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Introduction

This Early Help Handbook is a resource to support the delivery of early help work with children, young people and families carried out by practitioners.

It is a desktop guide aimed at practitioners that will:

- clarify the role and responsibilities of practitioners in Early Help;
- outline the help and support available to practitioners in Early Help;
- show the pathways and processes around Early Help.

This handbook is a working document that will be continually updated to include any changes around the current Early Help assessments and processes that are under review.
**Background and Context to Early Help**

Early Help is an approach to working with families to ensure that support needs are identified and assessed at the earliest opportunity. Effective Early Help requires all practitioners to act early, appropriately and assertively, supported by a clear pathway to services and interventions.

Developing a clear pathway to Early Help, which represents a whole system approach to working with children, young people and families, is a key priority in Manchester. The strategic approach is outlined in the Early Help strategy (2013) and supported through the Thresholds document developed by Manchester Safeguarding children’s board (MSCB). Access the full versions of these documents [here](#).

The overarching statutory framework is summarised in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013), which can be accessed [here](#).

Effective Early Help relies on local agencies working together:

- To identify children and families who would benefit from Early Help;
- Undertake an assessment of the need for Early Help;
- Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve outcomes for the child.

Under Section 10 of the Children’s Act (2004), local authorities have a responsibility to improve the welfare of children:

> “Each local authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the authority, each of the authority’s relevant partners and such other persons or bodies working with children in the local authority’s area as the local authority considers appropriate”.

Working Together (2013) also states that:

> “the LSCB has the responsibility to publish a threshold document which includes early help. In order for an LSCB to fulfil its statutory functions under regulation 5, an LSCB should assess the effectiveness of Early Help being provided to children and families”.

The current strategy articulates an approach to Early Help underpinned by the following principles:

- Early Help is about empowering families to achieve economic independence, enabling them to retain control of their lives and preventing escalation to enhanced or specialist services;
• Early Help is about maintaining a family focus and recognizing how problems that adults experience can impact on the whole family;
• Early Help requires a commitment to multi-agency working, a consistent application of thresholds and the use of a single assessment.

This handbook aims to outline the support available to practitioners delivering Early Help to continue to promote these principles.
The role and responsibilities of practitioners in Early Help

- **To deliver Early Help**

Regardless of your organisation or agency, every practitioner has a role and responsibility to deliver Early Help. **If you do any work with a child, family or young person you deliver Early Help.**

The delivery of Early Help itself is the responsibility of all practitioners across local agencies, and the local authority provides support to do this which is outlined in this handbook (pages 6 – 8).

- **To monitor or record the progress of their early help work**

Using the MCAF is a way for practitioners to do this. It is a useful tool to assess the strengths and needs of a child, family or young person which is the purpose of section 2 of the MCAF. It is also a tool to monitor and review the progress of the work you are doing with the child, family or young person which is the purpose of section 3 of the MCAF. By using the MCAF tool practitioners are also able to identify if there are any further needs that may emerge through an assessment.

- **To work effectively with other agencies**

As outlined previously, the Local Authority has a statutory duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure there are arrangements to promote inter-agency cooperation between all agencies working with children. However, it is the responsibility of all local agencies to ensure this is practically happening both in and between services and organisations.

One of the MCAF’s benefits is it helps this inter-agency working by emphasising Team around the Child meetings. A benefit of using the MCAF when working with a child, family or young person is that practitioners can monitor and record these meetings to make sure all agencies are working towards helping effectively meet the needs.

- **To inform the LA of their early help work**

By using the MCAF tool and sending a copy to the Early Help Team via email the Local Authority is aware of the early help work being delivered by partners in the city. This can then be used to inform any further tools that need to be developed to support partners to do this. The process of sending the MCAF sections via email is under review, however currently it is required that all sections of the MCAF are sent in; most importantly section 1 which is the registration part of the tool with basic details of the assessment, and section 4 which is the closure part of the tool with information about why the MCAF has been closed.
Manchester’s Early Help Offer

The delivery of Early Help is dependent on partners working with children, families and young people to identify their strengths and needs and help them to meet those needs. This is sometimes defined as Manchester’s “Early Help Offer”.

To support partners in the effective identification of needs and delivery of Early Help, Manchester has developed the role of the Early Help Team, Early Help Advice Line, Early Help Training and the Family Service Directory.

There are also a number of existing universal and targeted services, which are key to the delivery of Early Help; for example, Health Visiting and Sure Start Children’s Centres. For full up to date contact details and information about these services, please visit the Family Service Directory.

