

Guide to Early Help





This guide sets out what we mean by early help in East Sussex, the targeted services we provide, and how we ensure good, coordinated support for vulnerable families



Responsibility for raising children and young people lies with their families. Most parents and carers support their children and young people without the need for help from beyond their circle of family and friends.

Some need additional help at times - perhaps from local NHS or voluntary sector services, from Children's Centres, or schools, or from specialist services for particular issues. A small number of parents and carers, for various reasons, are unable to provide good enough care and statutory intervention is necessary to protect the well-being and development of a child or young person.

This guide is about the help available to those families before problems reach a level at which social care intervention is needed. The need for this help can arise at any point in the life of a child or young person, so early help does not only mean help in the early years of a child's life.

By providing early help we want to improve children's lives, prevent families from needing social care services, and keep families together where possible. We want to help parents to raise their families safely and well, building their ability to do this in the long-term without professional support.

This guide focuses mostly on the help that is available for families with significant problems or challenges. It is not a directory of the wide range of services and help available, but several directories of services in East Sussex exist and can be found on [czone](#), and we are working on new ways of making service information available, including through the [Special Educational Needs and Disability Local Offer](#).

This guide is aimed at professionals and practitioners working with children and young people who live or go to school in East Sussex. Parents and carers can find out more about services on offer from our Information for Families service on 0345 6080192 or by emailing informationforfamilies@eastsussex.gov.uk. Young people can find out more about local services on the [Connexions360 website](#).

Who needs Early Help?

The East Sussex Continuum of Need tools describe the kind of needs a child may have, broken down by four levels. Using this tool helps us to work out what kind of additional help children and their families might need in order to be safe and well.

The Continuum is designed to help with professional discussions. The tools include detailed descriptions of what might be happening for children and young people at these different levels. You can access the full set of Continuum of Need tools online here:

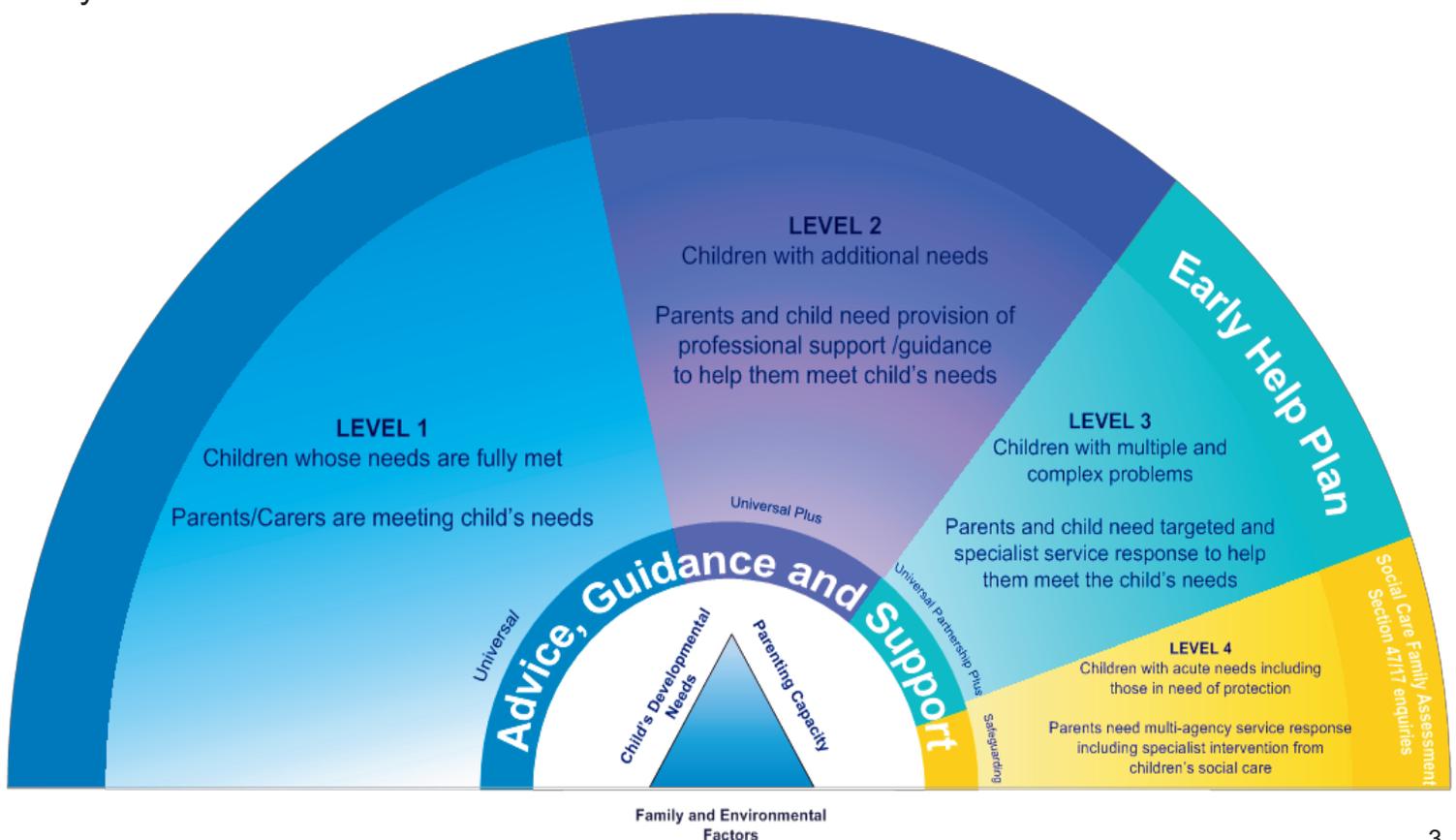
<https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/continuum>

