



Early Help Practitioners Guidance -Working in a Restorative Way

*Working with families in the right way, at
the right time to make a difference*



Handbook for Professionals V1
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Who this Guidance is for?

This **Early Help – Working in a Restorative Way** guidance is for all partners and practitioners who work with a child, young person or family who may require “early help”, to identify and address needs as soon as they occur.

This guidance complements that which details the Early Help Partnership Model, titled “**Partnership Early Help Model Induction - Getting families the right support at the right time**”. Whereas that document details the overall, strategic approach to delivering Early Help in Torbay, this guidance, **Early Help – Working in a Restorative Way**, is more of a practice guidance for practitioners.

This guidance focusses on how we embed the principles of Restorative Practice into Early Help practice.

This guidance therefore contains the following:

Aim of Early Help: An Introduction to what Early Help is and how it is “everyone’s business”.

Threshold Tool: This helps in identifying at what level a child, young person’s or families’ needs are at, to define the most appropriate response.

Early Help Assessment: This form will help you to capture and fully understand the current needs of a child/young person and their family. It should be completed in partnership with the child/young person and their parents/carers. The assessment is used to map out the lived experience for the child/young person and family, current concerns and the impact, strengths, and areas of needs. This form is primarily used for a multi-agency assessment, however, could also be used for a single agency assessment.

Restorative Practice: Restorative practices enable those who work with children and families to focus upon building relationships that create and inspire positive change. Creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support.

Team Around the Family (TAF) Meetings: This section discusses what a TAF meeting is and proposes a standard method of undertaking them.

Early Help Plan – This will help you to develop an Early Help Plan in partnership with the child/young person and their family. It should address the needs identified during the assessment. It should be regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure it is keeping children and young people safe.

The Aim of Early Help

Early Help is not a specific service or team it's an approach to working that brings together professionals from a range of different services who will work with the whole family to help improve things for everyone.

We believe that children and families need to be heard when they first ask for help to minimise the risk of problems getting worse and help them address them at the earliest opportunity. Engaging a family in Early Help is also a voluntary process and consent from children, young people, and their families to work with them should always be sought. Without this, it is unlikely that they will engage in the support that we can offer them.

Early Help can be provided through a single agency or multi agency response as appropriate to the needs of the child and family and the concern.

Our principles for Early Help are based on the principles of the legislation as described in Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018:

“Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. 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 can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018

In practice, these include:

- Always working WITH the child, young person, and family, and not “doing to” or “doing for”.
- Working in a relational and strengths-based way
- Considering the whole family as part of the analysis of need and the solutions to that need
- Identifying and addressing the problem at the earliest opportunity
- Early Help being “everyone’s business”, promoting accountability, evaluation, and sustainability across the partnership

In delivering Early Help, we are very clear however that where there is a safeguarding concern, the Torbay Safeguarding Board’s safeguarding procedures must be followed.

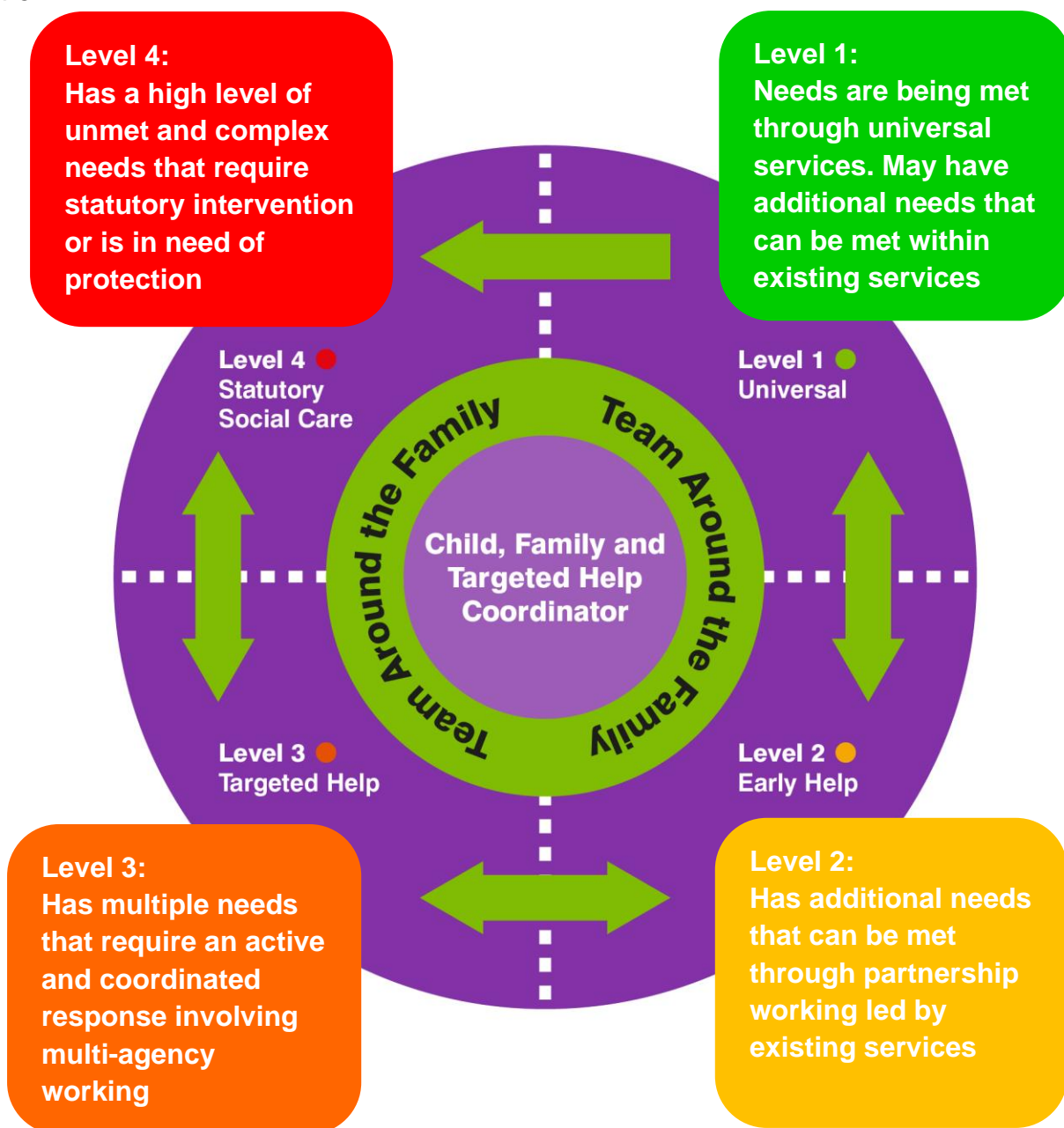
Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Safeguarding procedures should still be followed.