Early Help Team

To support the effective coordination of Early Help in Manchester, the Early Help team now includes a dedicated Early Help Coordinator for each SRF area. The role of the Early Help Coordinator is to:

• Offer information, advice and support around services to support children, young people and their families;

• Provide support and advice with the Early Help assessment process including multi-agency meetings;

• Deliver training and develop resources to support practitioners with identifying needs and delivering support;

• Support the coordination of the Early Help offer and the development of partnership working at an SRF area level;

• Support the development of the Early Help Directory and ensure that families and those working with them are able to access the full range of Early Help services and interventions in one place.

The Early Help Coordinators are supported by Early Help Advisers, who provide support with the assessment process, attend multi agency meetings, offer information and advice on services and engage with families.
Early Help Coordinator Contact Details

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<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Pauline Ibsen</td>
<td>07939 998 172</td>
<td><a href="mailto:p.ibsen@manchester.gov.uk">p.ibsen@manchester.gov.uk</a></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wythenshawe</td>
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<td>07795 447 545</td>
<td><a href="mailto:s.tran@manchester.gov.uk">s.tran@manchester.gov.uk</a></td>
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Early Help Advice line

The Early Help Advice line **0161 234 5969** is aimed at practitioners. It is available weekdays 9am to 4pm, with an answer phone available at other times. The helpline can be contacted if you are working with a child, family or young person and have enquiries about Early Help and the services available to them. Support can be offered around undertaking the MCAF (Early Help Assessment), checking if an MCAF has already been registered and helping you to find information on the Family Service Directory. This support is also available via email; cafit@manchester.gov.uk.

Early Help Training

Early Help training is multi-agency training for practitioners which seeks to reflect the needs of practitioners, including guidance on the Early Help Assessment (MCAF). It covers:

- when to undertake an assessment with a family, child or young person;
- the role of the Lead Professional;
- the importance of person-centred approaches and outcome focused action planning.

The training also gives a wider overview and understanding of the Early Help Offer, such as the role of the Family Service Directory.

**Click here** for dates of the next courses and to book a place online.
**Early Help Directory**

The Family Service Directory (FSD) is an online directory of the services available for the children, families and young people of Manchester. It can be accessed at [Family Service Directory](#). A step by step guide on how to use the FSD is available on page 16.

Feedback from partners has informed us they need more accessible information about local services and interventions when working with families to ensure an effective Early Help response.

A new area "[Early Help Offer for Practitioners](#)" has been added to the FSD to pull together information about services and interventions to address family support needs in one place. The services have been grouped by the following categories, which reflect the recurring themes identified through MCAFs from a range of agencies including schools, health and the voluntary sector.

- Anti-Social Behaviour and Offending
- Domestic Abuse
- Family Health and Wellbeing
- Housing
- Money and Debt
- Parenting
- Relationship Breakdown and Bereavement
- Special Educational Needs
- Substance Misuse
- Support to employment

These categories will continue to be developed and reviewed and we welcome feedback and contributions from our partners.
**Existing Universal and Targeted Services delivering Early Help**

The existing universal and targeted services listed below deliver types of Early Help. You may feel it is appropriate to direct a child, family or young person you are working with to these services if their needs identified could be met by these services.

**Sure Start Children’s Centres**

Sure Start Children’s Centres are located across the city to improve outcomes for young children and their families and have a range of services available that provide support to families;

- Early Learning opportunities for families and child minders e.g. ‘stay and play’ and ‘babbling babies’;
- Adult Learning services and activities;
- Advice and guidance services;
- Services to support volunteering, training and employment activities;
- Birth registration.

At the targeted level the support available includes:

- Children and Parent Services (CAPs), this includes referral to CAPs Pre-school Psychology Clinic (1:1 appointment with clinical psychologist) and the Webster Stratton Parent Survival Course
- Speech and Language e.g. Chatterbox
- Sure Start Early Years Outreach and Family Support
- Targeted Early Learning opportunities for families e.g. Getting Ready for School course

Full details of Sure Start Children’s Centres and the services available can be found in the [Children’s Centre category of the FSD](#).

**Short Breaks for those caring for children/young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)**

Short breaks enable the child to participate in fun, interesting, and safe activities and they provide a break for parents/carers from caring for children with SEND. Short breaks can take place at home or at other venues and include a whole range of things from accessing local services which are available to everybody (e.g. going to the leisure centre), more targeted activities (e.g. going to a club or joining a play scheme specifically for children with disabilities), or having an overnight stay somewhere else.

Eligibility criteria has been developed to help clarify which type of short break best meets the needs of the family, and to ensure that those who are most in need of resources are appropriately targeted. The criteria is applied flexibly to ensure that provision is sufficient to meet the needs of the child and/or family.
Short breaks are intended to be contributory towards helping family life be more like that of families with non disabled children and it is not the expectation that Short Breaks will cover the entire costs of families preferred leisure activities.

