



Early Help Assessment Framework

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Our ambition/vision

It is our vision that all children in Darlington are safe and happy with personal skills and confidence to achieve well and contribute to their local community. They are to be supported by resilient, strong and happy families within a thriving environment.

Introduction

Section 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 articulate the requirements on the Local Authority and its partners to make arrangements with a view to improving the wellbeing of all children in the area. This framework has been developed with partners so that a common understanding of early help exists within the delivery across Darlington. It supports a community based approach to early help, building on all partners' social responsibility to deliver timely and effective intervention. Welfare is paramount; Darlington Borough Council has a statutory duty under the Children's Act 1989 and 2004 to safeguard the well-being of children in need and their families.

'Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. 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. Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care' - **Working together to safeguard children, March 2013**

This document replaces that of April 2016 and all previous documents in relation to the use of Common Assessment Framework in Darlington and is effective from 01 September 2015. The new practice framework has been written to ensure the Local Authority continue to deliver its statutory responsibility whilst at the same time supporting the following principles:

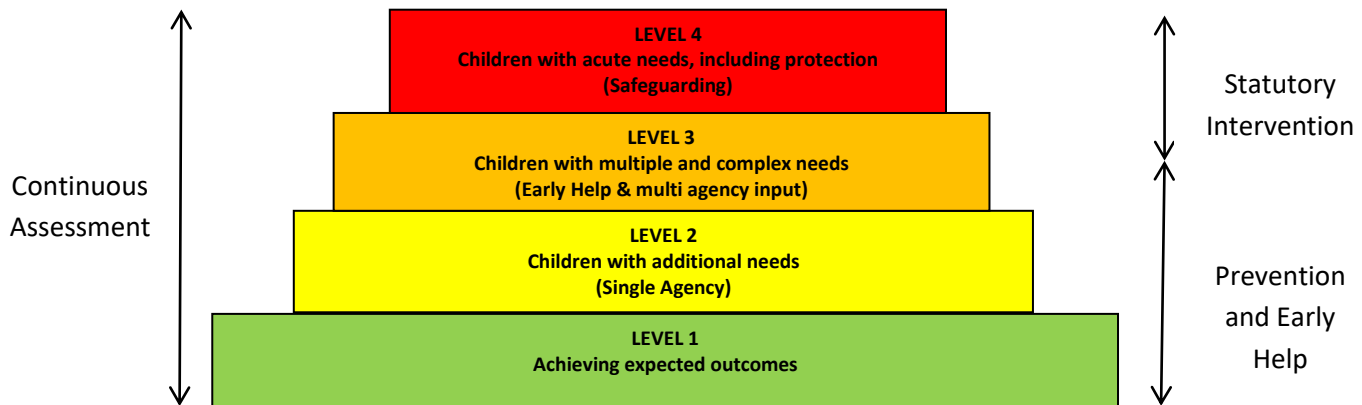
- Strengthening multi agency working
- Offering an assessment that is accessible to families and is family led.
- The needs of the family are considered with a focus on outcomes.
- Providing a consistent, high quality services to improve outcomes.
- Establishing clear and explicit objectives with clear timescales.

What is early help?

The early help assessment is the single assessment used by Darlington's multi agency partnerships that includes Schools, Colleges, Health, Childcare settings, voluntary sector and across all Children's Social Care teams. Early help assessment provides a standardised and coordinated approach for practitioners across agencies and services and is designed to ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right support at an early stage to reduce the chance of escalation to specialist services. This tool should be used at the earliest opportunity when a family's needs are not being met by universal services.

When should I carry out an early help assessment?

Darlington's thresholds document is the key reference document that should be used by all agencies working with children and families. It is a requirement of the framework that multi-agencies embed the threshold document within their working practices and Practitioners use their professional judgement to determine the level of need for a family.



Continuum of Need Level Indicators

(The full threshold document can be found at <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/>)

The focus of the framework and supporting procedures is to ensure early and clear identification of children and their families with additional needs. An early help assessment should be considered when the following criteria are met:

- A professional or parent/carer is concerned about the progress of the child or young person.
- The support of more than one agency is required.
- There is not already an Early Help Assessment /Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection Plan (CP) in place.
- The family has given consent for an Early Help Assessment to be undertaken.

Where the support from a single agency is appropriate to support a family's needs then an Early Help Assessment would **NOT** be required.

Where there is a concern regarding a child's safety an Early Help Assessment would **NOT** be appropriate. An immediate referral to a specialist service, Children's Access point (CAP) referral is required. (<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/>)

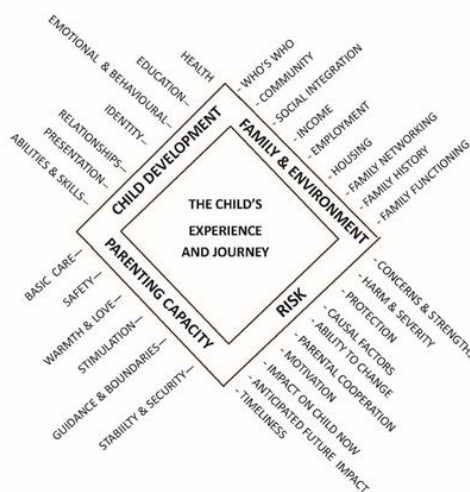
In an emergency where you are concerned for the child's immediate safety you should call Darlington Police on 999.

