

## FAQ relating to the Early Help Assessments

### **1. How can I find out if there is an Assessment registered for a family – or who the Lead Professional is?**

Contact [ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk) to establish if there is already an Early Help Assessment in place and who the lead professional is.

### **2. Can we proceed with an Early Help Assessment without the consent of the family?**

No, an Early Help Assessment is a voluntary process and therefore parents – and children where appropriate – should be fully engaged in the process. Consent must be given.

### **3. What happens if the family refuse the assessment?**

Parent's involvement should always be encouraged.

If a young person (approx. 16+) requests an Early Help Assessment and does not want parents involved they can give consent themselves. The reasons for this should be clearly recorded as having been considered.

The Assessment cannot proceed without either the Parent or Young Person consenting.

The Team around the Family meeting cannot proceed without the parent or young person being present.

### **4. Do I have to include parents?**

Encourage engagement. This may need careful discussion and explanation of the process and how we want to support the family. Another trusted partner agency known to the family may be able to engage hesitant families.

Assess the impact of lack of engagement. If it is felt that the situation will deteriorate to a safeguarding level contact Children's Access Point (CAP) Tel: 01325 406222

Log refusals with [ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk) where the Early Help Coordinator will follow the refusal procedure.

### **5. At what age should I start including the voice of the child?**

This will depend upon the child's level of understanding but even very young children are able to give their views. The skill is in finding the right techniques to encourage them to talk and express themselves. Puppets, pictures, role play, picture cards and using age appropriate language etc. will all help a young child to express their thoughts. With particularly young children and those who are not verbal, consideration should be given around their development, engagement with others and nonverbal cues. Parents and other professionals can also provide an insight as to what the voice of the child may be or how they are feeling e.g. health visitor or nursery teacher. Changes in behaviour are worth considerable note.

### **6. Are there a minimum number of members of a Team around the Family (TAF)?**

The nature of the Early Help TAF meeting is multi agency support. Initially there may just be you, the family member(s) and one other agency. Further agency involvement can be identified in this meeting.

### **7. What happens if the family don't engage once the Team around the Family meetings are in place? (Failure to attend meetings, not participating in the plan etc.)**

Always check with the family why they do not want to proceed with the plan. There may be issues that you are unaware of which can be resolved.

Inform (via letter if you are unable to contact) the family that the lack of engagement will result in the Early Help Assessment being closed. If engagement does not improve then close the case. Assess the impact of lack of engagement. If it is felt that the situation will deteriorate to a safeguarding level contact Children's Access Point (CAP) Tel: 01325 406222  
Send documentation (Team around the family with closure details) to [ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:ChildrensAccessPoint@darlington.gov.uk)

**8. Who can I share the Assessment document and details with?**

A copy of the assessment should be given to the family. It is good practice to watermark this document as 'Family copy'

Parents/carers or the young people will have given consent for information to be shared. They can specify any agencies they do not wish to share with. It is good practice to inform the family who you plan to share with throughout the time you work with the family.

**9. How soon should the Team around the Family meeting take place?**

The initial meeting should take place within 15 days once the young person has been identified as needing additional support. Review meetings should take place at least every 6 weeks.

**10. Who should be the Lead Professional?**

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. The family should be involved in this decision and can request to change the lead professional.

**11. What happens if that person doesn't agree to be the Lead Professional?**

It is important to respect the family's wishes with regards to who they want for Lead Professional.

The family is also more likely to engage if the Lead Professional is a person of their choice.

Try as much as possible within reasonable levels to encourage the person in the meeting to take on the role but if it becomes contentious take it out of the meeting as it is not beneficial for the family to witness disagreements between agencies.

Contact your Early Help Officer as an independent person. Kelly-Ann Reay Tel: 01325 405635

**12. How often should the TAF meet?**

It will differ depending on the situation. Initially it will be more frequent but should be at least be once every 6 weeks.

**13. What do I do if a professional does not attend the meeting?**

If one of the professionals is unable to attend the meeting, then they should be contacting the Lead Professional to let them know. They should be prepared to provide a written report in their absence, or at least give some information verbally that can be shared at the meeting.

It is appropriate to contact any non-attendees to share relevant information and decisions made by the meeting in their absence. If an agency is persistently absent then this should be followed up directly if necessary escalated through line management. One manager talking to another manager often solves the problem. If the problem is still not resolved then report the situation to the Early Help Coordinator Tel: 01325 405635. Ensure that you have clear evidence of what has happened and how you have managed this to date.

**14. Can I hold a Team around the Family meeting without the child/young person/parent/carer being present?**

The Early help process is based on consent and the willingness of the family to take part in the discussions and action planning so their participation is crucial. If they have failed to attend the

meeting you should contact them to see what has happened. You can consider holding a professionals meeting instead to discuss progress, however it will not be possible to set any new actions on the plan.

You will need to rearrange the meeting to discuss the full action plan. If any professionals are unable to attend the subsequent meeting then their view will need to be obtained verbally or through a written report.

**15. Do I need to distribute minutes after each meeting?**

This is good practice. Ensure that everybody has agreed the date for the next meeting. Update the action plan at the meeting and this can limit the paperwork that needs sending. Members may find it beneficial to receive a meeting reminder e-mail nearer the time.

**16. Who should have a copy of the completed Assessment?**

The family should have a copy as well as each member of the TAF.

**17. What happens if a member of the TAF leaves – but we still require involvement from their agency?**

Ideally they should bring their replacement to their last TAF meeting. If this is not possible, they are to ensure that their replacement is aware of dates etc.

The Lead Professional should ensure that the family have changed the list of people they are happy to have their information shared with the new staff member.

If the new staff member does not contact the Lead Professional within four weeks the Lead Professional should contact the line manager of that post.

**18. What happens if the TAF believe that the situation has not improved or that it has deteriorated to the stage where there are Safeguarding concerns?**

Inform the parents and the child (if appropriate) that you have these specific concerns and that you are making a referral to the Children's Access Point Tel: 01325 405635. You should have parental consent to make the referral unless the child is at risk of immediate harm or the referral will affect the detection of criminal activity. Professionals should submit a CAP referral form and submit it to [childrensaccesspoint@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:childrensaccesspoint@darlington.gov.uk)

This is called Step Up.

**19. Where should agencies store their Early Help Assessments and reviews?**

Each agency should follow their own safe storage of records policy.

**20. Can I initiate an Early Help Assessment for an 18 year old?**

Yes - for a young person with a disability an Early Help Assessment plan can be in place until age 25 years. Each case should be assessed in its own right.