

Early help pathway



A guide for practitioners



Contents	page
What is early help?	4
What are the principles of early help?	5
How to make a referral for early help	6
How can I get advice and support to access early help?	8
Early help assessment - what is it, who should complete it and when?	10
What happens at a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting?	14
What are the early help networks	15
Is there training available?	15

Our vision is that all children and young people will be happy, healthy, safe and confident in their future.

What is early help?

‘Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from foundation years through to teenage years.’¹

It’s about working with children, young people and families to identify and address problems before they escalate. Early help includes services that are available to all families as well as services for more vulnerable families who need a greater level of support. Effective early help means that:

- Parents and/or care-givers feel supported to provide stable, consistent and appropriate care for their families.
- Children and young people achieve their education goals.
- Young people are equipped with the skills and attitudes to join the workforce and overcome barriers to employability.
- Children and young people achieve the best possible physical and mental health.
- Children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This is what we are working towards as a partnership in Surrey. We want to have a consistent and collaborative early help offer for children, young people and families delivered jointly by all partners. Giving us the ability to offer the right help at the right time.

¹Working Together to Safeguard Children, HM Government, March 2015 What are the principles of early help?

What are the principles of early help?

In Surrey, we want children and young people to have the best possible start in life and in order to achieve this we have agreed the following key principles to guide our approach:

- Timely intervention** - dealing with problems as soon as they arise and before they escalate.
- Integrated working** - children, young people and families receive support for all of their needs through a single offer.
- Flexible pathway and tools** - that recognises children and young people will move between different levels of need as their needs and circumstances change.
- Participation and co-design** - with children, young people and their families.
- Early help is everyone’s responsibility** - it requires everyone to work together to put the child or young person at the centre of everything they do to meet their needs and improve outcomes.

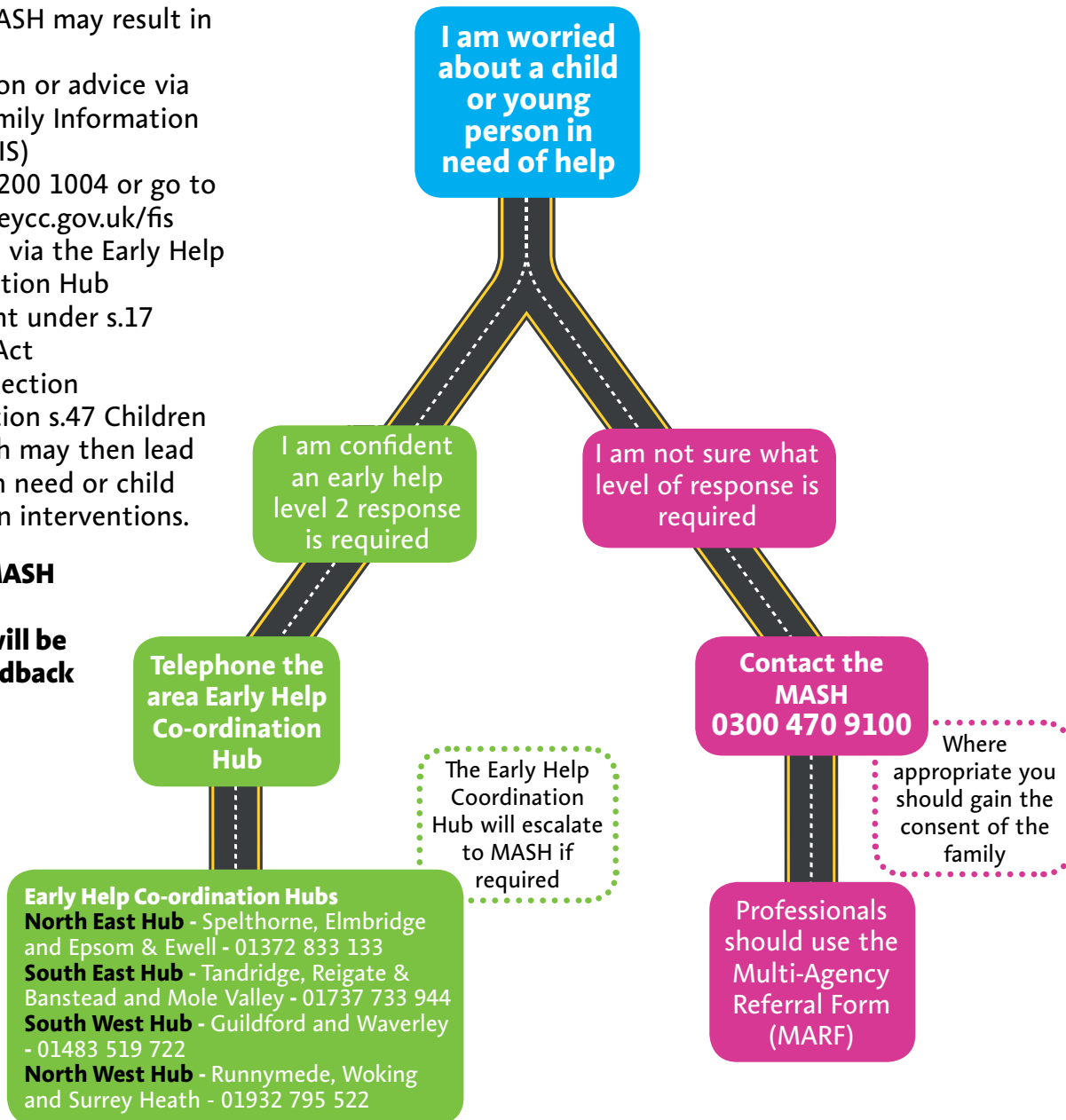
How do I make a referral for early help?