Full information on Short Breaks is available on the Family Service Directory

**Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for two year olds**

Free Early Education Entitlement (sometimes referred to as Targeted day care places) is funded by the government to improve children’s readiness for school. It can be accessed via Early Years settings, which includes nursery schools, nurseries on school sites, some nursery classes in schools and academies, children’s centres, day nurseries, some playgroups and pre-school and childminders..

Full information on FEEE for two year olds including eligibility criteria can be found on the [Manchester City Council](#) website.

**Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for three and four year olds**

All three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours free early education. Further information can be found on the [Manchester City Council](#) website.
Early Help Process Map and Step by Step Guidance
Current process December 2014– April 2015

Please note this process is being reviewed and subject to change from April 2015, this handbook will be updated accordingly.

The current Early Help Process January -April 2015

Early Help Process Jan-April 2015

Emerging Family Needs Identified

- Is it a safeguarding issue?
  - Yes: Call Contact Manchester 0161 234 5959 mcs@manchester.gov.uk
  - No: Do you have consent from the family?
    - Yes: Early Help Advice Line 0161 234 5960
    - No: Guidance Early Help Advice Line 0161 234 5960

Early Help Advice Line Functions Include:
- Information, Advice and Guidance including the MCAF
- Check if MCAF has already been done
- Engage if family has already received support

Start Early Help Assessment

What kind of response is needed?

Multi Agency Single Agency

Single Agency Response Insufficient progress, still concerns

Register Family
- Email MCAF to cafir@manchester.gov.uk

Team Around the Family agree Lead Professional

Plan Plan/Review Review

Identified family needs met:
- Close case, email cafir@manchester.gov.uk
Step by Step Guidance

Please note this process is being reviewed and subject to change from April 2015. This handbook will be updated accordingly.

This process assumes that you have identified emerging needs in a member of a family under your care e.g. a child in your class. The steps listed below are summarised in the accompanying Early Help Process diagram on page 11.

Step 1: Check for safeguarding concerns

Is it a safeguarding issue? (You may want to consult the MSCB Thresholds document for more info [here](#)).
If **yes**, seek advice from Contact Manchester for advice on **0161 234 5001**.
If **no**, continue to Step 2.

Step 2: Gain consent

It is essential that you gain the consent of the parent/carer, and young person where appropriate, when undertaking an Early Help Assessment (MCAF), which must be documented as part of the MCAF.

If you require further advice around consent and MCAF, please contact the **Early Help Advice Line 0161 234 5969**. They can also tell you if an MCAF already exists for the child, family or young person. Refer to page 15 for the next steps if an MCAF already exists.

Further information on consent from the Department for Education *Information Sharing: How to seek consent* (HM Government, 2008) is available [here](#).

Step 3: Start the Early Help Assessment (MCAF)

Consider what kind of response the child, family or young person you are working with needs. Can your organisation manage the emerging needs in house (single agency) or are further agencies needed to do so (multi-agency). If you feel a multi agency approach is best, you may need to arrange a Team Around the Child Meeting to plan a response and decide on the Lead Professional.

Step 4: Register the Early Help Assessment (MCAF)

Once the assessment has started you must let the Early Help Team know by submitting section 1 (and section 2 if necessary). This can be done via email [CAFIT@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:CAFIT@manchester.gov.uk) or fax 0161 274 7082.
Step 5: Review

During the review process you may consider questions such as:

- Has the single/multi-agency response worked?
- Does the family feel that their needs have been met and that they are resilient enough to continue without further input?
- Are there concerns about the family, which the plan has not been able to address?
- Has the family fully engaged with the process throughout? If not, review the case and contact the Early Help Advice Line for any additional support around family engagement that might be available.
- Has the case and the needs previously identified escalated? If yes, seek advice from Contact Manchester on 0161 234 5001.

If you feel the response has worked, then the MCAF can be closed. Please complete part 4 of the MCAF including the reason for closure and the outcome, and email to CAFIT@manchester.gov.uk.
How to submit an MCAF

This current process from December 2014 – April 2015 is under review and this document will be updated accordingly.

Check is there is already an MCAF in place for a child, family or young person by calling the Early Help Advice Line on 0161 234 5969.

YES  MCAF already in place?  NO

- MCAF Team will provide you with the contact details of the Lead Professional (LP)
- Make contact with LP & request they send you the existing MCAF
- Once you have received the MCAF complete Section 2 and/or 3 with parents agreement – follow guidance on MCC website:
  www.manchester.gov.uk/MCAF
- It is the responsibility of the referrer to complete the MCAF as fully as possible. Without detailed, good quality information, the referral cannot be considered for the specialist support available and it will need to be returned to you.