Threshold Tool

To begin with, we consider the Threshold Tool which helps in identifying at what level a child, young person's or family's needs are at, to define the most appropriate response.

The Torbay Integrative Tool provides clearly **Interactive Threshold Tool** (torbaysafeguarding.org.uk) defined thresholds and a range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs across the different levels.

Torbay's early help approach in line with **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018** (publishing.service.gov.uk) also includes proactive and planned support for children and families moving from statutory social work interventions or specialist care.



The Early Help Assessment Process

Generally, if needs are defined as anything “level 2” or above in the threshold diagram, the approach to Early Help intervention can be defined in four simple steps:

Step 1 – Identify and respond to needs early and seek consent

- The family or professional identify there is a need for Early Help support for a child, young person, or their family.
- The purpose of Early Help support is clearly explained to the child/family by a relevant professional or supporting agency
- Written consent is gained from the child and family to complete an Early Help Assessment.

Step 2 – Assess those Needs

- Undertake an Early Help Assessment in partnership with the child their family and any other services involved **within 20 working days**, to identify the level of need and support required.
- If other partners need to be involved, you could do this via a TAF (Team Around the Family) meeting. This is where the identifying agency would identify who else is / should be involved in supporting the family, and record /gain contributions to the Early Help Assessment.
- The Early Help Assessment should enable partners to explore ‘unmet’ needs and concerns and explore strengths and resilience factors within the family that can be built upon.
- It should be clearly explained to the family at this point the benefit of sharing relevant information with other professionals, and agreement gained to do this.
- The identifying agency may be able to meet the need in a relatively straight forward way through a simple, time bound intervention or access to a source of support.
- Where the identifying agency is unsure at this stage if a wider multi-agency response and hence a referral to the MASH is needed, they should seek advice from the Community Engagement Officer who will help them identify if there are any other sources of support available through the Locality Networks.
- If needs can be met with existing support to this point, move to Step 4.

Step 3 – Deliver multi agency services

- Where it is agreed that a referral to the MASH for multi agency Early Help support is necessary – either where it is very clearly the right course of action or after discussion with the Community Engagement Officer as detailed in Step 2, an Early Help Assessment should be completed. The Early Help Assessment is sent as a referral via the MASH where it is considered by professionals including the Duty Assistant Team Manager within the Early Help Service.

- Where the Duty ATM within the Early Help Service deems that a single agency response is appropriate and a Lead Professional can be easily identified, the assessment is assigned to that single agency for action.
- Where a multi agency response is required and there is no obvious Lead Professional at this stage, the case is referred to the **weekly Early Help Panel** to identify what needs to happen.
- The panel will review the case and will support the referring partner to identify the course/s of action that would best meet the family's needs, and the panel will support the referring partner to identify the most appropriate Lead Professional.
- It is highly recommended that lead professionals are those who have the best relationship with a family to ensure successful family engagement. Lead professionals should access support of other partners from within their Locality Network / Team or from any relevant Bay wide services
- A lead agency is identified, and an initial Team around the Family (TAF) meeting is held **within 10 working days**. Where a lead agency is not identified this will be discussed at an Early Help panel for multi-agency consultation and allocation.
- Work with the family to develop a plan of support is undertaken by professionals.
- Agree Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Timely (SMART) outcomes and record them on the action plan and agree a review date.
- The optimum time span of an Early Help Plan is 12 to 14 weeks, as they should be focussed on clear outcomes that ultimately support families to build their confidence and resilience to support themselves.

