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| **Advocacy for Parents** |

**GUIDANCE NOTE**

**BACKGROUND**

This service should be used to provide support to parents with additional vulnerabilities who are considered at Legal Gateway Panel. The aim is to provide additional support to ensure that parents can engage effectively with Children’s Social Care. In exceptional circumstances it may be used to assist parents in understanding and complying with Court directed actions however it should NOT be used as a replacement for independent legal advice which parents are entitled to access during any formal process. The purpose of the support is to ensure that the parent/carer can:

* Understand information being shared by social workers and what is required of them as parents
* Ensure they can meaningfully participate within meetings and assessments
* Make informed choices
* Have their voice heard by supporting them to express their views and wishes
* Know when to access legal representation
* Advocate for themselves where possible

Examples of the types of circumstance in which a family may require support includes but is not exhaustive of the following.

* To be able to clearly understand the issues and what is required of them.
* To be able to work in partnership and collaboratively with Children's Social Care to identify issues together and to co-produce a plan to support change.
* To embrace the opportunity of effecting change and understand the consequences that a lack of change may bring.

**REFERRAL PROCESS**

All referrals must be submitted on the appropriate Referral Form for consideration by a Head of Service within Children’s Social Care. Referrals must be framed in terms of the advocacy support required by the parent/carer and an estimate of the number of hours of support needed will also be required to arrive at an estimate of the cost of service. (Direct support is usually offered for period of 1 – 1.5 hours per week. Where this is not offered virtually travel time may also be required. Adapt (North East) can support in providing an initial estimate of the work required.)

Once approval has been obtained from a Head of Service then parental consent for the referral must also be obtained. The referral should then be sent to Adapt (North East) (generaloffice@adapt-tynedale.org.uk) with a copy to the Commissioning Team (commissioning@northumberland.gov.uk), who will record the level of expenditure agreed.

NB Adapt (North East) will not progress a referral unless both a Head of Service and the Parent/Carer has provided written consent on the appropriate documentation.

Please note that if the number of hours of support required increases after the point at which approval by a Head of Service has been given then you must submit complete the Review section of the referral form to seek approval for the increase. Approval must be sought prior to the service being delivered and a copy of the form must again be submitted to commissioning.

**REVIEW**

This section of the form is not required in every case. If the service is delivered within a 6-8 week period and no additional funding is required, then only the Evaluation section of the form should be completed.

The Review section should be completed and submitted to the Head of Service to report o progress after 6-8 weeks of the service commencing. It should also be completed if the services is needed for longer than expected and costs are above the original estimate. Once the Head of Service has approved the Review a copy should be sent to the Commissioning Team (commissioning@northumberland.gov.uk), who will record the new review date and/or increased level of expenditure agreed.

**EVALUATION**

It is important that the outcome of the process is captured, both in terms of individual case management and to support future learning when developing services. Please ensure that the evaluation section of the referral form is completed once the service has been delivered and submitted to both the approving Head of Service and Commissioning Team.