannot be met via one of these services, consideration of a Targeted Support or may be beneficial. See [Targeted Support](#).

There may be some circumstances that require a more specialised intervention, such as CAMHs and 0-25 Disability Service. Where this is the case, a referral to the relevant service should be made directly.