This referral pathway should be used in line with the Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) **levels of need document** and following discussion with your Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Referrals to the MASH may result in the provision of:

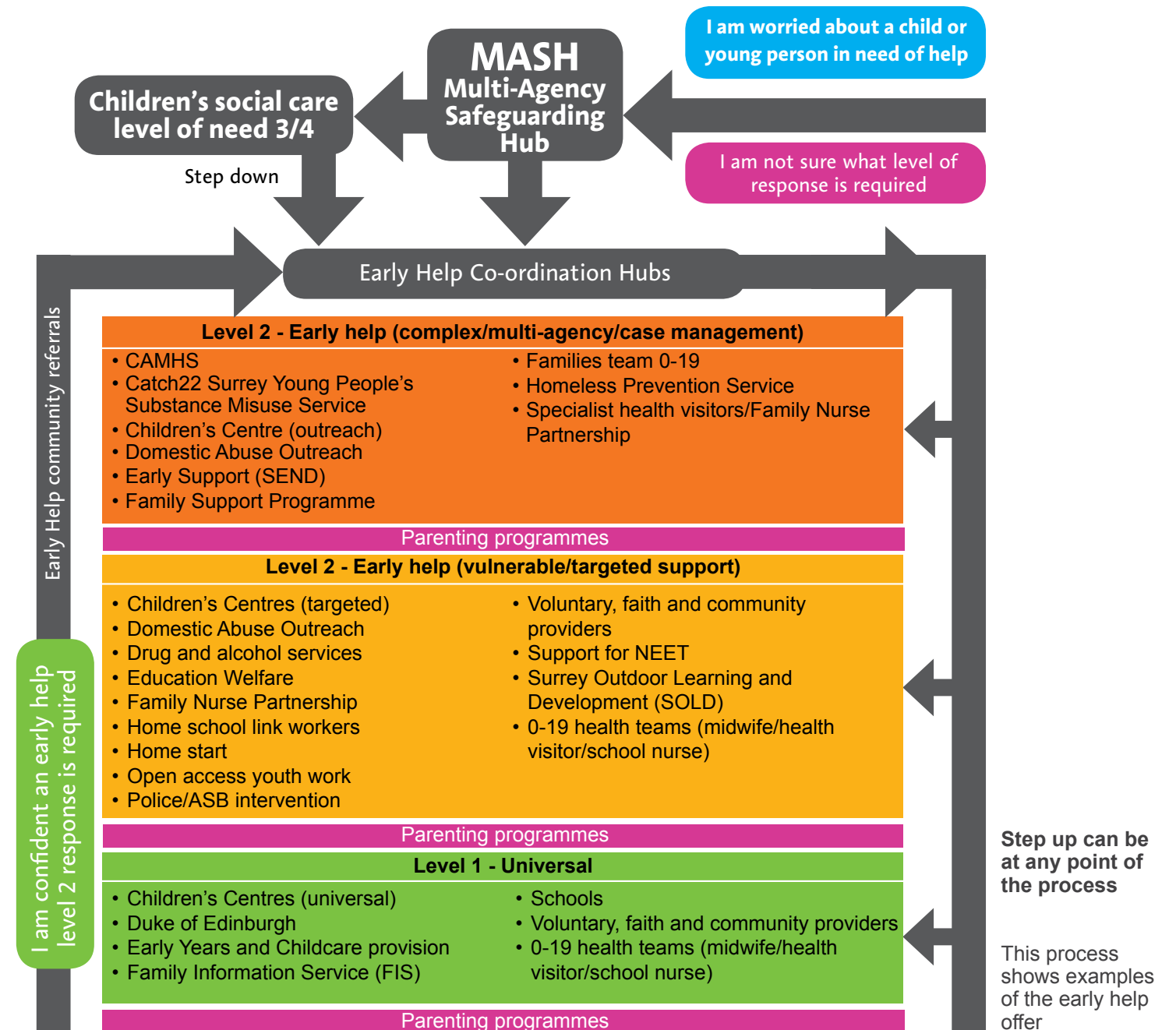
- Level 1** - information or advice via Surrey Family Information Service (FIS)
tel: 0300 200 1004 or go to www.surreycc.gov.uk/fis
- Level 2** - early help via the Early Help Co-ordination Hub
- Level 3** - assessment under s.17 Children Act
- Level 4** - child protection investigation s.47 Children Act, which may then lead to child in need or child protection interventions.

