

New Early Help Assessment – Practitioner Guidance

Introduction

The new early help assessment has been created through multi agency workshops using the following principles:

- **Work to families' strengths** – especially those of parents and carers and take the time to understand their needs fully;
- **Strength-based assessments** which evaluate a family's and young person's ability to make improvements for themselves
- Focusing on the needs of the **family as a whole**
- **Focus on preventing problems** before they occur and offer flexible responsive support when and where it is required;
- Assessments **address the underlying needs, rather than the presenting symptoms.**
- **Build the resilience** of parents, children, young people and communities to support each other;
- **Work together across the whole system** aligning our resources so we can best support families and do what needs to be done when it needs to be done;
- **Base all that we do on evidence** of both what is needed and of what works and be brave enough to stop things that are wrong;
- **Be clear and consistent about the outcomes** we expect, and judge what we do against them.

Examples of Early Help assessments from other local authorities have been used to inform the Surrey Early Help assessment. The EHA is supported by the use of a range of agency and practitioner assessment tools

The new form has been redesigned to ensure it does not act as a barrier to engagement and recognises the importance of capturing the voice of the family, their strengths and the things they want support to improve in their lives.

Assessment Practice

The assessment process should engage the family and children and is an important part of establishing the relationship that will support the change the family wants to make. Where the change that the family wants to make has been described as a part of the initial request for support/contact and it is important that the practitioner uses this as the starting point. A holistic assessment should be undertaken.

A holistic family assessment:

- Provides a sense of what is going on in their life, using the holistic person-centred framework offers a base for conversation
- Gives a sense of what is going well and where they don't need help,
- Is person centred – allows the parent or child to take the lead and be an active participant in their own support, capturing what is important to them.
- Is holistic and outcomes focused – providing a consistent framework for exploring and reflecting on someone's life today and their goals for the future
- Is collaborative and empowering – data is collected through collaboration

- Is simple and clear – and has accessible design and language for parents and children themselves

An example of a holistic assessment tool is The Outcome Star used by many services in Surrey. Other assessments used by different professionals can be used to inform the early help assessment and should be seen as contributing to the holistic picture, examples of these are Health Needs Assessment, NSPCC Graded 2 Profile, 2 year progress checks and development matters. The assessment should be owned by the family and should use language that is accessible for the family, child/young person.

Completing the Early Help Assessment

How are things for you and your family? How does this effect the children?

What is going well?

What would you like to be different?

What support do you have now? What support have you had previously?

A range of assessment tools can be used alongside an EHA, to capture views and engage the family, child or young person. Practitioners should ask appropriate questions to engage the family to help complete this section. Good practice would include reflecting and summarising what the family have expressed as part of the process before then agreeing what is entered into these sections. Helping families to see their own strengths is a critical part of the work of the practitioner with questioning that is purposeful. These initial questions are designed to record the voice of the family and wherever possible reference the actual words used by the family to describe their lived experience. It's important that every interaction provides an opportunity to build self-esteem and confidence

Practitioner Summary and Analysis

This section is for the practitioner to provide a summary assessment. Drawing on the information gained through the assessment tools practitioners should briefly summarise the relevant strengths and areas of focus for the action plan. Using the assessment triangle for guidance (Appendix B) the analysis should reflect the three domains of the assessment triangle.

The analysis should reflect the person's and practitioners best thinking in respect to your worries, an understanding of the drivers behind those worries and how together you are going to take steps to reduce some or all of these worries. Wherever possible base comments on evidence, not just opinion and indicate what your evidence is. Where the assessment has been supported by the use of specific tools such as the Graded Care profile the findings of these tools should also be summarised here.

The analysis should clearly set out

- What are the main worries that the young person/family have?
- As a practitioner what are your concerns? What is the impact on the children?
- How will you know things have improved?
- How will the young person know things have improved?
- How will the family know when things have improved?

- How by the end of your intervention will you have built resilience so the young person/family are better able to prevent their worries escalating again

Action Plans

The action plan identifies objectives and goals, details the actions to be undertaken, and the roles and responsibilities of the child, young person and family and each of the organisations providing services to the family. The assessment and goals will be discussed and agreed with the child, young person and their family.

