

Bracknell Forest

Early Help Assessment Guidance

Guidance notes for completing
an Early Help Assessment



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Introduction

In Bracknell Forest, we want to use the Early Help Assessment to help ensure that children, young people, and their families get the right support, at the right time. Many families can face challenges that make parenting difficult, and sometimes they may need the support of an organisation for a short period of time. In order to intervene at the earliest point, a good quality assessment and plan is required.

Early Help is not the responsibility of one service or organisation, we need to work together to share information so that families do not have to repeat their stories. The Early Help Assessment incorporates Signs of Safety and the Outcome Star, in order to look holistically at a family's needs, in a strength-based approach. The assessment looks at what is working well, what are we worried about and what needs to happen.

The assessment can be completed by any lead professional who is supporting the family, for example, a teacher, school support staff, health visitor. You do not need to undertake training; however, you should feel confident in your safeguarding knowledge.

Consent

Early Help is voluntary and is about working alongside children, young people and their families to support them. A family must give their consent for Early Help before a referral can be made for targeted support. If you are unable to gain consent from the family, please discuss next steps with your designated safeguarding lead or equivalent.

When Should I Complete an Early Help Assessment?

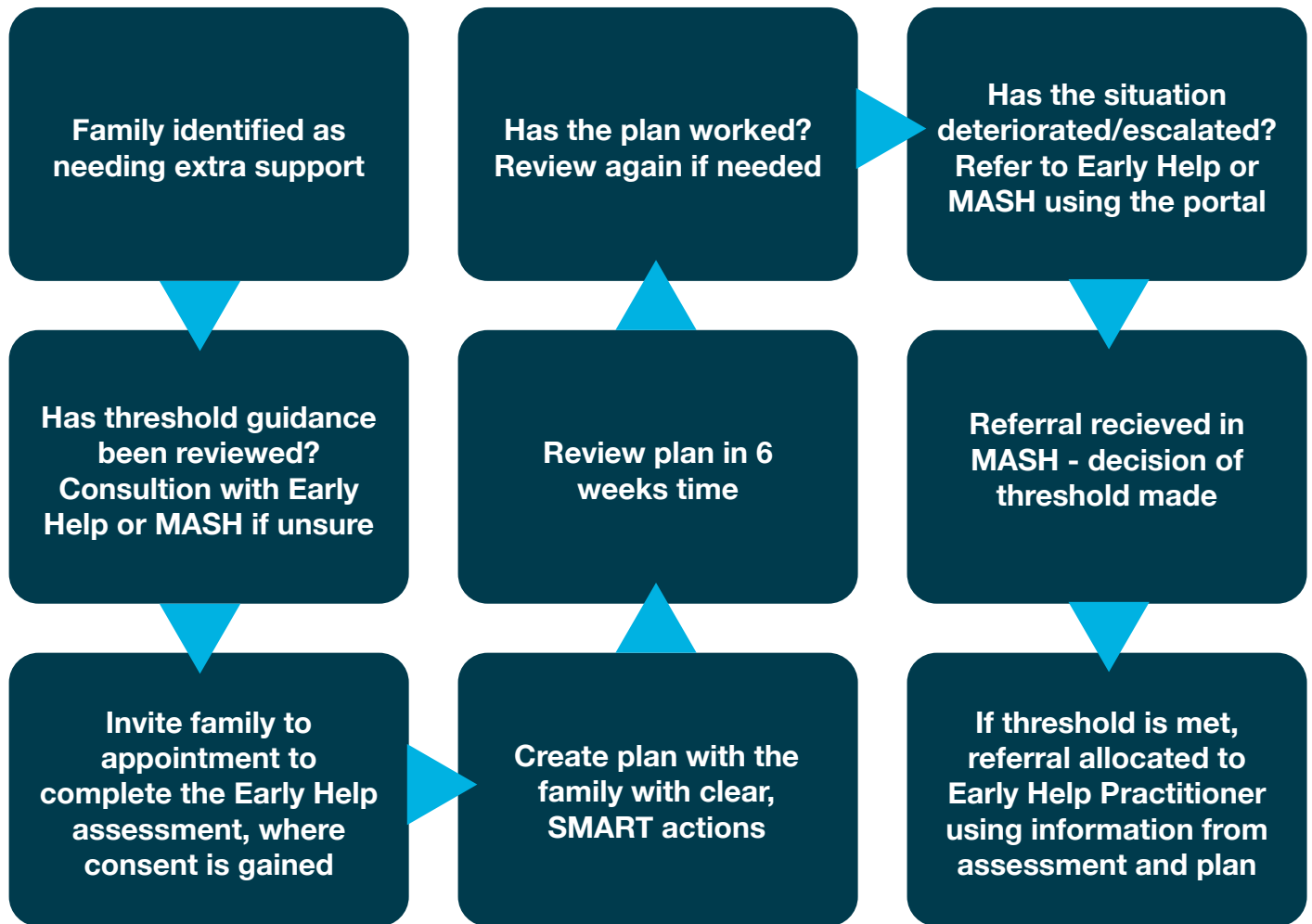
Early Help support is for children, young people up to 19 years old (25 years with SEN needs) and their families. Early Help works to improve a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the issues getting worse. Here are some examples of situations when you may want to consider completing an assessment to establish if a lead professional for a coordinated approach is required. This is not an exhaustive list but gives examples of indicators to consider.

