



Stoke-on-Trent

**Guide to Levels of Need
Early Help and Safeguarding
Threshold Criteria
2016**

FINAL

Updated 10 June 2016

Introduction

The Guide to Levels of Need sets out what is meant by ‘early help’ and safeguarding in Stoke-on-Trent and how we ensure good, co-ordinated support for vulnerable families is put in place at the earliest opportunity.

This guide is aimed at those people working with children and young people who live or go to school in Stoke-on-Trent. It will enable professionals and practitioners to support families to get the right help at the right time, and provide early help to prevent problems reaching a level at which Children’s Social Care intervention is needed.

This guide is not a directory of the wide range of services and help available. You will be able to obtain this detailed information by contacting

Cooperative Working	01782 232200	CW@stoke.gov.uk
---------------------	--------------	--

For other useful contact numbers please see *Appendix 1*.

Working Together 2015 guidance on early help

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 the foundation years through to the teenage years. For example; midwives and health visitors are involved with a family before and after a child is born, and therefore are in key positions to identify a need and initiate an early help assessment.

Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care.

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; and
- 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 **section 10 of the Children Act 2004**, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of children.

Things to consider when using the Guide to Levels of Need

1. The Guide to Levels of Need does not replace professional judgement or decision making and cannot be used as a checklist or an assessment of need.
2. The Early Help Co-coordinator is available to offer support and advice around all aspects of early help
3. Children, young people and their families rarely fall neatly into one level.

4. The practitioner should consider which of the presenting issues should take priority when identifying the appropriate level of need.
5. Families may not always remain at a fixed position on the Guide to Levels of Need - this could alter as their needs and circumstances change.
6. The lines between each level are not always clear, and there will always be room for different interpretations.
7. The Guide to Levels of Need will provide a framework for professional thinking and communicating with other partner agencies, assessing presenting concerns, analysing the information that has been gathered and using professional judgement.
8. It is always best practice to work in partnership with families and discuss your concerns with the appropriate family members, before obtaining consent to contact Children's Social Care. However, the exception to this would be:
 - where you think this would place a child, young person or adult at risk of harm;
 - prejudice the prevention or detection of a crime; or
 - cause a significant delay in making a child protection referral.
9. If you have concerns about a child/young person's welfare and are unsure as to whether Children's Social Care involvement is required, you should contact Cooperative Working 01782 232200 or the locality social workers for advice and support.

North Locality Social Workers:	01782 237677 07827 281639 07717 892744
Central Locality Social Worker:	01782 238352 07826 891800
South Locality Social Worker:	01782 237520 07771 508475

10. If you have concerns that a child is suffering from, or likely to suffer from significant harm, then you should make a referral to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team without delay.

Safeguarding Referral Team (Office hours)	01782 235100
Emergency Duty Team (Out of office hours)	01782 234234

How do we identify those families who are in need of early help?

Local agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children, young people and families. This requires all professionals including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other professionals to support early identification and assessment.

Within universal services, children and young people may have some relatively minor additional needs, or they may display signs which require a professional from a universal service to identify, intervene and implement the appropriate level of early help to prevent further escalation of need.

It is paramount that professionals share their knowledge with each other regarding those families who are in need of additional support. This will enable the most appropriate intervention and support to be provided in order to achieve positive outcomes.

Each level provides an opportunity for interventions to be “stepped up” or “stepped down”, according to the family’s need.

Be mindful that where there are immediate safeguarding concerns professionals must contact either the Police or Children’s Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.

Click on the link to view SOT SCB Procedure [C01 Making a Referral](#).

1 Universal Services are available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required and the family is doing well with no concerns about health and development, parenting capacity and environmental factors.

2 Universal Services with additional support: Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services. *(An early help assessment is not required at this level; (i.e. Universal Services with some additional support), however it is the responsibility of each agency to record on their own agency paperwork the additional support that has been put in place).*

3 Early Help:

If the family’s needs are more complex and cannot be met at the previous level, then an early help assessment will be required to co-ordinate multi- agency professional intervention and support. An early help assessment should be led by your agency and registered *with the Early Help Co-ordinator (see appendix 2). Consent needs to be gained from the family.*

If the Early Help Plan is still not able to meet the family's needs, you must contact the Cooperative Working or the locality social workers for additional advice and guidance.