The action plan also contains timelines for the length of intervention and for monitoring and review. All plans should be reviewed every 3 months at a minimum or following a significant event.

The plans should focus on 'one family one plan' and bring together in one place the action required to achieve the outcomes and goals. A single plan will ensure the efforts of different agencies and professionals are pulled together and aligned. This provides an opportunity to reduce some of the overlapping agency activity that surrounds families and the waste that entails, plus the knock-on impact that may have on the families.

Action plans should be family centred and focused on action that improve the outcomes for children. Some actions such as 'making a referral to...' or 'Chasing another professional', should not be included in the family plan, as these are professionals actions.

3 stages to action plans

Engagement– plans at this stage are likely to be short and include small steps and will include actions for the practitioner to prove trust and quick wins. The Action Plan must be reflective of the individual's personal and family-related needs as well as their barriers, the stage they are at in overcoming these barriers for the plan to work.

Direct work – these plans are after engagement and once a family are open to change. The action plan should chart the progress made by the individual and should give the individual a framework to help focus on what they need to do. It should be agreed by the individual and reviewed regularly. The Action Plan is an important way of evidencing the progress made and it is therefore important that all family activities undertaken are recorded on it.

Exit Plans – the timing of exit plans is crucial as this empowers and enables families to identify their journey and the changes they have made, then use this as a resource to remind them if things begin to become difficult later. Good effective exit plans can prevent early re referrals.

Consent and data privacy statement

The data consent statement on the EHA is a guideline provided by Surrey County Council, practitioners and agencies using the form should refer families to their own privacy statements and ensure consent to share is gained from the family.

Appendix A

Practical Questions to help identify strengths and needs to inform Early Help Assessments

The questions presented are NOT intended to be seen as a 'script' for the assessment (and not all questions will be relevant or need to be asked). They are a bank of possible questions that should aid thinking in respect of the type of questions that a worker might use. Practitioners will need to use their experience and professional judgment, guided by training and these examples to determine how best to select questions in order to explore and evidence areas of strength and need.

Although certain questions have been allocated to a particular section, they are flexible and depending on the answers may cover more than one point on the assessment. Also it is key to remember that assessment is not just about questions, your observations of the home, body language and the type and tone of responses are all relevant.

General Questions and technique

Phrases to help open up a dialogue:

- "How are things at the moment /since the request for support was made?"
- "Can you tell me about who is in your family?"

Phrases to help gain a greater understanding:

- "Have there been any changes in your family recently?"
- "It sounds like there's a lot going on, what worries you the most/what you'd like to talk more about?"
- "Can I check that I've got this right....?"

Linking feelings with facts:

- "Let me check you feel angry/frustrated/sad because....."

Affirming:

- "I can see that things are difficult at the moment" this validates their story
- "However you managed to....." acknowledges their strength and encourages and isn't just focusing on negatives.

Summarising:

- "You've shared/talked about a lot of things today. So let's recap/see where we've got to....." this provides another opportunity to check for accuracy and understanding and also to clarify priorities.

Questions to support the completion of the initial assessment alongside summaries from bolt on assessments

- “How are things for you and your family? How does this effect the children?”
- “What is going well?”
- “What would you like to be different?”
- “What support do you have now? What support have you had previously?”

Questions to support the completion of the EHA

Physical Health

- “Are you registered with a doctor & dentist?”
- “Has anyone in the family had a recent illness?”
- “Do you have any worries or concerns about your own or any other family members health?”
- “Do the children sleep well?”
- “Has any health issues affected your child’s school attendance?”
- “Does your child have a lot of energy?”
- “Has your child had all their immunisations/development checks?”
- “Does your child have any allergies?”
- “Do you feel you all have a variety of foods (fresh fruit and vegetables) in your diet?”
- “Are any of the children fussy eaters?”
- “Is anyone taking prescribed medication? Are there any difficulties with this?”
- “Do you see any other health staff?”

