



One minute guide

Early Start Service

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What is the Early Start Service?

Early Start helps key services, working with families with young children, to work more effectively together. This supports our ambition for Leeds to be a child friendly city and the best city for children to grow up in.

Early Start is an integrated family based offer for children aged 0-5 years and includes the provision of services such as health, childcare, play, early learning and development. Early Start recognises the importance of early help and giving every child, in every community, the best start in life through improving maternal health and providing support for children's health and development.

The Early Start Service is comprised of health visitor service practitioners and children's centre practitioners working together in fully integrated teams. The teams are aligned to [locality clusters](#) and based in health centres and children's centres across the city.

Why do we have an Early Start Service?

The Early Start Service was established to ensure that practitioners with the appropriate skills are working together to provide the right support to meet the needs of children and families from pregnancy up to when the child is five years of age, ensuring children achieve the best start in life.

The aims of the Early Start Service are to:

- Ensure that families are offered the Healthy Child Programme;
- Ensure that families are offered the [Early Years Foundation Stage](#) Framework as part of the Children's Centre Core Purpose;
- Identify children and families where additional preventative programmes and interventions will reduce their risks and improve future health and wellbeing;
- Promote and protect health, wellbeing, learning and school readiness;
- Provide a gateway into specialist services.

What do the Early Start teams do?

Early Start teams provide families with a clear point of contact, communication and advice. They work collaboratively with communities to improve health and education outcomes and support families to keep children safe from harm. They provide family support using restorative and collaborative approaches, in partnership with other agencies including GPs, maternity and Early Help services.

What are the Early Start offers and pathways in Leeds?

In Leeds, pathways differ depending on the needs of the family:

Universal Family Offer: This is a planned programme of contacts and services available to all families in Leeds, which starts from 28 – 34 weeks into pregnancy and up to the child's fifth birthday. Every family is offered a programme of screening tests, immunisations, development reviews and information and guidance to support parenting and healthy choices; all the services that children & families need to receive if they are to achieve their optimum health & well-being. Also available: pregnancy, birth and beyond group programme; breast feeding support group; and information, advice and signposting.

Universal Plus and Universal Partnership plus Family Offer: Some families need additional services. When these needs are identified by an Early Start practitioner, they will undertake an initial assessment and in collaboration with the family, discuss this at an Early Start Allocation Meeting. Early Help Assessments may be offered with the aim of offering the family the most responsive and appropriate route of support available.

Universal Plus includes additional services that families might need for a specific length of time; and Universal Partnership plus Family Offer refers to services for families with more complex and longer term needs. This includes adult substance misuse, children with a disability or complex needs and children who may have social work involvement.

Care pathways are developed by Early Start practitioners and supported by those with specialist expertise where the family needs additional services, for example support for: domestic violence; alcohol misuse; or maternal mood.

Key contacts and more information

Practitioners who come into contact with a pregnant woman or a family with a child under five should inform them about the Early Start Service and how to contact them. This is crucial if it appears that the family are not receiving the services they are entitled to. The Early Start Service can be accessed through any Health Visitor team or Children's Centre.

Families and practitioners can find the right Health Visiting Team and Children's Centre by using the postcode tool from the Family Information Service: <https://familyinformation.leeds.gov.uk/early-start-search>

Key contacts

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