

# ROTHERHAM COUNCIL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE EARLY HELP & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE CO-WORKING FRAMEWORK 2021



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# ROTHERHAM COUNCIL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

## EARLY HELP & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE CO-WORKING FRAMEWORK 2021

### 1. Introduction

Rotherham has high aspirations for children and families in the borough and how we work together, across services, within the children's directorate is an extremely important element of this. This framework highlights the required methodology for practitioners and managers working across Early Help and Children's Social Care, that will maximise the potential and resilience of our children and families and help them in achieving long term, sustained change. **YOT is part of the Early Help Service and Step-Up, Step-Down and Co-Working arrangements should be applied in the same way as with Early Help cases.**

The four main categories covered within the Framework are Co-working; Step-Down; Step-Up and Evidence-based intervention requests.

### 2. Definitions

#### Early Help in Rotherham

Early Help means providing support to families as problems emerge, at any point in a child's life, from conception and the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early Help intervention is also offered to prevent further problems arising, or, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care.

There is clear evidence that it is better to provide focussed intervention when problems first emerge, rather than delivering a more costly statutory intervention when the needs have escalated; however, Early Help is also important to support children and families when families are in a statutory intervention to reduce or prevent specific problems from getting worse and becoming deep seated and entrenched.

The Early Help Assessment (EHA) and Planning tool is the means to understanding a child and family's needs and addressing them. The EHA is also the common agreed tool for partners to work to support children and families at an early level:

**Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) summarises the essence of early help, as well as the responsibilities that we share with partners by stating that:**

- Providing **Early Help is more effective** in promoting the welfare of children **than reacting later**. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child's life from pre-birth through to the teenage years.
- Preventative approaches are important to stop problems from emerging in the first place.
- Early help can also support de-escalation and prevent further problems arising following statutory intervention.
- Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to:
  - Identify children and families who would benefit from early help
  - Undertake an assessment of the need for early help
  - Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child.
  - Local authorities under s10 children Act 2004 have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children.

<p><b>Co-working</b></p>	<p>For all co-worked families there should be regular joint supervisions with a manager and should include both the Early Help practitioner and the Social Worker. The Social Worker remains the Lead Professional and the Early Help Worker will deliver agreed, specific pieces of work to enhance the statutory plan and build resilience and safety. Co-working is triggered following assessment of need via the Social Work Assessment and the Early Help Worker and Social Worker liaise closely to deliver key elements of the plan. Co-working can result in the offer of a group programme (Evidence Based Hub) or can result in a Family Support Worker allocation. There needs to be a clear discussion and agreement as to which intervention will work best for the specific family, acknowledging differing learning styles.</p>
<p><b>Step-Down</b></p>	<p>Step-Down is an extremely important function to ensure that children and families receive consistent, fluid support, at the right time and from a range of professionals across the borough. When children have received a statutory intervention and the family have progressed positively, it is important that the progress made is sustained and that children and families do not feel that they are being passed from 'service to service'. Step-Down to Early Help enables relevant professionals from both Children's Social Care and a range of other services to support the intervention plan appropriately as the statutory work is withdrawn. Early Help professionals are pivotal to the Step-Down process as they enable continued support and oversight of children and families once statutory services have stepped out.</p>
<p><b>Step-Up</b></p>	<p>Step-Up is when the need for a child is escalating and outcomes are not being met, despite structured intervention from universal and Early Help services. In these instances, the Early Help Assessment and any additional evidence should be shared with and viewed by, Children's Social Care who will make decisions on whether the issues warrant a statutory intervention and an allocation to a Social Worker is required. When cases Step-Up from the Early Help Service it may be appropriate for a continued co-working arrangement to be triggered. This framework covers Step-Up between Early Help and Children's Social Care only.</p>
<p><b>Evidence Based Intervention</b></p>	<p>This includes a range of parenting programmes, parental conflict groups, child exploitation intervention or sleep hygiene courses. These programmes can be implemented as part of a statutory or Early Help Assessment and plan and are delivered by existing case holders within the Early Help Service, along with two members of staff from the Early Help Evidence Based Hub.</p>



### 3. Principles: Collaborative and Consistent Approaches

In order for the joint working to be effective and offer seamless support for children and families, **it is important that practice is consistent and that all Early Help Practitioners, Social Workers and Team/ Locality Managers follow agreed processes to enable purposeful working together.** The following table outlines key elements of practice that should be adhered to in all co-working agreements.