Education and learning

- “How would you describe your child’s behaviour at school?”
- “Does your child ever have difficulty following instructions?”
- “What subjects/toys do they like best?”
- “What is your child attendance like at school? Are they in school on time?”
- “What worries or concerns do you have about their education?”
- “Do you attend parents evening or other school events?”
- “Do they do their homework? Who helps them with homework?”
- “Do they attend pre-school?”
- “What do you want for your child?”
- “What does your child wish for the future?”

Your well-being

- “Are you the main carer for the children?”
- “Do you feel stressed or anxious?”
- “Do you feel you are able to have a good sleep pattern?”
- “Do you feel you’re able to enjoy being with the children?”
- “Do you care for anyone outside the family home/or other adult family members?”
- “How would you describe your emotional well-being?”

Meeting emotional needs

- “Which members of your family network does your child/ren have a close relationship with?”
- “Does your child talk to you or another family member about their day or if something is bothering them?”
- “Are you worried about the amount of time your child spends on their own?”
- “Does your child make or have friends?”
- “Do you have concerns about your child/rens group of friends?”
- “Does your child have a best friend?”
- “How do they behave with their friends?”
- “What impact do friends have on your child?”
- “How does your child cope with stress or strong emotions such as anger and frustration?”
- “What makes your child happy/sad?”
- “Do you feel you get on as a family or is there lots of arguing?”

Keeping your children safe

- “Do you feel the children are safe at home/at school/in the community?”
- “When they go out do you know where they are and who they are with?”
- “Do you have access to any mobile phones/social networks your children have? And how regularly do you check this?”
- “Who would care for the children if you were unable to or ill?”
- “Have the police had to attend your home? And if so what was this for?”
- “Do you feel any current or past relationships pose a threat to you or the children?”

Boundaries and behaviour

- “How would you describe your child’s behaviour?”
- “Do you have any worries about your child’s behaviour?”
- “Do you find managing any aspects of your child’s behaviour difficult to manage?”
- “Tell me about how you manage difficult or challenging behaviour?”
- “Do you feel able to be consistent?”
- “Do you think the children understand the consequences for poor behaviour?”
- “Do you think your discipline is appropriate and effective?”

Social networks

- “Who do you turn to for help if there was a sudden problem?”
 - “What do they do?”
 - “How often?”
- “Do you attend any social activities in your area?”
- “Do you attend any groups with or without your children?”
- “How much time do you spend with other family or friends?”
- “Are there other people who are important to you who live nearby?”
- “Do you get help with shopping, childcare arrangements?”
- “Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?”

- “Do the children go to any clubs or activities?”

Family routine

- “Do the children have a bedtime routine and regular bed time?”
- “Describe a typical day’s routine for the children?”
- “Do you or another family member have any health concerns that affect your daily routine?”
- “How do the children get to school/pre-school?”

Home & money

- “How long have you lived in this home/area?”
- “What happened to make you leave your previous home?”
- “What type of tenancy do you have?”
- “Is there enough space for everybody?”
- “Do you have any outstanding repairs or alterations?”
- “Have you been or are you at risk of eviction?”
- “Do you have an income?”
- “How do you manage to budget for food/clothes and bills?”
- “Do you have any concerns about money?”
- “Are you sure you’re claiming all your entitled benefits?”
- “Have you received support with your finances before? If so who and when and was it helpful?”

