

**Westmorland and Furness
Safeguarding Children
Partnership**

Westmorland and Furness Threshold Guidance

**Meeting the Needs of Children and
Families at the Earliest Opportunity**



Meeting the needs of Children and Families in Cumbria

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states that “the safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document, which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood”. This should include:

The process for the Early Help Assessment and the type and level of Family Help services to be provided.

The criteria, including the level of need, for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care for assessment and for statutory services under:

- Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need)
- Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm)
- Clear procedures and processes for cases relating to:
 - The abuse, neglect and exploitation of children
 - Children managed within the youth secure estate
 - Disabled children

*In Westmorland and Furness the safeguarding partners are known as Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP).



Introduction

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states “Nothing is more important than children’s welfare. Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support as soon as a need is identified.” This Multi-Agency Threshold guidance and the Understanding the Level of Need and Practice Response document have been developed alongside multi-agency partners to offer guidance for all practitioners, in all agencies who have direct or indirect contact with children, young people and their families within Westmorland and Furness. The Understanding the Level of Need and Risk document can be found at [**Understand Level of Need and the Practice Response**](#)

Using the guidance will support practitioners and managers to identify when a child may need additional support. The needs of children, young people and families should be considered on a case by case basis and responses should be based on sound assessment, professional judgment and where appropriate, statutory guidance.

Through strength-based conversations it introduces a continuum of need and support, provides information on the levels of need and gives examples of some of the factors that may indicate that a child or young person needs additional support.

A Coordinated Approach - Safeguarding is Everyone’s Responsibility

Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe.

Talking and listening to children and observing their behaviour will help us to understand their lived experiences and what support/help they need.

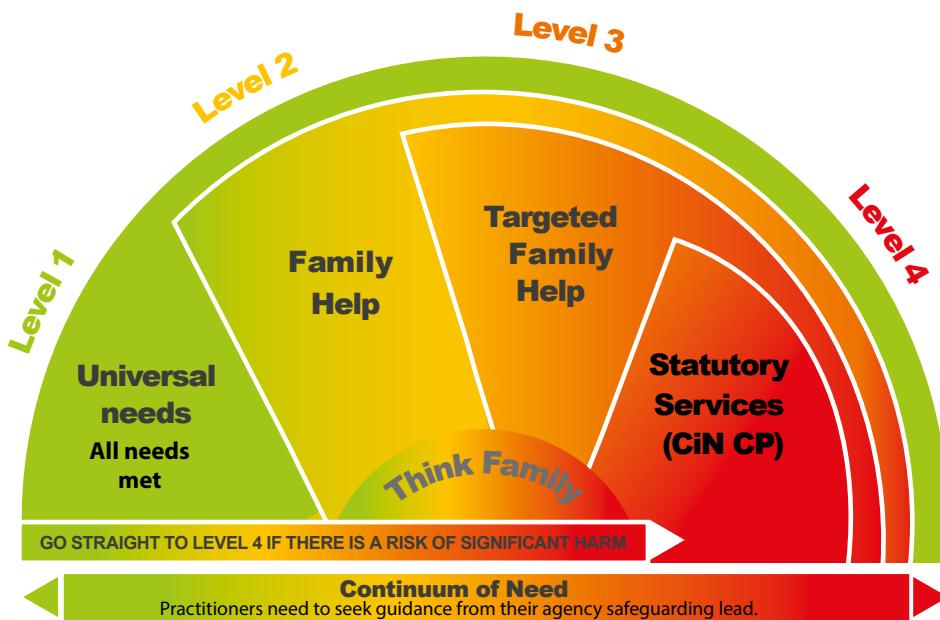
Parents and carers should be involved at the earliest opportunity when safeguarding concerns are identified to enable discussion about how best they can support and protect their child.

Information sharing is paramount as no single partner can have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances.

Family Help means working with families as soon as any worries emerge. This can be at any point in a child’s life, whether they be a baby, child or teenager.



Continuum of Need



Westmorland and Furness has developed a continuum of need along with features that might be expected to be seen in families across the continuum. It is important to note that this does not represent a fixed definition of need; it should be used alongside professional judgement and form part of a wider discussion about how best to meet the needs of a specific child or family and support the consistency of response to children and young people.

In this guidance we have identified four levels of need:

Level 1 Universal Needs – these are children who make good overall progress through an appropriate universal service; have no additional unmet needs and where there is a single need identified that has been or can be met by a universal service.

Level 2 Early Help – children whose needs are emerging and cannot be met through universal services and require additional support. This includes children whose needs are unclear. A multi-agency Early Help Assessment will be initiated, a Team Around the Family will be developed and co-ordinated with an evidence based clear plan about actions to be taken.

