

Step Up and Step Down Guidance

This guidance has been developed with the core principle that children and families should experience a seamless service regardless of need or the level of intervention within their lives. It is intended to ensure that children receive the right service at the right time and are supported by professionals with the right skills and expertise to help meet their individually assessed needs and progress their plan successfully and is based on collaboratively multi-agency working. Families need to clearly understand decision-making about the pathways between different levels of support based upon need. The threshold/ level of needs document should help to inform these discussions.

I. Definitions

A. Step Down

Step Down enables professionals from Children's Services, and multi-agency early help services to support the child/family intervention and plan as they move from requiring statutory services, or coordinated early help provision, to universal services.

Step-down may happen within statutory services; if progress is made from a child protection plan and the risk of significant harm is removed the plan may step down to a child in need plan or, if there is no longer a role for Children's Services, it may step down to coordinated early help.

Professionals from a range of services can offer coordinated early help and this is crucial to the step-down process as they offer continued support for families once statutory services step away. Step down is an extremely important function to ensure that children and families receive consistent, seamless support at the right time and from the appropriate professionals. When children/families have received a statutory intervention and have progressed positively, it is important that the progress made is sustained and that children and families do not feel that they are being passed from 'service to service' or left with a gap in provision.

As coordinated early help recognises progress has been achieved and continues positively, the early help plan will no longer be required, but families should be reassured that the universal services they still access will remain involved with them and are available for them to seek support if needed.

B. Step Up

Step Up is when child/family needs are increasing, and outcomes are not being met despite planned intervention from universal or early help services.

Universal services will have their own mechanisms for assessing the needs of those they work with, and they may need to signpost to other community services. However, if progress is not being made, or there are other needs identified, it may be necessary to consider stepping up to a coordinated early help approach.

If a coordinated early help approach is not making progress, or further unmet needs are identified, there may then be a need to step up to statutory services; this may be as a child in need or, if there is the likelihood of significant harm, child protection. Within statutory services, if a child-in-need plan is not progressing and there is a likelihood of significant harm for the child, this may need to step up to a child protection intervention.

If at any point there is an immediate child protection concern, professionals and members of the public should contact MAST (0207 364 5606/5601 or out of hours in an emergency only 0207 364 4079), and this should be followed up with a completed Multi-agency referral form as appropriate. If it is an emergency situation the police should be contacted on 999 for guidance.

II. Guidance

A. Stepping Down- From Child Protection

When concerns affecting the child/family no longer indicate a likelihood of significant harm it is important that this progress is recognised and within the child protection conference discussion takes place to decide what the next steps will be to ensure that positive change can be sustained.

If there are still needs that can only be met by provision from Children's Services, this may need to be a step-down to a Child In Need plan. **If Early Help is determined to be the most appropriate support for the family, this will be agreed at the next Child In Need Meeting including identifying who the early help lead professional will be.** Consent from the family is required for child in need or coordinated early help plans. The child in need social work role or early help lead professional role should be agreed.