Focus Area	Issues presenting
Education and Learning (including SEN and under 5 development)	Child arriving late or periods of unexplained absence, unmet SEN needs, behaviour deteriorating at school, children not on track with learning/development, speech and language concerns, emotional based school avoidance
Boundaries, behaviours, and routines	Challenging behaviour at home, parent struggling with maintaining routine – may present as child tired at school, no breakfast etc
Family relationships (including social networks and parental conflict)	Reports of arguments at home, reports of arguments with neighbours, child copying adult/like behaviour
Keeping Safe (including domestic abuse, exploitation, and harm)	Missing episodes, incidents involving the police, violent behaviour towards peers, reports of violence at home, unhealthy relationships, peer influences, exploitation, online safety
Wellbeing (Including expectant and new parents)	Reports of poor parental mental health, parent not attending medical appointments, struggling to get children to school, anxiety
Emotional Needs (Including children, parents/carers needs)	Child's anxiety, unmet emotional needs, no support in place for child's mental health, low level of resilience, identity
Physical Health	Physical health needs of child or parent, evidence of unhealthy lifestyle presenting, child undertaking additional caring responsibility (young carers)
Home and Money	Unable to afford school uniform, regular food bank referrals, pupil premium, reports about housing, overcrowding
Progress to work and future ambitions	Child at risk of becoming NEET, parent seeking opportunities
Substance Misuse (Including alcohol and drugs, adults and young people)	Incidents involving drugs/alcohol for young person/ parents, police involvement

Some children may also be vulnerable and showing early signs of abuse and, or neglect. Their needs may not be clear, not known or not being met. There might be concerns that parents of some children may not be prioritising their children's needs and/or have limited parenting capacity.

The Referral Process

The diagram below outlines the assessment process from when a professional has identified a family as needing support.



Referrals are submitted using the portal page, where your Early Help Assessment can also be attached. [Early Help referral, Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](https://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/early-help-referral)

If you are unsure of the threshold, please consult the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board Threshold Guidance BF Children's Threshold Guidance 2023 (bracknellforestsafeguarding.org.uk)

What Makes a Good Quality Assessment?

The principle of an effective assessment is the gathering and analysis of information, identifying strengths and worries, to generate a plan of action which is strength based and focuses on positive outcomes. The assessment should be collaborative, alongside the child and family with their full understanding, consent, and engagement.

When a family experiences difficulty, they often have to speak to a number of different professionals before being allocated an Early Help Worker. We want to reduce this, with a good quality assessment families should be able to say their story once, to someone that they trust already. We understand that often, a lot of support is already in place or has been tried, if this information is included it saves us attempting to repeat the same intervention twice, if we know something has been unsuccessful already.

It is important to actively involve the family in a meaningful conversation, to ensure that the action plan and goals are fully informed and agreed by the children and parent/carers. This is a family assessment and plan; therefore, they need to own this with the support of the lead professional. The lead professional needs to help the family identify what needs to happen but be open and honest about the process and what steps may be taken if the situation deteriorates.

A good quality assessment provides a holistic analysis of the family's strengths and needs and is also:

Accurate – The assessment provides an accurate representation and focuses on the strengths and needs of the child and their family.

Clear – The assessment is concise and understandable by all those involved, particularly the family and any professionals who may be involved, or who take responsibility for the case at a later stage.

Inclusive – The assessment ensures that the child and their family are fully involved, and their voices are evident. The assessment is unbiased and gives positive expression without prejudice or discrimination.

