

# Getting Help Early in Staffordshire

A strategy laying out how children and young people in Staffordshire can get access and support as soon as they need it



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## INTRODUCTION

The desire to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families is what unites our Children's Trust in Staffordshire and we know that by working in partnership we can make a big difference.

We are also united in our thinking around early intervention; we know that if our services identify the needs of children, young people and their families as soon as possible and take swift action to address those needs we could stop problems starting, getting worse or becoming entrenched. If problems worsen for children and young people they can start to influence every aspect of their lives. It is therefore important that every service and every professional has an interest in effective early intervention being in place.

Serious Case Review learning nationally and indeed locally has taught us that the more swiftly we recognise a child has problems, the quicker we take action. Furthermore, the better we work together and share information the more likely we are to avoid disastrous consequences for children. We know intervening early is the right approach to take.

We accept that orienting services towards early intervention is not easy, particularly during tough financial times, but there is evidence that it can be done. Some suggest that under the current economic circumstances early intervention is a luxury that cannot be afforded, but when early intervention is embedded it can relieve the pressure on services so a given level of resource is used to better effect. When the high costs of 'non-intervention' are compared to the significantly



lower costs of intervening early, it becomes clear that early intervention is often the better approach. In the long term early intervention can yield significant savings. Moreover, all the evidence suggests that no children's services system can be efficient unless early intervention is a significant part of the mix.

With this in mind we have laid out in this Early Intervention Strategy the **principles** and **processes** that we, the Children Trust, have all agreed to keep at the heart of our services and will be willing to be held to account to in doing so.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Prevention:** where services or interventions are intended to build skills and resilience and thus prevent problems arising. Prevention includes advice, support and anticipatory guidance at key life stages or transitions. This is a key role for universal services.

**Early Intervention:** means taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems that have already emerged for children, young people and their families.

**Early Years:** is a phrase used to describe the initial years of a child's life.



## WHAT IS EARLY INTERVENTION?

It is important to recognise that early intervention is not a single, one-off event but a process whereby:

- Children, young people and families' difficulties are **identified** before they have reached a point at which a child's development and well-being is seriously compromised.
- Having been identified early on, the scale and nature of these problems are properly understood and a plan for offering help is developed through a process of high quality **assessment**, and
- Children, young people and families are then offered the **help** they need, in line with those assessments, accept it, and then either overcome their difficulties or they are offered and accept longer term support to help manage them.

Early intervention is a key part of a wider continuum of services and will work along side universal services. For early intervention to be successful each stage of the process must be carried out well and followed through by every person who works with children, young people and families and has an individual responsibility for early intervention.

Early intervention in Staffordshire is about professionals working in an integrated and multi-agency way and delivering services in the right locations based on the needs of that local area.

## PRINCIPLES

Early identification in Staffordshire is underpinned by the following key principles. All services in the partnership have agreed to embed these principles into their organisational culture.

- **Children, young people and their families are at the centre of everything we do and interventions and services are shaped and delivered around them. To ensure this we will:**
  - listen to the views of children, young people and their families to understand their needs
  - build services around the needs of children and young people, not around professional or service boundaries
  - design services to be flexible to adapt and react to changing needs/demands.
  
- **Any service or individual presented with a child's unmet need should take action or invoke the help of others; everyone has a responsibility to act and to ensure this we will:**
  - use the Common Assessment Framework to provide a one-model, one-process way of working which should be at the heart of all other assessments
  - safely share information between services to avoid duplication where appropriate and purposeful to do so
  - use interventions which are based around what we know works and have a proven evidence base ensuring the right person is available at the right time
  - provide good, clear information about services to help families access advice and guidance about emerging difficulties at the appropriate level



- work in a co-ordinated and integrated way.
  
- **Early intervention is core to the work of every mainstream service and as such investment and resource should be reoriented into early intervention. To ensure this happens we will:**
  - shift services to early identification and intervention to improve safeguarding
  - endeavor to make the children's workforce skilled in identifying, assessing and swiftly responding to unmet need.
  
- **Success is measured based on outcomes achieved for young people. To ensure this happens we will:**
  - understand what matters to children, young people and families and ensure measures are in place to drive continuous improvement
  - ensure that the journey the child, young person or family make is both empowering and sustained.