Level 3 Targeted Early Help – there is an increasing level of complex and/or multiple unmet needs where coordinated support is required to prevent worries escalating. A multi-agency Early Help Assessment will be initiated or already in place, a Team Around the Family developed in coordination with an evidence based clear plan about actions to be taken. Support can be sought from the Early Help and Family Support Panels or Team Around the School/Setting.

Level 4 Statutory Services (CiN/CP) – these are children who have experienced or are at risk of significant harm (section 47) and where there are significant welfare concerns (section 17). These children will require a response from Children's Social Care.

When there is reason to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a referral must be made to Westmorland and Furness Multi-Agency Children's Hub.

Moving Between the Levels

Children and young people can move across the levels of vulnerability according to their particular circumstances. The divisions between the levels should not be conceived as fixed rules, but rather guidelines to support decision making. The presence of a single or multiple combination of factors, the age of the child and protective factors will all need to be taken into account. Services need to be flexible to meet the need as it changes.

Safeguarding reviews have consistently shown that professionals have a tendency to use trigger incidents to reflect on the need for support or intervention. It is particularly important when considering the risk of harm from neglect and/or emotional abuse that professionals understand the cumulative impact on the child. A chronology is a critical component of building up a picture over time.

Practitioners should ask what they can do to help and support children they come into contact with, in order to ensure that their additional needs are identified. Practitioners will need to continue to contribute to multi-agency plans when needs become complex. All agencies should make reasonable adjustments to enable children and their families to access services as required by the Equality Act 2010.

Understanding the Level of Need and Practice Response

Understanding the Level of Need and Practices Response should be used alongside professional judgement and form part of a wider discussion about how best to meet the needs of a specific child or family and support the consistency of response to children and their families.

Understand Level of Need and the Practice Response



Family Help

Family Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from birth through to the teenage years. Family Help relies on local organisations and agencies working together. The Early Help Assessment (EHA) is a multi-agency Team Around the Family, with an identified person who coordinates the assessment and whole family plan to address the worries at an Family Help level. The assessment should consider the whole family and the impact of the public, social context on children and young people's lives. The assessment needs to respond to extra-familial worries posed to young people from outside of their home, either from adults or other young people. In Westmorland and Furness the Early Help Assessment is known as 'Early Help Assessment – Signs of Well-being and Success'.

Level 2 Family Help this is where children's needs cannot be met through Universal Services and children require additional support. This includes children whose needs are unclear. At this level an Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success will be initiated, registered, a Team Around the Family developed and Team Around the Family meetings put in place. A coordinator will coordinate the assessment and plan. The family should be involved in the decision making as to who the coordinator is, and they should be known to the family. The coordinators details should be communicated to the child, family and agencies involved in the Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success.

Level 3 Targeted Family Help an Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success should already be in place along with a Team Around the Family, with planned and regular reviews being undertaken. An Early Help Assessment can be initiated at this level but there is an increasing level of complexity and there may be multiple needs identified. Support can be sought from the Early Help and Family Support Panels where a social work manager is in attendance.

It must be noted that at Level 2 and beyond, agencies may use their own assessment tool to identify single agency support for children. These assessments should form part of the information sharing discussion with the family and agencies, to develop and continually inform the Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success.

At **Level 2 or Level 3**, SEND support is embedded within the Family Help process.

When an additional need is identified for a child or young person, whether social, emotional, developmental or educational, an Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success form can be started to gather information. Some agencies may already have completed their own assessment tool which will inform/contribute to the Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success. The emphasis is on assessing all aspects of a child or young person's strengths, needs and circumstances, developing a plan to meet their identified needs and reviewing progress systematically.

The Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success will be essential for:

- SENCOs following the 'Graduated Response' outlined in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (DfE 2015)
- Recording evidence of high quality teaching and SEN support in schools and settings using the information and advice set out in Bands 1 and 2 of the Cumbria SEND Handbook here [Westmorland and Furness SEND Handbook](#)

If at any point during the Early Help Assessment process the risk of harm is identified, a referral to Children's Social care should be made. Information on how to do this can be found here: [How to Report a Concern](#)

Family Help Professional Consultation

If you have concerns about a child and want an opportunity to talk these through to help decide the best course of action, please contact the Family Help Team and ask for a consultation. At any time when a family is being offered support and help from an agency, it is important that practitioners feel they can ask for help and advice and draw on the expertise of others. All practitioners, services, schools and settings who work with families should feel able to consult with one another at any time before deciding on a course of action or way forward.

