

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE: CHILD IN NEED

Hints & Tips for
Effectively Meeting the Needs of Children
Through Multi-Agency Child in Need Arrangements



Derby and Derbyshire
Safeguarding Children Partnership

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Background to the Best Practice Guide

In 2023, Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (DDSCP) undertook two Rapid Reviews (Working Together to Safeguarding Children Statutory Guidance (2023), chapter 5, page 136) about two unconnected children who were suspected to have died as a result of abuse or neglect.

The Rapid Reviews found that Child in Need arrangements was an overarching learning area across both cases. Special Guardianship Orders and Personal Health Budgets were identified as individual learning areas.

The Rapid Review Panel decided that developing three best practice guides based on the findings of the Rapid Reviews and by drawing on the expertise of practitioners and the experiences of children & their carers would:

- Provide practitioners across agencies with a set of best practice principles to support and enhance their work with children and families in addition to following relevant legislation and local procedures.
- Help to achieve the shared multi-agency aims of meeting the needs of children and increasing their safety and wellbeing.

The DDSCP facilitated practitioner groups to discuss the practice associated with the three learning areas. The groups were attended by a variety of practitioners from a range of agencies and included front line staff and senior managers. Their input alongside that of children & their carers has helped to create this best practice guide which has been endorsed by senior leaders across the DDSCP.

The best practice guide provides a framework for practitioners working collaboratively across all agencies to help improve outcomes for children and their families in the areas of assessment, planning, intervention, review and evaluation and exit planning.

Online versions of the Child in Need, Special Guardianship Orders & Personal Health Budgets Best Practice Guides can be found here:

[2.2 Local Best Practice Guidance](#)



WHO IS A CHILD IN NEED?

Under Section 17 of The Children Act 1989, a child is considered in need if:

- > they are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the Local Authority;
- > their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision of services from the Local Authority;
- > they have a disability

Children in Need may be:

- > children with special educational needs and disabilities;
- > young carers;
- > children who have committed a crime;
- > children whose parents are in prison;
- > asylum seeking children

Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance (2023) outlines that supporting children (including those that are in need) is a shared responsibility where successful outcomes depend on strong partnership working between parents or carers and all practitioners working with them.



ASSESSMENT

KEY TIP:

As a practitioner group, aim to understand the child's life experiences, their wishes & feelings

- > Identify the agencies that need to be part of the practitioner group
- > Think about how to best to engage the family
- > Aim to understand the features & dynamics of family relationships
- > Be aware of personal values & bias: avoid making assumptions about the family without supporting evidence & use research to enhance the assessment
- > Use tools like the graded care profile and genograms to support the assessment
- > Consider previous assessments & identify key themes: are those themes still present?
- > Consider other agencies assessments: analyse different opinions about risk, vulnerability & need
- > Think about how willing the family may be to engage and accept support based on their previous experience of services
- > Build knowledge of the family history from a variety of sources including education & health providers
- > Create a family chronology with the practitioner group to support the assessment
- > Consider the family's strengths & protective factors to help assess how risk & vulnerability concerns can be mitigated
- > Identify diversity factors & consider the impact that they have on the child & family
- > Consider how environmental & societal factors like poverty, housing & health issues may affect the family
- > Consider factors in & around the family & how & when risk of harm to the child may increase: think about parents' experience of mental health, substance misuse & domestic abuse & the impact of these issues
- > Be curious with the family & practitioners: think critically about the information gained, use practitioner judgement & analysis
- > Consider wider family support: assess the strength of this & how it can be sustained
- > Reflect as a practitioner group on the quality of the assessment: are there gaps in information or areas to improve?
- > Reflect in supervision with a manager: check that the assessment is not overly optimistic & is defensible
- > Share the assessment with the family & practitioner group & check that they understand it



PLANNING

KEY TIP:

As a practitioner group, create the plan with the family: what changes are a priority for them? what do they think will help?

- > Consider the learning needs of the child & family
- > Complete the plan in a timely way
- > Help the family to trust that the practitioner group will support them to make changes
- > All involved agencies should share responsibility for creating a child's plan: agree with the family & practitioner group (including health & education providers) what the plan should aim to achieve
- > Make sure that the family's diverse needs are considered and reflected in the plan
- > Think about how and where interventions & support will be delivered to increase the likelihood of the family engaging
- > Include objectives to keep the child safe & well & make these a priority in the plan: think about how to address substance misuse, mental health & domestic abuse issues in the family
- > Identify who is responsible for completing each objective in the plan & by when
- > Include in the plan the factors that may increase risk & vulnerability: detail who will do what & when in response
- > Check that the plan will meet the needs of the family: are necessary resources & services available?
- > Think about language & presentation: are the objectives & desired outcomes in the plan clear & understandable to all?
- > Check that the plan reflects the findings of the assessment: is it proportionate to risk & need? will it prompt support & challenge?
- > Check that the objectives in the plan are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic & timely)
- > Check that the interventions in the plan are research and evidenced based
- > Agree with family & practitioners how the progress of the plan & any changes in risk & need will be communicated
- > Share the plan with the practitioner group including the child's education provider & GP



