



Devon
Safeguarding Children
Board

EARLY HELP IN PRACTICE

A guide for professionals and managers on working together to support children and young people in Devon, whatever their level of need.

WHAT IS EARLY HELP?

Early Help is about more than just child protection: it is about making sure that children living in Devon are safe, healthy, happy and well educated.

Early Help Strategy for Children & Families

Early Help refers both to help in the critical early years of a child's life, when the fundamental building blocks of future development are laid, and responding as soon as possible when difficulties emerge throughout a child or young person's life. **All key agencies in Devon are signed up to this approach.**

The critical features of an effective Early Help system in Devon are:

- A multi-disciplinary **Team around the Child** approach that coordinates expertise
- The family's relationship with a trusted **Lead Professional** who coordinates support needed from other agencies or the community and voluntary sector
- **Empowering families to resolve their own problems**, building resilience for the future
- Not stopping with the "child's problem", but looking at **whole family need**
- **Easy** access

The '[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)' guidance, National Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and the Children Act 2004 set out that we must coordinate our services and support each other to keep children safe. The research (such as the Munro Review) shows it works but most importantly the families we work with tell us it needs to be this way – the problems they experience don't fit neatly into our multi-agency, inter-disciplinary divisions.

Principles

- Children, families and young people are at the centre of the assessment and planning process and should be partners in making decisions throughout, including the decisions about the content of the plan.
- Assessment and planning is an on-going process. It builds on previous assessments and develops with the child.
- Practitioners should be engaged and committed to the co-ordinated assessment and planning process.
- As far as possible, 'tell us once' and we share the relevant information, so people don't have to repeat the same information to different agencies or practitioners.
- Work by agreement on shared goals, co-ordination and joint working between all agencies
- Focus on clear outcomes
- Build on the strengths of the child or young person as well as identifying difficulties.
- Look to informal (family and community) support as well as to statutory agencies.
- Have the necessary skills to be good at what we do

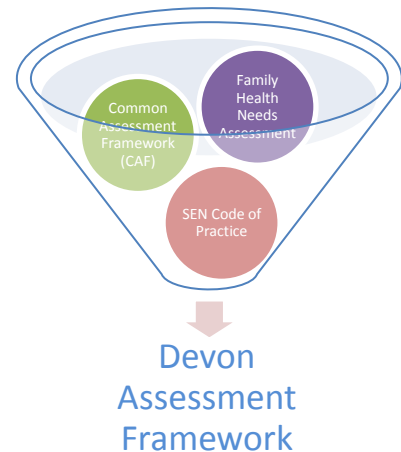
HOW IT WORKS

“When things are going really wrong, you need something to be done about it really quickly”

When a child’s needs increase it is likely that more services will become involved. The aim of Early Help is to coordinate this **multi-agency approach** to make it simpler for families, make sure they’re at the centre of decision making, reduce duplication and be more effective.

The [Devon Assessment Framework \(DAF\)](#) is the tool which has been developed to support Early Help, for children and young people, in Devon. The DAF incorporates the Family Health Needs Assessment, the Common Assessment Framework, Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Pathway (from birth to 25 years) and early safeguarding.

The DAF should be used to identify the needs of a child or young person and also explore the family’s strengths and any potential risks. Following this, a Team around the Child (TAC) meeting should be set up to discuss what needs to change with the family and other professionals involved. As a result of the TAC, a plan will be developed to record the agreed outcomes to be achieved and who is responsible for each outcome.



“Everyone has come and visited and told me about their services, but it has been confusing as more services are involved.”

The [Threshold Tool](#) is available to assist you with identifying the most appropriate service response for children, young people and their families. A range of Early Help services are available in Devon, and you can find out more about them, including how to access them, by searching our [Early Help directory](#).

If you are concerned there may be a safeguarding issue, or you’re not sure, you must contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub on 0345 155 1071 for advice. They will talk to you about your concern. If this can be handled through the use of DAF, they will signpost you to the Early Help Coordination Centre (EHCC).