- Complete Sections 1 & 2 and as appropriate Section 3 of a new MCAF with parents agreement – follow guidance on MCC website:
  www.manchester.gov.uk/MCAF
- It is the responsibility of the referrer to complete the MCAF as fully as possible. Without detailed, good quality information, the referral cannot be considered for the specialist support available and it will need to be returned to you.

The MCAF must be completed electronically and sent electronically. To ensure information is sent securely – see following sections for details.

Submit the relevant sections of the Early Help Assessment (MCAF) via email to CAFIT@manchester.gov.uk or fax 0161 274 7082.

Full information around MCAF is available on the Manchester City Council website.
The role of the Lead Professional

Every MCAF should have someone assigned to the role of lead professional. This role is simply one of coordinating the agencies and practitioners who are working with the child, family or young person to meet their needs. The lead professional will arrange any Team around the Child meetings, be a point of contact and support for the child, family and young person and coordinate the delivery of support services by agencies that have been identified as relevant to needs.

The decision of who should take the lead professional role should be made on a case by case basis and informed by the child, family or young person. It could be the practitioner who has initiated the assessment, or any practitioner working with the child, family or young person. A decision around this can be made at any Team around the Child meetings that take place if it is not appropriate to do so at the initial assessment.

The lead professional can change during the MCAF process if necessary, for example if they leave their role or other needs have been identified that another practitioner is more suited to coordinating the meeting of these needs.

You must inform the Early Help Team of any change in lead professional via email cafit@manchester.gov.uk or the Early Help Advice Line 0161 234 5969.
How to send an MCAF securely

Remember that MCAFs contain personal information and you are responsible for sending it securely.

To ensure this we recommend sending MCAFs in one of the following four ways:

1. **Via a GCSX mail account** (secure network used by the NHS, Police and other Government Agencies). This will only work with the following email addresses:
   - @nhs.net
   - @<xyz>.gcsx.gov.uk
   - @<xyz>.pnn.police.uk
   - @<xyz>.gsi.gov.uk

   Our secure email for submitting MCAFs is [CAFIT@manchester.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:CAFIT@manchester.gcsx.gov.uk)

2. **Via fax**

   Any faxes we receive are sent directly to our email account. Our fax number is **0161 274 7082**.

3. **Contained in an email attachment** (not in the body of an email) using a strong password protection and WINZIP software.

   You will need to telephone us on **0161 234 5969** to provide us with the password, or send it via as separate email.

4. **By Egress**

   The Egress service provides encrypted email with non-government partners such as customers, voluntary sector, schools etc.

   The first time you use this service, the Early Help Team will send you an email entitled “Egress – Secure Communication” (this will instruct you on how to set up and use the service).

   You will also receive a second email from us with a **blank** subject line.

   Once you have registered with Egress, if you reply directly to the blank subject email, it will be emailed to us securely.

   You can reply more than once, but the encrypted email will only be usable for a few days. If in doubt, ask us to send another one.

   Please ring the Early Help Advice line **0161 234 5969** if you want to use Egress to email a MCAF.
How to Use the Family Service Directory

You can access the Family Service Directory at

www.manchester.gov.uk/fsdirectory

Below is the homepage for the Family Service Directory, which outlines what the directory is and the categories of services and support that are available.
How to Search for Services on the Family Service Directory

You can search for services and support via category, keyword or location.

1. If you are searching for a more specific service you can use this search box to enter a keyword.

2. To narrow your search by area enter a postcode or location into this search box.

3. Click Go to search via keyword or location.

Welcome to Manchester’s Family Service Directory

“Want your service listed on the Family Service Directory? Or want to take ownership of an existing entry to update it? Click here for user guidance.”

The FSD has lots of information on national and local organisations, services and activities for families, children and young people and the practitioners supporting them. This includes details of childcare providers (Childminders, Day Nurseries, Playgroups, etc) in Manchester.

The FSD is being developed as a key tool to support the delivery of the Early Help Strategy for Manchester and will include information, advice and guidance to support the whole family approach.

The Disability and Special Educational Needs (SEN) section includes lots of advice and information, which makes up Manchester’s Local Offer for families of disabled children and young people up to the age of 25.

If you are unable to find the service you require please contact the Family Information.

Alternatively, as a practitioner there is a dedicated category where you can view the all services for early help; click on the Early Help Offer for Practitioner category.

These categories are also useful for the families you are working with to search themselves for services.
Search via Early Help Offer for Practitioners Category

Below is the page you will see by clicking on the above category, which outlines the Early Help Offer and contact details for the Early Help Helpline.