Most children and young people are at **Level 1** on this continuum most of the time. This means that they don't have any additional needs, or their needs are fully met.

If children and young people have needs that the Continuum tools describe as **Level 2**, then extra support can usually be provided by those that already know them—for example their school, college, or pre-school, NHS community services such as Health Visiting, or any youth activities they attend.

For children and young people who have needs at **Level 3** on the Continuum we provide targeted Early Help services that can support them and their families.

Level 4 on the Continuum describes needs that require Children's Social Care involvement in order to ensure that children are protected from harm. If professionals feel that a child or young person's needs are at this level they should consult their local Duty and Assessment team.



How are families who may need help identified?

Working out if extra help is needed begins with midwives before a child is born, and by health visitors after the birth, who are both trained to identify additional needs of families. As children get older, universal services, for example Children's Centres, Pre-Schools, Schools, GPs, Health Visitors, School Nurses, primary health services, and community groups, have a crucial role in being alert and responding to parents, children and young people who may be struggling. Parents, and, as they get older, children and young people, are also encouraged to seek help themselves if they think they need it.

Professionals pool their knowledge about which families, children or young people need additional support in a range of ways so that they can work out how best to help them. These conversations happen regularly between practitioners, but we also have more structured places for them to happen.

For example:

Integrated Screening Hub: every day a meeting is held to look at some cases brought to the attention of Children's Social Care services to decide whether an early help service should be offered to those families, or whether social care support would be better.

Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings: at least once a fortnight, professionals working with children aged 0-5 meet to discuss the plan of support for particular families in their local area, who should lead on that support, and whether anything else is required. These meetings are part of the Good Start programme and are led jointly by ESCC and NHS services.

School multi-agency meetings: schools and academies sometimes hold meetings of school and other staff to look at how to meet the additional needs of children in their school and their families.

Multi-agency meetings about individual children and young people: for children and young people who have an individual plan of support – for example a plan that relates to their disability or Special Educational Needs – the regular review of their plan might identify other things that they need help with.

Professionals use the Continuum of Need tools to come to a view on the level of need that a child or young person has, and to think about the best service response if additional help is needed. If they are not sure about the level of need they might consult with Children's Social Care through the Duty and Assessment teams.

What Early Help is available?

Some early help services are available to all children and young people. These include:

- Advice from Health Visitors
- Extra one to one support, and information for parents, provided by Early years education and childcare settings
- Groups and activities provided by Children's Centres and community organisations
- Support provided in school and by schools—for example pastoral care, parent information and nurture groups
- School Nursing and school health services
- Primary healthcare—such as GPs, walk-in centres, Dentists, Opticians and Pharmacists
- Parenting Groups—for example Incredible Years and STOP parenting programmes
- Support from voluntary and community sector groups and services

Universal services work closely with targeted Early Help services and social care services if they feel families need more support and input, or children are at risk of harm, and continue to provide support if other services are also needed.