Progress to work

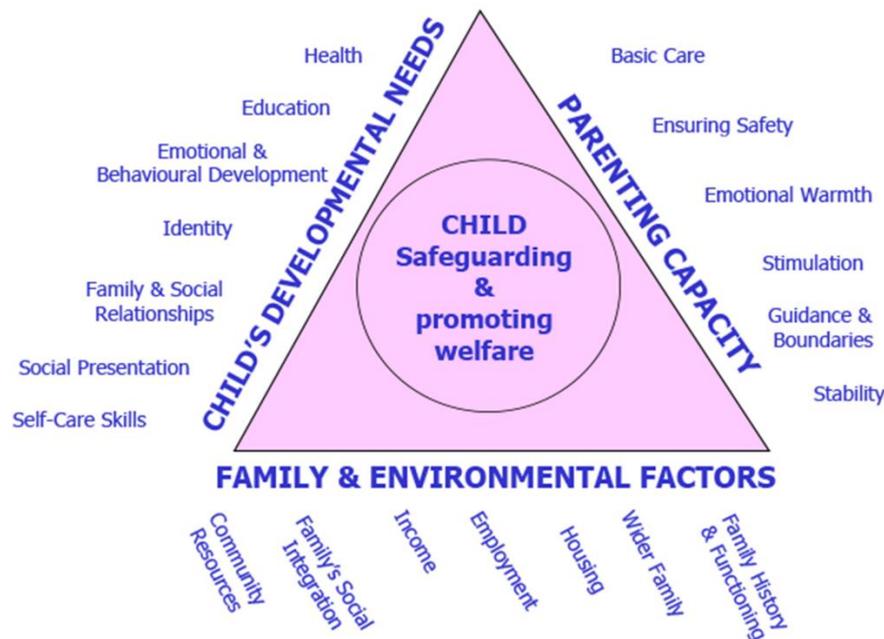
- “Have you been able to find employment?”
- “Would you like to find or change your employment?”
- “Would you like to access additional support for qualifications or training?”

Phrases to help develop an action plan and find solutions:

- “If things get better, how would that look?”
- “If you woke up tomorrow and knew it was better, what would have changed?”
- “When things were better than they are now, what was happening then to make it better?”
- “What kind of support would help you?”
- “Are there any barriers to prevent you achieving your and the children’s goals?”

Appendix B

The Assessment Triangle.



Childs Developmental Needs.

- **Health development:** Include general health; birthing experience; physical development; conditions and impairments; access to and keeping appointments for dentist/GP/optician; immunisations; developmental checks; nutrition; communications development; hospital admissions and accidents.
- **Emotional development:** Include mental health; early attachments; risking/actual self-harm; phobias; coping with stress; motivation; self-confidence; feeling isolated/solitary; sense of belonging; fears.
- **Behavioural development:** Lifestyle; self-control; reckless or impulsive activity; behaviour with peers; substance misuse; anti-social behaviour; sexual/sexualised behaviour; offending, violence and aggression; restless and overactive, easily distracted, attention span/concentration; becoming independent; reaction to boundaries and rules; self-care skills, hygiene.
- **Social and Family relationships:** Building stable relationships with family, peers and wider community and how those relationships impact on the child/young person; helping others; friendships; experiences of discrimination due to race, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability; experience of being a Young Carer.
- **Education and Learning:** Understanding; reasoning and problem solving; decision making; Speech & Language; access to, attendance and participation in education/employment; achievement and attainment in education/employment.

Parenting Capacity.

- Basic care, ensuring safety and protection: Provision of food, drink, warmth, shelter and appropriate clothing; age appropriate daily routines in place; engagement with services; safe and healthy environment.
- Emotional warmth and stability: Stable, affectionate, stimulating family environment; praise and encouragement; secure attachments; frequency of house/school/employment moves; family activities, what is family life like.
- Guidance, boundaries and stimulation: Encouraging self-control; modelling positive behaviour; effective and appropriate discipline; avoiding over-protection; support for positive activities.
- Parent/carer history, functioning and well-being: Physical illness; bereavement; violence; domestic violence; parental substance misuse; criminality, anti-social behaviour; absent parents, relationship breakdown; physical disability; emotional/mental health; abusive behaviour.

Family and Environmental Factors

- Wider family: Extended family relationships; help and support from extended family, friends & neighbours; potential positive role models; other significant adults that have, or could have, impact on the child's life.
- Housing: What is the current housing situation and is it adequate for family's needs?
- Employment and Financial Considerations: Work and shifts; worklessness; income/benefits; debts, loans; financial problems; effects of hardship; ability to manage finances.
- What is it like living in the Community? Access to and involvement in local Social and Recreational Activities and networks; Local levels of harassment, anti-social behaviour, crime/hate crime/fear of crime; (un)employment; social isolation and impact on family.