Early Help Guidance 2015

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to clarify and update guidance to practitioners and managers in Bolton to deliver Early Help Support to children, young people and families. The guidance includes tools to ensure compliance with Bolton's Framework for Action (2014), support multi-agency working and improve quality.

Early Help

Early Help is the support that is delivered at the Every Child, Level 1 and Level 2 of Bolton's Framework for Action. It includes universal interventions that are offered to an entire population to prevent problems developing and targeted support to particular children and families with additional needs.

The purpose of Early Help is to support the well-being of children and families by tackling emerging needs at the earliest opportunity and prevent them from getting worse. This means working with children and families to engage and include them as equal partners and to support them to access additional services that can promote positive outcomes.

Effective Early Help may be delivered at any point in a child's life; pre-birth onwards about any issue which is impacting or could affect their development and well-being, including education and health safety.

Working Together to Safeguard Children – a Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children 2013 identifies that supporting children to achieve these outcomes is more effective when local agencies work together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from Early Help
- Undertake an assessment
- Provide Early Help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family to improve outcomes for the child

Early Help Framework

The Early Help Assessment and Action Plan provide a standard assessment approach to enable those working with children and families in need of Early Help to identify and respond effectively. The assessment will help identify:

- The child's level of need
- Which needs must be prioritised
- What actions are needed to meet needs
- Whether a child needs to access additional support from named services
- Which outcomes are to be addressed

Some agencies will be required to undertake specialist assessments. It is important that the information from these actively contribute to and inform the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan.

Those receiving Early Help Assessments should use the information received to contribute to further specialist assessment. This should avoid the need for children and families to re-tell their story and reduce the likelihood of falling in to the trap of 'start again syndrome'.

Contents

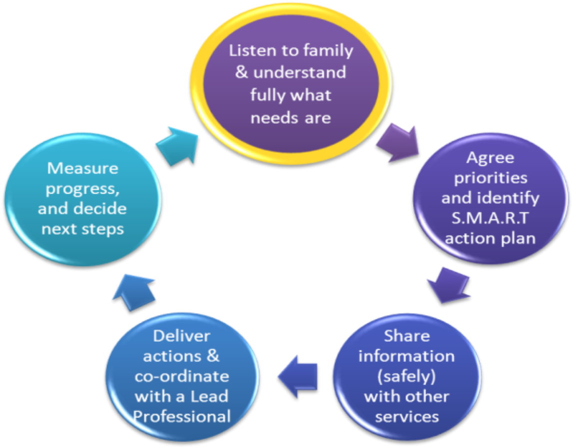
Bolton Integrated Working Team

Early Help Assessment Framework - A Quick Guide to completing assessments

1	**You have a concern about a child/young person, need to share information, or need to access a targeted or specialist service for the child/young person.** Talk to your line manager and decide whether it is a child protection concern. If it is, **follow Local Safeguarding Board procedures. If the child already has a social worker, contact them to discuss your concerns. If the child doesn't currently have a social worker, the first step is to ring Referral and Assessment:** South East District:01204 337729/7730; West District: 01942 634587; North East District: 01204 337400 If it is not a child protection concern , follow the steps below:
2	**Check who else is involved with the child and whether an Early Help Assessment is already completed.** To do this you can contact the IW team: 01204 331394 or by email: boltonISA@bolton.gov.uk This will tell you who else is involved with a child or young person and whether or not an EH assessment has already been undertaken. If there is an EH assessment in place, contact the Lead Professional. Discuss the issues with them and agree whether an Action Meeting is needed or whether to update the Early Help Assessment (this will be done at the next review).
3	**Obtain consent from parents/carer/young person to undertake the assessment** Parents and/or the young person need to agree to undertake the assessment. If consent isn't gained, then you should not continue. The only exception to this is when you are sharing information without consent – for example, to protect children from harm, or to prevent crime.
4	**Undertake the assessment** Collect information with the parents/carers and/or young person. You may choose to use an appropriate assessment tool. This can be done informally with the family, using your own paperwork, or assessment methods, but must be transferred onto the Early Help form and signed by parents/carers/young person. You can include information gathered from other practitioners involved with the child or young person, but agree this with the family. If needed, an Action meeting can be called to gather all the information. Families should always be at the centre of this process and should agree what is recorded on the EH assessment. Identify strengths as well as needs, include useful factual information and professional observations but avoid putting in opinions. If you are using the Early Help Assessment to request an additional service from a targeted or specialist agency, include relevant information relating to the issues for which you are seeking specific support. Recording information thoroughly will prevent families having to repeat personal information, and help other agencies understand what is needed.
5	**Agree Action Plan** When information is gathered and recorded, an action plan needs to be made to address any needs identified. This could include actions to be undertaken by the family or your own service or request an additional or specialist service from another agency. Try to be specific about what is required. If you are not sure that another service can meet the need/issue you are trying to address, then you should contact them in advance of completing the action plan.
6	**Set Review date** A review should be agreed in every case. It may be possible to do this very informally, if all the issues identified have been addressed. Reviews can be undertaken with the family and the Lead Professional or it may be necessary to call a Child/Young Person Action meeting with the family and everyone involved. The Early Help Action plan should be reviewed and updated and if needed, new actions identified. If at this point, it is agreed with the family, that all the issues identified on the Early Help Action Plan have been addressed satisfactorily, then it should be closed. This should be noted on the Action Plan and a copy sent to the IW team.
7	**Information Sharing and Storage Consent** It is essential that parents/carers/young people give their 'informed' consent for the information to be stored and shared. This means that the person giving consent needs to understand why information needs to be shared, who will see their information and what will be done with that information. In this section, list all the people with whom you intend to share the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan - those that need the information in order to provide a service to the child or young person. When the it is reviewed and updated, also consider if any agencies need to be added (or removed). It should be made clear that the form will be stored electronically, and will be not shared with anyone not identified in the consent section. The form is signed by the parent/carer/young person. **A copy should be given to the family, a signed copy kept by the service/organisation undertaking the Early Help process, and copies sent to everyone identified in the consent section. In addition, a copy should be sent to the IW team – contact details are on the form.**