Authentic – The assessment is an accurate and evidence-based record of the discussion.

Solution focused – The assessment focuses on what the child and their family want to achieve.

Practical – The assessment clearly identifies the strengths and needs of the child and their family, and there is appropriate action plan to address those needs, as well as information of what steps may be taken if the situation deteriorates or no action is taken.

Child centred – The child is kept in focus throughout the assessment and that account is included from the child's perspective.

If at any point you are concerned about the safety or welfare of the child or young person, seek immediate advice using your organisations safeguarding procedures.



Questions to Ask a Family

The holistic assessment looks at many areas of family life. Some areas may feel difficult to ask questions around. The list below provides examples of questions that may be asked to give you an idea of the information that would be helpful to explore.

Focus Area	Example questions
Education and Learning (including SEN and under 5 development)	<p>Do your children enjoy school?</p> <p>Are you involved with school – parents’ evenings etc.?</p> <p>Are your children attending school regularly?</p> <p>Are your children meeting their developmental milestones?</p> <p>Is your two-year-old eligible for 15 hours free early years education?</p> <p>Does your three/four-year-old attend nursery – where do they go?</p>
Boundaries, behaviours, and routines	<p>How do you feel about being a parent?</p> <p>How do you find putting discipline and boundaries in place?</p> <p>Which parts of the day do you find most difficult to create a routine?</p> <p>What behaviour management skills do you use at home?</p>
Family relationships (including social networks and parental conflict)	<p>What support do you have? Family/ friends?</p> <p>Do you have conflict with your partner?</p> <p>Are the arguments frequent, intense or poorly resolved?</p> <p>Do you feel the conflict between you and your partner impacts on the children?</p> <p>How do you communicate at home with your partner/ children?</p>
Keeping Safe (including domestic abuse, exploitation, and harm)	<p>Have you been a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour?</p> <p>Has anyone in your family committed a crime or at risk of crime?</p> <p>Has the child/young person had any missing from home episodes?</p> <p>Do you have any concerns about your current or previous relationship?</p> <p>Is there any child/adult violence in the home or aggressive behaviour?</p>

Focus Area	Example questions
Wellbeing (Including expectant and new parents)	Do any of the household have mental health issues? If yes, are they receiving treatment or support for their condition? What impact does it have on the family? Tell me about your upbringing – exploring ACEs in childhood
Emotional Needs (Including children, parents/carers needs)	How do you meet your children’s psychological and emotional needs? What relationship do your children have with you? Does your child have any additional support with their emotional needs? Is anyone in the family self-harming?
Physical Health	Would you say you lead a healthy lifestyle – exercise and diet? Do any of the family have any health/disability issues – are they accessing appropriate support? Is there anyone in your family who needs extra support? Do you do anything to help them or look after them? Do you or anyone else in the family need support with sexual health?
Home and Money	Do you own or rent your property? Are there any issues with the condition of the house? Are you at risk of eviction/homelessness for any reason? Do you currently have any debt? Are there repayment plans in place? Do you claim any benefits or are you concerned you are not claiming what you are entitled too?
Progress to work and future ambitions	What is your employment status? Have you been looking for work? If so, how long? Have you had any support? Do you wish to take on any training/courses? Would you like support with this?
Substance Misuse (Including alcohol and drugs, adults and young people)	Do you have concerns about any family members using drugs or alcohol? If so, does this impact on finances? Does this impact on the family?

Capturing the Voice of the Child/Young Person



The principle of good practice is to ensure that children and young people's views are heard and recognised. The voice of the child is paramount in ensuring that the outcomes of interventions are having the desired impact on the child/ren. Seeking the views of the child will ensure that there is not over reliance on parental accounts which can minimise the risk of disguised compliance. Professionals need to ensure the voice of the child runs through everything we do and that the child perspective is clearly visible throughout any assessment that affects them and taken into account no matter what their age or ability to communicate directly.

This can be done by:

- Direct engagement – talking to the child;
- Observation, particularly for young or non-verbal children;
- Discussion with parents, family members, carers or agencies (but don't let this be your only perspective);
- Analysis of information held to consider what the impact might be on the child (test this out with the child).

The following considerations are positive approaches that underpin effective communication and aid workers ensuring the voice of the child is captured.