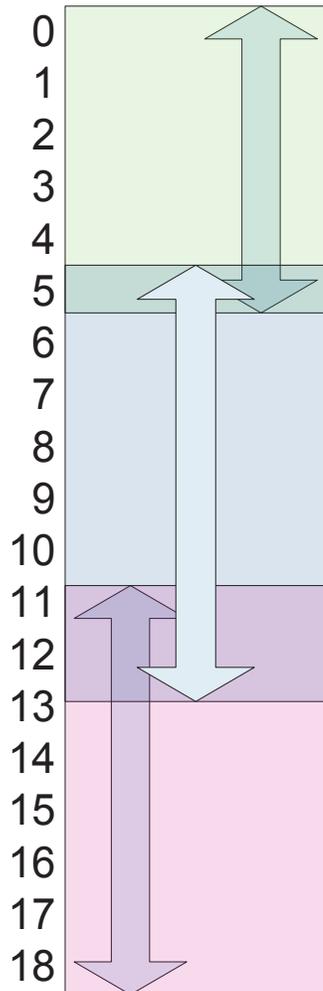
NHS community services offer support across levels 1-4 of the Continuum of Need, including through Health Visiting, School Nurses, and Family Support Health Practitioners.



Targeted Early Help services

Targeted Early Help services are aimed specifically at helping families with children and young people whose needs are at Level 3 on the Continuum of Need.

There are three main services in East Sussex:



The **Children's Centre Keywork and Health Visiting** services work closely through the Good Start programme to agree what support is needed where families have children aged **0-5**. The Children's Centre Keywork service used to be called the Family Outreach Service.

Family Support Keywork services are provided across the county to work with schools and academies to provide coordinated support for families with children aged **5-13**. They are based on the previous Parent Support Advisor, COPES and Inclusive Learning Tutor services.

The **Targeted Youth Support** service provides help where there are children aged **11-19** and works closely with secondary schools, academies, and colleges. This service was created in 2011 by bringing together a range of smaller teams.

Although they have an expertise with different age ranges, any of these services can lead a plan of support for the whole family.

There is no 'wrong door' when choosing a service to refer to— they work together to make sure that the right person is leading a plan of support based on what that family needs and ensuring that individual children and young people are supported.

Targeted support is also provided by family keyworkers in specialist services, for example Probation, Sussex Police, the Traveller Education Team, and in some schools, and by School Nurses and Family Support Health Practitioners. These other services may lead a plan of support in a similar way to targeted Early Help services.

What do the targeted Early Help services do?

ESCC Targeted Early Help services are moving to a proactive whole family keywork approach to their work. This means:

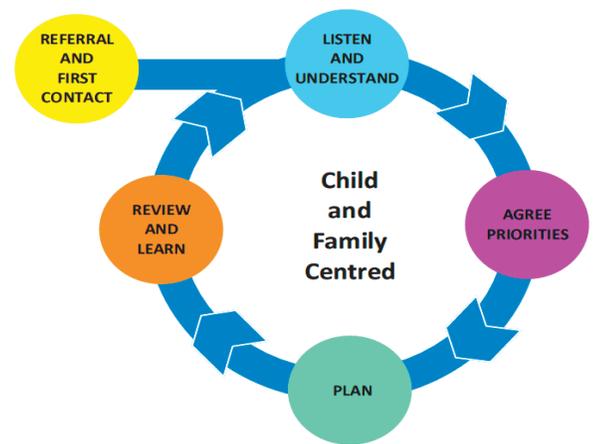
- one keyworker coordinating a plan with the family, ensuring there is no duplication and that support is manageable for the family
- looking at the needs and strengths of all family members
- being flexible about the duration and intensity of support provided based on the needs of the family
- offering practical, 'hands on' support
- challenging family members where that's necessary so that things can improve for them in the long term
- not giving up on families easily and persisting, even when things are difficult

The work that targeted Early Help services do will be different for different families, but will be focused on outcomes, motivating family members to make changes to improve their lives and children's safety and wellbeing. When working with young people the services will respect their right to confidentiality and how they would like to involve and share their experiences with family members as support progresses.

Assessing needs and planning support—the Early Help Plan

Where children and young people have needs at Level 3 on the Continuum of Need targeted Early Help services assess the strengths and needs of the whole family and work closely with them and any professionals involved to decide how family needs can best be met.

By doing this they create an Early Help Plan for the family. The Early Help Plan will gradually replace the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) that has been used in East Sussex for many years.



The diagram shows the Early Help planning cycle of listening and understanding, agreeing priorities, planning what to do next, and reviewing and learning.