Remember!	The IW team can provide advice and support. Contact us on 01204 331392 or 01204 331394. Further information and a copy of the form is available on our web-site www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk Here you'll also find fuller guidance and other supporting documentation.

Early Help Key Messages



Using the Early Help Framework to help children, young people and families is the best way to work with them to help make improvements and prevent things from getting worse. Before responding to a presenting issue by rushing to make a referral to a specialist agency, make sure you have listened to the parent/young person to get a full understanding of their circumstances. Then, agree with the family what the main priorities are and how you work towards achieving these.

Only at this point, will you know whether specialist services are needed and what you want them to do. Review and if necessary adapt your action plan to make sure it is making a difference and to keep the family motivated in achieving changes. This fits with Bolton's agreed way of working with families identified in the Framework for Action.

Being child - centred and working with the family

- Make sure that the child/parent's views and opinions are sought and recorded.
- Make sure that you consider the age and stage of the child's development to make sure that language and actions are appropriate and also to inform your expectations and concerns.
- Keep the family involved and informed.

Understanding needs fully through assessment

- Make sure that you get a whole picture of the child, including the strengths and difficulties.
- Use appropriate assessment tools to get more information about the issues of concern.
- To get the full picture, we sometimes have to ask difficult questions, be prepared for this and think about the best way of doing it so as to keep the family on board.
- Make sure that you avoid delay or drift as Early Help depends on putting the right help in place as soon as possible. Families will also get fed up if the process drags on.

Understanding the Early Help information and what to do about it

- Consider all the information gathered during the assessment.
- Look for any gaps and discrepancies and how you will resolve these.
- Discuss the information with the family and agree what it means, (including strengths and needs) and how it impacts on them.
- Make decisions about what changes are needed.

Smart Action Planning to make Early Help a useful process

- Identify specific actions that are relevant to the changes you are trying to achieve and avoid wish lists or vague statements.
- Make sure the actions you have identified can be measured for progress.
- Set realistic timescales for actions and changes.
- Set dates to review progress and adapt plan if needed
- Know when you will have achieved your goals and you have come to the end of the process.

Early Help Framework
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is the Early Help Framework?**
Using the Early Help Framework is the best way to help children, young people and families make improvements and prevent things from getting worse. Before responding to a presenting issue by rushing to make a referral to a specialist agency, make sure you have talked to the parent and young person to get a full picture of the child/family circumstances. Once you have gathered all the relevant information, agree with the family what the main priorities are and what changes you will work towards achieving and how this will happen. Only at this point, will you know whether specialist services are needed and will have a better picture of what you want them to do. To make sure you know that you have made a difference and to keep the family motivated in achieving changes, it will be necessary to review and if necessary adapt your action plan. The Early Help Framework has been developed to support this work with families. A standardised form has been introduced to record this process which fits with Bolton's agreed way of working with families – the Framework for Action.

2. **Who is the Early Help Framework for?**
Any child or young person who is not developing as expected in line with their peers or has additional needs that are not being met by the current service/s working with them.

3. **The Early Help process has a strong emphasis on consent – what if the family doesn't agree to the assessment or information being shared?**
Sometimes the parent may be apprehensive about what the Early Help Assessment involves and may be reluctant to agree to the take part in the process. It is reasonable to assume that few parents will know about this process, and when they hear about assessment, information sharing and the involvement of other professionals some may worry about what it may lead to. Some may be particularly worried that professionals will take over and they will lose control over their own lives. It is really important to take the time to explain to parents/young people about the process and what is intended to be achieved.
An Early Help Assessment cannot go ahead without consent from the child s parents (unless the child themselves is of sufficient age and understanding and has consented in their own right see 5 below). You will need to consider whether this leaves the child at greater risk and whether a referral into Children's Social Care is justified. However, there may be alternative ways of dealing with this situation. Consider whether you have done all you can to 'sell' the Early Help process to them. Is it worth having another conversation or perhaps could they speak to someone who has already experienced Early Help support? If the answer is still no, and you feel the child is not at risk, or the situation is not meeting the thresholds for social care services, then you will need to consider how to offer support in a less structured or formal way. Your work can still carry on but perhaps in a less coordinated way than you would have liked. You will need to make sure you record all that you have done with regard to the Early Help process and the reasons why this has been unable to proceed.
Seeking consent should always be the first option. That's why the process of doing an Early Help assessment has such a strong emphasis on consent and the form asks practitioners to record that consent has been given. **In most circumstances you should only record and share information on an Early Help form with the informed consent of the child or parent.** However, if there are concerns that a child or young person may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, it is important that information is shared. The concern must not be ignored. If you are not sure whether there is a reasonable cause for your concerns, then you should talk to your manager or contact Referral and Assessment for advice. The decision to share information without consent in the best interests of the child should be recorded in your own system. Any Early Help forms that do not clearly state that consent has been given to share the information cannot be entered onto the ONE system. (Also see question 29)