- Be flexible in your approach. No one method or tool will work for every child.
- Professionals must ensure they make sufficient time to spend with each child or young person.
- Establish a working relationship with the young person and engage their interest or consider who already has this and can capture the child's voice.
- Develop trust and a rapport through non-intrusive questions.
- Give the young person a good introduction to your role and why their voice is important, ensuring they understand the process if age appropriate.
- Consider how you could make the child more comfortable.
- It is important to have a variety of tools available to help communicate with children and young people.
- Professionals should work at the child's pace and tailor their communication style to the best way of communicating with the individual.
- Understand their diversity needs, plus their interests and activities.
- Activity based communication helps both children and young people feel more comfortable expressing their feelings and helps to build trust.

A child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families.

What further support is available?

- Support and training from Family Support Advisor Co-ordinator
Sophie.Everett@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
- Contact the Early Help Team for advice if you wish to discuss an assessment you are considering Earlyhelp.referrals@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
- Anonymous MASH consultations – please call 01344 352005 between 8.30 – 5pm for advice and guidance
- Refer to a Parenting Programme [Parenting referrals | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parenting-referrals)
- Reducing Parental Conflict Resources [Reducing Parental Conflict programme | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/reducing-parental-conflict)
- Support with school attendance [Schools | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/schools)
- Family Information Service [Family Services Directory | Bracknell Directory \(fsd.org.uk\)](http://fsd.org.uk/bracknell)
- Information on The Local Offer [Local Offer | Bracknell Directory \(fsd.org.uk\)](http://fsd.org.uk/local-offer)
- Refer to Homestart (for families with children under 5) [Home-Start Bracknell Forest | There for parents when they need us most, because childhood can't wait \(hsbf.org.uk\)](http://hsbf.org.uk)
- Support for Young Carers [Young carers | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/young-carers)
- Drug and Alcohol Support [Drugs and alcohol advice | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/drugs-and-alcohol)
- Mental Health Support [Mental health and wellbeing | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/mental-health)
- Cost of Living Support [Cost of living support | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](http://bracknell-forest.gov.uk/cost-of-living)

Follow us on Facebook – Bracknell Forest Family Hubs – for all information on our universal sessions, special events and Citizens Advise Appointments.

Early Help Assessment (EHA)

(For Unborn's, Children, Young People and Families)

Information to support completion of the Early Help Assessment

Early Help Assessment

Early Help Assessment is used to identify a child and family's needs and strengths, and to plan the right support and services to address those needs at an early stage. The process allows different agencies and services to share information and work together in a coordinated way. It is a way of working that aims to improve access and delivery of services to support children, young people, and families. For the right support to be provided it is important that an early help assessment with the family is completed prior to a referral being made to Early Help via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Consent

Early Help is voluntary and is about working alongside children, young people and their families to support them. A family must give their consent for Early Help before a referral can be made for targeted support. If you are unable to gain consent from the family, please discuss next steps with your designated safeguarding lead or equivalent.

Exceptional circumstances: significant harm to unborn, child or young person

If at any time during this assessment you feel that an unborn, child or young person has been harmed or abused, or is at risk of harm or abuse, you must follow your local safeguarding children partnership procedures. For Bracknell Forest these are set out in the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Partnership child protection procedures. [Click here for more information](#).

Before you complete the form please consider:

- The assessment should be completed with parents/carers, young people, and children.
- Ensure that the child's/young person's voice is captured and used to inform the assessment. Additional resources are available, [click here](#).
- Further guidance and copies of the assessment form are also available on the Bracknell Forest School Management site, [click here](#).

Once you have completed the form:

- Check you have the relevant signatures and consent to share information.
- Check you have provided your details so any agency may contact you to feedback or make further enquiries.
- Add any supporting documents e.g., academic information, specialist reports as appropriate and child's/young person's contributions should be included.
- Provide a copy to the family of the EHA.
- Send copies of the EHA to Early.Help@bracknell-forest.gov.uk as part of the action plan.
- Set a review date so progress can be monitored.
- Further information can be found at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/safeguarding



Part 1: Consent for information sharing and storage

We need to collect the information in this Early Help Assessment form so that we can understand what help you may need. If we cannot cover all your needs, we will need to share some of this information with other organisations specified below, or as agreed in 'Next Steps/Actions', so that they can help us to provide the services you need.

We will treat your information as confidential and we will not share it with any other organization unless we are required bylaw to share it, or unless you or any other person will come to some harm if we do not share it. In any case we will only share the minimum information we need to.