Prior to referrals being made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team, consultation must be held with Cooperative Working or the locality social worker unless an immediate safeguarding referral is required.

4 Safeguarding

If the risks and unmet needs cannot be resolved through Early Help intervention and support, then advice should be sought from the locality social worker as to whether the threshold for a safeguarding referral is met.

If there is an immediate risk of harm then the Police should be contacted. If a risk of significant harm is identified then a referral must be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team. **There is an expectation that Families will be informed of all referrals, and their consent will be gained unless to do so would:**

- place a child or adult at risk of significant harm;
- prejudice the prevention or detection of a crime; or
- cause a significant delay in making a child protection referral.

Significant Harm: According to [Working Together 2015](#), significant harm refers to “the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children, and gives LAs a duty to make enquiries to decide whether they should take action to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child who is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm”.

For reference, the areas of safeguarding highlighted below are all within level 4.

Child in Need: Children who have highly complex needs and will be experiencing compromised parenting. There is a significant risk of family breakdown or they are likely to suffer significant harm but where that risk can be managed on a Child in Need Plan with engagement from all appropriate agencies.

Child Protection – this level applies to children who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and require Children's Social Care involvement in order to ensure that children are protected from harm. A Child Protection plan is required. Local authority social workers have a statutory duty to lead assessments under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Child in Care – this level applies to children who are looked after by the local authority. This could include extended family or children and young people involved in criminal proceedings and remanded into secure accommodation.

Guide to Levels of Need - Early Help and Safeguarding 2016



Child / Young Person's Development Needs

		Child / Young Person's Development Needs			
Health	Level 1 Universal Services Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services.	Level 3 Early Help If your agency with additional support <u>is not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i> .	Significant Harm	Level 4 Safeguarding If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
	All physical needs met. Physically well.	Persistent minor health problems.	Severe/chronic health problems.		Severe/chronic health problems and appropriate services not being accessed. Life threatening health problems.
	Adequate diet/good hygiene/clothing.	Emerging minor concerns regarding diet/hygiene/clothing. Limited diet	Escalating concerns regarding hygiene, clothing. Problematic diet e.g.no breakfast, lunch, obesity, faltering growth.		Regularly unfed. Severe health effects from problematic diet. Very unclean/dirty, clothing smells.
	Meeting developmental milestones. Developmental checks/immunisations up to date; health appointments kept.	Slow in reaching developmental milestones. Starting to default on appointments.	Slow in reaching developmental milestones. Non-attendance for appointments.		Developmental milestones unlikely to be met.
	Speech and language development appropriate.	Emerging speech and language difficulties.	Failure to access / engage with some speech and language services.		Significant impact of not accessing or engaging with speech and language.
	Routine medical appointments, including dental and optical care are attended as required.	Defaulting on routine medical appointments, including dental and optical appointments.	Medical appointments not being made when required and dental and optical concerns not being met.		Significant deterioration of medical condition including dental and optical treatment.
	Sexual awareness and activity appropriate for age.	Emerging concerns around sexual activity and awareness.	Increasing risk of vulnerability from sexual activity and awareness (incl. teenage pregnancy) Episodes of missing from home/care.		Sexual exploitation/abuse. Episodes of regular and prolonged missing from home/care.
	Good state of mental health and emotional wellbeing.	Emerging concerns around mental health and emotional well-being.	Concerns around mental ill health not being met. Failure to access support and services.		Serious mental health issues. Serious risk to self or others. Sustained bouts of depression /self-harm. Threats of suicide or self-harm - (urgent contact with CAMHS)
	No use or exposure to substances.	Exposure to substances which impact on health and development.	Exposure to problematic substance use. Experimental use by adolescent.		Problematic and chaotic use of substances which impact significantly on the health and well-being of the child. Class A drug use or daily use of any substance by an adolescent.

