EARLY HELP ASSESSMENT

Toolkit for Practitioners 2014

Document History

I. Document History

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Name	Date	Issue
Lynda Luck	06/08/2014	1.0
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Contents

The toolkit has been divided into the following sections for ease of use

Introduction to the Toolkit

Using this document

This toolkit is for use by any practitioner using the Early Help Assessment process to support child/ren, families and adults resident in Stoke-on-Trent.

Whilst this document gives guidance on best practice, it does not remove the need for professional judgement that takes account of all factors affecting child/ren, family or adults.

N.B: throughout this toolkit, the term child refers to an unborn baby, child or young person.
'Family' refers to parents, step parents, carers and their children but can also refer to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends who might also live in the same household. Adult is only used for households where there are no children.

This toolkit will lead you through the Early Help process and provide information on other sources of support.

Early Help for families in Stoke-on-Trent

Early Help for families has evolved from the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Early Help is similar to CAF in that it is an early intervention and prevention process that can be used by practitioners to support families and meet their needs. However, there are some differences between Early Help and CAF and these can be found in the national and local context section, local arrangements and key messages from the pilot. The main difference is that

- each family will only have one assessment that takes into account all members of that household whereas the CAF only related to the individual child

National and local context

- Working Together (2013) advocates the use of a shared early help assessment for children, young people and families
- The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been used in Stoke-on-Trent since 2005
- Although there have been many successes with the CAF process, a separate assessment was completed for each child within the family, leading in many cases 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 interventions completed with children and families. 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 is also the vehicle for escalating families into Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting (VCCP).

Local arrangements

- The paperwork has been developed using learning from practitioners, family experiences with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the 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 piloted / tested between April and August 2013 by a number of local authority disciplines; mainly within locality services. The paperwork was further tested by a broader range of agencies in phase two of the pilot between November 2013 and February 2014
- A number of different agencies were involved in the pilot including:
  - Integrated Family Intervention Service
  - Families Matter Lead workers
  - four private day care settings
  - one Local Authority nursery School
  - 3 primary schools, four secondary schools
  - one special school
  - one alternative education provider
  - two providers from the Voluntary and Community sector
  - one school nurse
  - three Health Visitors
- Between April 2013 and March 2014, 714 families were supported using the Early Help process
- Two of the recent Ofsted inspections of Children's Centres in Stoke-on-Trent cited the Early Help Assessment as a positive and effective means to identify and support families in a holistic way
- The Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Board agreed, on 28 February 2013, that the Early Help Assessment would replace the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) from 1 April 2014 when no further CAFs would be registered
- Existing CAF's will remain open on the CAF register until closed by the lead worker
- All Board representatives agreed to accept full and joint responsibility for the early identification of family needs and that their staff would take lead professional responsibility for cases
- All board members agreed that named champions would be nominated by all partner agencies. Nominated champions have attended briefing sessions to enable them to cascade information on the use of Early Help Assessments within their own organisations. The briefing sessions will continue bi-monthly
- The purpose of the assessment tool and key messages will be communicated via a co-ordinated plan led by the corporate communications team
- An outcome monitoring tool will be agreed and used as part of the assessment to capture progress made by the families/adults supported by this process

- The Early Help Assessment and Early Help Action Plan can be downloaded from www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk
- On Friday, 20 June 2014 there was a formal launch of the Early Help Strategy which incorporated the Early Help Assessment and the Guide to Levels of Need.

Key messages from agencies involved in the pilot

- Early Help terminology is more service user friendly, easier for children, families, adults and practitioners to understand and is frequently used in the above guidance
- The tool is a shared assessment for all internal and external agencies working with children, families and adults. It can also be used for adult only households
- The tool promotes family focused assessment. Practitioners no longer need to complete multiple assessments for each household member. Families no longer need to keep repeating their story to different professionals
- It focuses on children, families and adults in a holistic way and gives professionals an opportunity to listen to what young people, parents and adults want
- It enhances opportunities to build relationships with families and allows more opportunity for disclosures from children, families and adults
- the process provides a mechanism for professionals to meet and share information with each other (if capacity allows)
- The central collation of Early Help Assessments, through the procurement and implementation of an electronic monitoring system, will allow a city-wide perspective on Early Intervention across partner agencies. However, the information is currently recorded on a spread sheet and this is inappropriate for a number of reasons.

Role of the Early Help Team

The role of the Early Help Team is to provide support and advice to any practitioner involved in the Early Help process. This support can include:

- offering support and guidance to the identified champions across all agencies including supporting them to deliver cascade training
- advice on completing the Early Help Assessment form or action plan
- sign-posting practitioners to different types of services in the City
- answering queries on any existing Early Help cases or providing advice as to whether or not an Early Help Assessment should be completed
- ‘trouble shooting’ for any cases that have issues which need to be resolved. However their role will be part of a broader ‘escalation’ route. Advice can also be given on any cross border issues that may arise in relation to the Early Help process
- Recording and monitoring all Early Help Assessments completed/closed
- Collating data to provide information/reports.

Practitioners should always contact their own line manager for advice in the first instance. The Early Help Team provides additional support specifically related to the Early Help process. The Early Help Team can be contacted on 01782 231964 /01782 236334 or alternatively by email at early.help@stoke.gov.uk

The Early Help Assessment Database

Earlier in the toolkit, reference was made to “the implementation of an electronic monitoring system” however at the time of writing this system is not in place. Until this is in place the Early Help Team will continue to hold a central database, recording all Early Help Assessments completed in Stoke-on-Trent. Internal agencies should continue to scan and email the completed page 2 of the assessment form to obtain an Early Help ID number and page 10 at closure to early.help@stoke.gov.uk

External agencies should telephone the Early Help Team on 01782 236334 / 231964 / 235273 unless they were part of the pilot and successfully registered on the Secure Portal in which case they can continue to email the assessment until the electronic monitoring system is in place.

Why would I need to check the Early Help Database?

- To check if a child you have a concern about already has an existing Early Help Assessment
- To register that you have completed an Early Help
- To close an Early Help
- To change lead worker or amend any other details e.g. address
- To log refused consent

The Guide to Levels of Need

The Guide to Levels of Need is a tool outlining circumstances and services able to provide support, to children and young people. It is divided into several levels and gives a definition for each level, for example, Level 1 would be children who have universal needs that are met by universal services.

The Guide has been agreed by Stoke-on-Trent, Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership Board and Safeguarding Board and is widely used across the Partnership.

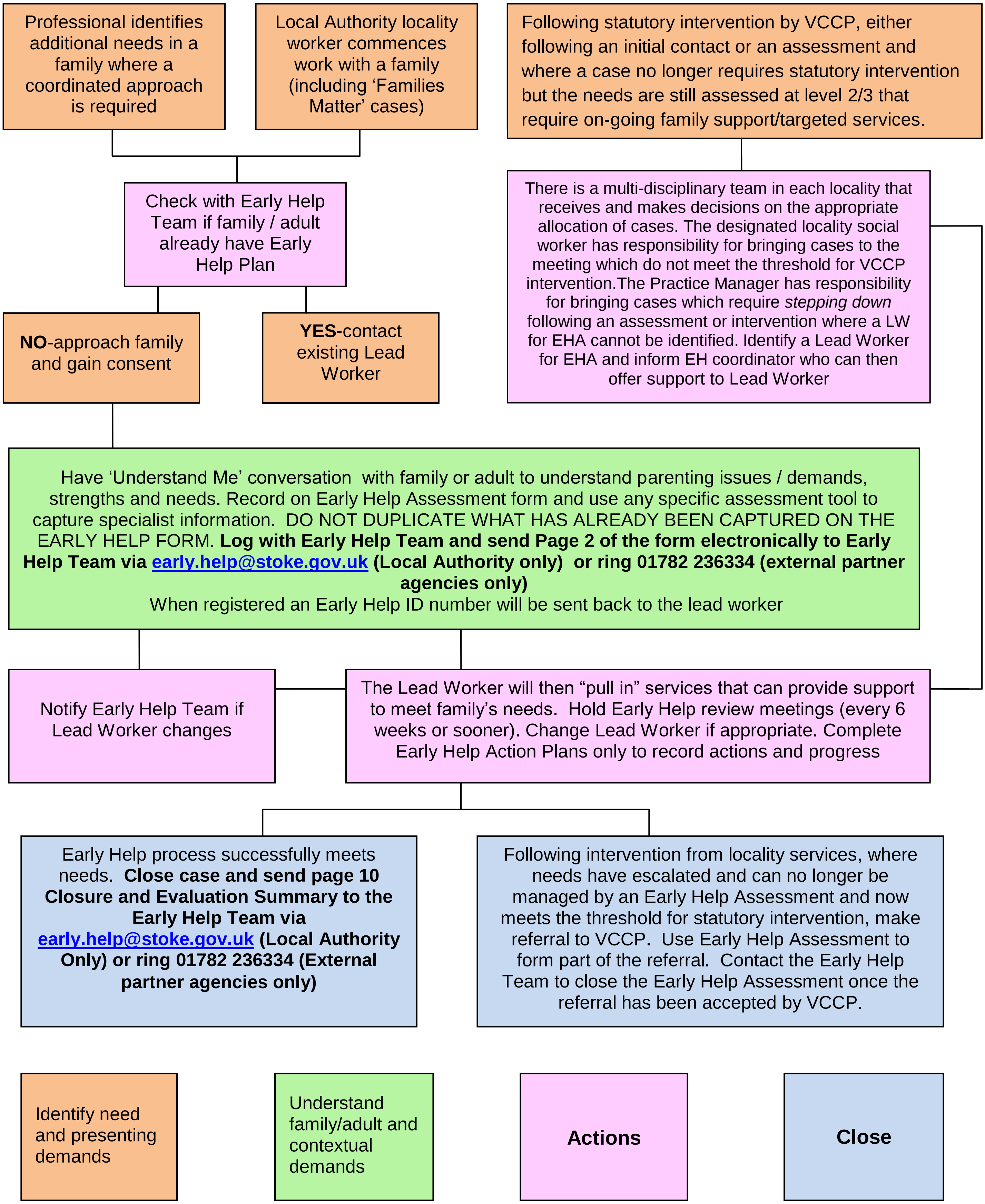
The levels that feature in the Guide are:

Level 1	–	Universal Needs
Level 2	–	Additional Needs
Level 3	–	Intensive Needs
Level 4a	–	Children In Need
Level 4b	–	Children in Need of Safeguarding
Level 4c	–	Children in Care

This Guide is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it accurately reflects changes in services.

The guide can be download from www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk.

Flow chart


Professional identifies additional needs in a family where a coordinated approach is required
Local Authority locality worker commences work with a family (including 'Families Matter' cases)
Following statutory intervention by VCCP, either following an initial contact or an assessment and where a case no longer requires statutory intervention but the needs are still assessed at level 2/3 that require on-going family support/targeted services.
Check with Early Help Team if family / adult already have Early Help Plan
There is a multi-disciplinary team in each locality that receives and makes decisions on the appropriate allocation of cases. The designated locality social worker has responsibility for bringing cases to the meeting which do not meet the threshold for VCCP intervention.The Practice Manager has responsibility for bringing cases which require *stepping down* following an assessment or intervention where a LW for EHA cannot be identified. Identify a Lead Worker for EHA and inform EH coordinator who can then offer support to Lead Worker
NO-approach family and gain consent
YES-contact existing Lead Worker
Have 'Understand Me' conversation with family or adult to understand parenting issues / demands, strengths and needs. Record on Early Help Assessment form and use any specific assessment tool to capture specialist information. DO NOT DUPLICATE WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN CAPTURED ON THE EARLY HELP FORM. **Log with Early Help Team and send Page 2 of the form electronically to Early Help Team via early.help@stoke.gov.uk (Local Authority only) or ring 01782 236334 (external partner agencies only)**
When registered an Early Help ID number will be sent back to the lead worker
Notify Early Help Team if Lead Worker changes
The Lead Worker will then "pull in" services that can provide support to meet family's needs. Hold Early Help review meetings (every 6 weeks or sooner). Change Lead Worker if appropriate. Complete Early Help Action Plans only to record actions and progress
Early Help process successfully meets needs. **Close case and send page 10 Closure and Evaluation Summary to the Early Help Team via early.help@stoke.gov.uk (Local Authority Only) or ring 01782 236334 (External partner agencies only)**
Following intervention from locality services, where needs have escalated and can no longer be managed by an Early Help Assessment and now meets the threshold for statutory intervention, make referral to VCCP. Use Early Help Assessment to form part of the referral. Contact the Early Help Team to close the Early Help Assessment once the referral has been accepted by VCCP.
Identify need and presenting demands
Understand family/adult and contextual demands
Actions
Close

The Early Help Process

Identify Need

Under what circumstances would I initiate Early Help?
The criteria for initiating the Early Help process is:

- Professionals identify that a child, family member or vulnerable adult has needs that are currently not being met
- Family members have numerous needs that are being met by multiple services, but require co-ordination
- A case that is de-escalating from a Child in Need (CIN) Plan or Single Assessment requires an action plan only.

When would Early Help not be initiated?

- If the identified needs can be met by a single service
- If there are concerns that a child or adult is at risk of significant harm. If there are concerns that a child is at risk of, or suffering actual significant harm, follow individual service procedures for making a referral to Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting (VCCP).

If there is uncertainty that an Early Help is appropriate, please speak with line managers or contact the Early Help Team for advice.

Where do I get a copy of the Early Help form?
On the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board website at
www.safeguardingchildren@stoke.gov.uk

How do I find out if a child / family / adult already have an Early Help Assessment?
Ask the family or adult or contact the Early Help Team who will be able to tell you if there is a current Early Help Plan in place.

Understand the family

How do I undertake Early Help?
Professionals should always obtain consent from a family/child or adult before the Early Help process starts.

Once consent is obtained, the professional should have a conversation with the family/adult to gather more detail on their strengths and needs and this information should then be captured on the Early Help Assessment document. The family must sign the form and be given a copy. The professional should also retain a copy. At this point it must be agreed by the family and the Lead Worker which services can be included in the sharing of information and these services should be invited to the Early Help meetings by the Lead Worker.

Where can the Early Help Assessment take place?
The assessment can take place at any venue that is comfortable for the family. However, it would be good practice, at some point during the assessment, to visit the family home.

Who can give consent for Early Help?
If Early Help is being initiated with a child, it is still best practice to gain consent from someone with parental responsibility for the young person. If this is not possible and you feel that it is still in the best interests of the young person, then you can go ahead with the assessment with their consent if you believe them to be competent enough to understand and give this consent.

How do you assess a child's capacity to consent?
National guidance (taken from 'Information Sharing: Practitioners Guide' HM Government, April 2006) states:
The following criteria should be considered in assessing whether a particular child on a particular occasion has sufficient understanding to consent, or refuse consent, to the sharing of information about them:

- can the child understand the question being asked of them?
- does the child have a reasonable understanding of:
- what information might be shared?
    - the main reason(s) for sharing the information?
    - the implications of sharing that information, and of not sharing it?
- can the child:
    - appreciate and consider the alternative causes of action open to them?
    - weigh up one aspect of the situation against another?
    - express a clear personal view on the matter, distinct from repeating what someone else thinks they should do?
    - be reasonably consistent in their view on the matter, or are they constantly changing their mind?

Please refer to Information Sharing Practitioners Guide HM Government April 2006 for more in depth information about sharing of information and consent

If Early Help is being initiated on a family, consent is required from a family member who has parental responsibility for the children included in the Early Help Assessment.

If Early Help is being initiated on an adult, only their consent is required.

What happens if consent is refused?

If consent to carry out an Early Help is refused, the Early Help cannot be undertaken. This should be logged on the Early Help database by contacting the Early Help Team. If you contact the Early Help Team to enquire if an Early Help has been completed and you are told that consent to undertake the Early Help has been refused, the Early Help Team can tell you the name and contact details of the practitioner who approached the family and had the consent refused. You may wish to contact that practitioner for further information but remember you have to do so in accordance with 'Sharing without Consent'. Again please seek advice if you are unsure of what to do.

What happens if consent is withdrawn half way through the Early Help process?

In this case, the Early Help process will have to stop, but this is dependent on whether or not there is a statutory obligation to continue working with the family. The Lead Worker should document the reason for stopping the process on the Early Help Assessment form and on the action plan section. The Lead Worker must then contact any members who attend the Early Help review meeting and inform them of the change in circumstances. The Lead Worker should also contact the Early Help Team to inform them of this. They will then update the Early Help database.

What happens if I need to share information without consent?
The Data Protection Act 1998 states that information can be shared without consent:

- To protect the vital interests of the data subject (in this case the child or young person) or another where
    (i) it is impractical to gain consent
    (ii) it cannot be obtained, or
    (iii) where consent has been unreasonably withheld.

  For example, if gaining consent places a child or young person at increased risk of significant harm or place an adult at risk of serious harm
- Where it is to assist the prevention or detection of crime
- Where it would lead to unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm
- Where there is substantial public interest and processing to support social work counselling or other intervention is necessarily kept secret
- Where it is necessary to carry out a statutory obligation e.g. under the Children Acts.
- To facilitate legal proceedings
- And in other circumstances not relevant to this process.

Who can I share Early Help information with?
You can share Early Help information in accordance with the confines of the consent given by the family.

If during the course of the Early Help process, it is clear that more services than the family originally agreed to need to be involved, then:
(i) consent needs to be obtained again
(ii) it must be recorded on the Early Help assessment form or action plan and signed and dated by the parent / child and the practitioner.
If further consent is not given, then information can only be shared in accordance with the original consent.

What happens to the Early Help documentation?
The Lead Worker must keep a copy and a copy should be given to the family. The Lead Worker can keep a hard or electronic copy but it is their responsibility to ensure the security of the document.

***How do I register the Early Help Assessment*?**
The Lead Worker must contact the Early Help Team to log that this stage is complete on 01782 231964/ 235723. Internal agencies should continue to scan and email the completed page 2 of the assessment form to obtain an Early Help ID number to early.help@stoke.gov.uk

Actions

What is the Initial Early Help meeting and the Early Help review meeting?
The initial Early Help meeting is the first meeting following conversations with the family and completion of the Early Help form. The family and other professionals who have been identified to help support the child/family or vulnerable adult should be invited to attend to share information and agree how they can work together to support the family. The Early Help review meetings are all subsequent meetings held to review progress.

When does an Early Help meeting need to take place?
As a guide, the meeting should take place within 2 weeks of the initial Early Help discussion with the family and subsequent meetings should take place every 6 weeks. These timescales should not replace individual professional judgement or the needs of the family and they may need to be held more or less frequently.

Who arranges the Early Help meeting?
The current Lead Worker.

What happens at the Early Help meeting?
The family and professionals meet and discuss the information that was shared and captured on the Early Help form. Everyone agrees what actions they are able to do in order to start meeting the needs of the family. This is recorded on the Early Help action plan and all attendees should have a copy.

Agreement can be made at the meeting to change the Lead Worker. Early Help meetings are also the appropriate place to decide when to close an Early Help Plan.

Future dates for meetings should also be agreed at Early Help meetings.

Who can be a Lead Worker?
Ideally this should be the professional from a universal or targeted service who has the best relationship with the family and who has initially identified the unmet need.

The IFIS service based in Children's centres will use Early Help as their assessment when providing interventions to families with children aged 0-19.

In the majority of cases, the locality teams will use the Early Help assessment as their baseline assessment, and their own specialist assessment to capture any additional information that service requires.

What does a Lead Worker do?
The Lead Worker:

- obtains consent from the child/family or adult
- has the “understand me” conversation with the child/family or adult and records it on the Early Help form
- keeps the Early Help team up to date at every stage of the process, including any changes or amendments
- organises the Early Help meetings
- is a single point of contact between the family and other services involved

Can the Lead Worker change?
Yes, the Lead Worker can change at any time. If a Lead Worker needs to withdraw from an Early Help Plan, the Lead Worker responsibility should be passed to another professional at an Early Help review meeting. Consideration should always be given to school closures, when a temporary lead worker may need to be appointed.

Close

Under what circumstances would I close an Early Help Plan?
There are a number of reasons why Early Help would close and these are recorded using a Red, Amber, Green system. An explanation of this system is described below:

- All identified needs have been successfully met – **Green**
- Identified needs cannot be met but the case has been escalated to Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting (VCCP) – **Amber 1**
- Some but not all identified needs have been met **– Amber 2**
- Identified needs not met – **Red**
- These include
    - Consent is withdrawn
    - The family leave the area **(if this is the case, please contact the Early Help team as they can support the transition of the case to another area in England)**
    - Deceased
    - Other (please state)

Who do I need to notify?
The Early Help Team should be notified as soon as possible so that the closure can be recorded.

How do I close an Early Help?
Page 10 Evaluation and Closure Summary of the assessment form must be completed. Internal agencies should continue to scan and email to early.help@stoke.gov.uk until the electronic system is in place

External agencies should telephone the Early Help Team on 01782 236334 / 231964 / 235273 unless you were part of the pilot and successfully registered on the Secure Portal in which case you can continue to use this until the electronic monitoring system is in place.

What happens to the documentation when an Early Help Plan closes?
The Early Help paperwork should remain with the Lead Worker at the time of closure. Each organisation will have their own guidelines as to how long paperwork is kept after a case is closed.

Transition

What happens when a child moves from one setting to another, e.g primary to secondary school?

- If the Early Help is OPEN it should move to the new setting with the child/ family/adult's consent. This would then require a change of Lead Worker which must be logged with the Early Help Team. If this is a planned move then the Lead Worker can manage this by inviting a professional from the new setting to the Early Help review prior to the move.

- If the Early Help is CLOSED then all paperwork should be retained by the closing agency for the length of time indicated in that agency's policy.

Cross Border

If a child involved in an Early Help is moving in or out of Stoke-on-Trent, contact should be made with the Early Help Team who will contact the relevant area that the child is moving to/from to ensure smooth transition of information and service provision.

SUPPORT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Accessing Early Help Forms

Copies of all the Early Help documentation can be found at:
www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

Support

For operational support your line manager should always be your first point of contact. However if you need any additional support you can contact the Early Help Team via:

Claire Williamson
Early Help Services team lead
Tel: 01782 233871
Email claire.williamson@stoke.gov.uk

Debbie Walters
Early Help Assessment Coordinator
Tel 01782 231964
Email: debbie.walters@stoke.gov.uk