Information sharing and consent

The Early Help Assessment is a voluntary assessment so before completing an assessment, the consent of the parent/carer and in some cases the young person will need to be obtained. This consent is to complete the assessment AND to share their information outside your agency. The family will want to understand the purpose of the document and the process. A leaflet is available to explain the process to the family available on: <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/early-help-assessment/>. If a family chooses not to consent to the Early Help Assessment, the practitioner should always contact the Early Help Coordinator (Kelly-Ann Reay, Tel: 01325 405635) who will record that it has been declined.

The assessment

The Regional Framework for Assessment Diamond as illustrated in the diagram below provides the basis for the assessment model. The framework provides guidance to ensure the completion of high quality assessments against each factor.



The assessment and your analysis will help you to work out what support is needed. It is important to complete each area fully to ensure that appropriate support is identified even outside of the referrer's specialist fields. (Refer to Strengths and needs document which can guide you through key areas of discussion <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/early-help-assessment/>)

Where the Early Help assessment identifies that additional support is needed from the Early Help Team in Darlington Borough Council, the Lead practitioner should detail the outcomes in section 11 on Part B of the Early Help Assessment form. Refer to the service request guidance document as to what support is available <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/early-help-assessment/>. Send the form to childrensaccesspoint@darlington.gov.uk.

If you believe that the child may be at risk of significant harm you should make a referral to the Children's Access Point (contact number 01325 406222) or call Darlington Police on 999. A CAP referral form can be found on <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/>

Toolkit

The toolkit provides a broad range of resources and strategies to be used to engage the child and family with the assessment. The toolkit can be found at <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/early-help-assessment/>

What is the Team around the family?

This meeting is a coming together to develop a shared understanding of the family's needs. The identified agencies who are working or who need to work with the family should be in attendance to agree and discuss and how these will be achieved. **This meeting can only take place when the parent/carer is present.**

Lead professional?

Many professionals already work as a lead professional when supporting a family as part of single agency support, however it is more effective to coordinate multiple agencies to meet regularly and agree an action plan with the family.

The lead professional acts as a central point of contact for the child, the family and other members of the Team around the Family. The lead professional will support the child and family and act as an advocate on their behalf. The role can be undertaken by any professional who is working with the child and/or their family for example General Practitioner (GP), Health visitor, family support worker, a teacher, Special educational needs coordinator, voluntary organisations etc.

At the early stages of the assessment the professional undertaking the assessment will be the lead professional until the initial Team around the Family meeting is held and a Lead Professional can be agreed by the family and supporting agencies. This should be considered on a case by case basis. This approach ensures that all professionals are clear on what their responsibilities are and a process is in place to ensure that plans are monitored with progress and outcomes achieved in a timely manner.

Support for the Lead Practitioner

You can contact the Early Help Co-ordinator to:-

- Obtain support and advice about Early Help Assessments.
- Find out if there is already an assessment in place for a child in Darlington.
- Log that the parent/carers have refused an assessment.
- Notify a change of lead worker.
- Notify when an assessment has been closed.

Team around the Family - Review

A date for a review discussion is set at the initial Team around the Family (TAF) meeting and should always be within 6 weeks of the initial meeting. The review meeting gives consideration to whether outcomes have been completed, family's needs are met and whether new outcomes have been identified. This should be recorded and shared only with the TAF members and the family.

Watermark the professional's documents with the wording 'confidential' and watermark the family copy with 'family copy'.

TAF documents should also be sent to ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk

Step up process

Where there are safeguarding concerns, you can step up making a referral to the Children's Access Point (contact number 01325 406222) or call Darlington Police on 999. Update part A and send to ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk

Step down/Closure

The plan can be closed when:

- It steps down to universal/single agency service. (Multi agency involvement no longer required).
- The outcomes have been achieved.
- It steps up to specialist services.
- Family withdrew consent.
- Family did not engage (evidence of non-engagement required, strategies to engage family should be evidenced and a notification letter of closure should be sent to the family.)

- Moved out of area (the lead professional should initiate a handover meeting with the new identified lead professional so the support can continue in the child's new area.

Closure should be agreed by both the family and the supporting agencies. Please notify ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk of closure and provide a copy of any outstanding review documents.

Step down process from Children's Social Care

The following steps should be followed:

- Social worker to discuss and agree the step down with their line manager
- Social worker to obtain consent for Early Help from the family.
- Social worker to request a slot at the transfer panel meeting.

Once the step down has been agreed at the panel meeting the following steps should be followed:

- Social worker to invite the identified key worker to a Multi-Agency Meeting to complete a handover of the case.
- Social worker to step the case down on liquid logic outlining all of the above information.
- Identified worker will then continue with the Early help Process.
- Social worker to close case.

Quality Assurance Process

The continuum of support to children/young people and families in need of Early Help intervention will be regularly monitored through the Early Help Assessment Quality Assurance Framework. This is measured via monthly audits to be undertaken by the early help coordinator and Early Help Team managers to establish whether the children/young people are receiving the right support at the right time and that the support is proportionate with clearly identified and understood needs.

Data protection

All data should be collected, stored and handled in line with each agency's Data protection policies and procedures (Data protection Act 2018).

Important Documents

All Early Help documents can be downloaded from this location:

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/early-help-assessment/>:

- Early Help Assessment Form Part A
- Early Help Assessment Form Part B
- Team around the Family document
- Family's Information Leaflet
- Early Help Process Map
- Early Help Assessment Quality Assurance Framework
- Early Help Audit Tool
- Practitioner Self-Assessment Checklist
- Service User Feedback Forms