By clicking on the view all services in the category, the page below lists all those available in this category; to narrow these results in line with the needs of the family you are working with use the bar on the left hand side of the page.
Search via keyword or location

You may find it easier to search by keyword or location; below are the results using the keyword ‘mental health’ and the location ‘Wythenshawe’.

The Family Service Directory relies on partners and practitioners updating their own information about the services they offer.

Click here to find out how services can register on the FSD and create and take ownership of their own records.
Problem Solver Pages

Frequently Asked Questions around Early Help:

The family I’m supporting is no longer engaging in the Early Help Assessment process – what do I do?

Contact the Early Help advice line on 0161 234 5969.

The family I’m supporting is unwilling to consent to an Early Help Assessment (MCAF) – what do I do?

Firstly, ensure that the family fully understand the benefits of engaging in an Early Help Assessment. Some practitioners have told us that parents think the assessment may result in social workers becoming involved or lead to the children being removed from the home. Make it clear that Early Help is about being supportive, identifying strengths as well as needs and helping the family to help themselves. If the parent and/or young person still refuse to give consent, you should seek advice from an Early Help Coordinator by ringing 0161 234 5969. If you have any safeguarding concerns, seek advice from Contact Manchester on 0161 234 5001.

Is Early Help a council run service?

No. Early Help is an approach that many services and organisations already take by seeking to act early and preventatively when working with a child, family or young person.

How do I report a safeguarding concern?

Any safeguarding concerns should be directed to Contact Manchester on 0161 234 5001 for advice.

How do I escalating a problem which is not a safeguarding concern?

If you need further support with a problem that is not a safeguarding concern but could benefit from early help you can contact the Early Help Advice Line on 0161 234 5969. If necessary they will direct you to your area’s Early Help Coordinator for further advice.

Can anybody use the FSD?

Yes. The FSD is for both members of the public and practitioners. The ‘Early Help Offer for Practitioners’ category is aimed specifically at practitioners to support them around early help assessments and to find suitable support and services to address family’s identified needs.
**Information Sharing**

It is essential that information sharing is confidential and secure when working with a child, family or young person.

Guidance on information sharing is from the Department for Education *Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers* (HM Government, 2008). A pocket guide to Information Sharing from the Department for Education is available [here](#).
How to Encrypt and Send Confidential or Personal Information by email

- All confidential or personal data must be in a separate document – do not put any confidential/personal information in the subject or body of the email itself, or in the filename of the document.
- Some organisations might not have immediate access to “zip and encrypt” software, but this is available at low cost or free to download. The Council does not recommend particular software but, for information, the Council uses WinZip or 7-Zip. The recommended encryption standard is “AES 256 bit”
- You must use the method explained below – it is not enough to use the password protection options in Word or Excel.
- Make sure you use a strong password that is difficult to guess
- Tell the recipient the password by separate email. Never send the password in the same email as the attachment.
- Always double-check the email address.

1. Make sure you have the appropriate “zip and encrypt” software on your computer.
2. Find the folder or document you would like to email, right click on it. Go to 'Winzip' and select (click on) 'Zip and E-mail Plus'.
3. Click on the 'Encrypt Zip file' box to put a tick against it, then click on 'OK'
4. Enter a password. It is advisable to select the '256 Bit AES Encryption' option, then click 'OK'.

![Encrypt window with options](image)

5. After you have clicked on 'OK', this will take you through to your email programs (Outlook, Outlook Express, Eudora, and AOL 7.0 and 8.0,) from which you can now send your email. If you use another email program, follow these steps:
   a. In your e-mail program, open the dialog that you normally use to attach files to your e-mail messages.
   b. Using the standard Open File dialog box, locate the file or folder that you wish to attach.
   c. Position the mouse pointer over the file or folder name in the dialog, then click the right mouse button and choose Add to filename.zip from the WinZip shortcut menu (note: the filename shown in the menu entry will be the name of the file you selected). This will create a Zip file called "filename.zip".
   d. Don't forget to click on the 'Encrypt' button in the WinZip window, enter the same password and click 'OK'.
   e. Still in the Open File dialog, click once on filename.zip (the Zip file created in the previous step). This file will normally be at the end of the current directory listing.
   f. Click the appropriate button to attach the Zip file (this is typically labeled Open, Attach, or Insert).

6. Finally, once you have emailed this encrypted and password protected file, you can send the password in a separate email.
Early Help Case Studies and Best Practice

Manchester City Council has published a number of case studies online that demonstrate the practical impact an MCAF can have on children, families and young people. These can be accessed here.