Early Help in Birmingham

What do we mean by Early Help?

Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, as soon as it emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child’s life from pre-birth to adulthood, and applies to any problem or need that the family cannot deal with or meet on their own. It also applies to all children and young people, with any form of need.

Early Help requires that agencies should work together as soon as a problem emerges or a need is identified to ensure the child gets the right response, and the right services, from the right people at the right time. Our aim is to meet need early and avoid a problem escalating or the need increasing.

Early Help is provided to prevent or reduce the need for specialist interventions unless they are absolutely the correct response to meet the need and resolve the problem.

Early Help can be provided in the most complex of circumstances as well as the simplest. Early help means responding promptly if a child is at immediate risk of harm (or has other significant or complex needs) as much as it means responding to a need which only requires advice or guidance.

The key steps

There are 4 key steps to providing early help:

1. **SEE** - identify that there is a possible issue, problem or need and find out more – from the child or young person, their parents or carers, and other professionals and agencies who know the child as necessary.

2. **PLAN** - assess the need and plan with the child, young person and their parents or carers, alongside other professionals as necessary how best to meet that need.

3. **DO** - agree who will lead the plan, implement the plan together, commission or provide the service (s).

4. **REVIEW** - review progress, change the plan, change services or withdraw because the help is no longer needed.
The key principles

- Universal services support every child to meet their full potential - they stay involved even if early help is needed
- Every professional has a responsibility to identify or see the need for early help and to act accordingly – if more than one agency needs to be involved they must work together to assess it, respond appropriately depending on the identified needs, and provide services as necessary
- Decisions are reached through having conversations with each other as well as the child, or young person and their family
- Decisions focus on the best response to meet the needs of the child
- The tools, processes and protocols followed are there to support professionals to have the right conversations, use the right information and make child focussed decisions, rather than as an end in themselves

The Birmingham Basics

This provides the basic code of conduct for all staff regardless of their profession when working with children, young people and their families.

Right Service, Right Time

Early help can be provided to any child, young person and family who need that help. However there are different types of need expressed. The assessed need determines the type of response. Right Service, Right Time is there to help professionals identify the types of response they should provide. A range of vulnerabilities (such as those listed in Working Together, for example children with disabilities, children whose parents are struggling to parent because of poverty, poor housing, or their own problems etc.) can make it more likely that professionals have to provide those early help services because parental capacity to parent well and solve their own problems is compromised. Any front line professional who has concerns about a child and their family can provide early help and should do so as necessary.  

1 This statement sets out clearly what is meant by ‘Early Help’ in Birmingham. It has been agreed by all the organisations in the City working with children, young people and their families in the City through the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board

It should be read in conjunction with the City’s policy document and needs model “Right Service, Right Time – Meeting Children’s Needs” and Chapter 1 of the Statutory Guidance, “Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015” It should also be used with the attached flow chart still to be finalised
It is mandatory for staff working with children, young people and families in the local authority (all Departments) the NHS, West Midlands Police, the Probation Service, all types of school, early years settings and any organisation commissioned by a public sector organisation, to provide relevant services when a need for early help is identified.