I/We understand the information that is recorded on this assessment and that it will be stored and used for the purpose of providing services to:

- ☐ Me/Us
☐ This/These unborn(s), child/ren or young person/people for when I/we am/are a parent/carer.

Retention statement:

I/We agree to the sharing of information as agreed between the services listed below and those agreed below, detailed above

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Services that information will be shared with: Please consider transition e.g., from primary to secondary school.

Next Education Setting/School:	
Other Services – please state:	

Part 2: Early Help Assessment

Assessment Information	
Family Name	
Date of assessment	
Proposed Review date	
Who is completing the assessment, role, agency and contact details	

What has led to the assessment being completed for the family?
Details

Who lives at the address? (Family Network) including children, siblings, parents/carers, and all people who live with the child												
Child's/Young Person's Address												
Subject child/ parent Full name/ AKA (1)	DOB (2)	Gender	Family relationship	Ethnicity/ first language	School or educational setting	Attendance (%)	EHCP/ SEND	Young carer (Y/N)	Child looked after (Y/N) (3)	Took part in assessment	Unique Pupil Number (UPN)	

1. 'Also Known As'

2 Expected Date of Delivery

3 Looked After by Local Authority

Who else is part of the family network that does not live at the address? (Aunts, uncles, friends)								
Parents/carers details Full name/AKA and any previous names. Include address and postcode and contact number	DOB	Relationship to Child	Parental responsibility (Y/N)	Recourse to Public Funds (Y/N)	Ethnicity and First language	Interpreter required Y/N	Religion	Disability

Professionals who are supporting the family		
Name and Role	Organisation and contact details (email/contact number)	Support being provided

Early Help Assessment			
Focus Areas	What is working well? Please consider from the point of view of child, young people, parent/ carer and professional.	What are we worried about?	What needs to happen? (SMART Actions)
Education and Learning (including SEN and under 5 development)			
Boundaries, behaviours, and routines			
Family relationships (including social networks and parental conflict)			
Keeping Safe (including domestic abuse, exploitation, and harm)			
Wellbeing (Including expectant and new parents)			
Emotional Needs (including children, parents/carers needs)			
Physical Health			
Home and Money			
Progress to work and future ambitions			
Substance Misuse (including alcohol and drugs, adults, and young people)			
What is the voice of the child/young person?			

Part 3: Early Help Family Plan

Early Help Family Plan				
Focus Areas	SMART Actions	Intended Impact	Lead	Due Date
Education and Learning (including SEN and under 5 development)				
Boundaries, behaviours, and routines				
Family relationships (including social networks and parental conflict)				
Keeping Safe (including domestic abuse, exploitation, and harm)				
Wellbeing (Including expectant and new parents)				
Emotional Needs (including children, parents/carers needs)				
Physical Health				
Home and Money				
Progress to work and future ambitions				
Substance Misuse (including alcohol and drugs, adults, and young people)				

Signatures			
I/We agree this review/assessment is accurate summary of my /our family's needs.			
Signatures			
Person	Signed	Name	Date
Child/Young Person			
Parent or Carer			
Professional Completing the form			

END OF EARLY HELP FAMILY PLAN

Part 4: Early Help Assessment Review (EHAR) *Half-Termly

(For Unborn's, Children, Young People and Families)

Early Help Assessment review	
Family Name	
Date of first assessment	
Date of review	
Lead professional, role, agency and contact details	

Who is taking part/supporting the review? (Including family and friends)			
Name	Role/Agency	Address	Contact Details

Review of progress since assessment	
What has gone well?	What are we worried about?

Review of Previous Actions and Current Actions					
Date of Action	Outcome and Action	Lead	Due Date	Progress and Impact	Completed

What are the next steps?	
Universal Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Continue with existing support. <input type="checkbox"/> Information, advice, and guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Programme's <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Abuse Support <input type="checkbox"/> Universal Youth Offer <input type="checkbox"/> Close Other:
Tier 2 Targeted Support (via MASH referral)	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Hub 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Support 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Young Carers Support <input type="checkbox"/> Education Welfare Service <input type="checkbox"/> Getting Help – (Team of Child Wellbeing Practitioners based within Early Help working) <input type="checkbox"/> Migration Team Other:
Other Support	

Next Review date of Early Help Assessment		Venue	
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Signatures			
I/We agree this review/assessment is accurate summary of my /our family's needs.			
Signatures			
Person	Signed	Name	Date
Child/Young Person			
Parent or Carer			
Professional Completing the form			

END OF REVIEW