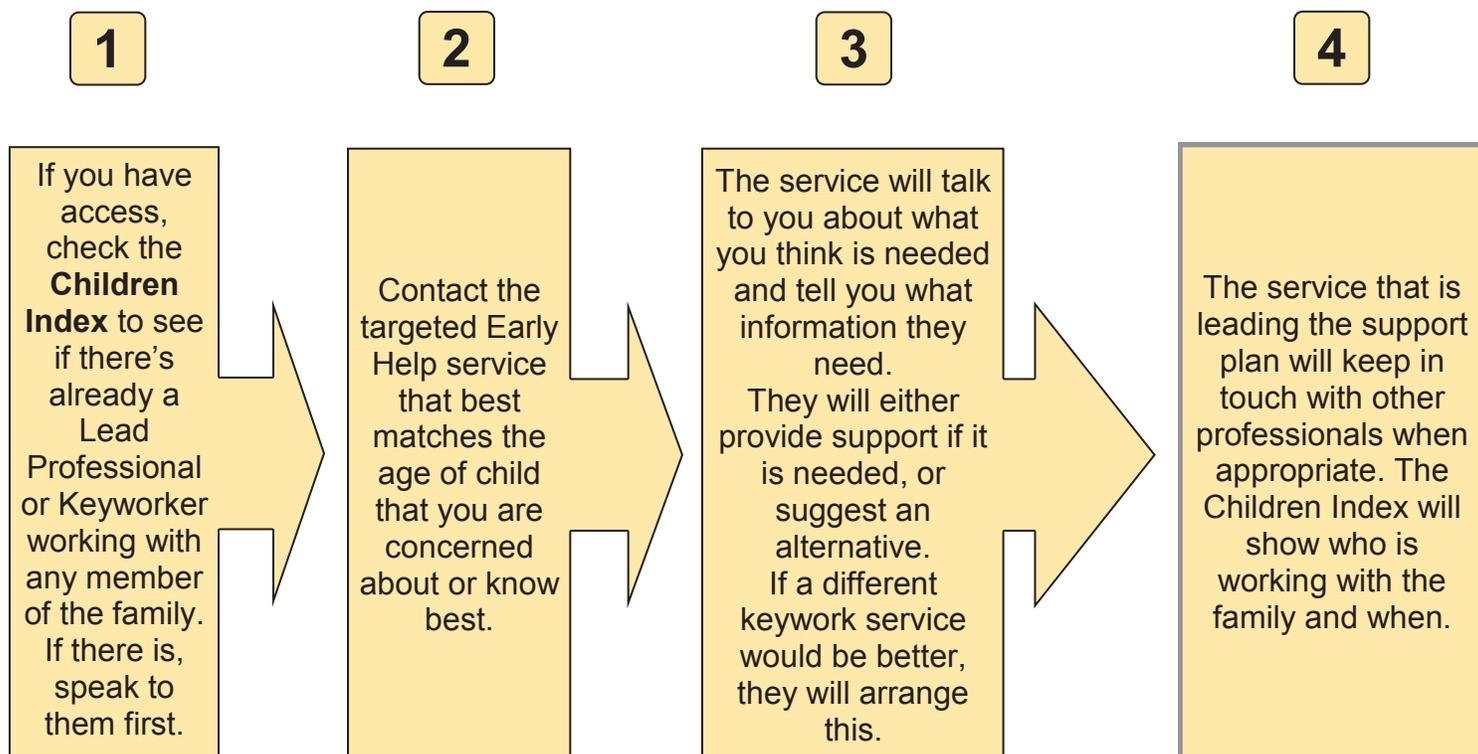
Professionals take time to build a relationship with a family and work with them to develop outcome-focused plans which empower them to make measurable and sustainable changes. The Early Help Plan includes and coordinates the contribution of any other services involved in supporting family members. Professional judgement is at the heart of the process, enabling practitioners to make decisions based on the needs of individual families.

The Early Help Plan is based on thorough assessment of any risks to children and young people, and can build on previous assessments where relevant—for example a social care Family Assessment.



Referring for targeted Early Help support

Anyone can request that one of the targeted Early Help services offers support to a family if they believe that the family has needs at Level 3 of the Continuum of Need. It is only necessary to contact one service, even if there are children of different ages in the family.



For up to date contact details for targeted Early Help services go to:

<https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/earlyhelpcontacts>

If you don't have access to the internet you can call the Information for Families service on 0345 6080192.

If you have immediate concerns about a child's safety or think they may have needs at Level 4 on the Continuum of Need you should consult with your local Children's Social Care Duty and Assessment team.

This document has been produced by the Early Help and Commissioning Division of the ESCC Children's Services Department for the Children and Young People's Trust. For further information please contact the team on 01273 335966.