



One minute guide

Early help — our approach to responding to the needs of children and families in Leeds

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What is early help?

Early help is the term used by agencies in Leeds to describe our approach to providing support to potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families as soon as problems start to emerge.

Although research shows that the most impact can be made during a child's early years, early help is not just for very young children, as problems may emerge at any point throughout childhood and adolescence. Children and families are entitled to early help if and when they need it.

The purpose of early help is, through prompt and targeted interventions, to prevent issues and problems becoming acute, chronic and costly to the child, young person, the family and the wider community.

Early help may be provided through an increase in the levels of universal services, or services provided or commissioned in clusters; this includes family support provided by schools and third sector services. Families are best supported by those who already work with them organising additional support with local partners as needed.

How we do it — right conversations, right people, right time

We use a range of **conversation** opportunities to identify appropriate support for the child and their family. Anybody working with children, young people and families, including services for adults for example mental health and housing, is responsible for starting conversations on their behalf.



Where a practitioner feels that a child or young person may need additional support (beyond that available from a single agency) there will be the opportunity to have a quality conversation with practitioners from other agencies to: clarify the nature of the concerns; identify the needs of the child / young person; and agree the appropriate response and how it will be co-ordinated.

Conversation opportunities include the phone calls and meetings that take place between those **people** working across universal, targeted and specialist services.

The best **time** is early in the life of the problem, when it is felt that the child's needs are not being met and something else is needed to improve their outcomes.

As children's needs are met and concerns are reduced, we continue to have quality conversations in order to provide appropriate support for the child and their family until that support is no longer required.

Universal, targeted and specialist services

Most children's needs are met by their family or **universal services** that is, those services that are available to everyone. These are provided as a right to all children, young people and their families, including those whose needs are also met within targeted and/ or specialist and statutory services.

For those children and families who face more challenges and may have multiple needs, **targeted services** provide additional capacity and expertise to work with these families to address their needs.

For children whose needs and circumstances make them more vulnerable, a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach is usually best, based on an **early help assessment**, with a Lead Practitioner to work closely with the child and family to ensure they receive all the support they require. A range of targeted services are available through clusters to support these interventions.

When a child's needs cannot be met in universal or targeted services, practitioners can make a request directly to **specialist services**. This includes when a child is in need of help, and where it is believed that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

When concerned about a child

When practitioners are concerned that a child is at risk of, or is experiencing, significant harm, they must contact the Duty and Advice Team tel: 0113 3760336, and out of hours 0113 2409536.

When members of the public are concerned about a child, they should ring the Contact Centre on tel: 0113 2224403.

For more information and the key contacts

For information about universal services contact the Family Information Service tel: 0800 731 0640 or visit the website www.familyinformationleeds.co.uk

For information and advice about clusters and targeted services, contact the Integrated Processes Team tel: 0113 2476830

The Duty and Advice Team can discuss concerns and advise on the most appropriate course of action. This may include accepting a referral, signposting to other specialist services, or recommending an Early Help Assessment and support to be met in clusters. Contact Duty and Advice tel: 0113 3760336 and out of hours 0113 2409536

Further information about [early help](http://www.earlyhelp.org.uk) can be accessed from the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board website www.leedslscb.org.uk. There is the 'Right conversations, right people, right time' document and a poster to download, as well as a video and glossary.