

Information for Families

Guide to the Early Help Assessment and Plan



This guide explains how we work with children, young people and their families in Redcar & Cleveland.

So that you know what to expect throughout the early help assessment process and understand how we will work with you, your family and your support network to create a plan that supports the wellbeing of your child or children.



Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.

Useful Telephone Numbers

Family Hubs

Most of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council's early help staff, such as Health Visitors, Key Workers, Targeted Intervention Officers, Schools Nurses and Family Hub staff, are based in our three main Family Hub centres.

If you want to get in touch with someone who is already helping you, they can be contacted by their direct number or by phoning your nearest Family Hub and leaving a message:

East Cleveland Family Hub - 01287 626158

Redcar Family Hub - 01642 776030

Greater Eston Family Hub - 01642 513665

Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH) – Early Help

If you would like to refer yourself for early help support, or discuss your family situation with someone for some advice, please contact the Early Help Coordinators in the Redcar and Cleveland Multi Agency Children's Hub

MACH Early Help Helpline - 01642 130678



During all our conversations and visits with your family and network you can expect the following from the Early Help Teams at Redcar & Cleveland Council:

- **We will be honest and respectful** in all the discussions we have with you about any worries and concerns.
- **We will ask you lots of questions** to find out about what's working well in your family's life and explore what you, or others, are worried about and what everyone thinks needs to happen to help get the worries sorted out.
- **We will spend time with your child or children** (if they are old enough) to understand their wishes and feelings and make sure this is at the centre of all the work we do.
- **We will work with you and the important people in your life to develop a plan that keeps your child safe and well**, we want you to be central to this process.
- **We will use clear, everyday language when we speak or write to you** so you understand exactly why we are worried and what we need to see achieved for us not to have a worry, even if you don't agree with us.

For example, we shouldn't use a term like 'neglect' without describing exactly what has happened to have worries that a child is being neglected. If we use any words that you don't understand, if you don't think we have explained something very well or aren't 100% clear what we mean, please tell us.



About the Assessment Process

Why have I been contacted by an early help worker?

There are a number of reasons why an early help worker from Redcar & Cleveland Council's Children's Services might be involved with your family. You might have requested help or someone else might have requested help on your behalf.

Sometimes Children's Services get involved because we have received a 'referral.' This means that someone has contacted us to say they are worried about a child. If we receive a referral, it is considered by a social worker - they have a legal duty to look into this further, even if the worries aren't confirmed. If they don't think a social work assessment is necessary, they might ask an early help worker to contact you instead.

What is an early help assessment?

The early help assessment is the process that early help workers use to gather information about you and your family, so that we can establish if we need to help and support you to create a plan that keeps your child safe and well cared for.

The assessment will consider what you or other people are worried about, what is working well to address these worries and what needs to happen next.

To do this we will work closely with you, your child and other important people in your lives.

We will also speak to people who work for other organisations who might know your family, like someone from your child's school or your health visitor. We will do this to get their perspective on how well you are doing and their view on whether you are having any struggles.

Reasons for undertaking an early help assessment:

Children and families may need support from a wide range of local organisations and agencies. Early help assessments are undertaken where a child and family would benefit from co-ordinated support from more than one organisation or agency (e.g. education, health, housing or the police).

The early help assessment is undertaken by a lead professional, this is usually an early help worker, and will involve any other agencies supporting you and your family. The assessment will identify what help your child and family needs to address any worries. This is to stop things from getting worse and prevent the situation reaching a point where a social work assessment is required.

Your early help worker will explain to you the reasons for the assessment.

Do I have to give my consent to the assessment?

If we are undertaking an early help assessment we will ask you for your consent, which you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If we are concerned that your child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, your consent is not needed, we are legally required to seek advice from a social worker who may consider it necessary to undertake a social work assessment.

What happens at the end of the assessment?

At the end of the assessment your early help worker will create a plan with you, this will set out recommendations for what happens next and it will be considered by their Team Manager. The manager will consider all the information in the assessment and authorise the assessment outcome if they agree with



the early help worker's recommendations.

Your early help worker will share the early help assessment with you and explain what will happen next.

The assessment usually takes about 45 working days.

What will you do with my records?

Throughout the assessment we will collect and record information about you and your family. We will store and process this information in line with the requirements set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

Children's Services are allowed to share this information with other agencies but ONLY for very specific reasons, for example, to protect a child from the risk of significant harm or to prevent a crime. For more information about how we process your data please see the Early Help Privacy Notice.

At the end of the assessment process, you will receive a paper copy of your assessment. You can also request to see the information that we hold on you and your children at any time.

How can I share my feedback

We value your feedback about your involvement with Children's Services and will invite you to complete a survey at the end of the assessment process.

Should you wish to make a compliment, comment or complaint about the service you received, you can do so at any time by emailing PeopleServicesComplaints@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk.



What happens during the Early Help Assessment?

During the assessment we will collect information to help answer the following key questions:

- **What are we worried about?**
- **What's working well?**
- **What needs to happen to address the worries?**

This part of the guide explains what is involved in the assessment process and explains all the things that we will consider.

Involving you, your child and your network

At the beginning of the assessment process we will ask you to tell us about the important people in your family's life such as:

- The people who are most important in your child's life and
- the people that help and support you.

With your consent, we will work with you to identify a network of all the important people to support you and your family. We will call this a support network.

Your network can include your extended family, friends and neighbours. It's really important that you have a network, they will be involved in the plan that we all work together to create to make sure your child or children are safe and well.

At the beginning of the assessment process we will arrange a meeting with you and your support network. Network meetings will need to take place regularly throughout the assessment process.