4. **Should the child be included in the assessment?**
As the Early Help Assessment is about the young person - their views should be sought. Even younger children may also be able to make a significant contribution to the carrying out of an assessment. Eg When completing a EH assessment, the practitioner asked a 6 year old "How do you think things can be made better?" "How could the service make things better between you and your mother?" - She was able to offer ideas which were very relevant. This also meant that she was able to understand how extra services were being delivered to help her.

5. **Can a teenager give consent for an EH assessment without their parents knowing? Can you use the consent of a young person?**
   It is presumed in law that a child aged 16 and older will have sufficient understanding to decide about consenting to share their own information. Think about whether you need the young person's consent to speak directly to their parent. National guidance is clear that children aged 12 or over may generally be expected to have sufficient understanding – this decision must be made on a case by case basis, taking the child's maturity into account. However it is recommended that practitioners should always encourage children less than 16 years to involve their parents where possible.

6. **What sort of information do I need to gather in the assessment?**
   Make sure that you get a whole picture of the child, including the strengths and difficulties. Use appropriate tools where needed to get more information about the issues of concern. Think about what a child of this age/stage of development who is progressing as expected and meeting their developmental milestones would be like. To get the full picture, difficult questions sometimes have to asked, make sure you are prepared for this and think about the best way of doing it so as to keep the family on board. Do not delay in using the process with the family, as Early Help depends on putting the correct support in place as soon as possible.

7. **Do I have to gather information for every box on the form?**
   It is always beneficial to other practitioners to give as much information as you can to build a picture of the child or young person. This helps to show that it is understood what is needed by other services. Consider the areas where you have lots of information and complete these first. Remember that you should be including the child/young person's strengths as well as their needs during the discussion, initially some areas may be sparse but gathering information from other relevant agencies or following discussion or you will find that additional information can be added. Including all relevant information stops families from having to repeat their information many times. Future reviews of the assessment and action plan may identify more information over time.

8. **What if the parent is very negative?**
   When children run into difficulties parents can sometimes focus on all that's going wrong in the family. This can easily turn into negative thinking about the children and themselves. When practitioner is trying to carry out an assessment, this can sometimes make it difficult to ask questions, and difficult to obtain the balanced assessment that the EH assessment looks for. In one situation, allowing Dad some space to voice his concerns first meant that he was then able to hear the practitioner's questions. Having another worker there also helped to keep the discussion on track. Solution Focused questions helped him to identify strengths, achievements and goals reached. Talking to Dad about what had worked before helped to create a more balanced way of viewing the current situation.

9. **What about when parents seem unaware that their own issues are impacting on their children?**
   Sometimes when undertaking an assessment about what's happening in a family it identifies that parents have difficulties in their own life which are likely to be causing difficulties for their children. However, the parents themselves may not see it this way. If the practitioner raises this the parent may become defensive and disengage to a point where an Early Help assessment is no longer possible because their consent to proceed is withdrawn. In one situation the practitioner found that when they asked the parents what they thought needed to be different for the children to change for the better, the question helped them identify the significance of mental health and substance misuse issues in their own lives.

10. **Where do you start when there are a lot of difficulties?**
    Carrying out an assessment at an early stage will sometimes bring practitioners into situations which turn out to be more complicated than was initially expected, but still not within the threshold for other services to take over. Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start. In one situation where a 17 year old had a number of difficulties presenting at the same time, simply asking the young person what the priority was for her enabled a decision to be made. This increased the likelihood that the young person would engage in subsequent action plan.

11. **What's the best way to ask questions which may be awkward?**
    Collecting information which helps to build a holistic picture of a child or young person in difficulty can mean that the practitioner has to go beyond what the parent is concerned about. In some circumstances this can feel awkward and intrusive. One practitioner has commented that the Early Help form itself provides a useful platform for covering all the areas that need to be asked about. Identifying the filling in

of the form as a task to be carried out by the practitioner and parent/young person together, can allow the assessor to take one step back from the process, instead of being the person driving the process. The practitioner can then say “Well, now we need to look at this section…”

12. What if only one parent is agreeing to an Early Help Assessment?
National guidance states that the consent of one parent is sufficient, so if parents are living separately you should normally obtain consent from the parent the child is living with. However each situation is different and you will need to manage each case carefully. Consider whether it is in the best interests of the child to include both parents. Both parents may be legally entitled to receive the information recorded on the form, so consider the way information is recorded. Be careful not to exacerbate situations and potentially put people at risk.

13. What’s the best way of using the background information my service already has?
In some situations the child, young parent and their family will already be well known to the practitioner and they may have a lot of information. Addressing everything that is known in an Early Help Assessment could easily be overwhelming to the service user, especially distressing historical information. This might even lead to the service user/s withdrawing their consent to proceed. If you consider that it may be more helpful to go through the existing information before carrying out the assessment with the family, and recording this in advance on the form, then be clear that you will need to spend time clarifying the information you have recorded, concentrate discussion on current pressing concerns and get agreement about what information can be shared. It may be necessary to reword some of the original recording if the family does not feel their circumstances have been represented clearly. It will not be helpful to present a family with a completed assessment and action plan and expect them to sign it off.