Step 4 – Review progress

- The child and family's plan should be reviewed with the family **every 6 weeks**.
- At each stage, it should be considered if a plan is still required to achieve outcomes or if the family are able to sustain progress without ongoing intervention. The emphasis should be on progressing the family to build their confidence and skills to manage the need themselves to support their sustainability, resilience, and independence.
- Any revised plan should be agreed with the family, network and agencies, and consent updated as necessary
- If the Lead Practitioner role is appointed to another professional the Early Help Service must be notified.
- If cases are open for more than 6 months, an Early Help ATM will chair a TAF to identify what is happening with the case and how it can be moved to a positive outcome.

Step 5 – Needs met

- If a plan is no longer required, a final TAF should be held, and the Early Help “episode” closed. A record of the “exit strategy”, including referral to universal services if required, should be recorded.

The Early Help Assessment

An Early Help Assessment is an initial assessment and planning tool that facilitates and coordinates support, particularly where multi agency support is needed. It assesses the situation of the child or young person and their family and helps to identify the needs of both the children and the adults in the family

It is a shared tool that multiple agencies can use to develop a coordinated response. This improves involvement between agencies and ensures that the child and their family are getting all the support that they need from wherever they need it. By doing this, the assessment aims to resolve any problems in the early stages and therefore removes the need for the intervention of social care.

All family members should contribute to the assessment and their voices should be evident throughout.

The Early Help Assessment should be undertaken using a restorative approach. **Further detail is included in the Restorative Question section in this guidance.**

The Early Help Assessment should consider the following:

- Identify where help and support are needed, and the underlying causes of the need to ensure that the focus of support provides a sustainable, long term success
- Identify and detail the needs of all family members where they may be relevant to the needs of the child / young person
- Focus on the family members strengths and resilience, and how these can be used to find solutions to the problems identified
- Empower the family to consider their own wider support network
- Be realistic about what can and cannot be positively changed
- Be honest and transparent – you may have different views on the areas of concern
- Make sure it is completed in a timely manner
- Ensure all practitioners who are supporting the family (when the assessment is undertaken) contribute to the assessment

- It must be completed and shared with the family

You should foster an environment where the individuals themselves problem-solve and decide how they can move on. As a result, you empower the families, and let them develop their skills. Rather than facilitating or having to control the process, you are collaborative in your approach to understanding the challenges for the family.

How to complete the Early Help Assessment form

A copy of the Early Help Assessment form is included as an Appendix to this guidance. It is divided into various sections:

Who's in our family?

This section enables you to identify details of who is in the family, who is living with them and who plays a part in their lives. If unborn, you should state the name as “unborn baby” and mother’s name, e.g., unborn baby of Ann Smith and record expected date of delivery.

The inclusion of those who may not be a biological part of the family but who is still an important figure is important, as this will help identify those who are integral to a family’s life who may have strengths to be able to play a real part in supporting them. This very much takes the “strengths based” approach that we are seeking to embed.

The assessment then asks for key family contact details. It is wise to take as many details as possible as people change their mobile numbers, so to rely on just one may contacting them difficult if that person’s mobile changes.

Who else is working with our family?

Consider here all universal and additional services who are working with the family. This should include any key services who are working with the adults if you feel that this is of relevance to the needs of the child. **This will also help you in pulling together a TAF meeting but also possibly identify a more relevant lead professional.**

Useful information to know when working with our family

This is the opportunity to add anything relevant at this stage which may not easily be recorded within the other sections of the assessment.

Your family's consent and privacy

This is where you would record the family’s consent to work with you. If consent has been verbally gained, state that in this section.

Family Genogram

This section supports the “Who’s in our family” section but enables a pictorial diagram to represent it. This can be hand drawn if necessary.

Our family story - what has happened in the past and what is happening now?

We are now getting into the reasons for the assessment – what has happened / is happening now which is relevant to the problems that the child, young person, and family may now be having? It should then lead into the next question about what they are now worried about.

What are you worried about and why?

This is the section where we describe, from the child, young person and family's perspective, what they are worried about, why, and what are the things that they want help with. You should try and be as specific as possible here as it will help to break down the key issues that need addressing and lend itself to specific interventions and desired outcomes to address them. The more specific we can be, the more chance we have of meaningful impact. We should also be focussing not just on the presenting issue, but the underlying causes of it. Often, we will see a focus on the child / young person's behaviour where it is seen as challenging, and the focus is on that and not what might be causing it. A child / young person's behaviour may be the symptom of the problem, and not the cause.

What is going well for your family?

This section identifies what is going well, and strengths that can be built upon. This is an important section as not only does it enable the family to consider their strengths and not just their concerns but there are likely to be some "building blocks" to build upon in finding solutions.

What support would help to address my worries and concerns?

This is a very person-centred way of hearing from the child, young person, or their family of what they feel they need to help them address their needs.

Observations/behaviours of child/young person (particularly if aged between 0-5 years) / Voice and views of the child/young person (include the views of all children in the family)

Following on from the previous question, this section captures in particular the child / young person's views and perspective on their difficulties and what support would help them address them. This is a critical part of the form. Where a child or young person may find it hard to articulate their feelings verbally, consider other forms of communication that would work for them – drawing, writing it down, role play (e.g., part of an activity which involves them talking to a toy or a pet for example).

School and Early Years achievements

This section simply records all relevant school related information, to help us understand the impact that the child, young person's or family's needs may be having on the child or young person's education. Importantly it asks for data over a two-year period so that you can see if there has been a change in that period. It also allows you to record if the child / young person has any other relevant plan, such as an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan for children and young people with SEND), or an SEN Support Plan.