#### Co-working

This is when Early Help supports the statutory plan that is in place for children. It is important to note that the Social Worker remains the Lead Professional and that the following should take place to ensure oversight and quality in the joint working arrangement:

In order to agree a co-working request, there should be a prior discussion between Childrens Social Care Team Managers and Early Help Locality Managers to agree what is needed from Early Help, how this links to the needs ascertained within the assessment and how this intervention forms part of the statutory plan overall. Following discussion, the Early Help Locality Manager should **add a general note to EHM** confirming that the co-working arrangement has been agreed and providing detail of what has been agreed.

**Social Workers are then required to complete a co-working request** within the Liquid Logic system in order to trigger the formal co-working agreement to Early Help\*.

\*NB The co-working request is then processed by Business Support and it is important to note that this will only be completed when a general note has been added, that evidences the discussion between the Early Help and Social Care Manager. In the event that this has not taken place, Business Support will return the transfer on Liquid Logic to alert the Social Worker that evidence of a discussion is required.

Co-working requests should always be submitted via Liquid Logic and at this point a Locality Manager in Early Help will allocate the child and family to a member of staff, who will work alongside the Social Worker to deliver intervention. The following are important elements of practice:

- It is crucial that the Social Worker **provides a clear and consistent outline of the work required** to support the child and family. This should set out purposeful work, be specific and should not offer vague requests (such as *'help with parenting'*; or *'help with emotional wellbeing'*) but should set out clear expectations of the issues that still require addressing and what further change is required from the family. This should include desired outcomes in order to measure success.
- Early Help intervention should be clearly recorded in the statutory plan for the child and family.
- Upon allocation to an Early Help Worker, this worker should have a discussion with the Social Worker to agree the nature and sequencing of work to be completed.
- It is important practice for the Early Help Worker and Social Worker to **complete a joint visit together with the family** so that introductions can be made and to make all expectations clear to the family. This visit is vital to give families a clear and consistent message and to support ongoing engagement with the plan.

## Co-working Continued

- **All co-worked families should have joint supervision with both Early Help and the Social Worker. The first joint supervision should take place within ten working days of the co-working agreement commencing;** and thereafter, should take place at **no longer than six-week intervals**. This is extremely important to enable space for sharing intelligence, discuss progress and for problem solving to take place where required. It should be agreed in the joint supervision, who will be responsible for recording the session and there should be reference to it on both LCS and EHM. Data on compliance with joint supervision will be collated on a regular basis and quality will be explored during audit and Practice Learning Days. If joint supervisions are not taking place or there are any difficulties in making these arrangements, this should be discussed with a line manager in the first instance and escalated to the relevant Manager, Service Manager, and the Head of Service if the issue cannot be resolved.
- Joint supervision should be supported by Managers, Advanced Practitioners and Senior Practitioners in both Early Help and Children's Social Care.

## Step-Down from Social Work Assessment to Early Help

When issues affecting the child and family no longer require statutory involvement, it is important that good progress is sustained, and appropriate oversight continues. Where there is continued support required for a child or family from Early Help then a Step-Down should always take place.

When Children's Social Care intend to step out of a case, dialogue is important to gain agreement on who the Lead Professional will be and discussion with existing professionals is important. It is crucial that there is **a clear and consistent outline of the work required** to support the child and family and this should set out clear expectations of the issues that still require addressing and what further change is required from the family. This should document purposeful work, be specific and should not offer vague requests (such as '*help with parenting*'; or '*help with emotional wellbeing*') but should outline clear expectations of the issues that still require addressing and what further change is required from the family. This should include desired outcomes in order to measure success.

