

Context Briefing Regarding Early Help and Team Around the Child (TAC) in Lincolnshire

1. INTRODUCTION

This document outlines Lincolnshire's current arrangements for the provision of co-ordinated Early Help for children and families, and the national context relevant to these arrangements.

'For children who need additional help, every day matters. Academic research is consistent in underlining the damage to children from delaying intervention. The actions taken by professionals to meet the needs of these children as early as possible can be critical to their future'

(Working Together to Safeguard Children - A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, Department for Education, 2013)

What is Early Help?

Early Help is the term used to describe arrangements and services that identify the need for help for children and families as soon as problems start to emerge, or when there is a strong likelihood that problems will emerge in the future.

Early Help is not just for very young children, as problems may also emerge at any point throughout childhood and adolescence. Lincolnshire's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) has recently endorsed Lincolnshire's Early Help Strategy and Offer documents. These describe our commitment to, and arrangements for Early Help for children and families. The Early Help Offer in Lincolnshire includes universal and targeted services designed to reduce or prevent specific problems from escalating or becoming entrenched.

What does the Early Help Offer mean for children and families?

The Government Guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2013 identifies the critical features of effective Early Help are:

- a multi-disciplinary approach that brings a range of professional skills and expertise to bear through a "Team Around The Child" approach (TAC)
- a relationship with a trusted Lead Professional who can engage the child and their family, and coordinate the support needed from other agencies
- practice that empowers families and helps them to develop the capacity to resolve their own problems
- a holistic approach that addresses children's needs in the wider family context
- simple, streamlined referral and assessment processes.

Lincolnshire's Early Help Strategy and Offer takes into account reports and reviews by Frank Field, Dame Clare Tickell, Graham Allen and Marmot, with regards to the impact of growing up in poverty on child outcomes, use of evidence based approaches and programmes, and the important focus on

the early years given the increasing body of evidence around early attachment and baby brain development.

Our offer also takes into account key messages from Munro's review:

- preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services
- co-ordination of services is important to maximise efficiency
- within preventative services, there needs to be good mechanisms for helping people identify those children and young people who are suffering or likely to suffer harm from abuse and neglect and who need referral to children's social care

Central to our Early Help Offer is the early identification of children and families who would benefit from Early Help and a co-ordinated early assessment and response to prevent abuse and neglect of children and young people, and improve outcomes for children and families as a whole. In order to achieve this all agencies in Lincolnshire, via the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), have committed to arrangements for Team Around the Child (TAC).

2. What is TAC?

The effectiveness of Early Help for children is underpinned by the responsibility of **all** professionals to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children and families, irrespective of the whether they are providing services to children or adults. The professionals working mainly in universal services are best placed to identify children or their families, who are at risk of poor outcomes. These will be in health services, such as health visitors, GPs and school nurses, or in Children's Centres, or in education provision at any age from early years onwards.

'Working Together' recommends that professionals should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence and / or
- is showing early signs of abuse and / or neglect and / or sexual exploitation

Universal services such as schools and academies are well placed to identify potentially vulnerable children.

To ensure that the best possible support is provided to children and families there needs to be an early assessment of need considering child's developmental needs, family and environmental factors and parenting capacity. This can be undertaken by any professional.

Locally this assessment is undertaken currently through usage of the Single Assessment (formerly CAF). For a full step by step guide for TAC please see www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/TAC

Working Together 2013 describes this assessment as an Early Help Assessment. We will move to use this title and language instead of the Single Assessment Framework in the near future following a review of the existing paperwork and processes.

In some cases a professional will be able to identify a specific need, but will not be in a position to provide appropriate locally sourced support. In this instance a TAC Co-ordinator will work with the referrer to identify the appropriate help and support to access from a single agency.

Where the assessment identifies support needs that cannot be met by a single agency or service, there needs to be a co-ordinated response with local agencies working together to support the family. The **Team around the Child** (TAC) model is used locally to bring together a range of different practitioners from across the children and young people's workforce and sometimes from adult services to support an individual child or young person and their family. The members of the TAC develop and deliver a package of solution focused support to meet the needs identified through the Single Assessment (formerly CAF) with a lead professional identified to co-ordinate the support and act as the key point of contact for the family and professionals / services. Decisions about who should be the lead professional should be taken on a case by case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.

Working Together states that in order for an early assessment to be effective:

- the assessment should be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents/ carers. It should involve the child and family as well as all the professionals who are working with them
- if parents and/or the child do not consent to an early help assessment, then the lead professional should make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate. If so, a referral into local authority children's social care may be necessary

What is important is that professionals work together effectively to ensure that families experience smooth transition between services and that all services supporting the family remain focused on the needs of the child.

It is also critical that all professionals remain aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and protecting children.

Further information on safeguarding arrangements in Lincolnshire is available in the LSCB document, 'Meeting the Needs of Children in Lincolnshire,' which provides an overview of the continuum of needs and guidance on the key concepts and processes in working with children, young people and their families according to their needs.

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