

Children's Services Step Up from Early help Practice Guidance

This document outlines the practice guidance and process for changing the support we provide to children when their needs escalate, and the support provided to them needs to change from early help to children's social care.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 'Step Up' describes the process of supporting children and families when additional, escalating needs are identified that require statutory social care intervention.

2.0 'Step up' from open early help episode

- 2.1 It is not unusual for the needs of children and families to be fluid and to move up and down the continuum of need. Where there is an established early help intervention, the level of need for the child can escalate for a number of reasons, there may be an incident of concern, a lack of engagement or a lack of progress with the plan.
- 2.2 In these instances, the Consultant Social Worker (CSW) in discussion with their team manager will make the decision as to whether the child needs a social work assessment (using the levels of need guidance) and wherever possible, information from other Team Around the Family (TAF) professionals.
- 2.3 Before the support for the child changes, the Team Manager will have a case discussion with the Early Help Head of Service who will ratify the step-up decision or outline the next steps to be taken. The CSW will record a clear rationale on the child's record that explains the reason for the step up. It is important that whenever possible, the family are informed that the decision has been made to request a social work assessment and their consent is obtained. The reason for requesting the social work assessment should be shared with the family unless doing this would increase the risk to the child.
- 2.4 Where Level 4 (Safeguarding & Specialist) concerns are identified, 'step up' should be within one working day unless the child/ren are judged to be at risk of harm - in those instances 'step up' should be immediate and a phone call should be made to the Duty Team Manager to alert them that the 'step up' request will require an urgent response.
- 2.5 Management oversight including the rationale behind the decision to 'step up' must be recorded on the child's record. All recordings should be up to date on the system at the point of step up.
- 2.6 It is important that the family continue to receive support while arrangements are being made to change the level of support from early help to social care. In order to ensure a smooth handover early help services will stay involved with the family for up to 3 weeks.

3.0 'Step Up' from Early Help Triage

- 3.1 There may be occasions when the child's level of need increases due to further information being gathered at the triage stage. In these instances, the 'step up' process outlined in the previous section should be followed.
- 3.2 There may also be occasions when early help do not agree with the initial triage decision. In these instances, there should be a discussion between the manager who made the decision in Careline and the early help CSW, and if agreement cannot be reached, the escalation process below should be followed. If agreement is reached that the referral can be returned to Careline, the details should be placed in the Duty Manager tray with a clear rationale that explains the level of need decision.

4.0 Escalation

- 4.1 Where professionals cannot agree on the levels of need either for a request to 'step up' or at the initial triage stage, there should be a discussion between the relevant team managers. If agreement cannot be reached at this stage the case should be escalated to the relevant Heads of Service and if needed there can be a final escalation to the Director of Early Help and the Director of Social Care.
- 4.2 There may be occasions when families refuse consent once a 'step up' has been agreed. In the first instance, discussions should take place with the parents and the young person to understand the reasons for their refusal and offer reassurance and further clarification.
- 4.3 If the family propose an alternative source of support that will meet the needs of the child, this should be considered and discussed with other agencies. There will need to be clear agreement about what actions are taken if the intervention is either not subsequently sourced or ceases prior to achieving the desired outcomes.
- 4.4 Where families refuse consent, the social worker and team manager will need to hold a reflective discussion that considers the potential impact on the child. This discussion should consider information that has been provided by agencies working with the child and the step-up information provided by the early help service.
- 4.5 If the view of the team manager is that the impact of not engaging in an assessment is not significant, agreement may be considered for the child to remain supported by early help. Progress regarding these children will be closely supervised to ensure

that their desired outcomes are being met. The Early Help Head of Service must be consulted about all children where the decision is made for them to continue being supported by the early help service following a 'step up.'

- 4.6 If the reflective discussion considers that refusing consent will have a significant impact on the child and their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, then the Assessment Team Manager should consider undertaking a s47 child protection enquiry.