The wishes and feelings of your child or children

We want the wishes and feelings of your child or children to be central to the assessment. It's really important that your early help worker sees and speaks with your child, and they will need to spend time with them alone. The early help worker will do this in a caring and friendly way and will communicate with your child in a way which is appropriate to their age and needs.

To help your child explain anything they are worried about, who and what makes them feel safe and well cared for and what they want their future to look like for them not to have a worry (if they have any), the early help worker will use different approaches and activities to help them open up and talk about how they feel. This might include encouraging them to draw pictures and write things down.

The worries, good things and wishes that your child shares will form part of the assessment; so that their thoughts and feelings can inform what happens next.



What are we worried about?

Your early help worker will ask lots of questions to understand what has happened to make people worried and, most importantly, the impact this has had on your child or children.

They will ask questions to understand when the worries started, the worst thing that has happened, how often this has happened and the last time this happened.

To understand the extent of the worries the early help worker will ask, you, your child and people in your network about this. They will also speak to other professionals to find out if they have any worries.

When we talk to people about their worries, we will always make a distinction between what people have seen and heard to make them worried and their opinion.

We will also consider anything which is happening in you or your child's life which isn't a worry in itself but is making the worries more difficult to deal with. This is known as a '**complicating factor**', for example, if someone in the household has a long term illness.

When your early help worker has collected the information that they need about the worries, they will develop a worry statement and share this with you and your network.

Worry Statement

The worry statement is part of the assessment, it summarises the information collected by the early help worker to explain who is worried, what has happened to make them have a worry, what is likely to happen if nothing changes and the potential impact this will have on your child.

If there are lots of things happening that the early help worker is worried about there might be up to four separate worry statements. The worry statement(s) will be shared with you, your network and any other professionals so that everyone understands what we are worried about.

What's working well?

Your early help worker will ask you, your child, your network and other professionals lots of questions to understand the best ways everyone has been trying to get the worries sorted out. They will be particularly interested in:

Existing Strengths – Who has been doing what to try and get the worries sorted out?

Existing Wellbeing – Who has done what to keep the child safe, particularly at times when the things we are worried about have been happening.

All of the what's working well information will help you, your network and your early help worker to agree 'what needs to happen' we can use the existing strengths and wellbeing as the basis for this.



What needs to happen?

When your early help worker has considered the worries and what's working well they will write a wellbeing goal and agree this with you and your network.

Wellbeing Goal

The wellbeing goal explains what the day to day life of the child would need to look like for everyone, including your child, not to have a worry and feel confident that your child is safe. The wellbeing goals must be met in order for the case to be closed.

There will be a wellbeing goal linked to every worry statement, there could be up to four wellbeing goals that you are working towards.

There needs to be a plan in place for each worry statement and wellbeing goal which shows us how you and your network are keeping the child safe from the worries and reaching the goals set. The plan is explained further on the next page of this guide.

Wellbeing Scale Questions

Throughout the assessment lots of meetings will take place, involving you, your child and your network, as well as your early help worker and professionals from other agencies. Wellbeing scale questions are used at meetings to help everyone involved explain how well they feel the plan is working to keep your child safe and to explain what they would need to see happening in order to increase their rating. Everyone at the meeting will be asked to answer the question, including you and your child if they are old enough to contribute to this process.

The wellbeing scale question will be adapted to reflect your family's individual circumstances but will look something like this:

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is 'the child is safe and well and the early help worker is confident that the support network can consistently meet their needs' and 0 is 'the child is not safe and well and the support network are unable to meet their needs' how worried are you about the child?

Scaling questions help generate conversations about what needs to happen, it also helps everyone to see if things are getting better.



What is a Plan?

At the end of the early help assessment it will be necessary to develop a plan to achieve the wellbeing goals identified during the assessment.

The early help worker will work with you, your child(ren) and your network to develop a plan that works for you and your family.

There are a number of different parts to the plan:

Bottom Lines

If there are any bottom lines your early help worker will explain this to you at an early stage. These are the most important things that must happen for the early help worker and other professionals to be satisfied that your child is safe and protected from harm in their current situation.

If you don't stick to the bottom lines, the early help worker will need to review the situation, this could result in a referral to the Multi Agency Children's Hub and a discussion with a social worker to see if they think a social work assessment is necessary.

Timeline

The timeline sets out how and when we will work with you to achieve the wellbeing goal. Most of the tasks in the timeline will be for you and your network but there will also be tasks for the professionals who are involved with your family, including the early help worker. Every timeline will include the following stages:

- **Preparation Phase** – The work the early help worker will do to prepare for safety planning work to start.
- **Safety Planning Phase** – Helping you to build a network and create a safety plan that keeps you and your child safe.
- **Monitoring Phase** – Explains how everyone, including your network, will check that the plan is working, and for how long, so that we can be sure that this will continue to work when children's services are no longer involved with your family.

Who is involved in the plan

This part of the plan sets out all the regular tasks that members of the support network will do to help support the children. For example, it might specify that Mum's sister will visit three times a week to check things are okay or that Granny will phone everyday.



Rules of the Plan

It's really important that you help to create the safety plan because we know that this is far more likely to work for you when we are no longer around.

The rules of the plan will show everyone who will do what to keep your child safe if the problems ever happen again.

In some cases this will mean that the rules of the plan need to stay in place until the child is 18.

How will my plan be reviewed?

Lots of meetings will take place with you, your child, network, early help worker and other professionals to develop your plan and check on progress. Your early help worker will explain how often these meetings will need to take place.

If you have any questions about your plan, or how it will be reviewed, please contact your early help worker.

