



FAQ relating to the Early Help Assessments process

Early Help Officers have collected Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) largely coming from training sessions but also through general discussions with frontline staff. These will be updated on a regular bases to reflect new questions as they are identified.

How can I find out if there is an Assessment registered for a family - or who the Coordinator is?

Ring a member of the Early Help team.

Is there a minimum number of members of a TAF?

No - initially there may just be you, family member(s) and one other agency. The TAF may then identify other members.

Do I have to include parents?

Parent's involvement should always be encouraged. However if a young person requests an Early Help Assessment and does not want parents involved they can give consent themselves following the Fraser Competence guidelines (this should be clearly recorded as having been considered). The Assessment cannot proceed without either the Parent or Young Person consenting.

Can we proceed with an Early Help Assessment without the consent of the family?

As above. An Early Help Assessment is a voluntary process and therefore parents - and children where appropriate - should be fully engaged in the process. Consent must be given.

What happens if they won't engage?

Encourage engagement over a period of time - if necessary via another trusted partner agency known to the family. Assess the impact of no improved levels of support for this Child or Young person. If you feel that their circumstances are or will deteriorate discuss with your line manager or designated safeguarding lead or contact an Early Help Officer

What happens if they engage - the TAF starts to meet and a plan is in place. Then the family disengage and stop attending the meetings and won't participate in the plan?

In a similar way to the two points above - always check why they do not want to proceed as it may be constructive feedback to change the approach or change coordinator.

Who can I share the Assessment document and details with?

The parents carers or young people will have given consent for information to be shared with identified professionals initially listed. As other professionals become involved further consent needs to be sought and the form updated.

Does my Assessment have to be on the Cumbria CSCP Early Help Assessment Form?

No - if you have one of a list of other assessments that include the key components Assessment, TAF, Review, Parental consent then this can be considered for registration. Check the Early Help Strategy for the list of agreed Assessments. Compatible Assessments are listed on the Early Help page of the CSCP website.

Do I need to send the Assessment to Cumbria Safeguarding Hub?

No - you complete the Registration Form and send it to Cumbria Safeguarding Hub at Skirsgill - or email to early.help@cumbria.gov.uk

Do I have to fill in the whole Assessment form?

No - complete as much as you can with the information that you have. Organise the TAF. At the first meeting agree who is going to complete the assessment on each family member - and who the Coordinator will be. There are additional assessments sheets on the CSCP website where you got the original form from. This allows other agencies to pull off a sheet for each child and/or parent. They will then return their completed contribution to the Coordinator for consideration at the next TAF. The assessment should grow with each review or update via the plan.

Where there is an EHCP and wider issues are identified what should I do?

The identified needs should be reflected in the current plan, and advice should be sought via the Cumbria Safeguarding Hub if you feel that the threshold for CWD has been met.

Who should be the Coordinator?

The decision should be made by the family.

What happens if that person doesn't agree to be the coordinator?

Try as much as possible within reasonable levels to encourage them in the meeting - and then take it out of the meeting if it appears to be contentious. It is not helpful for parents to witness agencies disagreeing. If it persists seek advice from your Early Help Officer as an independent person to consider taking to the Early Help and Family Support Panel.

How often should the TAF meet?

It will differ depending upon the complexities of the situation. Initially it will be more frequent but should be 6 weekly - or in some circumstances termly.

If there is a Youth Offending Order in place should there be an Early Help Assessment in place for that young person.

No - where there is a statutory assessment in place there should not be an Early Help Assessment for that young person. However where there are other siblings with identified unmet needs and Early Help Assessment should be initiated. The YOS staff member would be a member of the TAF to input in relation to the young person they are working with. At the point of the order ending an assessment should be considered as a Step Down process to discourage re-offending. If the YOS staff member identifies other unmet need within the family impacting on other siblings as well as their own client - then they should initiate an Early Help Assessment.

I find the paperwork onerous - do we need minutes distributed after each meeting?

No - Formal Minutes aren't required but a TAF Review Record must be completed and shared with the family and TAF members. Make sure everybody has the date of the first/next meeting, if possible send an email reminder shortly before. Try to identify a laptop available for the meeting to update the plan and complete the review record page update the plan at the meeting - cutting down on the paperwork needing to be sent around.

Who should have a copy of the completed Assessment?

The family should have a copy as well as each member of the TAF.