Evidence of Child Exploitation

Whilst this is quite a stark question (and we appreciate that it will not be relevant for everyone) it is included as this is becoming more and more prevalent in some of the cases coming to the Early Help Panel. If you have any concerns of this nature, Torbay also has a Child Exploitation Toolkit [Missing CSE - Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) which can help you further.

Once completed, this assessment must be sent to

This details where the assessment should be sent if it needs to be sent as a referral to the MASH which will in turn refer it to the Early Help Panel if multi agency support is required.

Principles and ethos of working restoratively

Torbay Children's Services and its partner agencies believe that a restorative approach can enable practitioners and families to develop appropriate relationships to ensure children and young people are safeguarded and the needs of the family are met. It recognises the importance of separating the behaviour from the person.

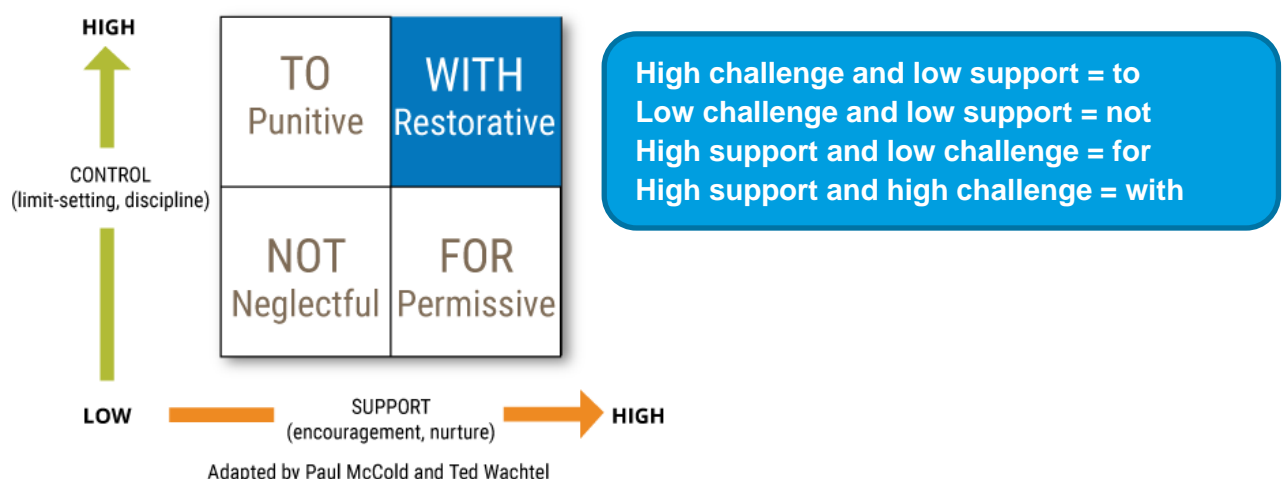
This means we are committed to shifting the balance of power so that our work is **family** and not practitioner led. We recognise the importance of families being supported to utilise their own resources and strengths to overcome challenges and develop long term solutions to areas of need.

The essence of working restoratively is that people are happier, more cooperative, and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.

When we work with and alongside children and families, rather than make decisions about them in isolation, there is strong evidence to say that outcomes for children and their families are improved¹.

The Social Discipline Window

The social discipline window² is a helpful way of explaining and understanding restorative practice. It describes four approaches that practitioners can use when working with children and families. The approaches are different combinations of high or low challenge and high or low support. The restorative approach to working with families would be through the provision of high support and high challenge, whilst minimising the use of working in the 'for' and 'to' quadrants.



Restorative Relationships

Using restorative practices creates a more respectful, relational environment, where people feel supported. It leads to better outcomes, less conflict with professionals, more informal support, and improved family functioning³.

The emphasis is to build a relationship that enables change to happen. Change sometimes requires challenge as well as support. Working with our children and families, rather than doing things *to* them or *for* them builds resilience, enhances problem solving skills and fosters a more compassionate way of working with others.

Children have said that they need the following⁴:

- Vigilance; to have adults notice when things are troubling them
- understanding and action: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- stability: to be able to develop an ongoing stable relationship of trust with those helping them
- respect: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not
- information and engagement: to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns, and plans
- explanation: to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response
- support: to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family
- advocacy: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views
- protection: to be protected against all forms of abuse and discrimination and the right to special protection and help if a refugee

Early Help assessments should be undertaken **with** families to enable them to be actively involved and encouraged to identify where they see there may be need for change or support, as well as areas where they consider their strengths to be.

If practitioners disagree with the families self assessment they should challenge through open and honest restorative conversations. This will allow for an agreed assessment of the family and any potential risks for children and young people to be acknowledged and openly discussed.

Restorative Questions

The Early Help Assessment can be explored using a restorative approach, which focuses on key questions which will help to lay the foundation for and act as the building blocks that seek to discover the root cause/s of challenging behaviour and difficulties, determine impact, repair harm and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

These questions are non blaming and open ended. They support inclusive and collaborative approaches to problem solving that emphasises the need to find solutions rather than assign blame.

What happened?

Everyone has their own unique perspective on a situation or event and needs an opportunity to express this to feel respected, valued and listened to.