Family Help consultancy may include:

- Being the first point of contact for advice and guidance after speaking to your own agencies designated safeguarding lead, when an agency is unclear if a contact needs to be made to the Multi-Agency Children's Hub
- Advise if the child or family is already open to a children and families service
- Support others to complete an Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success
- Support Early Help coordinators across the partnership, to understand and co-ordinate the Team Around the Family process.

Statutory Services (CiN,CP)

Level 4 Statutory Services (CiN, CP) - this includes children who have experienced significant harm or are at risk of significant harm.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the Local Authority's duties to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting welfare.

Local Authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children and must give consideration to a child's age and understanding, when determining what, if any, services to provide.

A Child in Need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. Children in need may be assessed under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 by a social worker.

Under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a Local Authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child (who lives or is found in their area) is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, has a duty to make such enquiries as it considers necessary, to decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Such enquiries, supported by other organisations and agencies, as appropriate, should be initiated where there are concerns about all forms of abuse and neglect.

There are requirements to consider the needs of young people where specific complexities have been identified. These are:

- Disabled children and carers
- Young carers
- Children in secure youth establishments
- Children being privately fostered
- 16/17 homeless children and young people
- Children where threats exist from outside the home.

As noted in the Family Help section, it is important to respond to harm and abuse posed to children and young people from outside the home, either from adults or other young people. Extra familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the community and /or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as County Lines; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. If practitioners identify children who are at risk of these threats they must follow the CERAR process which can be found [here](#).



How We Work with Children and Families

Signs of Safety

The Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership has adopted the Signs of Safety practice approach which provides a consistency of practice for all practitioners, and a consistency of service for all children and families in Westmorland and Furness. Signs of Safety focuses on building strong working relationships with children, families, and their networks, which empowers them to build effective solutions for change and take control of their own lives.

The Signs of Safety practice approach is supported by solution focus questioning, where children and families are asked the right questions to enable them to understand some of the challenges they face, and for them then to come up with realistic solutions to improve things in the future.

The Signs of Safety assessment focuses on three main domains with seven analysis categories to begin to draw together and analyse information as it relates to the worries about the children:

1. What are we worried about? (Past Harm, Future Danger, Complicating Factors)
2. What's working well? (Existing Strengths, Existing Safety)
3. What needs to happen next? (Safety Goals, Next Steps).

Signs of Safety offers a range of tools and methods so everyone has a clear focus on what needs to change, and what the behavioural changes will look like when we achieve our goals for safety or well-being. We measure success through changes in behaviours that support children to grow up within their own families and networks, where they have the potential to care for them safely.

The Signs of Safety core principles provide a framework for thinking and practice when working with all children and families:

1. Respect everyone you are working with as individuals
2. Engage the person and don't get lost in the problem
3. Recognise that collaboration is possible even when differences exist
4. Recognise that all people have capacities and strengths
5. Maintain a focus on competency and cast a vision for excellence
6. Learn what the family needs and strives for
7. Always humbly engage others
8. Focus on creating small changes
9. Don't interpret actions; ask questions
10. Offer choices
11. Treat every engagement as an opportunity for growth
12. Treat the practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions.

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Please use the link to below to access further information : [**Signs of Safety**](#)

Signs of Well-being and Success

In Family Help we use the Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success to ensure that children, young people and their families get the right help at the right time. Signs of Well-being and Success is in-line with the Signs of Safety practice approach, and works within the same practice principles when assessing and planning with children and families.

An Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success is a way of assessing and organising our practice. It is voluntary and needs consent from the parent or carer or, where appropriate, the young person. The Early Help Assessment - Signs of Well-being and Success uses the same method of gathering and analysing information, providing clear goals with solutions to change.

Within Signs of Safety and Signs of Well-being and Success we adopt a “Think Family ” approach as we know that a child’s needs must be understood holistically, therefore we work not only with the child, but the wider family and network.

More information and guidance can be found on the [**WFSCP Website**](#)



Designated Safeguarding Lead

Every organisation has a Designated Safeguarding Officer/Lead or Safeguarding Team. They are responsible for taking the lead for safeguarding worries within their organisation. The designated lead should be the first point of contact for all staff who need advice and guidance around safeguarding worries. This includes supporting staff and colleagues within their organisation in decision making and information sharing around worries for a child's welfare and safety. Conversations with the Designated Safeguarding Lead should be used to gain advice, reflection on concerns and determine the next steps at all levels of supporting children.