What happens if a member of the TAF leaves - but we still require involvement from their agency?

Ideally they should bring their replacement to their last TAF meeting. If this is not possible ask them to ensure that their replacement is aware of dates etc. If you are the coordinator - ensure that the family

have changed the list of people they are happy to have their information shared with - to include the new staff member. Make sure that a new consent form is signed. If the new staff member does not contact the Coordinator within four weeks the Coordinator should contact the line manager of that post.

What happens if the TAF believe that the situation has not improved or that it has deteriorated to the stage where there are Safeguarding concerns?

Throughout the TAF process practitioners should use the tools available on the Cumbria CSCP website to manage risk. If the threshold is met to Step Up, inform the parents and the child (if appropriate) that you have these specific concerns and that you are making a referral to Cumbria Safeguarding Hub. Refer to Cumbria Safeguarding Hub attaching the Early Help Assessment. Keep the TAF meetings in place - meeting regularly until there is a response from Children's Services. This is called Step Up (see Step Up Step Down Diagram on CSCP Website).

What happens if an individual agency identify a Safeguarding issue on an open TAF led by another agency that needs referred immediately?

They should, without delay, follow their own organisational Safeguarding guidelines on referring into Cumbria Safeguarding Hub. They should then inform the TAF Coordinator.

Will the Early Help Assessment resume when the levels of risk have reduced and Children's Services close the case?

Yes but not on every occasion it depends on the level of need at that stage - this is called Step Down. At the last meeting chaired by the Children's Services Chair before closure, an Early Help Plan should be completed using the remaining unmet needs contained on the Child Protection or Child in Need Plan. This will become the plan that the TAF review. This is important to reduce levels of re-referral. (See Step Up Step Down Diagram on CSCP website).

Can a Parent be a Coordinator?

This can be considered as an option it may be empowering to a family to feel that they have this role. However there may be occasions when it is felt that it is not in the best interests of the family e.g. where there is or has been evidence of DA and there are concerns about a parents misuse of their role as Coordinator.

Where do agencies store the Early Help Assessments and reviews?

Each agency should follow their own safe storage of records policy.

If families have a protected address how can we ensure that this information is not shared with inappropriate others?

Each agency should follow their own procedure for dealing with protected address and other confidential information.

Can I initiate an Early Help Assessment for an 18 year old?

Yes - for a young person with a disability an Early Support plan can be in place until age 25 years. An Early Help Assessment can be initiated for anybody up to and including 18 years old although it should only be in exceptional circumstances that one would be started when the young person is beyond their 18th Birthday. However each case should be assessed in its own right.

When would I consider taking a family to the Early Help and Family Support Panel?

Where there are problems with establishing a TAF, where the TAF is not affecting change, or where a co-ordinator can not be identified (cumbrialscb.com/professionals/earlyhelp/default.asp)

Does the family need to consent to being discussed at the Early Help and Family Support Panel?

Yes, this is additional to the consent for the Early Help Assessment.

Why should I consider initiating an Early Help Assessment if I have not identified any additional needs for the family?

In consultation with the family, you have been identified as the most appropriate person to initiate the Early Help Assessment.

Why should I initiate the Early Help Assessment when our identified concerns are being managed as a single agency?

You may be managing behaviours that are symptomatic of wider issues that are impacting on the family. As above you may have been identified by the family as the person to initiate the Early Help Assessment.

Why when I submit a referral to Cumbria Safeguarding Hub am I sometimes advised to initiate an Early Help Assessment?

Following the screening process within the Cumbria Safeguarding Hub the decision has been made that it meets the threshold for Early Help.

I have completed a SEND Assessment and have now identified wider social issues, what do I do?

When completing your SEND Assessment you should have captured as wide a range of information as possible at that time. All Early Help Assessments should be updated/reviewed regularly and if in doing so you identify wider social issues reflect these in the current plan and invite relevant agencies to the TAF.

If for any reason e.g. family separation where there is DA or where one family member does not want personal details shared with a separated partner can we create two EH Plans?

The assessment should be one assessment with both parents details recorded on separate profiles. Encourage the creation of one plan. However if for e.g. if there is parental health problems to be recorded on the plan that they don't want to share with their ex partner this can be added to an additional plan. The emphasis has to be on this not detracting from the need to have the child's needs as being central to the plan. The TAF would need to ensure that they always review both plans.