Thoughts / Feelings

The thoughts and feelings are 'beneath the surface' and yet very important to understand.

Impact

To live in harmony together people need empathy and consideration, so they understand who is likely to be, or to have been, affected by their choice of action in any given situation and how.

Needs

Unmet needs can be the underlying cause of inappropriate or harmful behaviour. It's important we try and help children and families identify what they need to help them move towards solutions.

Ways forward

It is the people affected by a situation or event who are best placed to identify what should happen. They should actively be encouraged to explore what they feel would help them to move forward.

Hearing the narrative (What happened?)

Events within families may have contributed to difficulties or problems being experienced in many ways. During the completion of the assessment, it's important to actively listen and capture the lived experiences of the child, young person, and family.

Questions to explore include:

- **What's been happening? Tell us the issues that have brought us here today? What has brought us here today? What has led to us completing this early help assessment?**

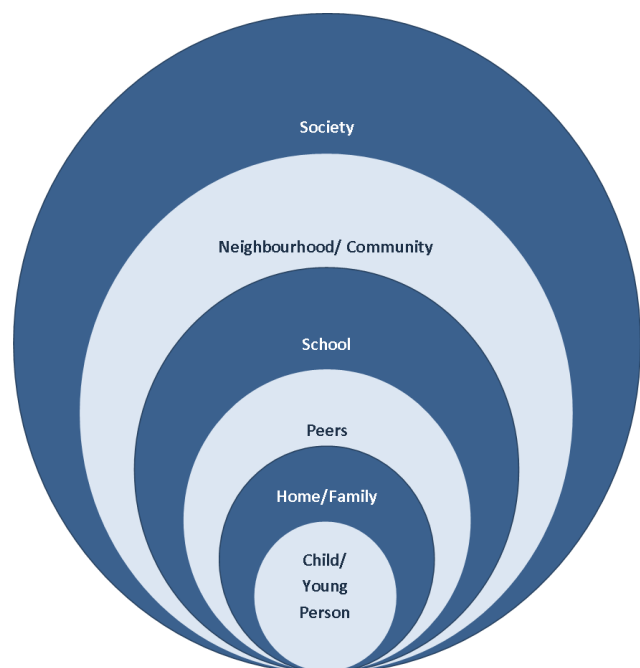
It's vital that we also consider what is happening outside of the family home and explore other factors that may contribute to concerns or help build resilience.

When working with history it's important to note that the children and families we work with will have pre-formed views of us based on all the good, less good, and indifferent experiences that have had in their personal lives and in their relationships with professionals.

They will interpret all that we do through these lenses, whether this is what we intend or not. What we should try to understand is what has led to the family requiring support at this exact moment in time.

Recorded information in the assessment needs to be accurate and demonstrate a clear understanding of what is currently happening for the family. Information should be concise, factual, and non-judgemental. It should clearly represent the lived experience for the family and not the professional's interpretation of this.

The objective of this part of the assessment is for the family to feel heard and understood, not corrected. **Remember to actively listen and seek to understand, rather than seek to respond.**



Thoughts / Feelings

It's important to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the thoughts/feelings of each individual family member who has consented for participation. The child's voice being pivotal to the assessment so we can properly assess risk and plan support.

By understanding the thoughts and feelings it can help build emotional literacy and seeks to allow us to consider how a family think and feel about what has happened or is happening in their lives.

Consider exploring a timeline of thoughts / feelings paying attention to the before, during and after of what's happened. How does what happened to them make them think and feel.

Questions to explore include:

- **What do you think and feel about what has happened to you?**
- **What were your thoughts / feelings at the time?**
- **If I can take you back to.... What were your thoughts / feelings at that moment in time?**
- **How do you think and feel about things now in the present day?**

Impact (Ripple of Harm)

Understanding the impact of the lived experience for children, young people and their families is important. It helps us to capture how their current concerns or worries impact on their everyday lives.



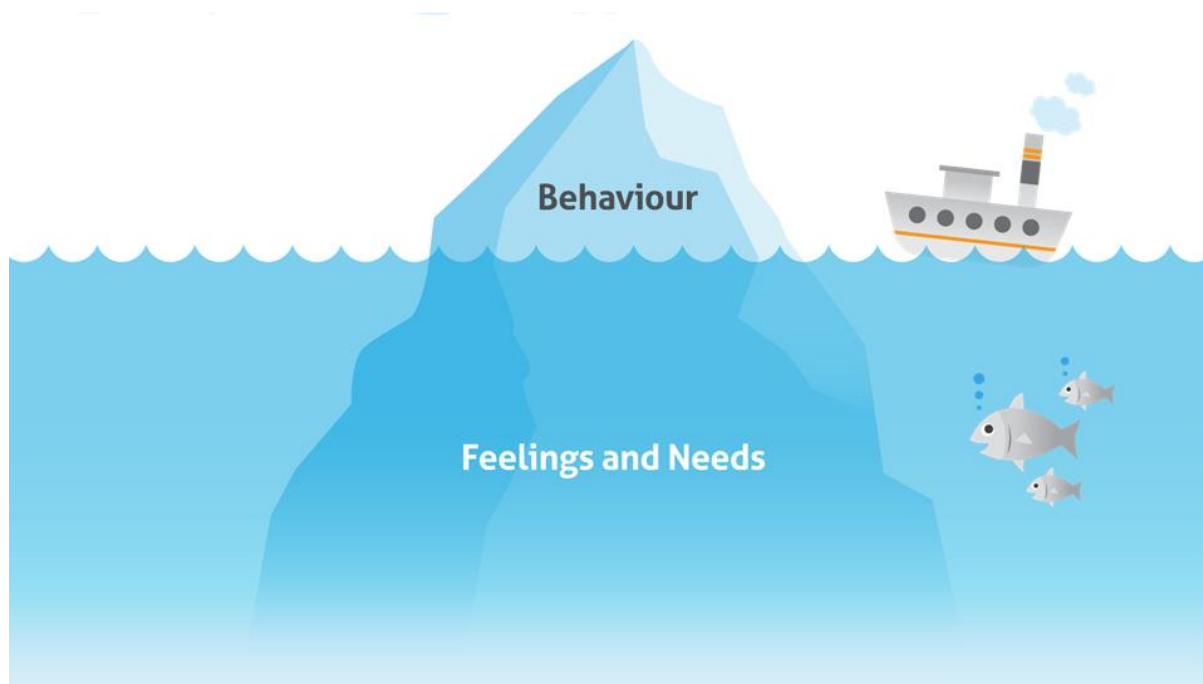
Questions to explore include:

- **How has their lived experiences impacted on their lives?**
- **How have you been affected?**
- **How have others been affected?**
- **Who else has been affected by what's happened?**
- **What has been the hardest thing for you?**

Be descriptive in explaining in the assessment how certain events have affected their lives. The more we can seek to understand the impact the better we can be in helping to find the solutions.

Needs

This is a crucial part of the assessment. To move to the solutions, we must first understand what the individual needs are for the child, young person, and their family. If we can help children and families understand their needs at the assessment stage, it will be easier to encourage them to be more involved in the planning stage to help them achieve positive and sustained outcomes.



Questions to explore include:

- **What do you need to move forward?**

Needs are important to identify as this will reduce the likelihood of escalation of risk and for the involvement of statutory social care services. The assessment should clearly identify areas of need to help inform the early help plan.

You may find that children, young people, and their families may need help to identify what their needs are. Look out for the clues given in conversation. They may say things like *“I need to for him to leave me alone”* or *“I wish the children would stop swearing at me, they treat me like dirt”*, *“I wish the school would understand the difficulties I have at home”*.

The underlying needs suggest a desire for **safety, respect, communication and understanding**. Once we can clearly identify these needs, we can then start to explore ways forward and how these needs can be addressed in a plan.

Ways forward

Now you have a clear understanding of what's happening, the impact and the child/dren and family's needs it's important to start to look at ways forward. The family should be actively included in the decision-making process.

In the assessment explore with them what solutions they think might help.

Questions to explore include:

- **What do you think will help you to move forward?**
- **What support do you think would help? What does support look like to you?**
- **What else needs to happen?**
- **If things were better, what would it feel/look/sound like?**

It's important to identify the family's strengths.

Reflect in the assessment what is going well for the family. What have the family tried before? And what were the blocks and barriers to this being successful?

The scaling question

There are many ways of using scaling questions to aid your assessment. Sometimes child and parents find it easier to gauge their level of concern by placing a numerical value to it. The scaling question used in the assessment is a reflective question for the family to consider how concerned they are about the difficulties that affect their life. On this scale 1 is the desired situation and 10 is the situation in which reflects the family feel they are at crisis.

The initial point on the scale recorded in the assessment can also be used as a baseline measurement that the family can refer to at every point in the Early Help process so they can visually see their progress. We should remember that even moving down one point on the scale shows progress and the family's efforts should be recognised for this and the work put in to get to that point explored to identify strengths and resilience factors that can be used to further reduce the concerns.

Team around the Family

A team Around the Family meeting (TAF) is a meeting between a child/young person, their family, and the group of professionals who are working with them. The purpose of the TAF is to share information and to create a solution focussed plan that will support the needs of the child and their family.

It should be an opportunity for families to work together with professionals to gain confidence and skills to ensure future support is effective and sustainable.

Key Principles:

- The Child/young person's needs and rights are paramount
- Consent has been obtained
- The child/young person and family should be present at the Team Around the Family meeting (if it is deemed appropriate for the child/young person to attend)
- The child/ren and families views must be considered and represented (even if they choose not to attend)
- Meetings follow the same format, pro-formas are provided so plans are clear, understandable and provide consistency
- The child/young person's safety, welfare and well-being are everyone's responsibility
- A TAF meetings needs to be helpful, timed to suit the family and only as long as it needs to be
- Those professionals/practitioners who are already or likely to be part of the 'personalised package of support' should be present.

Child and Families' view

It is essential that the **voice of the child** is captured during the meeting, even if the child is under 5 or non-verbal.

Team Around the Family meetings can only be effective when they are conducted with children and families in a true sense of partnership. This involves hearing and incorporating the view of all family members within the meeting and any plans for the child. It also involves maintaining respectful, open, and honest relationships with parents, carers, and children. Good information sharing and communication with all family members is essential to keep them aware of timescales and next steps.

Central to all of this is the importance of always keeping the child's needs in focus.

