



Leeds
Safeguarding
Children Board

Guidance on the interface between Children's Services Front Door and Early Help activity (including Common Assessment Framework CAF)

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Early Help
 - 2.1 Early Help Assessment
 - 2.2 Early Help activity on Frameworki
3. When a contact is made to the Front Door
 - 3.1 Consent
 - 3.2 No early activity before contact made
4. When a contact is accepted as a referral to Children's Social Work Service
 - 4.1 Early help assessment on Frameworki
 - 4.2 Early help assessment not on Frameworki
 - 4.3 Outcomes of Child and Family Assessment
5. When a contact is not accepted as a referral to Children's Social Work Service
 - 5.1 Monitoring outcomes where a referral is not required
6. Transfer from Children's Social Work Service involvement to Early Help

1. Introduction

This practice guidance is for use by the multi-agency team at the Front Door when a contact is made.

The guidance is also for use by all Children's Services practitioners when a case transfers from CSWS to universal and or targeted services and the need for an early help assessment (including CAF) is indicated.

2. Early Help

Universal and Targeted Services will meet the needs of the majority of children and families In Leeds. It is an expectation that where families require support, their needs will be routinely identified through an Early Help Assessment (see 2.1) and addressed through support provided by universal or targeted services.

It is also expected that assessments will be undertaken as soon as additional needs emerge and well before issues escalate resulting in a Contact to the Front Door.

Practitioners providing services specifically for children, young people and families can seek advice and information through a conversation with the team at the Front Door; (in this document they will be referred to as Front Door Officers unless the activity is only to be carried out by social workers). This advice may include contacts for relevant Targeted Services Leaders (TSLs) and other key colleagues in clusters.

Those working in services that do not work directly with children or families but come into contact with children, young people and families (for example: waste disposal workers; cleaners; and those working in public parks) should telephone the Contact Centre. Contact Centre staff will ensure details are taken and the contact responded to appropriately.

More information about Early Help and our approach to responding to the needs of children and families in Leeds, early in the life of the problem through *Right conversations, right people, right time*, is available to download from the [Leeds Safeguarding Children Board website](#). There is also a video to watch, a poster and guidance on training.

2.1 Early Help Assessment

We have agreed a change in language from the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to Early Help as an umbrella term to describe activity that is undertaken to provide support to families as early as possible. This includes early provision of the right support at points of transfer between services.

An **Early Help Assessment** can be an assessment that is currently used by a single agency. One example is a Common Internal Record completed in clusters, another is a universal needs assessment completed by health colleagues. Documentation developed from the CAF is still in use as part of Early Help. This documentation is used to coordinate plans and reviews when a number of agencies are working together. Assessment is essential as a basis for good quality support not simply a referral mechanism. However the same information can support a contact to social work services in relation to a child in need or child in need of protection.

2.2 Early help activity on Frameworki

An Early Intervention (early help) module has been developed within Frameworki, the Children's Services electronic case management system. Access to the module is being rolled out to early help practitioners supported by Targeted Services Leaders.

Open and active existing CAF cases will continue to be registered and recorded in exactly the same way until they can transfer, seamlessly, to the new system, ready for practitioners to pick up once they have the required access.

The benefits of this new module and associated practice include:

- Reduction of worker time as relevant information is 'pulled' from Early Help assessment to Child and Family Assessment (the social work assessment) when required and vice versa
- Better integrated working with better access to shared information across agencies.
- Increased intelligence on service requests and responses between agencies.
- Better monitoring of the "journey of the child" through different services over time.

The roll out of the early intervention (early help) module on Frameworki provides an opportunity to further develop joint working and to ensure that early help activity and assessments can be drawn on and shared more effectively, reducing the need for families to regularly repeat their story.

3. When a contact is made to the Front Door

Through a conversation between the Front Door and the practitioner, a decision is made to either accept the contact as a referral to CSWS or offer advice and guidance on alternative approaches to providing support.

3.1 Consent

All practitioners should be aware that the fundamental hypothesis for involving parents in decision-making is simply that, "human beings are happier more cooperative and more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in authority do things with them rather than for them or to them"(www.iirp.edu). It is therefore essential that practitioners work restoratively with parents to enable them to understand the need for contact with children's services and work hard to secure their consent before telephoning the front door.