14. What does analysing the Early Help assessment mean?
The Early Help process is about gathering relevant information and using it to decide:

- Are there any gaps in the information gathered?
- What are the risks and strengths?
- Has your view changed now that you have completed the assessment?
- How will you prioritise what needs to change?
- How does the information help you to respond to the young person’s needs effectively?

By using the assessment process and analysing the information, a sound action plan can be put in place to identify what needs to change and how this can be achieved. This make sure that any requests for additional support from specialist services are based on evidence and form part of a plan, not just simply vague referrals.

15. How often should I review and update the EH assessment and Action Plan?
It’s really important that the Early Help process is seen as a way of working and not just a form filling exercise. For this reason, reviews should be held with the family and if necessary other agencies (either informally or by holding a Child Action Meeting). Any new relevant information should be considered and progress on the action plan identified. The guidance advises that the reviews should be held every 6 – 8 weeks. A common sense approach should be used – if for example every half term would make more sense, or you are waiting for an intervention to be completed before deciding how successful it has been then it would make sense to arrange a review around this. If the child or young person has long term additional needs then you may wish to complete a full review of the Early Help Assessment every 6 months by adding any information you have gathered from other work you or other practitioners have completed with the family.
If issues are escalating or you have other concerns then you should review earlier, if at any time you are concerned about the safety or welfare of the child or young person, then you need to ring Referral and Assessment for advice or to make a referral.

16. What if there’s already an Early Help Assessment and Action plan in place for the child I am concerned about?
Contact the current Lead Professional and ask what has been identified and what actions are being delivered (you will need the consent of the family to do this). If you feel that you have additional information or a concern that is not being addressed in the current action plan, then discuss with the Lead Professional and then decide what the next steps should be. It could be that the Lead Professional reviews the action plan with the family, or a Child Action Meeting is called or together you have increased your concerns of the risks and need to escalate the situation by involving Social Care. It may be helpful to

consider at this point if the current Lead Professional should continue or whether you are better placed to take this role. Whatever you decide should be agreed with the family.

17. How can I access an existing Early Help Assessment?

Ask the parent or contact the IW team to find out who is the Lead Professional of an existing EH assessment. Speak to the Lead Professional and explain your involvement with the child/family and ask to see a copy of the existing EH assessment. Agree whether you should attend any Child Action Meetings that are being held. The Lead Professional may have to clarify if they have consent to share the information with you, so there may be a short delay before you can have access to it.

18. If I have concerns about more than one child in a family do I have to do an Early Help Assessment for each child?

It is important to treat each child as an individual as they will have their own needs - these should be reflected in individual assessments. Some information may be the same e.g. the family and environment issues and by completing the EH assessment electronically time can be saved by using cut and paste into individual forms. It is important to consider how these factors impact on each of the children individually, as this may vary depending on their strengths and age/development stage. One way forward might be to agree at a Child Action meeting if other children in the family need their own EH assessment and ask the most appropriate practitioners to undertake the assessments for other children in the family. Ideally there should be one LP for the family but if, for example there are big age differences with a wide range of identified needs, it may be appropriate for two practitioners to jointly undertake the LP role liaising closely together to ensure continuity for the family and consistency of advice.

19. Who arranges the Child Action Meeting (CAM)?

The first Child Action Meeting will be arranged by the person who has completed the Early Help Assessment Form with the child or young person. Once it has been agreed at a Child Action Meeting who will take on the Lead Professional role, they will co-ordinate any further Child Action Meetings and the ownership of the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan will be transferred to them.

20. When would a Lead Professional be appointed?

The Lead Professional should be appointed jointly between the parent/young person and practitioners before the end of the first Child Action Meeting. They should be the 'best fit person' i.e. the person who knows the child or young person best and already has a relationship with the family, in most cases the Lead Professional will be the person who has completed the EH form.

21. If there is more than one child in a family with an Early Help Assessment in place, can we hold joint meetings?

Yes, it is easier for families to come to one meeting rather than several. It might mean a bit more planning beforehand. For example if the children are at different schools and have different professionals involved it might not be appropriate for all the professionals to be there all the time. The meeting might need be held in 2 halves with some practitioners leaving half way through and some joining at the half way point. The parents and LPs should be present throughout.

22. What do I do if other practitioners don't turn up for Child Action meetings?

If one of the CAM members is unable to make a meeting, then they should be contacting the LP to let them know. They should be prepared to give a written report in their absence, or at least give some information verbally that can be shared at the meeting.

If a practitioner has just not turned up then it would be acceptable to contact them afterwards to share any relevant information or decisions made by the meeting in their absence that may affect them. If one agency is persistently absent then this should be followed up directly and if necessary escalated through line management. One manager talking to another manager often solves the problem.

23. When and how do I close an Early Help Assessment?

When the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan form is reviewed with the young person or family if all the outcomes have been met and there are no other concerns, it can be closed. It is important that this is agreed by everyone involved with the child or young person.

