



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

# Early Help System Guide

A toolkit to assist local strategic partnerships responsible for their  
Early Help System

April 2020

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government



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## Early Help System Guide

There will never be a simple process or instruction manual to transform early help — each place is individual, and the system is too complex, relying on context, precedent, relationships and culture. This Early Help System Guide does not dictate what needs to be done, but instead is designed to guide conversations between partners, think about the right questions, and develop a common language for the changes we all want to see. This guide is based on what is working around the country and is therefore a living tool that will adapt as national transformation develops. It should not be considered restrictive of new and better ideas.

The national vision for early help (see below) has been used to shape this guide. In the vision, early help is defined as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes, or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. The vision looks at the early help system from the point of view of families, communities, people in the diverse workforce and leaders.

The Early Help System Guide contains two sets of questions – one focused on the whole system and one focused on data maturity. There is some overlap, but this is intentional because each section is likely to be completed with different partners.

Your reflections with partners and communities on the Early Help System Guide should lead to an improved local early help strategy which, in turn, will help your local partnership improve families' outcomes and reduce demand to acute services. The Guide is intended for the local strategic partnership responsible for the Early Help System. It aims to provide a framework for local workshops, partnership conversations and strategic planning and to support prioritisation.

## The Troubled Families Programme

This guide has been produced by the national Troubled Families Programme. Whilst not the only driver within the Early Help system, the programme has, since its inception in 2012, been supporting areas to develop and transform towards a whole family approach. This guide applies to all those in a local area who are providing support which improves a family's resilience and outcomes, or reduces the chance of a problem becoming worse.

The national Troubled Families team expect all areas to submit their results from this work by the end of September 2020. The results will be used to tailor support to local areas, understand common areas for development and inform national policy making. Please get in touch with your area lead if you need support to complete the Early Help System Guide. The national Troubled Families team ask you also to submit your early help strategy or equivalent and will be interested to understand how this connects with other local strategies and transformation plans.

The work on this guide should be led by the nominated local Troubled Families Senior Responsible Officer, drawing on feedback from families and involving all relevant partners including as a minimum District Councils (where applicable), Police, Clinical Commissioning Group, JobCentre Plus, Schools, Housing partners and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

## The Early Help Vision

1. I trust the professionals working with me and my family – they understand us better

2. We only tell our story once. I get offered help much earlier now and everyone works together. There is someone in my life listening to and caring for me and my family, and appreciating our strengths

3. I set the outcomes in my family plan with my lead worker. I know how to improve our lives, navigate the system and get support if there are problems. Improving outcomes make a difference to our lives

4. When things get tough, I know the relationships I have with my friends and community will help me

1. Local leaders trust each and share responsibility to improve all outcomes for the place and population across the life course, with evidence and quality assurance of collective impact

2. Trust is underpinned by governance with shared responsibilities, e.g. Combined Authority, Public Service Board, Alliances

3. Local coordination of the family support system ensures needs are met, often matchmaking between demand and local resources and assets

4. There is an ambitious strategy that is transforming the local families support system and reducing demand to acute services. Prevention focussed initiatives are coordinated and seen as interdependent, such as crime, serious violence, child poverty, obesity, integrated communities

Early Help is the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse

FAMILIES

COMMUNITIES

Family Outcomes

LEADERS

WORKFORCE

1. In my community and networks, people know each other better and look out for how they can help

2. Our community and public services agreed to work together to promote and develop community resources, spaces and activity

3. There are local projects and groups in our neighbourhood connected to family support services. Businesses play an important role in the community

4. We help to design our local services. Any work with my community or family is done in partnership

1. There is a professional family support service. Whole family working is the norm for all people-facing public services through a shared practice model. And early help and family support is seen as everyone's responsibility

2. Public services work together in integrated hubs based in the community with a common footprint

3. Universal services such as schools and nurseries are supported to help local families and vulnerable people, with access to intelligence and common case management across the early help system

4. Data sharing across partners enables joint intelligence and risk-based analysis of families' needs, including finding and offering support to families with hidden needs

This vision was created by the Troubled Families Programme and has been tested with local authorities, partners and government departments

## The Early Help Vision (Plain Text)

Early Help is the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse.