It is usual practice for practitioners to identify the child or children about whom they are seeking advice. They should normally seek consent from the parent or older child before contacting Duty and Advice Team.

However under some circumstances a practitioner may want to seek advice first but the Duty and Advice Team will need to record the advice they have provided and the fact that they have advised the caller to inform the family; seek consent and report this back as done to Duty and Advice.

If the family decline to give consent, the record will be deleted unless Duty and Advice Team have reason to record it under current legislation.

The giving of advice without identifying the family should be in very rare circumstances, with good, explained reasons for doing this.

Social Workers have a statutory requirement to act when informed that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm or that a crime may have been or is about to be committed. Front Door Social Workers treat this as Section 47 Children Act 1989.

In this situation, the family should be informed before concerns are discussed with other practitioners unless, doing so would:

- “place a person (the individual, family member, yourself or a third party) at increased risk of significant harm if a child, or serious harm if an adult; or
- prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious; or
- lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm to a child, or serious harm to an adult” Information Sharing: Guidance for Practitioners and Managers, (2008)

Practitioners should be aware of the ‘Haringey Judgement’ where the London Borough of Haringey was judged to have acted without ‘due process’. Social workers had made enquires about the safety of a particular child with other practitioners including the child’s GP and the police before they had contacted the parents to inform them that this was to be the case.

Judicial Review: R (AB and CD) v Haringey London Borough Council (2013)

In addition, Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act gives powers to specific relevant agencies, such as: the police; the local authority; and health trusts; to share information for the purposes of community safety.

3.2 No Early help activity before contact made

Even though there has been no documented early help activity before the contact is made to the Front Door, it may be appropriate to continue with the contact, because of immediate risk of significant harm.

The Front Door Officers will clarify the presenting needs of the family, ascertain the details of agencies that are currently involved with them and consider the risks and whether the child is in need of help and protection. They will then make a recommendation as to whether there is a need for Children’s Social Work Services involvement and whether to accept the contact as a referral.

4. When a contact is accepted as a referral to Children’s Social Work Service

When a contact is accepted as a referral to CSWS, it is forwarded to the relevant area social work team or Child Health and Disability (CHAD) duty team for a decision about how to proceed.

If it is decided that a Child and Family Assessment is carried out, the usual CSWS procedures will be adhered to when completing this work.

4.1 Early help assessment on Frameworki

If there is an early help assessment or early help information on the Frameworki system and the lead professional is making the Contact, that lead professional will receive a request for access on the system which they can then approve.

If the person making the contact is not the Lead Professional and cannot grant access but information is on the Frameworki system, Front Door Officers can provide access to the information and inform the Lead Professional.

Once a decision has been made that CSWS involvement is agreed, the early intervention module on Frameworki will be closed.

The Lead Professional and Social Worker will agree who will inform the Team around the Child that CSWS will take the lead for the work.

The lead agency will now be CSWS, but other agencies will remain involved. The Early Help Assessment (CAF) documentation will inform an assessment if one is to be undertaken.

The early help assessment on Frameworki will be pulled from the early intervention module into the CSWS module. This can then be edited and amended as required when carrying out the Child and Family Assessment.

4.2 Early help assessment not on Frameworki

Where there is no early help information or assessment on Frameworki, but there is available information or documentation from off system such as an older version of a CAF, this will be supplied by Front Door Officers.

4.3 Outcomes of the Child and Family Assessment

Following the conclusion of the Child and Family Assessment, the outcomes include:

Child's needs can be met through Universal or Targeted Services – a discussion with the relevant practitioner to initiate or continue an early help assessment takes place. If there is no obvious Lead Practitioner, Front Door Officers may discuss this with the relevant TSL or the Early Start service with the aim of identifying someone to act as Lead Practitioner.

Support is required as a child in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

An assessment under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is required due to concerns identified about the risk of significant harm.

5. When a contact is not accepted as a referral to CSWS

If it is decided that CSWS are not required, the Front Door Officer will give advice to the practitioner who has made the Contact and recommend they share the information with the Lead Professional if they are not the lead.

The Contact episode will be outcomed as either advice given or initiate early help assessment which can, following agreement, be assigned to early help practitioners on the system, or will generate a task for a Front Door Officer to progress to anyone not on the system.

