

Early Help Assessment



The process to complete an Early Help Assessment can be described in four stages.

- **Identify Needs** - When any agency i.e. Health Visitor, Teacher, Youth Offending Worker or Childrens Centre staff, working with a child, young person or their family, identifies a need that they cannot meet on their own – they should consider an Early Help Assessment to widen the level of support available to the family. This requires the consent of the parent or carer of the young person involved. If in doubt staff can use the 'Pre- assessment checklist' to measure the level of need and whether the family would benefit from a Team Around The Family (TAF) to address the issues that are causing them to feel concerned. They check to clarify whether there is an Early Help Assessment already in place. This is done by contacting Cumbria Safeguarding Hub where all Early Help Assessments are registered.
- **Assess The Needs** - If the family give consent an Early Help Assessment Form can be downloaded from the Cumbria LSCB and Cumbria County Council website and the staff identifying the concern will complete as much as they can with the parent and young person. Recent changes have created the document as a whole Family assessment – meaning that all children will be considered as well as details about parents and carers to create a more holistic assessment and then plan for each as part of the Family assessment. This assessment is registered with the Central Registration Point in Cumbria Safeguarding Hub.
- **Integrated assessment into a Plan** - The agency identifying the concern calls a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting. This should include key agencies identified by both themselves and the family. It may initially be only a few people – growing as more needs are identified and therefore other services are required. The meeting should have the family as central to the proceedings whilst also driving forward the need to put a plan in place to bring about change and support each family member. The partly completed assessment is shared. At the end of the first meeting other agencies can have been identified to add to the assessment, deliver services and one agency will have been identified to be the Coordinator of the assessment. An Action Plan should be in place with clear outcomes set, who will be responsible for each action and when it will be reviewed. The Coordinator will hold the Early Help Assessment and any updates sent by other members of the TAF will be added by them.
- **Review progress** - The review is essential to ensure that all partners in the TAF are delivering the services that were agreed in the plan, but also that the family are continuing to cooperate to bring about the change necessary as agreed at the initial meeting. The first reviews will ensure that the assessment is complete and that all concerns have an action to bring about change. The situation should be reviewed until it is felt that all outcomes set at the beginning have been met and the plan is no longer necessary.
- **Step Up/Step Down** - if during this process the family either withdraw consent and therefore the process ends or there is no significant improvement a referral into Cumbria Safeguarding Hub should be considered. This would be done using a Single Contact Form. If this becomes necessary this process is referred to as Step Up and the Early Help Assessment closes. The assessment will be viewed by the Childrens Social Care staff involved. The TAF will become members of any Core group in any Childrens Social Care process. Similarly when the level of concern has reduced to the point where Childrens Social Care are closing a case, they will agree at the final meeting that the Previous Early Help Assessment should be re-opened. This is referred to as Step Down. Any actions still in place on their plan will transfer to an Early Help Action Plan and the TAF will be reconvened. This ensures that families leaving this statutory process have continued levels of support for a period of time.

Case Study

Lisa has three children aged 5 years 2 years and 11 months old. When Neil aged 5 went back to school after the holidays Lisa shared with the teacher that her partner, Neil's father, had been sent to prison 4 weeks ago. She was struggling to handle Neil's behaviour as he misses his Dad. She has had Post Natal Illness following the birth of her youngest child and felt that this was impacting upon her ability to meet the challenge. She said that Neil wouldn't listen to her and was misbehaving. Neil's behaviour had also changed in school. Lisa said that she was tired and Ryan aged 2 is constantly demanding her attention. Lucy is 11 months old and teething. She has attended the Children's Centre groups over the summer - but hasn't told them about recent developments. Lisa agrees with school that she needs some help to handle the demands of each child. School believe that Lisa is a good mother but is under pressure due the changes at home. The school do not believe that they are at risk of significant harm or neglect. However they feel that the family require support at this Early Help Stage. Lisa agrees to an assessment being completed.

School check, and there is no Early Help Assessment in place. They complete the level of detail that they can with Lisa on the assessment form and register it with Cumbria Safeguarding Hub. They call a TAF and invite a representative from the school, Lisa, her mother, the Children's Centre as well as the Health Visitor(HV).

At the first meeting they agree that the HV has more information than they do about Lisa and also the younger children. The HV agrees to complete those details on the assessment. The Children's Centre say that they know Lisa well, that she attends many of their groups and has had some family support from them in the past. Lisa's mother tells the group that she works – but can have at least two of the children every other weekend and sees Lisa during the week.

A plan is agreed

- The Childrens Centre will allocate a Family Support Worker to help Lisa to set routines with the children and if necessary refer her to the parenting classes.
- Lisa will attend the Stay and Play with Lucy on a Monday at the Children's Centre and also the Post Natal Illness group for 1:1 support as well as peer support on a Wednesday where a creche is provided
- Neil will attend the Lego Club after school run by the Children's Centre and school to help identify children who are struggling with a range of issues, with an option for 1:1 support for him.
- The Health Visitor will ensure that Ryan gets a Two Year old place at Nursery and gives advice on teething to Lisa. She agrees to visit monthly for three months. The Nursery become members of the TAF.
- Lisa's Mother will have the children every other weekend
- School will ensure that Neil gets some extra time with staff at lunchtime – which is when he can be disruptive.

Lisa says that on a scale of 1 – 10 she would measure herself as feeling at about 3 at the first meeting (1 is low and 10 is high).

The plan is reviewed every 6 weeks and after 6 months all agree that there has been significant changes in how Lisa appears to be coping.

- Lisa is attending the Children's Centre regularly, Family Support have reduced their visits to monthly as Lisa is also attending a Parenting Workshop which she is enjoying.
- Her mother has the children overnight – allowing her occasionally to visit her partner in prison but also to have time for herself.
- Ryan is in Nursery for 15 hours a week and is enjoying it. He will start Nursery for half a day, five days a week, in September.
- Lucy attends groups at the Children's Centre and settles well at the Crèche when her mother goes to the parenting course.

The members of the TAF agree to close the Early Help Assessment as the outcomes set at the outset have been achieved. The closure form is completed and registered with Triage.

Lisa reports that on the measuring scale she would put herself at 8. The group agree.