It is **good practice** for families that have not previously been co-worked by Early Help to have **a meeting that includes the family and relevant agencies**, to ensure that there are clear arrangements for the Step-Down and that they are understood by the family. Once an Early Help Worker has been allocated to the Step-Down, the Social Worker should invite them to a final meeting (ie. CIN meeting) to ensure that everyone is clear about the plans for Step-Down and contribute to the plan for the family moving forwards, once Social Care close.

In order to agree a Step-Down, there should **be a discussion between the Children's Social Care Team Manager and Early Help Locality Manager** from the relevant locality; to agree the support to be provided from Early Help once Children's Social Care withdraw. The Early Help Locality Manager should then add a general note to EHM confirming that the Step-Down has been agreed and detail of the discussion. There should be clear actions that are agreed for the Lead Professional that is stepping in.

**Social Workers are then required to complete a Step-Down transfer in the Liquid Logic system in order to trigger the formal Step-Down to Early Help\*.**

\*NB The Step-Down request is then processed by Business Support and will only be completed when a general note has been added that evidences the discussion between the Early Help and Social Care Manager. In the event that this has not taken place, Business Support will return the transfer on Liquid Logic to alert the Social Worker that a discussion is required.

**Step-Down from Social Work Assessment to Early Help**  
*Continued*

*Whilst this framework covers Step-Down to Early Help only, Social Workers should always consider first whether stepping down to another agency would be more appropriate (e.g., health/ school.)*

Upon allocation of an Early Help Worker, the Social Worker that is stepping out has a responsibility to carry out a joint visit with the new Early Help Lead Professional. Following the **joint visit (which should take place within seven working days)** a letter confirming Step-Down should be sent out by the Social Worker to the family to reinforce arrangements. The joint visit is important to give families a clear and consistent message as well as supporting future engagement.

The Early Help Lead Professional should then complete the Early Help Assessment within 45 working days of the Step-Down. The Early Help Lead Professional should ensure that key actions are implemented, and that the assessment process remains fluid and new concerns are discussed, addressed and escalated appropriately.

**Step-Up from Early Help to statutory intervention**

A Step-Up takes place when need is escalating, outcomes are not being met and a statutory assessment or intervention is needed.

Prior to Step-Up a discussion should take place between the Early Help Locality Manager, or Senior Practitioner and a Social Care Team Manager. This dialogue is important when stepping a family up into Children's Social Care, to ensure that families are receiving the right level of support at the right time and that thresholds are met for Step-Up.

Early Help should share as much information as possible when stepping a case up to Children's Social Care; this should include all assessments, plans and all relevant evidence that illustrates the escalating need or entrenched and cumulative nature of concerns.

Once Step-Up is agreed, the Early Help Manager or Senior Practitioner should send an email to **MASH-Referral@rotherham.gov.uk**, with details of the concerns and agreement for the Step-Up. It is important to note that an agreement to re-screen a case and an agreement to progress to an actual Step-Up are different things and the record should reflect this clearly.

Where case are rescreened but then rejected as not meeting threshold, there is an expectation that this will be communicated with clear rationale to the Early Help Locality Manager within 24 hours.

If the agreement to re-screen does not result in a Step-Up and this generates disagreement then the practice resolution protocol should be triggered and both mutual respect and dialogue are key to this.

**[https://rotherhamscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p\\_practice\\_resolution.html](https://rotherhamscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_practice_resolution.html)**

NB concerns of a safeguarding nature and where we are concerned about the immediate safety of a child, should be phoned through to the MASH **immediately** and should not wait for a discussion with the Social Care Team Manager.

It is important when escalating to Children's Social Care that Early Help has a conversation with parents/carers unless this would result in placing somebody at further risk.

If there is an established working relationship with the child and family, it is important that there is consideration for Early Help to remain involved when the case steps up to statutory intervention (ie move to co-working). This takes place using the co-working guidance above and this should be a fluid process with no delay experienced and continuation of Early Help Support regardless of the system process.