The Lead Professional

The Lead Professional should ideally be a professional who the family have identified as having the best relationship with. The role of the Lead Professional is to ensure that there is a well-coordinated plan with agreed actions. It is important that this practitioner has a good relationship with the child and their family and is best placed to support them in taking the lead in implementing and coordinating this action plan.

The role of the Lead Professional is to:








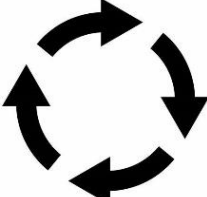
- Arrange and chair the Initial TAF meeting
- Support the family to actively engage with the meeting
- Inviting relevant professionals to the meeting and ask the family who they would like to attend if there are professionals already working with them
- Drive the plan forward and be focussed on reaching the best outcomes for the family.
- Keep the meeting focused and delegate another professional to complete the action plan ensuring all professionals and parents and child get a copy
- Give everyone an opportunity to talk
- Be clear about what the actions are and who is responsible for what
- Review the plan as required
- Adhere to safeguarding guidelines if safeguarding concerns are raised
- **Remember you are part of a team, you are not expected to do everything**
- Be prepared to reconvene a meeting if things are not going to plan. If another practitioner is not undertaking what was agreed, raise this with them and find out the reason. Hopefully this will focus them back on the plan, if this continues raise it with your manager.
- Ensure you have all the contact details of the other professionals
- Set a review date at your first TAF meeting and subsequent dates at next meetings
- Regularly check in with colleagues to see how things are going.

If a change in the Lead Professional role is required, then this should be agreed with the family and new professional prior to the review meeting. The Early Help Service should also be notified. We suggest these conversations take place outside of the TAF meeting. Be mindful and supportive for families as they may be reluctant and anxious about this change. Arrange a comprehensive handover between the current, new lead and family so it minimises disruption. Discuss any anxieties the family may have so they feel heard and supported and maintain engagement in the plan.

It's important that the family feel they have ownership of the meeting and are involved as much as possible.

Visual Agenda

Below is the suggested standard agenda for a TAF meeting. It is useful to be able to display it visually so that is clear and easily followed for all involved, including the family and the child / young person.

	<p>1. Welcome, check in, introduction and apologies</p>
	<p>2. Agree expectations (ground rules)</p>
	<p>3. Outline the purpose of the meeting</p>
	<p>4. Discussion of early help assessment and previous minutes</p>
	<p>5. Discuss what the identified needs are for the family</p>
	<p>6. Formulate the Plan – who will do what and when</p>
	<p>7. Set review date, time, and place</p>
	<p>8. Circulate plan to all at the meeting</p>

Suggested Meeting Format

Welcome and introductions	Please ensure the child and family know everyone present and what their role is. This should be explained in simple language, not complicated job titles. Undertake a restorative check in to begin to build relationships.
Expectations	Discuss expectations that everyone should agree too. Discuss things like timing, breaks, and mobile phones. Always discuss confidentiality and information sharing. Encourage respect and sensitivity and discuss how people will challenge appropriately.
Purpose of the meeting	Be succinct and use clear language
What's happened?	Use the information from the Early Help Assessment to summarise and then ask everyone present to add contributions as appropriate to develop a better understanding of the current issues.
Identify the strengths and needs of the child/family	Ask the family for their views on what they see as their strengths. What support do they currently have?
What are the identified needs?	The needs of the family should have been captured in the Early Help Assessment. Be clear that you understand what the needs are so you can help to explore ways forward.
Ways forward?	Ask for suggestions from the family and other professionals on what help they feel would be beneficial.
Formulate the plan – (Discussion of the plan should form the main part of the meeting)	These should be the goals that the meeting has agreed to improve the child/family situation and forms the basis of the action plan. They should address the needs identified and be clearly measurable so progress can be monitored.
Parents comments about the plan	Discuss how the parent/carer feels about the plan.
Child's views about the plan	Discuss how the child/young person feels about the plan. Where the child is not present, their views should be fed into the meeting. Decide who is best placed to feedback to the child the actions from the plan.
Set a date for a review	Agree a date to come together to review progress made with the action plan.
Circulate the plan	Make sure that all members present receive the plan and understood what is expected of them. Children should always get feedback at a level that is appropriate to them about what has been agreed in the plan.

Early Help Plans (See additional SMART plan guidance)

As with assessments, developing and monitoring plans for implementing change 'with' a family will be far more effective when you work in collaboration. Families involved with the development of plans will have greater ownership and will be able to guide how realistic steps and goals are for them to achieve and to challenge professionals if they disagree. However, professionals should again be willing to challenge if they don't agree with how a plan is being developed or implemented.

You should work with families to set SMART expectations, agree timescales, and explore expected outcomes as well as identifying how you (or others) will support them to achieve these outcomes. The plan must be clear and concise with no jargon or difficult to understand language. The main business of the meeting should be devising the TAF plan.



Plans should explore what needs to happen, what support will look like and what and who can help to make changes. The roles and responsibilities of everyone should be clear. It should include all areas of need identified in the Early Help Assessment.

It should also be clear what the potential next steps would be should it become clear that it is difficult or unlikely for families to reach the identified steps (and overall outcomes achieved). This would include revisiting and assessing plans, considering alternative steps, assessing levels of risk and may include the use of more formal processes such as Child Protection Plans or legal proceedings. Ongoing monitoring of risk should be undertaken, and any concerns should be discussed with the Community Engagement Officer, MASH consultation, line managers and within supervision to get support and assist decision making.