Chids / Young Person's Development Needs

	Level 1 Universal Services	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support	Level 3 Early Help		Level 4 Safeguarding
	Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required	Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services.	If your agency with additional support is <u>not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i> .		If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
Learning and Education	Success/achievement. Reaching educational potential	Not thought to be reaching educational potential. Some identified learning needs that require school-based support	Identified learning needs that are not being met. Evidence of non-engagement with appropriate support		
	Regular school attendance and good punctuality	Emerging pattern of irregular school attendances	Patterns of irregular school attendance. Some fixed term exclusions. Permanent exclusion. High percentage of non-attendance		Repeated permanent school exclusion. Permanent school exclusion with other risk factors
	Age appropriate cognitive development. Positive and stimulating environment	Reduced access to books/toys. Not always engaged in learning, e.g. poor concentration, low motivation and interest	No access to leisure activities/stimulation. No interests/skills displayed		Denied access to stimulation along with other risk factors
	Sound home – school link	Home – school link not well established.	Home – school link failing.		
	Planned progression beyond statutory education	Limited progression into education, employment or training post 16	No planned progression into education, employment or training post 16		
	Free early education entitlement (all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds)	Not accessing early years funded places – Please note: Not accessing a free place does not automatically mean that additional support is required. This depends on the individual family situation. Accessing a free place is a parental choice as the child has not reached statutory school age	Impact of not accessing the 2, 3 or 4 year old free entitlement should be considered as part of the Early Help		
Emotional and Behavioural Development	Good mental health and wellbeing	Mild to moderate mental health needs	Child has sustained and persistent mental health needs		Child has highly complex needs requiring multi agency response co-ordinated by Children's Social Care
	Good quality attachment with caregivers	Disrupted attachment due to parental or child factors. Can be overfriendly or withdrawn with strangers	Disruptive/challenging behaviour by parent or child linked to poor attachment		Dysfunctional attachment between parent and child leading to significant harm
	Behavioural difficulties well managed	Emerging difficulties around managing challenging/disruptive behaviour	Challenging / disruptive behaviour impacting on daily life, achievement and relationships etc.		Challenging / disruptive behaviour putting others or self in danger
	Feelings and actions demonstrate appropriate responses. Able to adapt to change	Some difficulties with peer group relationships and adults. Evidence of inappropriate responses and actions. Dislikes change	Acrimonious relationships with peers and adults. Difficulties coping with anger, frustration, upset and change		Regularly involved in anti-social/criminal activities/ drug and alcohol misuse along with other risk factors

Significant Harm

Child / Young Person's Development Needs						
	Level 1 Universal Services	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support	Level 3 Early Help	Significant Harm	Level 4 Safeguarding	
	Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required	Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services.	If your agency with additional support is <u>not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i> .			If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
Identity	Positive sense of self and abilities. An ability to express needs	Some insecurities around identity expressed, e.g. low self-esteem	Subject to discrimination e.g. racial, sexual or due to disabilities. Demonstrates significantly low self-esteem			Experiences persistent discrimination e.g. based on ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. Distorted self-image
	No young caring responsibilities within family network	Some appropriate responsibility for providing care for others	Caring responsibilities impacting on daily life, achievement and relationships etc.			High level of caring task impacting on life chances and emotional well-being
	Good relationship with siblings	Has some difficulties sustaining relationships	Some level of risk to or from siblings			Family breakdown related to child's behavioural difficulties
	Positive relationships with peers	Has some difficulties sustaining relationships with peers	Peers also involved in challenging behaviour. Missing school or leisure activities. Isolated from peers			Isolation affecting development or increasing risk of exploitation. No access to appropriate peer group
	Family support child in development of self-identity. Child happy with self.	Family struggling to accept child's self-identity. Limited self-acceptance	Family very negative about child's developing self-identity. Child socially excluded			Family's negative response to child's self-identity impacting significantly on child's well-being
	Able to make safe choices	Potentially vulnerable to extremism, radicalisation, gang involvement	Vulnerable to extremism, radicalisation, gang involvement			Evidence of gang involvement, including youth violence, child sexual exploitation, and other criminal activities directly linked to gang membership
Social Presentation	Appropriate dress for different settings	Inappropriately dressed for settings or seasonal weather	Presentation leads to isolation from peer groups and is impacting on development			Presentation is significantly impacting on development or leading to severe isolation
	Good level of personal hygiene	Level of hygiene causing concern	Poor hygiene manifesting in physical difficulties (e.g. sores)			Experiencing significant issues or clear impairments. No engagement with services to address concerns
Self-Care	Growing levels of confidence in practical and emotional skills, appropriate to age and development; feeding, dressing, independent living skills	Appears to be lacking appropriate self-care skills for age and development	Carer expectations or living circumstances not age or developmentally appropriate. Inappropriate young caring responsibility		Child or young person neglects to use self-care skills due to alternative priorities or parental factors such mental health or substance misuse	