Reasons for closing an Early Help Assessment may be:

- The child or young person's needs have been met
- The outcomes identified are achieved
- The family no longer wish to engage with the process

- The family have moved out of the area
- The issues have been raised to a statutory level and specialist assessments are in place

A copy of the final EH assessment and action plan needs to be given to the young person/family. A copy should also be kept with the Lead Professional. Send a copy to the Integrated Working Team stating that it should be closed, so that they can update their records.

24. Where do I get a blank Early Help Assessment form from?

A copy of the EH form and guidance documents can be found on Bolton's Safeguarding Children Board website: www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk

For further advice on how to complete an Early Help form please contact the Integrated Working Team on 01204 331394 or e-mail boltonISA@bolton.gov.uk

To access Early Help training, refer to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Training Programme and contact the Training Shared Service Centre to book on 01204 337600 or e-mail Trainingsharedservicecentre@bolton.gov.uk

25. How do I get a signature on the electronic Early Help Assessment?

Those signing the form should sign a paper copy which is held on the Lead Professional case file. Electronic copies of the form should have the name of the person giving permission for the information to be shared recorded on it, a declaration that it has been signed: 'signature held on paper copy in file' and the date of the signature.

26. When I have completed an Early Help Assessment what do I do with it?

When you have completed the assessment and recorded it, consent to share the information should be confirmed by asking the young person/parent to sign the form identifying which services can receive the information. A copy should then be given to the parent/carer or the young person and shared securely with *everyone who has been identified*. You should keep a signed copy of the form in the child or young person's file and store this securely. The IW team does not circulate forms on your behalf.

What information is stored by the IW team and where?

The IW team checks that consent has been recorded on the form and makes sure that contact details of the Lead Professional is recorded on the ONE system. Details of the Lead Professional are recorded along with the date the Early Help Assessment was completed or reviewed. The information on the document is not recorded on the system as yet. The copy is then kept for 6 months pending a multi-agency quality assurance group meeting.

27. How can I find out what services are available to support the child/young person?

Bolton's local directory of services can be found at: www.localdirectory.bolton.gov.uk

The Integrated Working Team can also try to help: 01204 331394 or email boltonisa@bolton.gov.uk.

28. How does the Early Help form work when making a referral to Children's Social Care?

Sometimes when using the Early Help process you recognise that difficulties have reached a more serious threshold and you decide that you need support from Social Care. This can be the result of undertaking an assessment where you gather information that points to a more serious situation than you originally thought, or that you have been working to an action plan for some time, and needs are either not improving or are actually escalating despite your efforts. The first step should always be to contact Referral and Assessment by phone and discuss your concerns. It is likely that the Social Worker will ask for supporting information and the previous use of the EH process gives the structure for sharing this information and identifying what has previously been delivered. The case will either be accepted as a referral or you may be advised to continue to use the Early Help process.

Do I need consent from the family to share the form in these circumstances?

As before, seeking consent to share the information should always be the first option. However, if there are concerns that a child or young person may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, it is important that information is shared. The concern must not be ignored. If you are not sure whether there is a reasonable cause for your concerns, then you should talk to your manager. The decision to share information without consent in the best interests of the child should be recorded in your own system.

What if I have a concern but have not previously used the Early Help process?

Occasionally, serious things happen when you haven't previously put an Early Help process in place. As before, inform the parents you are contacting Social Care, discuss your concerns with Referral and Assessment, and then follow up in writing, by recording concerns and **all** background information you have at that time that will help the Social Worker. This is not full use of the EH process, and it is not appropriate at this time to start to undertake the assessment. Pass the information on to Social Care within 48 hours.

29. How the Early Help is process Quality Assured.

A quality assurance framework has been developed to support quality at every level. There is a checklist for practitioners, line managers, service managers and multi-agency group. There are also evaluation sheets for parents and children/young people. Guidance supports the framework and suggests when it might be used at each level. A multi-agency group meets 3 times a year to review a random sample of 50 Early Help Assessments, following which recommendations are made for service managers to cascade to practitioners, plus guidance and training may be updated. The framework can be found on the Safeguarding Board website.

30. What training is available to support the Early Help process?

A wide range of training is available to support Information Sharing, Early Help Framework and the Lead Professional role. There are also supporting courses such as Assessment Skills, Chairing Meetings etc. All training is delivered as part of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Training programme. The programme is available on the Safeguarding Board website and can be booked via the Training Shared Service Centre: trainingsharedservicecentre@bolton.gov.uk

31. What support should I expect from my manager?

As a practitioner using the Early Help process, you should be able to seek support and advice from your manager and receive appropriate supervision. The expectations and role of managers is set out in National Guidance and in Bolton a half day course for managers is delivered at least once/year.

32. Where can I access other Early Help guidance and support documents?

There is a large range of guidance and support documents available on the Bolton Safeguarding Children website: http://boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk/working-with-children-and-young-people/early-help-and-working-together/

33. What happens to an Early Help Assessment when a child moves from one setting/service to another?

When an Early Help Assessment is in place for a child/young person, this means that they have identified needs and there is an action plan in place that usually involves your agency, family members and other services. When a child moves from your setting, it's really important that the plan carries on with a new Lead Professional. The family shouldn't have to start again from the beginning or wait for things to get worse. New agencies working with the child or family need to know about the family and about previous support that's been provided.