Referrers to the MASH and Early Help Co-ordination Hubs will be provided with feedback as to the service provided in respect of the child's assessment of need.



What happens when I make a referral?

Overview of early help process



How can I get advice and support to access early help?

The role of the Early Help Co-ordination Hubs is to:

- Offer advice and support to ensure families access universal and targeted early help services
- Connect families to early help services and monitor the interventions
- Support early help practitioners (Family Services and Community partners) to complete early help assessments, identify Lead Professionals, and engage in the Team Around the Family approach
- Work directly with the children and families providing assessment, planning and interventions, with Family Support Workers acting as lead professionals.

You can contact the Early Help Co-ordination Hubs to help you make decisions about next steps for early help support.

‘It was great to be able to talk through with the Early Help Co-ordination Hub how I could continue to access support for a family at the end of a child in need plan.’

Social Worker, North East Team

‘I visited a family at home, completed an early help assessment and shared with the local school and children centre. This enhanced multi-agency working and allowed me to support the family.’

Family Support Worker - Early Help Co-ordination Hub

‘You encouraged and supported our family to be more confident and try new things.’

Feedback from a parent to a family support worker in the Early Help Co-ordination Hub

‘I have used the Family Information Service directory to find a local charity to support a family.’

Advice, Support and Information Officer - Early Help Co-ordination Hub

How to contact the Early Help Co-ordination Hubs (EHCHs)

- **North west - Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Woking**
Surrey County Council, Quadrant Court, Guildford Road, Woking GU22 7QQ
01932 795 522 earlyhelphubnw@surreycc.gov.uk
- **South west - Guildford & Waverley**
Surrey County Council, St Francis Centre, Southway, Guildford GU2 7QQ
01483 519 722 earlyhelphubsw@surreycc.gov.uk
- **North east - Spelthorne, Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell**
Surrey County Council Fairmount House, Bull Hill, Leatherhead, Surrey KT2 7AH
01372 833 133 earlyhelphubne@surreycc.gov.uk
- **South east - Mole Valley, Tandridge, Reigate & Banstead**
Surrey County Council, Consort House, 5-7 Queensway, Redhill, Surrey RH1 1YB
01737 733 944 earlyhelphubse@surreycc.gov.uk

Trying to find services to support children, young people and their families?

Surrey Family Information Service is a free and impartial internet, telephone and outreach service. It provides information, advice and assistance to parents of children and young people aged 0 to 19 years old (up to 25 years old for young people with a disability or special educational need).

Website: www.surreycc.gov.uk/fis

Family Information Directory: www.surreycc.gov.uk/directory

Telephone: **0300 200 1004** (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, 24 hour answerphone)

Email: surrey.fis@surreycc.gov.uk

Early help assessment - what is it, who should complete it and when?

The early help assessment is used to help practitioners gather and understand information about strengths and needs, based on discussions with the family. The holistic assessment identifies the most appropriate way to meet those needs. You can download a copy of the early help assessment template on our website www.surreycc.gov.uk/earlyhelp

Practitioners in universal or targeted early help services can complete an early help assessment on their own or with the support of the Early Help Co-ordination Hub. The early help assessment can be completed to identify those who could be at the Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting or completed with those at the meeting.

For example, something will have triggered you to recognise a possible need in a child or young person. It may be a change in behaviour, an action, consequence or something which alerts you. Often you will then need to seek further information to help clarify the problems or issue and prevent needs from escalating.

When an early help assessment has been completed, practitioners are able to see the family's needs holistically and not fragmented. It is important to check if an early help assessment or TAF is already in place for the family to ensure you are working together. You can do this by contacting your local Early Help Co-ordination Hub.

What makes a good quality early help assessment?

A good quality early help assessment should be:

Empowering - making sure that the child or young person and/or their parent/carer is supported to participate and it is a collaborative assessment.

Developmental - supporting the child or young person and parent/carer to adopt a solution focused approach to the discussion.