Information Sharing

Effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Serious Case Reviews have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of, and share information in a timely manner, can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children and young people. Sharing information enables practitioners and agencies to identify and provide appropriate services that safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states that practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to Local Authority Children's Social Care (e.g. they are being supported as a child in need or have a child protection plan). Practitioners should be alert to sharing important information about any adults with whom that child has contact, which may impact the child's safety or welfare.

Each agency has an individual responsibility to record all conversations in relation to their involvement in the lives of children and young people, whatever the outcome, recordings need to be appropriate and in accordance with each agency's procedures, in order to show that conversations took place and what was agreed. Recording needs to be clear, concise, explain the evidence, explain the analysis, and record the decisions, the people responsible for actions and the timescales. The Signs of Safety mapping tool provides a useful framework to do this. [**Safety Case Mapping and Scaling Tool**](#)

The seven golden rules of information sharing can be found here [**Information Sharing Protocol**](#)

Consent

When considering sharing information or referring a child, young person, and their family/ carer you need to consider the following:

- If you do not believe or have the evidence that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, but it is a child or family that need help and support you must seek the consent of a parent, and child, if the child is over 13 years old and has capacity, to share their information with another service.
- If you believe that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm then you should share the information, but you must inform both the parent and child, if the child is over 13 years old and has capacity, prior to sharing that the information. Telling them whom you are sharing information with and why.
- In rare circumstances, whereby the informing of parent/child before information sharing is believed to increase or pose a risk of significant harm to the child or jeopardise a potential police criminal enquiry the information sharing should be made without informing the parent/ child.
- Parental refusal to provide consent to share information or to undertake an assessment, can be indicative of increasing risk to the child/ren. The impact for the child should be considered and advice should be sought from designated safeguarding leads or line managers to aid reflection in these situations.

Do not delay disclosing information to obtain consent if that might put children or young people at risk of significant harm.

Practitioners should always seek the consent of the parents/ carers and the child, if the child is over 13 years old and has capacity, before proceeding to share information with partner agencies. Engaging parents, carers, children, and young people in accessing help and support is an important part of working in partnership with families.

A child protection referral from a professional cannot be treated as anonymous, so the parent will ultimately become aware of the identity of the referrer and agency. Where the parent refuses to give permission for the referral to children's social care, unless it would cause undue delay for the child, further advice should be sought from your line manager or the nominated safeguarding lead and the outcome recorded.

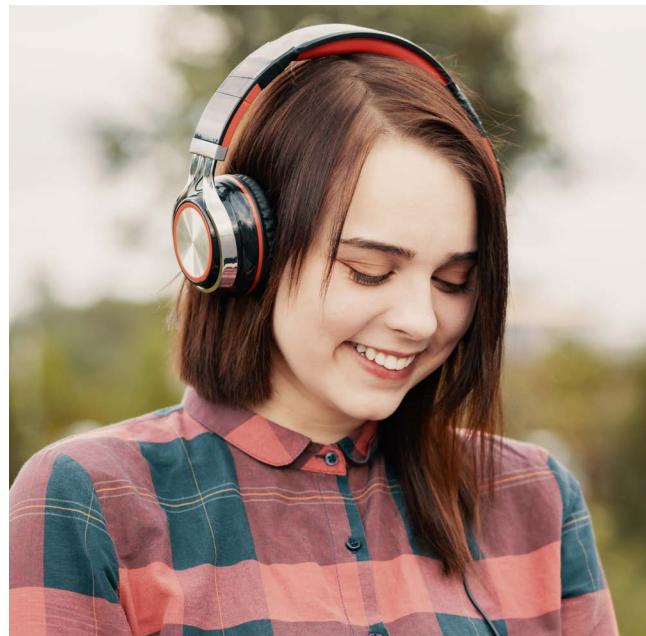


Resolving Disagreements and Escalation

National and local Safeguarding Practice Reviews formerly known as Serious Case reviews have highlighted the importance of professionals challenging decisions to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families. Local Reviews have found that concerns about decisions are often not challenged professionally.

The WFSCP has an 'Escalation Policy' in place to support you if you disagree with a decision made relating to a child. The policy outlines the process when any professional has a concern or disagreement with an agency decision or action related to a child. Its aim is to ensure that the focus is kept on the child's safety and well-being through promoting a culture of professional challenge and providing framework for timely and effective resolutions. At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

The escalation policy can be found [here](#).



Role of the LADO

Allegations are sometimes made against practitioners or others working with children and young people. It is a legal requirement that any agency must inform the Local Authority Designated Officer (known as LADO) within one working day when an allegation is made against any member of staff or volunteer and prior to any further investigation taking place.

Further details on this process can be found [here](#).