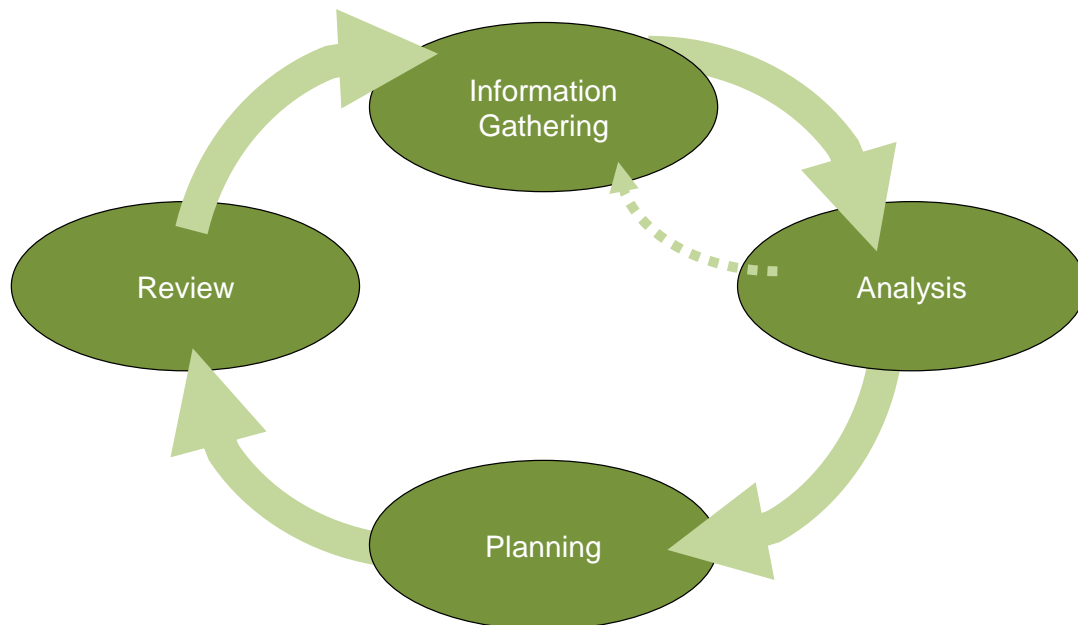
“Sometimes services don’t talk to each other and you are then blamed for doing something wrong because of lack of communication.”

Who takes the lead?

The DAF should be coordinated by a Lead Professional who will provide support to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and ensure the timely delivery of support services. This could be a GP, Family Support Worker, Teacher, Health Visitor and/or Special Educational Needs Coordinator. It’s about who knows the child and family best and who the family feel could best support them. Further information can be found in the Lead Professional Guidance.

THINKING THROUGH THE PROBLEMS

When a need has been identified, it's crucial to think through the information and work out what it means. The review cycle helps with this by providing some structure to our approach:



- **Information gathering** – What are we being told? What do we already know? What evidence is currently available? What are you concerned about?
- **Analysis** – What does this mean? How concerned should you be? What response is suggested in the [threshold tool](#)? What information do we need to gather to test out the ideas about what is going on?
- **Planning** – Once we understand what is happening, what actions could be taken to improve things? What outcomes need to be achieved? Set a date to review.
- **Review** – Have things changed for the child or young person? No plans are permanent, so what new information are we learning from to improve or change our plan? What actions need to be taken if there hasn't been a positive change?

Where you want to involve another service you must talk to the family, unless doing so would place the child or young person at risk of significant harm.

For more information on assessment and planning you can access the [Early Help e-learning](#).

THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

A vital part of Early Help is ensuring that the child or young person is central to planning and decision making, and that they feel their voice is heard and their contribution is valued. Fully involving children and young people means:

- Understanding what their life is like, their perceptions and fears. Being part of the family means children and young people have a central and unedited perspective on what affects them most.
- Recognising what the child or young person can contribute to the solution, whether working themselves on a particular behaviour or in what they might say to others
- Monitoring and reviewing how changes the family make affect the child's day to day life and longer prospects

Working towards the fullest possible involvement requires skill on the part of the practitioner, sometimes courage for the young person, and the building of trust between the two. There are a number of strategies and techniques that can help:

- Time spent with the young person – there's no substitute for a good relationship
- Thinking about who is best placed to get alongside the young person
- Tools such as 'Listen to Me', which give structure to discussion and allow young people to raise issues important to them

For some children there may be barriers to communicating their views. This may be because they are particularly vulnerable, because adults in their lives are unable to listen, or because our processes sometimes get in the way. Identifying an advocate who can work with the young person to best communicate is a good method to overcome some of these inhibitions, this will usually be someone in the young person's life who knows them well. In other situations it might be a dedicated 'professional' advocate.

