

Stoke-on-Trent

Early Help Assessment

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1 National and local context

National

- Working Together (2013) advocates the use of a shared early help assessment for children, young people and families.
- Although there were many successes with the Common Assessment Framework process, a separate document needed to be completed for each child within the family, leading to duplication of time and effort. This, amongst other things, led to a low number of CAF assessments being completed across the city. As a result, it has been difficult to accurately identify and record all early intervention work being completed with children and families in the city. Therefore, it was necessary to improve / streamline the CAF process.
- The Early Help Assessment represents the improved process. It allows lower level concerns (levels two and three on the Guide to Levels of Need) to be identified and managed effectively before needs escalate. It will also be the vehicle for escalating into Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting (VCCP).

Local arrangements

- The paperwork has been developed using learning from practitioner and family experiences with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the SOT Early Help Assessment pilot, the Re-balance me pilot project and principles and family assessments developed in other Local Authority areas.
- The Early Help Assessment paperwork was agreed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board in February 2014 and was implemented as the agreed assessment to be utilised by all partner agencies on 1st April 2014.
- It is recognised that some services will need to add modular inserts to the assessment paperwork to collect additional information relevant to their disciplines.

- The assessment and action plans are holistic and family focussed (parents and children). The document can be utilised when assessing adult only households.
- A lead worker will co-ordinate and review the action plan with the family and all agencies involved.
- It will streamline and replace the assessment process and documentation for all levels of early intervention

The Role of the Early Help Assessment Lead Worker

- Build a trusting relationship with the child/family/adult to secure their engagement in the Early Help Assessment Process.
- Be in contact with the family to keep them updated on progress and actions, ensuring they remain central to any decisions made about them and also to answer any queries the family may have.
- To empower the child/family/adult to make decisions including challenging them when appropriate.
- To arrange any Early Help review meetings and chair these between the family and other professionals and identify where others may need to be involved and make contact with those services as appropriate.
- Ensure the family and professionals have copies of up to date documentation e.g. the Early Help Assessment form and Action Plans, and make sure that everyone agrees to the actions and is aware of future meeting.
- The Lead Worker will contact the Early Help team when for e.g they register the Early Help assessment/action plan, change the Lead Worker details and close the Early Help Assessment.
- Ensure an effective handover when there is a change of Lead Worker or closure of the Early Help assessment this may include supporting the child/family through key transition points including accessing specialist/statutory services.
- To discuss any issues with the identified Early Help assessment champion in your respective organisation.
- Develop timely exit strategies with families so as dependency from services is not created or families are not closed too early.

Role of the Early Help Assessment Champion

- Have a clear understanding of the Early Help Assessment paperwork and process.
- Be the point of contact within an organisation/setting for the Early Help Assessment.
- Support and develop confidence in practitioners within an organisation/setting to carry out Early Help Assessments and Early Help Action Plans effectively.
- Advise practitioners when they come across barriers/resistance or non-engagement from families /adults.
- Support practitioners to ensure an effective handover when there is a change of Lead Worker or closure of the Early Help assessment this may include supporting the child/family through key transition points including accessing specialist/statutory services.
- Support practitioners to develop timely exit strategies with families so as dependency from services is not created or families are not closed too early.
- Promptly cascade to practitioners/colleagues up-to date information and any new developments about the Early Help Assessment.
- Feedback any issues regarding time or capacity to your line manager and the Early Help Assessment team and then to be part of developing sustainable resources for practitioners to use when they are completing Early Help Assessments.
- Identify any skill gaps and appropriate training requirements within teams and feedback to your line manager and the Early Help Team.
- Engage in the quality assurance process of the Early help Assessment alongside the Early Help Assessment team.
- Promote the Early Help Assessment and to share good practice with other agencies.
- Understand the role of the Co-operative Working Access Team (formerly known as FISH) team and how they can signpost practitioners to relevant service.
- Attend and have an active role in the Early Help Assessment champion meetings.

As at 21/01/15