Planned transitions – between services, for example - midwife to health visitor, nursery to primary; when a case 'steps down' from a targeted service to a universal one

Before the move, talk to the parent + child (if they are old enough) about the need for the Early Help process to transfer to the new service. If the information and action plan needs to be updated do this before the transfer. If Child Action Meetings are being held – this can be agreed here. Make sure you invite the relevant worker from the new service to the meeting. **Often services have transition processes already in place, where an Early Help Assessment is in place, transfer of this should be part of the process.**

Agree with the new service who will take on the role of the new Lead Professional.

Update the EH form with any new information, including the name of the new LP.

Share the updated EH form – a copy to the family, a copy to the IW team and **an electronic copy** to the new Lead Professional, so that they can carry on with the review process.

Set a review date with the family and the new Lead Professional. This way everyone will be clear that the action plan is ongoing and is clear about expectations.

Support for the new Lead Professional – if this way of working is new to the new Lead Professional, then remind them that they can access support from the Integrated Working Team.

Unplanned moves – for example when a family move area, or stop contact with a service before a transfer can be made

If you are the Lead Professional and are the owner of an Early Help Assessment, but are no longer able to contact the family – then the EH form should be closed. Send an updated copy to the IW team with the reason for closure so that the system can be updated. Copies of the EH form should be kept in the child's record for a minimum of 6 years, in accordance with retention schedules.

Early Help information and action plans can still be accessed by new services working with the family, so long as the parent (or child if they are old enough) gives their consent for you to have the information. Contact the original service with details of the consent and request an electronic copy is sent to you. Remember to send an updated copy to the IW team, so that they can update the system with the name of the new Lead Professional.

Guidance to complete an Early Help Assessment & Action Plan Form

This form has been completed *in the style* of the Early Help form, but should not be used to complete an assessment as some fields have been removed where guidance is not needed.

This Early Help form has been designed to help practitioners assess needs at an initial stage and then work with families, alongside other agencies, to meet outstanding needs.
It should record relevant core information to make sure that families don't have to repeat their information to different services and services don't have to reassess or repeat actions that have already been delivered.
An action plan should be included, so that everyone is clear what is being delivered and progress can be measured.

Child/Young Person details:

Name **All information should be filled in electronically and accurately.**	Other known names **Include different spellings of the same name in addition to any other aliases. Do not include nicknames.**
Address **The child's main address should go here** Post Code	Other address information **If a child regularly lives at another address, such as when parents are separated, then include the other address here.** Post Code
Contact Tel no:	Version No: 1 **Version numbers should be updated following reviews**
Ethnicity **When you are completing electronically, this is a drop down list** If other please specify	
Have you checked with the IW team whether an Early Help Assessment and plan is already in place? ☐ **Everyone should ring the IW team to make sure an Early Help Assessment isn't already in place.**	

Service Details:

Lead Professional **Please include your full name and job title to help other practitioners**	Agency Address **Include full details – do not use abbreviations as not all agencies will understand**	Tel: Email: Mob: **Enter all details accurately as this is the info other practitioners need to be able to contact you**
Date of completion: **Remember to put in the date that you have undertaken the assessment. Add the date of any subsequent reviews.**		
Reason for completing the Early Help assessment and Action Plan: **Outline <u>briefly</u> the main concerns that have led to the assessment being undertaken. If the form is being used as a referral to Children's Social Care, this should be clearly identified here.**		
Does the child or their parent(s) have any special requirements such as disability or language/communication issues? (If so, please explain clearly) **Provide information so every barrier for working with the family can be reduced or removed and to help other practitioners when working with the family, e.g. the need for ground floor access, information about signers/interpreters being needed**		
People present at the assessment/meeting: **This section has been included so that the form can be used to record a Child Action meeting. Include details of everyone present and what agency they represent.** **If the assessment is being completed with a parents and young person but isn't part of an Action Meeting, include them here and your name.**		

Parent/Carer details	Parent / Carer **Complete this section for parents. Where possible/relevant include the details of both parents**
Relevant family background: **This should provide detailed information that is relevant to provide a clear picture of the child and their family's home situation. Consider the identity and culture of the family; include relevant information regarding other family members and significant other adults in the child's life. If a child or parent has a**	

disability for example, identify this here and what it means for them. Include information that would mean that a family don't have to repeat their story from the beginning, and will help the agencies that receive it to have an understanding of their circumstances both current and relevant past history.

This box is designed to get bigger as you type into it and is not limited.

The Assessment – Use this space to provide a clear picture of the child/young person. Include all strengths and needs. Use relevant headings to record information in an appropriate and proportionate way.

Development of the child or young person

An Early Help Assessment should never be completed only from records or from the sole perspective of the worker completing it. Unless the child is very young they should be included in the discussion and in most cases you will involve parents (unless the child is old enough/competent to undertake this on their own – the Information Sharing Guidance for practitioners and managers gives further advice about how to decide this). Record and attribute information to everyone who has contributed.

The Headings below have been taken from the National Assessment Framework and are designed to give an opportunity to consider all the needs/development of the child.

