

Early Help

Early help, also known as early intervention, is support given to a family when a problem first emerges. It can be provided at any stage in a child or young person's life.

Statutory guidance in each nation of the UK highlights the importance of providing early intervention, rather than waiting until a child or family's situation escalates (Department for Education (DfE), 2018; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2017; Scottish Government, 2021; Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, 2020).

Early help services can be delivered to parents, children or whole families, but their focus is to improve outcomes for children. For example, services may help parents who are living in challenging circumstances provide a safe and loving environment for their child. Or, if a child is displaying risk-taking behaviour, early help practitioners might work with the child and their parents to find out the reasons for the child's behaviour and put strategies in place to help keep them safe.

Providing timely support is vital. Addressing a child or family's needs early on can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in a child's life (Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), 2021).

Protective factors can reduce risk to a child's wellbeing. They include:

- developing strong social and emotional skills
- having a strong social support network for the family – including support
- for good parental mental health
- income support, benefits and advice
- good community services and facilities

(EIF, 2021; Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2011).

It is more effective to provide early help when problems first arise than to intervene later (DfE, 2018; EIF, 2021).

Early intervention can also prevent further problems from developing – for example, as part of a support plan for a child and their family when a child returns home from care (DfE, 2018).

Types of early help

Early help can take many forms, such as:

- home visiting programmes
- school-based programmes
- mentoring schemes

(EIF, 2021).

Early help services should be part of a continuum of support which enables practitioners to respond to the different levels of need children and families may experience (DfE, 2018).

It's important that early help services are holistic, looking at the wider needs of the family and how to provide appropriate support.

Why early help is important

Early help can offer children the support needed to reach their full potential (EIF, 2021). It can improve the quality of a child's home and family life, enable them to perform better at school and support their mental health (EIF, 2021).

Research suggests that early help can:

- protect children from harm
- reduce the need for a referral to child protection services
- improve children's long-term outcomes

(Haynes et al, 2015).

Early help can also support a child to develop strengths and skills that can prepare them for adult life (EIF, 2021).

Identifying a child or young person who may benefit from early help

Signs that a child or young person may benefit from early help include:

- displaying disruptive or anti-social behaviour
- being bullied or bullying others
- having poor attendance at school
- being involved in, or at risk of, offending
- having poor general health
- having anxiety, depression or other mental health issues
- misusing drugs or alcohol
- having a particularly challenging relationship with parents or appearing to be unusually independent from their parents
- experiencing difficulties at home, such as domestic abuse, parental substance abuse or parental mental health problems

(Department for Education (DfE), 2018).

Some groups of children may be more likely to need early help than their peers. These include children who:

- have been excluded from school
- have special educational needs
- are disabled
- are in care
- are leaving or preparing to leave care
- are young carers
- are young parents (or about to become young parents)
- are experiencing housing issues

(DfE, 2018).

[> Find out more about children and families at risk](#)

[> Find out more about the signs a child may be experiencing abuse and neglect](#)

Recording concerns

It's important to record any concerns you may have about a child, to build up an overview of the child's lived experience so patterns of potentially abusive behaviour can be identified. These records should be shared with your nominated child protection lead who will consider all the available information and decide whether a referral to the local child protection services is necessary.

[> Find more information about recognising and responding to abuse](#)

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How to make a referral for early help

If you think a child, young person or a family might benefit from early help services, you should:

- keep a written record of your concerns
- inform your nominated child protection lead.

You can also contact the NSPCC Helpline on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns and give you expert advice.

Keeping a written record

If you think that a child, young person or a family might benefit from early intervention services write down the reasons why you think this type of support could be helpful. It's important to keep a written record of any concerns you have about a child.

Sharing your concerns

You should share your concerns with your nominated child protection lead. They will look at all the available evidence and decide what to do.

If the nominated child protection lead thinks a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect, they will follow your organisation's child protection procedures immediately.

If they think the child and their family may benefit from co-ordinated support from more than one agency, they can request an early help assessment.

An early help assessment is where a lead practitioner (such as a GP, family support worker, school nurse, teacher, health visitor, and/or special educational needs co-ordinator) makes an assessment of the child's needs. It can only happen with the consent of the child (if they are able to give consent) and their parent or carer.

If the nominated child protection lead thinks the family will benefit from more support from your organisation, they will arrange it. They may ask for your help in arranging this.

Working with the child and their family

Your nominated child protection lead will make arrangements to discuss things with the child and their family. They may ask you to be involved.

When talking to families that may benefit from early help, it's important to:

- be patient and calm. Listen carefully to the child and parent or carer and let them describe the challenges they are facing. Don't try to investigate or quiz the child or parent or carer, but make sure you understand what they're saying
- find out what the child and their family would like to happen. Ask what they would like to improve about the situation
- use non-judgmental language
- reassure the child/family that they can get support to move forward with their life
- agree on next steps with the child/young person and family.

The nominated child protection lead must guide all conversations with the child and the child's family.

Having a collaborative approach is key to making sure children and families receive the right help at the right time. Make sure you work proactively with other organisations to identify children and families in need of support and help them access the services they need.

> [Find out more about our designated and lead officer training courses](#)

Guidance

Statutory guidance across the UK highlights the responsibility of those in the education, community and care sectors to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and neglect. This includes providing help as soon as it is needed.

Early Help - Advice, Guidance and Support

Early Help is about providing support to potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families as soon as problems begin to emerge, or when there is a strong likelihood that problems will start in the future. It is also about providing support at any and every stage of a child's life: pre-birth, during pregnancy, childhood or adolescence.



In Gloucestershire, we believe that families are best supported by practitioners who are already working with them, as well as other organisations and services within their local community. These organisations include health services, schools, learning providers, councils, charities and voluntary groups, children and family centres, the police, housing providers and many others.

Children, young people and families with additional needs will be supported through the use of the Graduated Pathway of Early Help and Support.

The Early Help practitioners include:

Early Help Co-ordinators who provide support for practitioners who are working with children and families to meet their needs through the Graduated Pathway

Community Social Workers work with organisations to provide a social work perspective on families they are supporting. This supports practitioners to ensure families receive the right level of support and act as a link between Children's Social Care and the community

Early Help Partnership Managers support partnership work between organisations in communities to support the development of resources available to children and families. They attend District Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to make sure there is a focus on Early Help for vulnerable families alongside wider

community safety concerns.

Early Help Contacts in your locality

Cheltenham	01452328160	cheltenhamearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Cotswolds	01452328101	cotswoldsearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Forest Of Dean	01452328048	forestofdeanearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Gloucester	01452328071	gloucesterearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Stroud	01452328130	stroudearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Tewkesbury	01452328250	tewkesburyearlyhelp@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Please follow [this link](#) to Gloucestershire website for more details