B. Stepping Down – From Child in Need

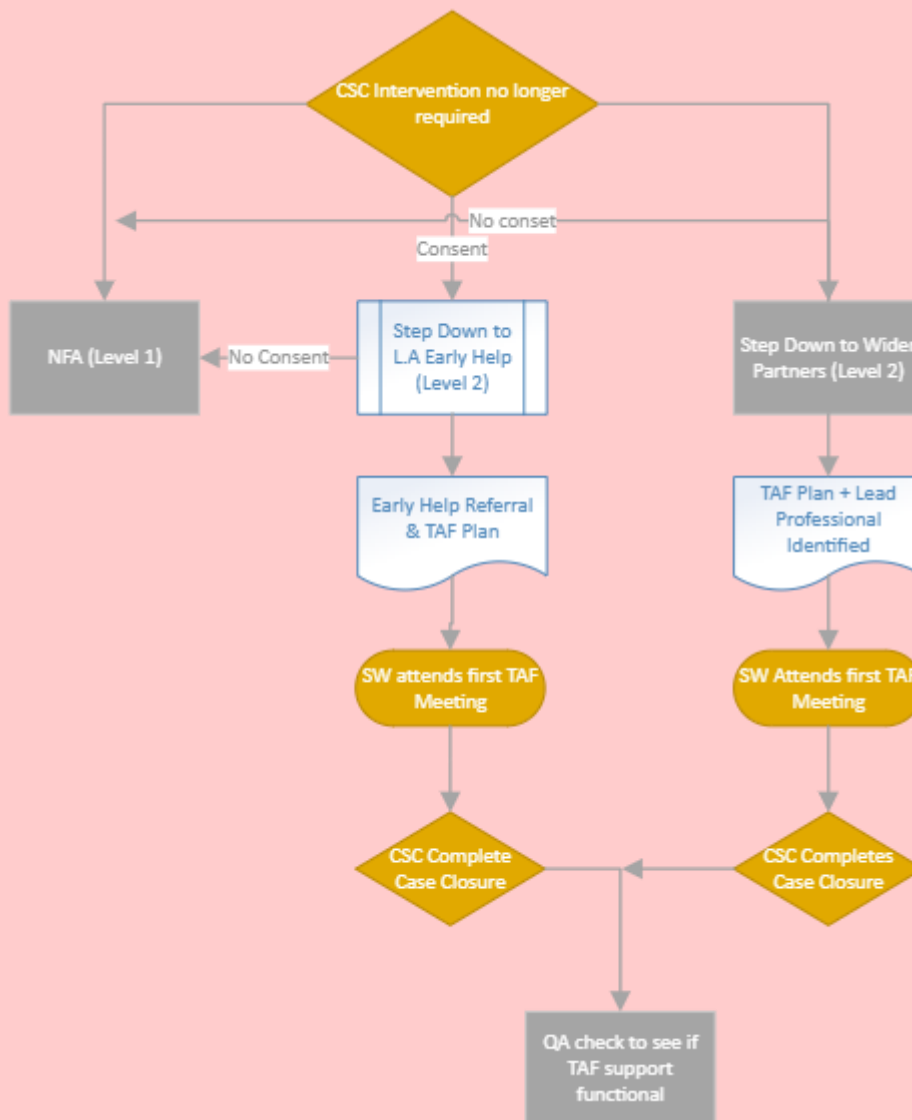
When input from Children's Services is no longer required, then the child in need plan can be stepped down to early help. Consent should be sought from the family and a lead professional identified.

Transfer to an early help plan should be seamless. An updated assessment or the review child in need plan process will identify the progress made and the unmet needs remaining. This will inform the new early help plan, so work with the child/family continues immediately. The early help lead professional should ensure that key actions are identified, and that early help team around the family review meetings are held. New concerns will inform updated assessments and plans and should be escalated appropriately if needed.

C. Stepping Down - From Early Help to Universal Provision

When needs have been addressed satisfactorily and the child/family no longer have additional needs, the coordinated early help plan will no longer be required. The family should be made aware of the universal services that are still available to them and someone from these universal services should be identified to check in with the family for the first 3 months.

Step Down Process Flow Chart



D. Step Up to Early Help from Universal Provision

Many children will require support for a single need; this issue in isolation doesn't usually require a full early help assessment and may be met by universal provision, such as sign posting to community services or one agency. If however, the needs of the child/family amount to more than one single need, it may be appropriate to complete an Early Help Assessment with the consent of the family.

Working Together to Safeguard 2018: advises that practitioners should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan)
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups
- is frequently missing/ goes missing from care or home.
- is at risk of modern slavery, Trafficking or exploitation.
- is at risk of being radicalised or exploited
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drugs and alcohol, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse.
- is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- has returned home to their family from care
- is a privately fostered child
- has a parent/carer in custody.

The Early Help guidance and procedures set out the process to be followed. It is important that children and families receive help at the earliest possible opportunity as problems begin to emerge. When professionals have concerns it is important that they speak to parents/carers and the child (where appropriate) and also that these concerns are shared and visible to other relevant professionals.

E. Step Up to Child in Need

If a child is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain, a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of Children's Services, then discussion should take place with the family about a child in need referral. It is important that consent is sought for this referral. When asking for a service to become involved in the family's life consent is required. Clear information should be provided as to why needs can only be met by Children's Services by sharing an existing early help assessment that evidences a lack of progress or identifies a need that cannot be met through a coordinated early help response. It is noted that not all services would have completed an early help assessment in advance of making a Child in Need referral however a rationale for referral must be provided.