## PROCESSES

In Staffordshire we talk about a ‘Continuum of Need Assessment and Action’ as illustrated in Appendix 1. The ‘Continuum’ represents a seamless approach to service delivery which meets the changing needs of children, young people and their families. There are four segments of the continuum:

Level	Need	Descriptor of need (for a full guide of indicators see appendix 1)	Example of typical service response	Example of assessment
1	Universal need	Children who are enjoying general well-being, accessing education and health services and maintaining good overall progress in all areas of development	Universal services including: Schools Children’s Centre’s Youth Clubs/Youth Projects	Screening tools SATs Health screening Risk tools
2	Additional need	Children who have an identified, singular need whose health, development and/or learning are starting to be adversely affected as a result	Family Support Outreach Support Targeted Youth Support Behaviour Support	Pre CAF
3	Multiple need	Children who have numerous needs, who as a result are not maintaining satisfactory health, development and/or learning and who are increasingly vulnerable. <i>(including Children in Need as defined by S17 of the Children Act 1989)</i>	Autism Outreach G8Way Workers Portage Workers Education Welfare Parent Support Workers	Full CAF
4	Acute need	Children in crisis, with complex, acute and often long term need, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where parents refuse or are consistently not able to co-operate</li> <li>• children who have complex disabilities</li> <li>• parental resistance and lack of support mechanisms which results in children suffering or likely to be suffering significant harm</li> <li>• children who are offending and subject to a court order</li> <li>• children who have serious unmet enduring health, development and/or learning needs</li> </ul> <i>(including Children in Need as defined by S17 of the Children Act 1989)</i>	Youth Offending Service Short Stay School Disability Services Safeguarding Units Looked After Children Services Attendance Prosecution	Initial Assessments Core Assessments SEN Assessments

**Level 2 and 3 represent early intervention in response to an individual need.** To enable children, young people and families to receive a seamless service all Children's Trust partners have agreed to operate the following processes to make early intervention happen in practice.

The **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)** is a key part of delivering frontline services that are integrated and are focused around the needs of children and young people. The CAF is a standardised approach to conducting an assessment of a child's additional needs and deciding how these should be met. The CAF promotes more effective, earlier identification of additional needs particularly in universal services. It aims to provide a simple process for a holistic assessment of child's needs and strengths, taking account of the roles of parents, carers and environmental factors on their development. Practitioners are then better placed to agree with children and families about appropriate modes of support. The CAF also aims to improve integrated working by promoting coordinated service provisions.

Where a multi-agency response is required, the formation of a **Team around the Child (TAC)** is needed. A TAC brings together practitioners from across different services that work together to co-ordinate and deliver an integrated package of solution focused support to meet the needs identified during the common assessment process. It is important that the child or young person and parents/carers are also included as part of the TAC.

The **Lead Professional** is the person responsible for co-ordinating the actions identified in the assessment process. They act as a single point of contact for children and young people with additional needs who are supported by more than one practitioner within a TAC.

The **Common Assessment and Delivery Plan** is regularly reviewed by the TAC to monitor progress towards agreed outcomes. The review identifies any unmet or additional needs for the child or young person's smooth transition between universal, targeted and specialist services. In the case of multi-agency responses, this will involve further multi-agency meetings and liaison between the members of the TAC.

The objective of the **Information Sharing Protocol** is to facilitate sharing of all personal, sensitive and non-personal data between the public, private and voluntary sectors so that members of the public receive the services they need.

The **Critical Pathway** is a process that ensures children, young people and families have the appropriate support at the appropriate time against the Continuum of Need Framework, including the escalation and de-escalation protocols.

The process has been endorsed by Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) and forms part of the safeguarding 'Working Together' guidance.

This can be found at: [www.staffsscb.org.uk/procedures](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/procedures)



Further information on the above can be found at:

<http://www.staffordshirechildrenstrust.org.uk/caf/>  
(Information Page)

<http://www.staffordshirechildrenstrust.org.uk/caf/professionals/caf/forms/> (Forms)

## HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES

By adopting these principles and processes across all of our services in the Children's Trust we expect children, young people and families to receive the right support at the right time. There will be:

- Fewer children, young people and families needing expensive high tier services (measured by the number of referrals to specialist services)
- Fewer severe problems (measured by the number of referrals with a primary need; the number of families in acute distress or family dysfunction)
- A narrowing of the gap between populations of children, young people and families (measured by Staffordshire Child Poverty Indicators, the proportion of children in poverty)
- Improved uptake and engagement with universal and targeted services (tier 1,2 ,3 and 4, measured by the number of CAFs)
- A reduction of Children in Need of Child Protection measured by the number voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1984
- Improved satisfaction about services (measured by the number of related customer compliments and complaints and service evaluations)
- Empowered and self-reliant communities (measured by re-referral rates)

**As part of this protocol each of the services that form the Children's Trust will embed these principles and processes into the culture of their service and be willing to be held to account by other Children's Trust services in doing so.**

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – The Continuum of Need, Assessment and Action