Parenting Capacity					
	Level 1 Universal Services	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support	Level 3 Early Help		Level 4 Safeguarding
	Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required.	Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services.	If your agency with additional support is <u>not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i> .		If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
Basic Care	Provide for children's physical needs; food, drink, appropriate clothing, medical and dental care	Basic care is not provided consistently	Parent consistently not meeting basic care needs. Parent resistant to change; failing to engage and sustain engagement with services that could assist in meeting child's needs	Significant Harm	Parents unable to provide "good enough" parenting that is adequate and safe
	Parenting history that provides evidence of supportive and positive parenting	Parental history beginning to impact on care of own children	Parental history impacting on ability to care for child		Parental history impacting significantly on ability to care for child
	Parents meeting own health needs	Parents failing to attend to own health needs	Parents' failure to attend to health needs impacting on child or unborn child		Unmet health needs of parents significantly impacting on child or unborn child
	No parenting issues identified	Parent requires advice/referral for parenting issues	Parent is struggling to provide adequate care. No improvement despite advice/referral for early help services at level 2		Parenting significantly impacting on child's well-being and safety. Parents unable to care for previous children
Ensuring Safety	Able to protect from danger or significant harm in the home and elsewhere	Some exposure to dangerous situations in home/community. Parental stresses starting to affect ability to ensure child's safety	Perceived to be a problem by parent. Family coming to the attention of agencies due to risk. Parents not acknowledging risk or responding to advice and support, e.g. child left with inappropriate caregivers; witnessing substance misuse		Instability and risk in the home continually. Parental lifestyle exposing child to significant risk. Lack of response to early help intervention leading to increased risk. Failure to report episodes of missing from home/care
					Highly vulnerable children – unaccompanied asylum seekers; risk of homelessness; exploitation. Children whose families have no recourse to public funds
Emotional Warmth	Shows warm regard, praise and encouragement	Inconsistent responses to child by parents. Emerging attachment difficulties	Erratic/inconsistent care leading to negative impact on child. Parental instability affects capacity to nurture		Parents inconsistent, highly critical or apathetic towards child or pregnancy
	Able to develop positive relationships	Parent appears to be isolated in the community	Inability to retain positive relationships		Parental isolation impacting significantly on child's emotional development

Parenting Capacity						
	Level 1 Universal Services	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support	Level 3 Early Help	Significant Harm	Level 4 Safeguarding	
	Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required.	Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services.	If your agency with additional support <u>is not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i> .			If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
Stimulation	Facilitates cognitive development through interaction and play	Limited development and failure to access universal services	Not receiving positive stimulation - lack of new experiences and activities. Engagement with support not sustained. Not attending pre-school setting			Child development adversely affected by lack of stimulation and support
Guidance and Boundaries	Appropriate guidance and boundaries consistently in place	Appropriate guidance and boundaries lacking or inconsistent	Absence of appropriate guidance or boundaries putting child at risk. Child experiencing difficulties or putting themselves at risk in other settings			No effective boundaries or guidance set by parents placing child at significant risk. Beyond parental control
Stability						Parental threats of suicide or severe harm (contact Adult Mental Health Access Team via CAMHS including out of hours service)
	Consistent parenting leading to secure attachment	Parental stress beginning to influence on their ability to prioritise their child's needs.	Frequent change of care-giver leading to instability. Lack of focus on child Parents' not prioritising child's needs due to significant / sustained parental stresses		Parent not prioritising child's needs above their own, significantly impacting on child	