In either instance the advocate will consider the following points:

- Make time to develop a positive relationship with the young person.
- Understand how the young person likes to communicate and support this.
- Be independent and stay impartial. Listen to the young person's opinions rather than your own.
- Try not to take sides, or offer solutions.
- Confidentiality - Talk through this with the young person before you start working with them. Explain that you will keep what is said to yourself, unless it is likely to cause harm to anyone, including the young person.
- When writing a young person's response for them, use the exact words the young person used.
- Evidence anything said on the young person's behalf, through multiple examples, photos etc.

Further information and guidance on ways of engaging children and young people can be found in the [Early Help e-learning](#) modules.

THE DEVON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The following sections set out the purpose of each of the DAF forms. Specific guidance on how to fill in the forms can be found in the Devon Assessment Framework (DAF) Practical Guidance or the [Early Help e-Learning](#).

DAF 1 Family Information and Assessment	<p>Records information about the family, including all children and adults in the household, significant contacts for the family and services currently or previously working with the family.</p> <p>The assessment sections allow professionals to identify needs, strengths, risks and what needs to change in order for the child to reach their full potential. It enables the views of the child/young person and their parent/carers to be recorded.</p>
DAF 2a My Plan	<p>Records the aspirations of the child/young person and parent/carers', the needs identified through completion of DAF 1 and the outcomes to be achieved, including what resources could be used to support these. In most cases the resources already available in the community, including school or health visiting for example, will be able to support the plan.</p> <p>This needs to be completed as a result of a Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting, where the family and professionals involved agree what needs to happen and who is responsible.</p>
DAF 3 Request for additional resources	<p>If a child/young person has complex SEN and/or a disability and there hasn't been significant progress using the DAF 2a 'My Plan', a DAF 3 'Request for Additional Resources' can be completed.</p> <p>Most children and young people should be able to be supported using the DAF 2a 'My Plan' and the existing resources already available in the community.</p>

INFORMATION SHARING

You will need to explain why it is important to share information and get the parent/carer (and child or young person where relevant) to sign the 'DAF Information Sharing Consent Form' before proceeding with the assessment. **Without consent you will be unable to complete DAF or enter it onto the HolistiX system**

Talking about families and sharing information is essential if we need to keep people safe, or ensure they get the best services. This sharing must only happen when it is helpful to the child, when it is legal and when it is necessary to do so.

The Seven Golden Rules provides a framework for everyone to understand the circumstances in which to share information and what the responsibilities are, making sure people always have control over their information (unless a child is at risk).

1. Remember the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing. It is a framework that ensures personal information about a living person is shared appropriately.
2. Be open and honest with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. Seek advice if you are in any doubt whether you should or shouldn't share
4. Share with consent where appropriate and where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share 'confidential' information. You may still share information without consent, if in your judgement that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.
5. Consider safety and well-being: Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure: Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.
7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it-whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

EARLY HELP COORDINATION CENTRE (EHCC)

The purpose of the Early Help Coordination Centre (EHCC) is to support the delivery of Early Help activity across Devon, this includes

- Providing support and advice to professionals about the completion of the DAF
- Contacting agencies, where necessary, to support the identification of lead professionals
- Signposting professionals and families to local services and support.

The Early Help Advisors, based in locality areas, provide support and training to partner agencies and monitor the ongoing quality of completed DAFs. It is important to note that the area based Early Help Advisors **will not** undertake the DAF or act as lead professional, but are tasked with supporting the practitioners in their area to complete high quality assessments, which have clear, positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

To contact the EHCC:

Call: 0345 155 1071 and ask for Early Help

Email: earlyhelpsecure-mailbox@devon.gcsx.gov.uk

MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)

The MASH is the central resource for receiving all safeguarding and child protection enquiries.

The MASH is staffed with professionals from a range of agencies including police, probation, health, education and social care. These professionals share information to ensure early identification of potential significant harm, and trigger interventions to prevent further harm. MASH staff decide the most appropriate intervention to respond to a child's identified needs. Where appropriate, the MASH team is able to immediately trigger a response.

To contact the MASH:

Tel: 0345 155 1071

E-mail: mashsecure@devon.gcsx.gov.uk

Fax: 01392 448951

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING (FGC)

An FGC is strengths based, family led, decision making process. The main difference with this way of working is that the family are the primary decision making group. The role of the 'professionals' is to share information about their role in supporting the family and potential resources that could be available; this might include extended family, neighbours and friends. The family have an agenda, set by the referrer, and after hearing information from the service providers, are left alone to make their plan. This process is set up and facilitated by a fully trained Independent Co-ordinator; children can be involved with support from advocates when required. This service is available free to all, wherever a plan needs to be made for a child. If you would like to know more please email fgcmailbox@devon.gov.uk