For more detail on how to develop a SMART plan, please refer to Appendix 3 – Creating a SMART Plan.

Recording and the Early Help Plan

The template attached as Appendix 2 to this guidance can be used to record the main points of the meeting. There is no need for formal minutes to record everything verbatim. The main purpose of the meeting should be to develop a solution focussed action plan. It is important that the views of the child, young person and family are heard within the meeting and that the actions are based on these views.

All Early Help plans and TAF minutes should be emailed to the Targeted Help email address Targetedhelp@torbay.gov.uk within 7 days of the meeting.

Review

A date within 6 weeks of the initial meeting should be set to review the plan agreed at the last meeting to ensure services are meeting the needs of the child and / or young person and family. Consideration should be given to:

- What has happened since the last meeting? Has progress been made against actions?
- Whether the plan is meeting the current identified needs?
- Review and evaluate goals and actions set at the last meeting?
- Has there been any measured improvement?
- Whether any new needs or priorities are identified?
- Have concerns escalated or de-escalated?

The meeting should be clear in the objective of reviewing progress. It should remain focused on exploring the plan and evaluating what has happened since we last met. Any new identified actions will need to be agreed and added to the plan and prioritised dependant on need.

The plans are designed to support families and build resilience. Crisis within families can and will occur, often impacting on the progress of the plan. Try not to fix the problem instead validate the challenge that may be faced by families. Make sure you explore the barrier and look to help form a solution. It may be that the action needs to be amended so it is more realistic for the family to achieve or increased to reflect a bigger change. Whatever the goal, always remember our aim of working *with* families not *for* them.

If there is no change or success for families then consider if the right actions or services are on the plan:

- Are all professionals and families still aligned?

- Is it appropriate to end support and step away?
- Consider are the family ready to change or does this need to be revisited in the future?
- Consider are we helping to facilitate change or creating dependency of support?

If you feel stuck then we suggest you talk this through with the other professionals, Early Help Community Engagement Officer, or utilising supervision with your manager.

It's important to acknowledge progress however small. Make sure that positive changes/outcomes are acknowledged and celebrated.

Ending Early Help Support

Managing the ending of support with children, young people and families is just as important as supporting the beginning. We need to support families with a plan that gives them confidence and autonomy to achieve independence once the plan is closed. Do not suddenly end support without having first planned for this to happen. Ensure you communicate open and honestly with children, young people, and families to monitor when it feels like the right time to begin to end support and agree closure of the plan together.

The Lead Professional should discuss how the intervention will end and hold a final TAF to explore creating an effective closure action plan that includes signposting to additional support and voluntary services. Be sure to explain to families how they can get help should circumstances suddenly change. Be specific give contact details of named professionals who can provide help and advice in the future. An effective action plan and effective closure can mean there is more support for our families which can then reduce risk for our children and young people.

Families may equally decide to withdraw consent, disengage, move out of area, or the goals are achieved. Alternatively, there may be an escalation to social care. Whatever the reason please let us know so we can keep our systems up to date and accurate. Complete a closure summary to evidence how effective the TAF has been in improving life for the child/young person and family. Make sure that you can clearly identify and evidence positive change that has allowed the family to sustain change for a positive period of time.

Working Together

Early Help Plans involve multi agency working and within those workings there can be disagreements. Professional challenge can be important and is effective in the support offered to children and families. However, too much challenge can lead to conflict and this can have a negative impact on the plan, the family, and the progress. It's important to understand the remit and expectations of other professionals involved as a lack of understanding around this can sometimes lead to high expectations which result in frustration and conflict.

Be prepared to have open and honest conversations with one another early in the life of the problem using the high support and high challenge approach. Set out expectations and explanations in the beginning through clear conversation and planning.

If you feel that someone is not willing to support the family or there could be some difficulties that a professional may have, it is a good idea to discuss this before the meeting goes ahead to avoid any conflict when the meeting is running. If an issue emerges during the meeting and cannot be resolved, action should be taken following the meeting for a resolution to be agreed. It is not good practice to continue these types of discussions in front of parents or other professionals.

Instead consider taking the below steps to find a way forward:



Safeguarding

If there are safeguarding concerns that cannot be met through an Early Help approach, they should be escalated in line with local safeguarding procedures.

If you feel a child is in immediate danger, please call **999**.

If you are worried about a child, please call the Torbay Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub on **01803 208100** or email **mash@torbay.gov.uk**
Out of office hours please call: **0300 4564 876**.

Additional Early Help Support

For further information, guidance, and support with the Team around the Family process, please contact the Lorrie Layne, the Community Engagement Officer, via lorrie.layne@torbay.gov.uk or **07771 806870**

Alternatively, please email: Targetedhelp@torbay.gov.uk or for MASH Torbay.Safeguarding@torbay.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Early Help Assessment

Appendix 2 – The Early Help Plan

Appendix 3 – Creating a SMART Plan

References

¹Adapted from: Wachtel, T. and McCold, P. in Strang, H., and Braithwaite, J. (Eds), (2001)

²Wachtel, T. (2013) Defining Restorative. International Institute for Restorative Practices

³ Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2003

⁴Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Version control

Updates	Date