INTERVENTION

KEY TIP:

As a practitioner group, work together to deliver the intervention outlined in the child's plan

- > Try & create a quality relationship with the child & their family: aim to be kind, show respect, empathy and positive regard. Remember that people can change. Be honest, trustworthy & reliable
- > Recognise the power imbalance between the practitioner group & the family & how personal values & judgement could undermine relationships when delivering support & intervention
- > Remember the value of collaborative working: try & understand the position of other practitioners. Work together, persevere & be creative when overcoming any barriers or mistrust
- > Remember that the family could already have some resilience, resources & their own support network to overcome their difficulties: enable them to make their own progress to help them sustain change without the support of the practitioner group
- > If there are barriers to challenging the family & having difficult conversations with them, seek support from a manager & reflect together to help find a way forward
- > Be alert to changes in & around the family & increase contact with practitioners to help implement any actions needed
- > To strengthen multi agency working, undertake sessions & home visits with the family with other involved practitioners
- > Regularly check whether resources and services are still available to support the plan
- > As a practitioner group, ensure that all necessary agencies are consistently involved in the delivery of the child's plan & that they are taking responsibility for their assigned actions.
- > Complete records in a way which captures the child's wishes, feelings & aspirations & shows understanding about their life



REVIEW & EVALUATION

KEY TIP:

As a practitioner group, amend the plan with the family if risk or need changes

- > Communicate regularly with the family & practitioner group
- > Share any concerns about the family's progress, risk & need with the practitioner group in a timely way
- > As a practitioner group, ensure that all necessary agencies are consistently involved in the evaluation of a child's plan including attending review meetings
- > Consider holding multi agency reflective supervision sessions to explore the family's complexities
- > As a practitioner group, take action if the family are not engaging with the plan: explore barriers, try a different approach, consider escalating to a child protection plan if risk can no longer be managed, think about whether legal advice is needed?
- > Regularly review the family's strengths & protective factors: have they changed? is any action needed?
- > Update the assessment when there is a significant change in circumstance or if new information emerges: this will help to decide whether the current plan is still appropriate
- > As a practitioner group, update the family chronology with new events & identify any emerging patterns that need action
- > Gain evidence from all sources (including health and education providers) to help evaluate whether the plan is effective
- > Consider what impact the plan is having on the child & family: are needs being met and risks lowered? Look for evidence of positive change being sustained over time rather than just an absence of risk factors
- > Reflect with the practitioner group about what the child may be communicating through their behaviour & presentation: are there indicators of risk or progress?
 - > When there are differing views on whether a plan is effective, discuss these as a practitioner group
 - > Talk to the family about how they view their own progress
 - > Share with the family the practitioner group's view of their progress



EXIT PLANNING

KEY TIP:

Consider the views of the family & practitioner group when thinking about ending a plan

- > Check whether all the objectives in the plan have been achieved
- > Discuss with the practitioner group the rationale for ending a plan: is it defensible based on current risk & need?
- > Aim to resolve any disagreement amongst practitioners about ending a plan
- > Seek support & guidance from a manager when consideration is being given to ending a plan
- > Make sure the right practitioners are involved in exit planning: do new agencies need to be involved? Explore which organisations including voluntary groups & charities could offer onward support to the family
- > Develop a sustainability plan with the practitioner group setting out how the family can maintain change, including what support networks they have and what should happen if circumstances deteriorate. Detail the factors which may mean that the family would require a new child in need plan in future
- > Make sure that any onward referrals for support are completed & accepted before ending a plan
- > Identify a lead practitioner to co-ordinate any outstanding intervention & ensure that the family & the practitioner group are aware of who this is
- > Make sure that the child's education provider & GP are aware that the plan is due to end



WHAT DO FAMILIES SAY?

"Following the closure of my family's child in need plan I would like to share my experience with the mums, dads and families that are currently at ground zero! This is the beginning of an emotional journey that's going to show you what impact you as a parent have had on your children! This was my second time around with social care, I was in full active addiction. You're probably thinking "I have nothing left to fight for"? You're wrong!"

"(I was) provided with the ways and means to clean up! They gave me hope, I trusted X and listened to the carnage I had dragged my children through, trust me when I say in those meetings you'll hear what needs to be done!"

"It's not a tidy journey, all said and done they were there to protect my children from me! And I am grateful. I'm clean again now and stable! I trust X and the way she supported me through the child in need process. They have a way about them that is caring and I felt heard! And that was massive for me! I can safely say that if it hadn't been for their efforts to help me save myself I would not be alive today!"



USEFUL LINKS

[Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance \(December 2023\)](#)

[Children's Social Care National Framework \(December 2023\)](#)

[Derby City and Derbyshire Threshold Document Effective Support for Children, Young People and their families within Derby City and Derbyshire County \(September 2022\)](#)

[Derby City Child in Need Plans, Work and Reviews](#)

[Derbyshire Child in Need Plans and Reviews](#)

[NSPCC Learning: What Makes a Good Assessment \(June 2024\)](#)



Please scan the QR code to answer 3 questions which will help the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership to evaluate the use of this guide in practice.