General Health	Physical Development	Speech, language and communication	Emotional and social development
Behavioural development	Identity, including self-esteem, self-image and social presentation	Family and social relationships	Self-care skills and independence
Understanding, reasoning, problem solving in learning	Participation in learning, education and employment	Progress and achievement in learning	Learning - Aspirations

Practitioners should consider the age and stage that the child they are working with would be likely to be achieving and discuss this. Assessments should include strengths as well as concerns. Language should be plain and not use jargon. There should be enough detail to give a full and relevant picture of the child and their circumstances, so that other practitioners don't have to ask families to repeat their information. More support for completing assessments can be found in the Multi-Agency Practice Standards and there is a guidance sheet with further prompts for each of these headings.

Should an agency require specialist information, for example: Education information for the Pupil Referral Service, or substance use information for 360, then use the 'Making a referral' guidance to make sure you provide everything that service needs to know.

Parents and Carers

As above. Consider any issues affecting parents' abilities to fully support their child.

Basic Care, ensuring safety and protection	Emotional warmth and stability	Guidance, boundaries and stimulation

Family and Environment

As above. Consider any strengths/challenges that may be impacting on the child or their family.

Family history, functioning and well-being	Wider Family	Housing, employment and financial considerations	Social and community elements and resources, including education

Early Help Action Plan

Who else is already involved?

This part of the form provides information about what support is currently being provided to the child or family. Include information about who is involved and what they are already delivering. That way you will be able to avoid duplication and have a clear plan in one place of all support the family is receiving. Education provision should include any additional support being delivered such as IEPs/Learning Mentor support etc. If additional fields are needed, contact the IW team.

Education setting:	Main Contact:	Contact details:
Is the child receiving any additional support from the education setting?		
GP name:	Contact details:	
Additional Service:	Practitioner name:	Contact details:

What do they provide?

The assessment has told us:

This part of the form should be used to summarise what the assessment means. The purpose of this is to identify what the most important issues are and to help you make an action plan. You should consider what the information that you've gathered means, what needs to change and how things will have improved for the child as a result of your actions. The information recorded here should be specific and measurable, take into account what is already being delivered and what positive actions the family need to continue.

Strengths:
Areas of Additional Need:
Things we would like to change:
This is how we will know how things have improved:

As well as the actions above, what else is needed?

Goal	Action	Who will undertake this action?	When will this be done?
Be clear about what you are trying to achieve. That way both you and the family will be clear when change has happened and the process is complete.	**Actions should be clear and relate to what you are trying to achieve – they should be measurable**	**Actions can be for the child or family themselves if appropriate. Be realistic about what can be achieved. Include new actions for those already involved or for new services to undertake. If you aren't sure about what service can offer - ring and ask for advice.**	**Always set a timescale. Avoid non-specific timescales such as 'ongoing'. You may need to be realistic about waiting times for services.**

Consider how many actions you try to achieve at once. Don't try to overwhelm a family by putting too much in here – this can be added to following review
If the Action plan has been reviewed a few times, you may need additional fields in the action plan. Contact the IW team who will be able to support with this

Is a Child Action Meeting needed to review this plan? Yes ☐ No ☐

This is an area we want to be able to report on, so is a new addition to this form

The action plan will be reviewed and updated on: **Add additional dates as needed. A review should be undertaken every 6 – 8 weeks, or half-termly. It can be done formally at an Action Meeting, or at another meeting e.g. a school meeting to review an educational plan, or informally with the child, parents and the lead professional.**

Comments

Child or Young person's comments on the assessment and action plan: **You will have already included the perspective of the child/young person in the assessment information. Here you should record any specific comments from the young person about the process.**
Parent's comments on the assessment and action plan: **As above. Include comments from the parent(s).**

Consent to store and share this information

Agree with the child and family which services the information will be shared with and list them here. As a minimum it should include everyone named on the action plan. Discuss with the family any other services that they want to share the information with.

I understand the information that is recorded on this form. I understand that it will be stored and used for the purpose of providing services. I have had the reasons for information sharing explained to me and I understand those reasons.
I agree that the agencies who need to receive this information are:(please list) **List all the agencies that the family have agreed to share the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan with here**

Parent/Carer:	Name: **on an electronic version,**	Date: **on an electronic**

	type the name of the person who has signed the form	version, type the date the form was signed
Parent/Carer:	Name:	Date:
Child/Young Person:	Name:	Date:
Practitioner:	Name:	Date:

Any Other Additional Notes or Comments: **On copies that you will send electronically, make sure you include a statement here that identifies that a signed copy is kept in your office.**

When the form has been signed by the young person (if they are old enough) and/or their parent/carer, a copy should be sent to the agencies listed above. **Make sure you use secure methods to share the information according to the data sharing policy of your organisation.**

A copy should be provided to the family.

For quality assurance and reporting processes, please also ensure a copy of this form is sent to:

Integrated Working (IW) Team
3rd Floor Paderborn House
Civic Centre
Bolton
BL1 1UA

The IW team **does not forward** copies on to other services.