Accessible - for all concerned, including the efficient use of time and resources (e.g. equipment and interpreter).

Transparent - the purpose of the assessment is clear, discussion is open and honest and there are no hidden agendas. All must understand the possible outcomes of the early help assessment.

The principles underpinning it should include:

Validity - the assessment has achieved what it intended to (i.e. the strengths and needs of the child or young person).

Accuracy - the assessment provides an accurate representation of the strengths and needs of the child or young person.

Clarity - the assessment is clear, concise and understandable by all those involved and any practitioners who may get involved or take responsibility for the child or young person's case at a later point in time.

Inclusive - the assessment represents the views and opinions of the child or young person and/or family; this is reflected through their language and expressions.

Equal opportunity - the assessment is not biased and gives positive expression to the opinions and experiences of the child or young person and/or their parents/carers without prejudice or discrimination.

Authenticity - the assessment is an accurate, evidence based record of the discussion.

Professionalism - the assessment is non-judgmental and follows organisational codes of practice for recording/writing public documents.

Outcome based - the assessment promotes an approach that focuses on what the child or young person and their parents/carers want to achieve.

Practical - the assessment identifies the strengths and needs clearly and specifically to allow for identification of appropriate actions.

Getting consent to use the early help assessment

Before you start you need to discuss with, and ensure that, the parents, carers and child or young person have provided consent to proceed with the early help assessment. **You must have consent to share information.** A young person aged 16 or over, or a child under 16 who has the capacity to understand and make their own decisions may give or refuse consent. You should follow current guidelines or local procedures to establish competency in relation to having capacity to consent. It is not simply based on age, it is based on a capacity to understand any consequences of consent or non-consent in the particular circumstances and make a specific decision at the time it needs to be made. This can be with or without the parent or carer's consent.

What if I don't get consent?

You cannot proceed with the early help assessment, even if you have identified additional needs. You must respect the wishes of the parents, carers and child or young person. Just because you haven't got consent doesn't mean you don't do anything. Identify what work can be initiated whilst you continue to discuss with them the early help process.

Can I ever share information without consent?

You can share information without consent in the following circumstances:

- when a child is believed to be at risk of significant harm
- when the public interest in safeguarding the child's welfare overrides the need to keep the information confidential
- for the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime
- when instructed to do so by a court
- when there is a legal obligation to do so
- when it is in the parent, carer or young person's vital interests to do so.

What should I do if I complete an early help assessment?

Copies of the signed and completed early help assessments should be sent to your local Early Help Co-ordination Hub via secure post or email. Please confirm in your email, or the signature box of the assessment, that you have kept the original documentation in your office.

The Early Help Co-ordination Hub will store this information on our system and will confirm receipt in writing, including a reference number and any feedback.

Please note: You need to gain written consent from the child, young person, parent or carer before submitting an early help assessment. If an early help assessment has not been signed, it will not be logged into our system and the Early Help Co-ordination Hub will make contact with you to follow up.

What happens at a Team Around the Family meeting?

Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings are led by practitioners in the community who are working with a child or family. Where required, the Early Help Co-ordination Hubs can support the co-ordination of the TAF process.

The TAF is a way of communicating and agreeing the assessment, intervention and plan. The meeting follows the completion of a holistic assessment with the family, and is a way of communicating issues and agreeing the next steps of the family action plan. It brings together the family and those identified agencies who are working with the child, young person, or family. The multi-agency meeting gives you an opportunity to explore creative options, identify overlaps or gaps and develop good working relationships with people from other agencies. It also provides the opportunity to agree a different lead professional if necessary.

What is the role of the lead professional?

- Act as a co-ordinating single point of contact for the family through a process of change both supporting and challenging when appropriate.
- Lead a 'single offer' of local co-ordinated services to families through a TAF.
- Co-ordinate the delivery of an agreed family action plan and monitor and review it until outcomes are met.

What are the early help networks?

The early help networks are countywide and aim to bring together those working in the children's workforce to help support each other as peers, and avoid the feeling of isolation in working with vulnerable children and families.

The networks can provide practitioners with the opportunity to:

- think and consider how best to meet the needs of children and young people with complex and challenging circumstances who fall below the threshold for a specialist service
- increase the confidence of staff that work directly with children at an early intervention level
- identify gaps in local services to meet the needs of children at an early intervention level
- share expertise and good practice
- improve information sharing
- discuss opportunities for integrated intervention for individual children and families, if necessary.

To find out more about your local early help network email earlyhelpnetworks@surreycc.gov.uk or visit www.surreycc.gov.uk/earlyhelp

Is there training available?

We offer free training to practitioners which is available via the Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB). You can find out more at www.surreycc.gov.uk/earlyhelp