Family and Environmental Factors				
	Level 1 Universal Services Service available to all families in Stoke-on-Trent. No additional support is required	Level 2 Universal Services with Additional Support Your agency is able to meet the needs of the family with the additional support of other services	Level 3 Early Help If your agency with additional support is <u>not able to meet these needs</u> , an early help assessment should be completed by your agency and registered <i>with the Early Help Co-ordinator</i>	Level 4 Safeguarding If there are significant concerns identified then a referral needs to be made to Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team.
Family History	Good relationship with family, including where parents are separated	Child not able to access full range of family relationships. Acrimonious divorce/separation.	Dysfunctional relationships between family members.	Significant parental discord e.g. domestic violence or serious physical or mental health difficulties. Substance misuse
				Honour Based Violence
				Forced Marriage
				Female Genital Mutilation
Wider Family	Sense of larger family network. Good relationships outside the family	Family has poor relationship with extended family/little communication.	No effective support from extended family.	Destructive involvement from extended family including significant risk. Private fostering arrangement
Housing, Employment and Income	Accommodation has basic amenities and appropriate facilities	Poor state of repair, temporary overcrowding.	Physical accommodation impacting on child health and parents taking no action. Family at risk of becoming homeless (intentionally or other)	Physical accommodation places child in danger and experiencing significant neglect. Family at immediate risk of homelessness
	Parents are able to manage the working or unemployment arrangements and do not perceive them as unduly stressful	Parents stressed due to overworking or unemployment	Chronic unemployment that has severely affected child and parent's aspirations and engagement with education and employment	Parents criminal activity
	Reasonable income over time, with resources used appropriately to meet individual needs	Poor allocation of funds and resources that impact on child. Poor debt management	Serious debts/poverty impact on ability to have basic needs met Lack of take-up of benefits and available resources	Extreme poverty/debt impacting on ability to care for child. Family requires emergency financial assistance. No access to public funds
Social Integration and Community Resources	Family feels integrated into the community	Some tension exists preventing the family feeling fully integrated into the community	Family socially excluded and / or vulnerable in the community, e.g. are experiencing frequent or persistent anti-social behaviour or hate crime	
	Good social network exists	Limited support network	No supportive network	Family experiencing frequent or persistent anti-social behaviour / hate crime / racists incidents which is having a significant impact on family well-being
	Good use of available universal services in the neighbourhood	Poor use of available universal services in the neighbourhood	Lack of access to universal services impacting on family	Extreme social isolation

Significant Harm

Useful Contact Details

Cooperative Working	01782 232200 CW@stoke.gov.uk
Early Help Co-ordinator	01782 231964 / 236334 early.help@stoke.gov.uk
Locality Social Workers North	01782 237677 07827 281639 07717 892744
Locality Social Worker Central	01782 238352 07826 891800
Locality Social Worker South	01782 237520 07771 508475
Children's Social Care, Safeguarding Referral Team (office hours)	01782 235100
Emergency Duty Team (out of office hours)	01782 234234
Safeguarding Children Board website	Early Help (click on the link)

Role of the Early Help Co-ordinator

In Stoke-on-Trent there is an Early Help Co-ordinator, who holds a register of all the children who have, or have ever had an Early Help Assessment.

You can contact the Early Help Co-ordinator to:-

- obtain support and advice about Early Help Assessments'
- find out if there is already an assessment in place for a child in Stoke-on-Trent.
- register that you have started an Early Help Assessment.
- log that the parents have refused an assessment.
- notify a change of lead worker.
- notify when an assessment has been closed.

Early Help Co-ordinator	01782 231964 / 236334 early.help@stoke.gov.uk
-------------------------	---

Role of the Early Help Champion

All agencies should have a named Early Help Champion, whose role it is to ensure that early help is being used appropriately in their agency and to support staff to undertake Early Help Assessments. (Click on the link to view a list of [Early Help Champions](#)).

Role of the Lead Worker

In some agencies, the Early Help Champion will act as the lead worker for an Early Help Assessment. However, any professional can undertake an Early Help Assessment providing that the family consent to this.

The most appropriate professional to undertake the Early Help Assessment is someone who has regular contact with the child/ren and has a relationship with them and their family. An Early Help Assessment is a holistic approach in identifying a family's needs and the support that is necessary to address their presenting needs.

The Lead Worker will be responsible for:-

- undertaking the Early Help Assessment with the family;
- ensuring that the Early Help Assessment considers both the needs and strengths of all family members;
- engaging with other agencies and professionals to provide the support required that has been identified through the Early Help Assessment; and
- co-ordinating the Early Help Plan with the family, ensuring there is no duplication and that the support is manageable for the family.

All agencies/professionals will be responsible for:-

- providing the support that it identified through the Early Help Assessment;
- being flexible about the duration and intensity of support provided based on the needs of the family;
- offering practical 'hands on' support;
- challenging family members where it is necessary, so that things can improve for them in the long term; and
- not giving up on families easily and persisting, even when things are difficult.