F. Step Up to Statutory Review

If there is an immediate child protection concern, then professionals and members of the public should contact MAST (0207 364 5606/5601 or out of hours in an emergency only 0207 364 4079) and this should be followed up with a completed Multi-Agency Request for Support form. (Would suggest that a completed IRF is always appropriate.) If it is an emergency situation call the police on 999 for advice.

There may be other times when professionals consider there is a likelihood of harm occurring for a child. This will require a referral that may lead to further investigation, an example would be where a family have agreed to an early help family plan, but progress is not being made and this is likely to cause the child harm. It could be when a family refuse consent to early help, and professionals consider that the lack of a coordinated approach is likely to result in harm in the future. It is important when escalating to Children's Services that you discuss and explain this with parents/carers unless this would result in placing somebody at further risk.

G. Dispute resolution / Escalation

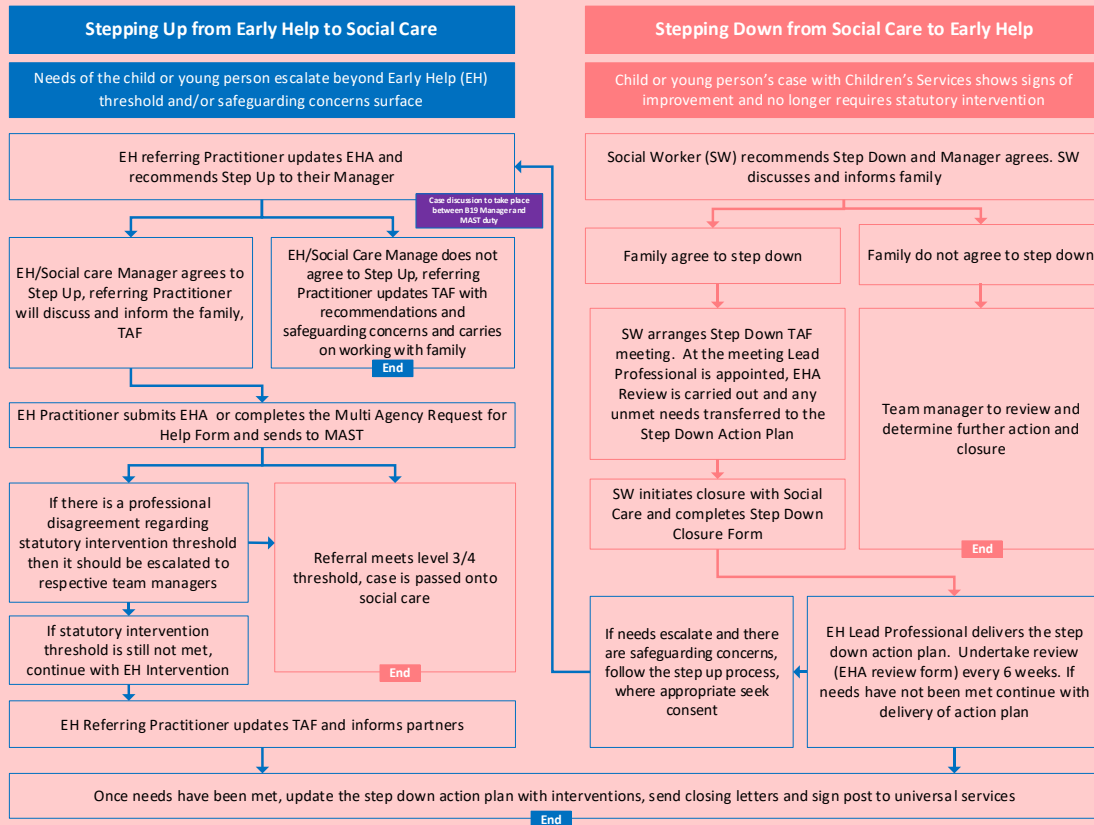
If there is a difference of opinion between professionals about a step up or step down process; for example, a professional is not willing to take a lead professional role to enable a step down or, despite all of the relevant information about an early help plan not progressing, a 'step up' is not accepted by MAST, the partnership dispute resolution/ escalation procedure should be followed.



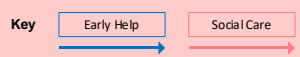
Tower Hamlets Step Up Step Down

Early Help & Children and Family services and Children's Social Care

Date: 21st August 2022 V1.10



If you are concerned that a child is at risk you should contact the Tower Hamlets Multi Agency Safeguarding Team on 020 73645601



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