## Evidence-based intervention

Rotherham has a range of evidence-based activity available to families. There is a programme of groups available through the Evidence Based Hub, which includes Triple P 0-12, Teen, and discussion groups; Family Links; Parents as Partners; Caring Dads; and Sleep Tight.

When a co-working request is considered, it may be decided that an Early Help Lead Professional is not required but an evidence-based intervention is the most appropriate course of action. Where a co-working request is being submitted for an evidence-based intervention then this should be **clearly identified on the Liquid Logic co-working transfer** which will then be sent directly to the Evidence Based Hub.



## 1. Purposeful work

Activity governed through a child's plan should seek to support the child and family with positive change and planning of intervention is extremely important. All home visits and direct work should have a methodology in mind, with pre-planned expected outcomes and an outline of how they will be achieved made clear.

## 2. Past issues, incidents and intervention

When a practitioner begins work either in a Step-Up, Step-Down or co-working capacity; it is important that the case file and relevant assessment (either Early Help or Social Work Assessment) is read so that there is a **clear understanding of previous issues**, past intervention and current worries. A conversation between Early Help and Social Care is also important to discuss the concerns and ensure that there are clear next steps.

## 3. Recording

**Case and supervision recordings on both LCS and EHM**, should reflect the joint working arrangement and include clear communication between the Early Help and Social Care Workers. This visibility is important and should be paid particular attention in order to ensure fluidity of information.

## 4. Joint mapping

Joint mapping between professionals is an important way of exploring concerns for children and families and consider next steps. Joint mapping should take place where there are concerns for a child or family requiring additional consideration, in support of Step-Up or Step-Down discussions and in cases where there are specific concerns such as neglect, CCE or CSE.

## 5. Meetings

Multi-agency meetings take place at all levels of intervention whether this be a Team Around a Family Meeting, a Child in Need Meeting, Core Group, Child Protection Conference or Looked After Review. Where there are co-working arrangements in place between Social Care and Early Help, the Early Help Worker should be invited to and will attend meetings. Early Help interventions will be co-ordinated through the plan for the family.

NB it is important and good practice to ensure **that there is a final meeting where Step-Down is discussed with the family** and professionals to ensure clear arrangements following the Step-Down; this could be the final CIN or Team Around the Family meeting.

When a Step-Down has been agreed, there should be an invite sent from the Social Worker via the Early Help Locality Manager so that the new Early Help Allocated Worker can be part of the multi-agency discussion.

## 6. Dialogue is important between Early Help and Children's Social Care

To support this, new regular joint management meetings will begin in 2021 to bring together the wider management from the two parts of the directorate and will be led by the respective Heads of Service. These meetings will focus on the landscape across the two services; explore disparities; discuss volume and demand; offer check and challenge etc.

## 7. Escalation/ Practice Resolution

It is important that if there are differences of opinions within the Step-Up, Step-Down and Co-working framework that colleagues seek to resolve these with dialogue between practitioners, managers and Service Managers; however, when resolution is not forthcoming, there should be an escalation to the respective Heads of Service who will support a solution. Support with practice resolution can be found here: [https://rotherhamscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p\\_practice\\_resolution.html](https://rotherhamscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_practice_resolution.html)

## 8. Court Reports

Joint supervision is an important element of co-working and supports Early Help in reducing the numbers of direct requests for court reports. The Social Worker should triangulate findings of work that has taken place within Early Help and present the work that has been carried out in their overall report. When presenting the case they need to refer to the work in Early Help as an extension of Social Care and part of their CYP 'team' as both are part of the same directorate and this should be made clear.

- Where co-working occurs it is important that the Social Worker ensures that their report contains full details of the work undertaken by Early Help as reflected in the Plan and joint supervision and should detail how they have observed this, the impact and the workers views on progress.
- Best practice will ensure that this is generated from regular dialogue, joint supervision and triangulation between the Social Worker, Early Help Worker and managers as a matter of routine.