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**Early Help Reviews**

**Practice Guidance**

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# **Introduction**

Early Help is most effective when delivered in collaboration with relevant parties (family, professionals and wider family and friends’ network) who have a role in providing support to children and families, it requires agencies to work together to ensure children and families receive support in a timely and responsive way leading to good outcomes.

This guidance has been written to ensure there is a collaborative process around Early Help intervention, with a particular focus on review meetings.

**Good practice principles**

1. Professionals should attend all review meetings to drive plans and allow families to hear professional views first hand.
2. The ethos of review meetings should be based on collaboration between Early Help, the professional network, and the family.
3. Information must be shared between agencies, networks, and the family.
4. Professionals need to build and sustain relationships with the family.

# **Involving children and young people in the review**

Children and young people’s involvement within the Early Help intervention should be meaningful and appropriate to their needs and wishes. Practitioners should help the child/young person to be fully informed about what is going on, why Early Help services are involved and include them in the process. Involving children and young people will require Early Help Workers to take into consideration the child’s age, level of understanding, communication preferences, needs, and general circumstances.

To support practitioners in delivering good practice, a focus group was set up with children and young people in Kent in December 2022. The young people in the group responded to questions about their experiences and what they feel practitioners can do to help them be involved, keep informed, devise plans, and attend or be supported with any meetings.

These are the key messages children and young people wanted practitioners to know:

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| **Before a meeting:** Personally invite me to the meeting in advance, so I know it is coming and have time to prepare.  Explain to me what the purpose of the meeting is, who will be there, and why.  If possible, let me have a say on when and where the meeting will take place and who will attend so I feel comfortable.  If I want one, organise a pre-meeting with me to discuss what will be spoken about in the main meeting and what I want to say.  Do not just give me a form to fill out!  Support me to prepare for my meetings by giving me different ways that help me share my views. This could be prompt cards or flashcards. **During a meeting:** Introduce all the workers at the meeting.  Tell me why they are there and how they support me - especially if they are strangers to me.  Speak to me directly in the meeting and give me clear opportunities to share my views in a way that suits me.  Do not speak to each other as if I’m not there.  Ask me what I think and take me seriously even though I am young. Use language that I understand, not acronyms and jargon.  Do not judge me, say “I know how you feel” or dismiss my opinions; you have not lived my life and experienced what I am going through.  Do not prioritise my family’s or other workers' views above mine.  Include a section in the meeting about what is going well and what I enjoy.  Take an interest in my life, do not just focus on the negatives.  Be as open and honest as possible about what is happening now and what might happen in the future.  Check up on me during the meeting and provide breaks if I need them. **After a meeting:** Give me time and/or a safe space after the meeting to think about what has been said. Meetings can sometimes be an emotional rollercoaster for me.  If my meetings take place during school time, let my teachers know that I may not be able to re-join the class and start learning straight away.  Provide me with a copy of the report or plan. Ask me if I want to get the same plan as the workers, a short version or just an overview. The plan should be easy for me to understand and written with my reactions in mind. In the report or plan, write what I say - not your interpretation of it!  Let me know how I can contact you in between meetings if I need you or want to discuss the meeting or anything else with you.  Keep me updated on what happens after the meeting, especially if things do not go to plan or happen more slowly than expected.  Check up on me after the meeting. It shows you care about me and my feelings. |

Where a child or young person does not wish to attend or where there are specific reasons as to why it would not be appropriate, they should be supported by their Early Help Worker to share their thoughts and feelings in other ways. This may include support from a trusted adult, letter, pictures, or video.

# **Membership and Attendance at an Early Help Review Meeting**

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states “Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who may come into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information, and taking prompt action. In order that organisations, agencies, and practitioners collaborate effectively, it is vital that everyone working with children and families, including those who work with parents/carers, understand the role they should play and the role of other practitioners”.

An Early Help Review meeting should include the people most able to contribute to an effective plan to promote change along with the family. The members will likely consist of professionals already known to the family (those involved in the assessment), such as Health and Education, as well as any family/friends from the network who the family have identified as being part of their support system.

The Early Help Worker should consult with the child/young person and their family about the most convenient time for them to attend, and where appropriate and feasible, provide options as to where the meeting could take place (e.g. home, school, Children’s Centre). This includes an option for online (virtual) meetings, where face to face is not possible. Consideration should be given to how the family will travel, the timing, and any childcare issues. If the child is of school age, the meeting should be held outside of school time wherever possible. A record about the discussion around arrangements should be noted on the file.

For families where English is not their first language, the use of interpreting services to support them within the meetings should be considered and encouraged.

The Early Help Worker will prepare the child/young person and their family for the review and ensure they have the relevant information required.

There should be no surprises for the family concerning what the meeting will involve, the information or proposed actions to be shared.

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| **Top tips for engaging professionals** |
| Work together in the best interests of the children and their family. |
| Use the same collaborative and empowering approach with professionals you would use with families. |
| Be proactive. At times this may prove difficult. Ensure you remain persistent and patient. |
| Use a strengths-based approach and encourage professionals to use the same approach. |
| Map out the network and make contact prior to the initial review meeting, consider using the template email in the resources section of this guidance. |
| Respect each other’s roles and responsibilities and recognise individual expertise. |
| Be clear about professionals’ roles within the network, including the benefits of their involvement for the family. |
| Take time to build relationships and understand the perspectives of others. In turn this will ensure the professional network work well together, supporting the family throughout your involvement/after our involvement ends. |

# **Chairing the Early Help Review Meeting**

The Chairperson (usually the Early Help Worker or Senior Early Help Worker) must ensure that the meeting provides an environment which is designed and intended to be helpful and supportive. This will include, thinking about who is present, where people are seated, what is said and how it is said, and ensuring there is professional challenge of language, which is blaming, or when jargon or acronyms are used.

With support from their Early Help Worker, the child/young person may wish to chair or co-chair their meeting, the Early Help Worker will ensure the child/young person has all the information needed to enable them to successfully chair their own meeting.

If there is drift from professionals in progressing actions, an agreement should be made about how this will be addressed. If this is not possible and there is no resolution within the family’s timescales, there may be a need to use the escalation policy. This involves a more experienced or senior member of staff liaising with their equivalent in the relevant agency using the resolution process. [Kent Resolution of Professional Disagreement Policy (proceduresonline.com)](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proceduresonline.com%2Fkentandmedway%2Fpdfs%2Fres_prof_disagree.pdf%3Fzoom_highlight%3Descalation%23search%3D%2522escalation%2522&data=05%7C01%7CJane.Caldwell%40kent.gov.uk%7Ca966877e99824584361a08db26262445%7C3253a20dc7354bfea8b73e6ab37f5f90%7C0%7C0%7C638145717477916346%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=nDROjrrAZyvk4J%2BDtlL4FMDaDMx5Kzdd95rB1S9MD1I%3D&reserved=0)

Where a child or young person has not attended the meeting, the chair will confirm how discussions and plans will be shared with the child in a manner that is appropriate to their age and understanding. The most appropriate person to do that should be agreed within the meeting.

The review document needs to be written to the child and consider the current outcomes and whether additional ones need to be added, as well as evidencing the impact on the child/young person and family.

The review document should be shared with the family and if consent is given, these should be shared with the professional and safety networks.

Some families can feel anxious about sharing their information and require support to understand the benefit of this. Be open and transparent with families about why, what, how and with whom their information will be shared. Support families to understand how sharing the information will ensure they receive the right support, at the right time, from the right people.

The decision to share information should be reviewed throughout the period of support to ensure families are aware they have a right to change their mind about consent.

# **Early Help review meeting agenda**

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| **Welcome and introductions – overview of the purpose of the review meeting.**   * Introduction and who is present. * Apologies received. * Any information received by professionals/ networks members who are unable to attend. * Brief overview of why there is an Early Help plan. * Ask the family if there are any additional worries that they wish to discuss during the meeting, this may include information they wish to share or difficulties they need further support with. |  |
| **What has happened since the last assessment or review meeting.**   * Start the meeting on a positive note by focussing on what is working well for the child and parents/carers now. * Focus on the needs of the child and what life is like for them and keep focussed on this common goal. * Note the improvements since the last review meeting or assessment. * Previous actions and progress, as well as identifying new areas of concern. * Update any changes since the last meeting starting with the family and circulate reports/information from absent agencies. * Address each action from the plan separately, family views should be sought on each action and chair to seek details from each service/network on what support they have/ can offer, what impact the support has had and what future support looks like, including timeframes. |  |
| **Views of the Child – (see Top Tips from Children about positive meetings)**  Children and young people should be told about the meeting, what it involves and asked if they want to attend and options on how to do this, along with ways they can contribute their views to the meeting.  Seek their views on the plan and how it is going, anything they think should be added or taken off, anything they want family and professionals to know, change or help with. |  |
| **Review the Early Help plan– what has been achieved, what is working well, what we are still worried about, the impact on the child/children.**   * Ensure parents views are gathered first, then professionals (unless parents request otherwise) on the progress of the plan and any barriers. * Consider the aims and actions, what has been achieved or not achieved, the impact this has had on the child and measure progress. * Consider positives and areas which need further development/ intervention. * Review the whole plan or note why any part is not discussed. * Consider whether parents or professionals want anything adding to the plan – be clear about why in the minutes. * Ensure the plan continues to reflect the safety plan, that it is SMART and written to the child. * Ensure that the agreed actions are SMART and recorded ready to add to the review on Early Help Module, including the actions being taken, by which agency/family member and timescales. |  |
| **Scaling**   * Is there evidence that parents have understood the changes needed, and have the skills and resources to implement and sustain the changes? * Are the concerns increasing or decreasing? Where concerns have increased, should a discussion take place regarding next steps, further support, or escalation to Children’s Social Work Services? * Should the family remain open to Early Help, or can we now end our involvement? |  |

# **Effective use of a Scaling Question to review progress.**

Scaling is used as a tool to gather a judgement from those involved with the family to ensure everyone has an opportunity to rate how safe they think the child/young person is on a scale of 0-10.

Within the review meeting, the scaling question(s) is a useful tool to explore views on the progress of the plan and achieving the wellbeing goals. This helps the family and professionals think about whether things are improving or not and often the family appreciate hearing the score and explanation from others. Children, family, and professionals should be asked their views on the score, with time given for them to gather their thoughts about the rationale for their score. Always ask the family first. The most important thing about scaling is to understand everyone's explanations for their score on the scale. For example, ‘*you said things are between a 5 and 6, what would need to happen so you could say things were between a 6 and 7*?’

When reviewing the scaling question, it is helpful to:

* Remind everyone that 10 is not about being perfect, but that everyone is confident the statement in the scaling question is being met and achieved over time.
* Remind everyone of their previous score, either from the assessment or previous review.

Example of scaling:

*Helen, on a scale of 0-10 where 10 is that you are attending school regularly (more than 95% attendance) and are able to engage in your learning without worrying how your mum is coping whilst you are away. You will also be able to share your worries with your counsellor, meaning you are no longer cutting your arms or picking at your hands until they bleed. Zero (0) is where your worries and anxieties feel huge for you, you continue to cut yourself, or worse, attempt to take your own life and as a result need to spend time in hospital where you can be kept safe.*

# **Ending intensive support**

As the aim of Early Help is to promote resilience, not reliance, Early Help Workers and families should be seeking to end their support as soon as the outcomes have been achieved and there is confidence that the progress can be sustained.

At the final review, Early Help Workers must discuss next steps with the family and agree what needs to happen when the intensive support ends. This will form the content of the Moving Forward Plan which is shared with the family to enable progress to be sustained and to aid their own capacity to resolve any future difficulties.

The Moving Forward Plan must be shared with the family, and with consent it should be shared with the partner agencies who continue to be involved with the family to ensure continued support. Prior to closure the case summary should be updated to reflect the Moving Forward Plan.

# **Additional resources**

[Safety Planning Guidance](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms2%2Fmedia%2F18261%2Fsafety-planning-guidance.docx&data=05%7C01%7CJane.Caldwell%40kent.gov.uk%7C77dd6796853d437eeade08db15b6a643%7C3253a20dc7354bfea8b73e6ab37f5f90%7C0%7C0%7C638127646433078382%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=8NN8cdqYV7Guk%2BBiPbnh0kTiPrSojuMntDyFF1JSblk%3D&reserved=0)

[SMART Plans Guidance](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms2%2Fmedia%2F18262%2Fsmart-plans-guidance.docx&data=05%7C01%7CJane.Caldwell%40kent.gov.uk%7C77dd6796853d437eeade08db15b6a643%7C3253a20dc7354bfea8b73e6ab37f5f90%7C0%7C0%7C638127646433078382%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=GPVyVL6dXHvkXuxLDptun%2F0mGha0z5e%2FdBdN6MVDdrw%3D&reserved=0)

[Top tips from Children about positive meetings](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms2%2Fmedia%2F18258%2Ftop-tips-from-children-about-positive-meetings.pdf&data=05%7C01%7CJane.Caldwell%40kent.gov.uk%7C77dd6796853d437eeade08db15b6a643%7C3253a20dc7354bfea8b73e6ab37f5f90%7C0%7C0%7C638127646433078382%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=%2FOe%2FSgu%2F7lPF1w8mhL2Mq48dDOR30gdTY5gdWtwBPfo%3D&reserved=0)

[Communities of Practice Streams channel](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fweb.microsoftstream.com%2Fchannel%2Fba55b338-0bf2-4d0b-bd2e-e04b3ba6f0ab&data=05%7C01%7CJane.Caldwell%40kent.gov.uk%7C77dd6796853d437eeade08db15b6a643%7C3253a20dc7354bfea8b73e6ab37f5f90%7C0%7C0%7C638127646433078382%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=0eyq8Q6UPZM4RlB6Y3NTBtM8KWdVsdmpr%2BQPmYU6ACc%3D&reserved=0)