An Early help assessment may be recommended. If recommending an Early Help assessment Front Door Officers will advise the practitioner to discuss this with the family to obtain consent. The agencies involved with the family would then, ideally in conversation with the family, identify who is most appropriate to undertake the assessment.

The Front Door Officer will ask if the case has been presented at the cluster Guidance and Support meeting or discussed with the TSL. If not, this may be one of the recommended outcomes.

Specific outcomes such as presentation at Guidance and Support meetings cannot be guaranteed. TSLs will work predominantly with practitioners and services rather than with individual families. TSL contact details should not be given out to the public.

The summary information captured on Frameworki should explicitly state if consent has been gained, include whether or not a lead practitioner has been nominated and detail any recommendations that have been identified.

Where consent needs to be gained from the parents, the Front Door Officer will discuss this with the practitioner making the contact and discuss how support for the family can be accessed.

It is good practice for the practitioner making the contact to record their own summary of the advice given in their records.

Where a parent has made the Contact to the Front Door and after discussion they have consented to an assessment being undertaken, the Front Door Officer will discuss this directly with the parent to achieve a speedy resolution and involve local agencies appropriately at the first opportunity.

5.1 Monitoring outcomes where a referral to CSWS is not required

The outcome of cases will be monitored by Front Door Officers in order to: provide extra support if required, alongside TSLs; ensure that the needs of the family can be met; and provide data for local and city wide planning, reporting, inspection and evaluation processes.

6. Transfer from Children's Social Work Services to Early Help

There will be opportunities to use Early Help Assessment processes when closing cases that have been open to CSWS, either immediately after a Child and Family Assessment is completed or following longer term work on Child Protection and Child in Need cases for example.

In some cases, children and young people will be living in kinship arrangements and may need support when social work involvement is no longer required. Consideration needs to be given to these needs and for a clear transfer to universal and targeted services arranged.

There is no prescriptive hierarchical route to exit or transfer from social work involvement. For example, it is not a requirement that a child in need plan must follow a decision to come off a child protection plan, or that an early help plan will always be required to meet the child's needs. There are a range of options that can result from coming off a social work plan and these include:

- Child protection plan can transfer to a child in need plan; or to targeted and or universal services
- Child in need plan can transfer to targeted and or universal services

The CSWS Team Manager will evidence their analysis and decision making process on Frameworki to make clear that the risk does not warrant continued CSWS involvement but that further support is needed.

The family and the agencies working with them should be clear why CSWS are no longer required and they should be provided with information on any recommendations for future work. This may be agreed at a meeting with the family and professionals.

This meeting may be a Child in Need review meeting, or Review Child Protection Conference. Where a recommendation from a core group meeting is that CSWS no longer need to be involved, this recommendation should be provided to the relevant Team Manager and Child Protection Chair and if they agree, this should be confirmed at a Review Child Protection Conference.

Where closure occurs directly from a Child and Family Assessment, the process is set out in the first bullet point of 4.3 above.

Steps should be taken to identify a Lead Professional from an agency already involved with the family before the meeting. If a lead agency for the Early Help Assessment cannot be identified, advice can be sought from Front Door Officers or the TSL.

Following the meeting the case should be closed to CSWS and assigned with a summary of advice to the appropriate Lead Professional. This can be done on Frameworki if that professional is on the system. If this is not possible, the Front Door Officers will be assigned the outcome to record the next steps on the system appropriately.

The work undertaken and areas addressed under the CSWS activity and plan should be recorded in a closing summary on Frameworki. This should give the reasons for the end of the plan and include the views of the professionals involved, and the views, wishes and feelings of the child / young person and their parent / carers.

Families will not be expected to undergo another assessment, or immediately attend another meeting as the appropriate information will be transferred within the Frameworki system. The information should include any specific recommendations for future work. This can be sent on Frameworki as an Early Help registration episode to be outcomed by the Front Door Officers and provided in PDF format to practitioners off system.

These decisions to close CSWS involvement and transfer to early help will be formally communicated by letter to the family and to the relevant agencies. If the decision is that the child's needs can be met in universal services and there is no need for an early help plan to meet these needs, this must be clearly communicated to universal services working with the child. These serves include: early years setting; Early Start Team; school; GP, etc.