Reviewing the plan:

Date of Review: **use one grey 'blob' for the date of each review**

Have the actions above been undertaken? Yes ☐ Some ☐ No ☐ Describe how things have improved/not improved since the action plan was made: **In some cases, it will not be necessary to review the whole assessment. A quick update can be provided here about progress (or lack of it). Significant new information should be updated in the assessment.**

List any additional actions needed below:

Goal	Action	Who will undertake this action?	When will this be done?
Update the action plan here	**Make sure it is still specific and measurable etc**		

If you need more boxes in your form, please contact the IW team
Is a Child Action Meeting needed to review this plan? Yes ☐ No ☐ **we are trying to count the number of CAMs that are held – if you have a meeting with parents and other practitioners about this plan, please count this as a CAM and tick the box** The action plan will be reviewed and updated on: **Always set another review date unless you are closing the Early Help Assessment. You need to check that the outcomes you have agreed have been achieved before closure.**

Review of consent to store and share this information

Following the review I agree that the agencies who need to receive this information are:(please list) **When the form has been changed following a review, the family should re-sign the form identifying any new services that it will be shared with.**		
Parent/Carer:	Name: **complete this section as before**	Date:
Parent/Carer:	Name:	Date:

Child/Young Person:	Name:	Date:
Practitioner:	Name:	Date:
Any Other Additional Notes or Comments:		

Are the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan ready to be closed? Yes ☐ Date of closure: **If for any reason, you are closing the assessment and action plan – then complete this part of the form and send a copy to the IW team and to any other agencies.**

Don't close this form just because you are no longer involved with a child/family. If there are outstanding actions or further needs, make sure you agree a new Lead Professional and transfer this form to them, informing the IW team.

If Yes, please update the form, give a reason, identify the date of closure and send a copy to the Integrated Working Team	All actions complete and outcomes achieved ☐
	Child or young person has moved out of Bolton ☐
	Child or young person has moved into adult services ☐
	Needs have escalated + need support of by specialist services ☐
	Consent has been withdrawn ☐
	Actions couldn't be achieved as no services available to meet needs ☐
	Other – please identify in additional comments box below ☐

A reviewed copy of the form should be sent to all agencies listed in the revised consent section, and to the Integrated Working Team. The family should also receive a revised copy.

Quality Checklists

Practitioner checklist

This checklist should be used by practitioners completing Early Help Assessments for the first time. Practitioners who haven't completed one in the last 3 months should also use the checklist to ensure that processes are followed consistently and are compliant with guidance.

		Y	N
1	Have you completed the form electronically? **This is a mandatory requirement**	☐	☐
2	A check with the IW team has been done to find out if there is an existing EHA or Lead Professional?	☐	☐
3	All basic details are recorded correctly: child name/gender/date of birth/address (inc postcode)/ contact telephone number/ethnicity/parent/carer details/disability/language or communication info	☐	☐
4	Are your full contact details recorded in the Lead Professional section?	☐	☐
5	Is the date recorded that the Early Help Assessment was completed/reviewed?	☐	☐
6	Are the details of which parent and/or young people were present at the assessment recorded?	☐	☐
7	Are the comments and views of the family recorded and attributed to them?	☐	☐
8	Is plain language used and kept free from jargon and abbreviations?	☐	☐
9	Have the family agreed to the information being shared with services and are they listed on the form?	☐	☐
10	Is the name of the person who signed the form recorded on the electronic copy and a statement recorded that a signed copy is kept in files?	☐	☐
11	Is the date that the form was signed recorded?	☐	☐
12	Are the electronic and hard copies stored securely?	☐	☐
13	Can the electronic copy be accessed by a deputy or line manager?	☐	☐
14	Have you explained to the family the reason why you need to carry out the assessment?	☐	☐
15	Have you explained to the family that the purpose is to gather relevant information to help decide what actions are needed, who else needs to be involved and that by sharing the information, other services will have what they need to know without the family having to repeat their information?	☐	☐
16	Does the assessment focus on what the child + family want to achieve?	☐	☐
17	Are both strengths and needs identified in the assessment?	☐	☐
18	Is the assessment comprehensive, relevant to the issues/concerns and includes all the information that other services might need?	☐	☐
19	If guidance tools or specialist assessments have been used, is a summary of the findings included in the EHA?	☐	☐
20	Does the conclusion identify what needs to change and how this will be achieved?	☐	☐
21	Does the action plan related to the original reason for starting the assessment?	☐	☐
22	Are all identified actions S.M.A.R.T.?	☐	☐
23	**Review**		
	Is new information recorded on the reviewed Early Help Assessment?	☐	☐
	Is it clear whether the process should be continued or closed?	☐	☐
	If a new Lead Professional needs to be appointed – has this been agreed and recorded on the form?	☐	☐
	Has an electronic copy sent to them?	☐	☐
24	**Has a copy of the form (including each update) been sent to the Integrated Working Team?**	☐	☐

Manager/Service Checklist

This checklist should be used by the Safeguarding Lead or Service Manager and reviewed on an annual basis

	Managing Early Help Checklist
1	Are you able to describe the Early Help you offer in your service? Actions for you:
2	Is it agreed who will undertake Early Help Assessments and the LP role? Actions for you:
3	Have relevant staff had Early Help Training and can they demonstrate the required competence to use EH processes? Actions for you:
4	Are supporting documents and tools easily available in your service? Actions for you:
5	Do you know how many EHAs your service has started, who has completed them and when they are due for review? Actions for you:
6	Do you have a safe central place to store completed EHAs? Actions for you:
7	Do your staff always complete an EHA before calling a Child Action Meeting? How do you know this? Actions for you:
8	Do you monitor the quality of EHAs completed by your staff? Actions for you:
9	What support do you give to those who act as Lead professional? Actions for you:
10	Does your service transfer EHAs and LP role in any transition arrangements? Actions for you: