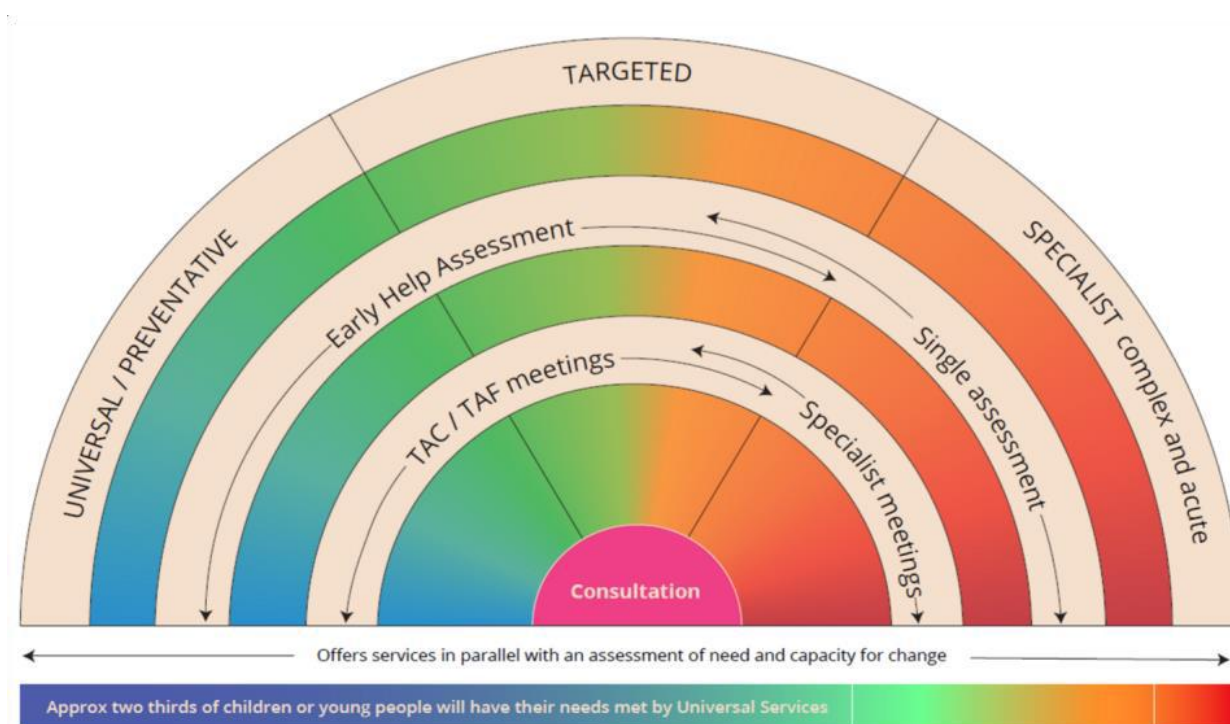


Cambridgeshire Families Thrive

Early Help Strategy

Introduction

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early Help may be provided by universal services by providing advice and information or support to a family. Early Help may also be provided by targeted services and be delivered through a more structured and planned approach in response to the family's needs.



This document sets out how the County Council provides targeted Early Help. There are many other agencies in Cambridgeshire which provide Early Help support both through universal and targeted services. This activity is not covered in this document.

Why is targeted Early Help provided?

Targeted Early Help addresses problems that families may be experiencing to prevent them escalating and the possibility of Children's Social Care needing to be involved.

When is targeted Early Help provided?

The County Council will provide targeted Early Help support when the needs outlined in the middle column of the threshold descriptors in Appendix 1 are identified. All requests for Early Help are received by the Early Help Hub. Requests will either be sent direct to the Early Help Hub through an Early Help Assessment or come from the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

What targeted Early Help is provided?

The County Council has seven District Early Help teams who provide a range of targeted Early Help support:

- Family Support services – Family Workers provide both short and long term, low and high intensity support to families experiencing problems such as difficulties with parenting and routines, health issues, substance misuse and domestic abuse. Support is tailored to individual needs which can be through home visits and evidence based interventions.
- Youth support services – Young People’s Workers provide short and long term support to young people experiencing a range of problems such as emotional difficulties, underachievement at school, behavioural issues and risk taking behaviour.
- Special Education Needs Support Services – SEND SS provide support for schools and direct to children and families to support children with Special Educational Needs to get the best out of their education

How is targeted Early Help provided?

There are a number of principles which guide how early help should be provided in Cambridgeshire. Services will:

- Work with dignity and respect towards everyone involved with the family network and minimise the number of people involved
- Always work alongside and wrap around / layer on to the support that is already in place – where we are providing help, more help, or risk support we will do it alongside all those already supporting or involved with the family
- Limit the transfers that families experience through our services.
- Value relationships within the family and the building of positive relationships between professionals
- Provide support which has been tried and tested but is tailored to the family
- Sometimes stay close to families and the community based services supporting them when work is ended in case things go wrong
- When several services are involved, we will always ensure there is:
 - one Lead Professional who co-ordinates the work of all involved
 - a thorough family assessment which considers the needs of the whole family, but places children’s safety as paramount
 - a family plan – which prioritises children’s safety and is managed by the Lead Professional and reviewed regularly with the family and services involved regular meetings. The plan will always be co-produced with the family: their preferences for intervention will be considered and outcomes negotiated.
 - a team around the family – all professionals who are involved with any member of the family working together to the family plan with agreed goals. The team will ensure they understand each other’s roles and speak well of each other.
- Work in a way which recognises that all of the needs in the family are inter-dependent and impact upon each other. This needs to be understood to provide an effective intervention and enable sustainable or second order change. This is working systemically and in a Think Family way.



Description

- ★ Children and young people are achieving expected outcomes, they have no additional needs, there are no concerns and they have their needs met within universal provision.
- ★ Children and families with some emerging needs which can be met within universal services. The emerging needs may require the support of another service, or worker, to prevent the escalation of needs.
- ★ An Early Help Assessment may be appropriate for children at the very top end of this Level.

What would we see?

- ★ Secure and warm parenting.
- ★ Guidance and boundaries in place.
- ★ Network of support, adequate home environment, good school attendance, accessing health provision as needed.
- ★ Age appropriate development and responses.
- ★ Positive sense of self and developing age appropriate independence skills.
- ★ Parents may be struggling with a specific issue and require a low level of support.
- ★ Basic care may sometimes be inconsistent.

Response

- ★ Typically these children live in resilient and protective environments where their needs are met.
- ★ Children, young people, parents and carers can access universal services directly.
- ★ A child may require specific support in school; additional Health Visitor support may be required; or Children's Centre group may be beneficial.

Description

- ★ Children and young people at this level have more significant emerging or complex needs and are in need of additional support without which they would not meet their expected potential.
- ★ Their identified needs may relate to health, education, or social development and if unaddressed, they may develop into more worrying concerns. These children and young people will live in greater adversity and have a greater degree of vulnerability.
- ★ Targeted services, working alongside universal services, will be required.

What would we see?

- ★ Parenting is inconsistent and parental issues may be getting in the way of meeting the child's needs (mental health, learning disability, substance misuse).
- ★ There is a lack of parental guidance and age appropriate boundaries are not in place. Parents may be struggling to manage behaviour within the home and there may be some evidence of domestic abuse.
- ★ There may be issues with poor school attendance and behaviour when in class, health needs may not be met as appointments are often missed, there may be issues with anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, risk taking behaviour including early onset of sexual activity.

Response

- ★ An Early Help assessment will need to be completed.
- ★ If the outcome indicates a need for a multi-agency response. This will be offered with the consent of the child/young person and family.
- ★ A Team around the Child (TAC) is also likely to be appropriate. Working with parents/carers and children will be essential to achieve the desired outcomes, and will require open discussion to progress targeted support.

Description

- ★ Children and young people at this level are in need of specialist assessment and services.
- ★ These are children and young people with high complex needs or where safeguarding can only be achieved by the involvement of specialist services.
- ★ They will require specialist assessment or immediate intervention, including accommodation. *Examples of this include:*
 - all Section 47 referrals
 - children at risk of imminent family breakdown or where the breakdown has already occurred
 - young people remanded in LA care
 - a disabled child requiring specialist services to prevent immediate impairment or to prevent the need for long-term accommodation.

What would we see?

- ★ Child may have been abused or neglected; adults caring for the child are known or suspected of being a risk to children.
- ★ Parents have significant personal issues such as mental health, substance misuse or learning difficulties which present a significant risk to their child.
- ★ Family relationships are significantly conflictual and domestic abuse is assessed as high risk (MARAC) and the child is at risk of significant harm.
- ★ The child's medical needs have been significantly compromised due to parental neglect.
- ★ There is concern regarding a child under 13 being engaged in sexual activity.

- ★ Child may pose a significant risk of harm to others.
- ★ The home environment presents an immediate and serious environmental and health risk to the child.

Response

- ★ At level 3 children and young people's needs and care are significantly compromised. They are highly vulnerable and are experiencing high levels of adversity.
- ★ They have or are suspected to have acute/complex needs, and a comprehensive statutory assessment is required under Section 17 of the Children Act.
- ★ These children and young people may also be children in need of protection as they are experiencing significant harm and are in immediate need of statutory intervention under Section 47 of the Children Act.
- ★ They may require legal action and may need accommodation.

DESCRIPTORS OF UNIVERSAL/PREVENTATIVE, TARGETED and SPECIALIST SERVICES

The above can only be a guide to support decision making.

The final decision about whether or not to refer a child to Children's Social Care will almost always require a degree of professional judgement. When considering the above, practitioners are asked to consider what the impact of family difficulties or other circumstances is on the child or young person concerned. Children and families are unique and strengths, risks and resilience factors vary from situation to situation. Where practitioners are in any doubt about whether or not to make a referral, they should discuss the situation with their safeguarding lead, or consult the 'further sources of support' section below.