### **Families**

1. I trust the professionals working with me and my family – they understand us better.
2. We only tell our story once. I get offered help much earlier now and everyone works together. There is someone in my life listening to and caring for me and my family and appreciating our strengths.
3. I set the outcomes in my family plan with my lead worker. I know how to improve our lives, navigate the system and get support if there are problems. Improving outcomes make a difference to our lives.
4. When things get tough, I know the relationships I have with my friends and community will help me.

### **Communities**

1. In my community and networks, people know each other better and look out for how they can help.
2. Our community and public services agreed to work together to promote and develop community resources, spaces and activity.
3. There are local projects and groups in our neighbourhood connected to family support services. Businesses play an important role in the community.
4. We help to design our local services. Any work with my community or family is done in partnership.

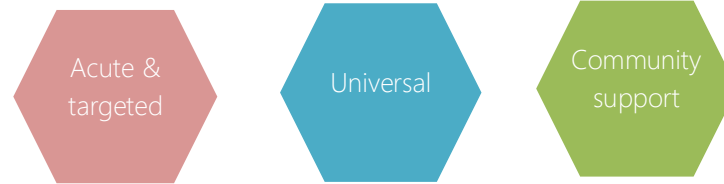
### **Workforce**

1. There is a professional family support service. Whole family working is the norm for all people-facing public services through a shared practice model. And early help and family support is seen as everyone's responsibility.
2. Public services work together in integrated hubs based in the community with a common footprint.
3. Universal services such as schools and nurseries are supported to help local families and vulnerable people, with access to intelligence and common case management across the early help system.
4. Data sharing across partners enables joint intelligence and risk-based analysis of families' needs, including finding and offering support to families with hidden needs.

### **Leaders**

1. Local leaders trust each and share responsibility to improve all outcomes for the place and population across the life course, with evidence and quality assurance of collective impact.
2. Trust is underpinned by governance with shared responsibilities, e.g. Combined Authority, Public Service Board, Alliances.
3. Local coordination of the family support system ensures needs are met, often matchmaking between demand and local resources and assets.
4. There is an ambitious strategy that is transforming the local families support system and reducing demand to acute services. Prevention focussed initiatives are coordinated and seen as interdependent, such as crime, serious violence, child poverty, obesity, integrated communities.

# The Early Help System



## The Early Help System (Plain Text)

The Early Help System available to children and their families is made up of three types of services that combine in different ways to form a local area's Early Help offer to its citizens. These are universal services, community support and acute and targeted services.

### **Community support includes;**

Family and friends, local places and environments, online support services, voluntary, faith and community services, local members of the community and local businesses.

### **Universal services include;**

School nurses, GP surgeries, health visitors, maternity services, community coordinators, post-16 education services, schools, nurseries, children's centres and libraries.

### **Acute and targeted services include;**

Mental health services, speech and language services, JobCentre Plus, special educational needs services, community nursing, accident and emergency departments in local hospitals, children's social care, targeted family support services, alternative educational provision, housing and homelessness support services, prison and probation providers, alcohol and substance misuse services, fire and rescue services, youth offending and youth services, family court and family court advisory services.

## Early Help System Questionnaire

The questions are quick and factual, areas are encouraged to share results regionally to identify collaborative projects to accelerate progress. The results will also help to steer national policy making and support.

The questions below are split between parts of the national vision, for families, communities, workforce and leaders. **Please respond to these questions as yes, mostly yes, mostly no, or no** and provide some rationale for your answer and what you plan to do. Do use your judgement, as we know not everything is straight-forward. All areas will be required to submit responses to all questions to the national team by 30 September 2020.

Note that the phrase 'Whole Family Worker' here refers to what may be known locally as a Lead Practitioner/Professional or Key Worker.



Families	Answer	What are you doing/planning to do?
1 <i>One worker:</i> Do families say they know who their whole family worker is?		
2 <i>One family:</i> Are all family members' needs considered individually and as a whole?		
3 <i>One Plan:</i> Do individuals and families say they tell their story once and that their views are reflected throughout the process?		
4 Do families set outcomes in their plans, alongside professionals? Do they have access to and can change their plan?		
5 Do professionals across the partnership build high quality, strengths-based relationships with families they are supporting?		
6 Do families know how to navigate local services and how to get help?		
7 When an intervention ends, are families more resilient because they have stronger relationships within the family, to extended family, friends and their communities?		

8	Do you collect feedback from families on the service they received? Is this feedback used as learning to support changes in practice?		
9	Are common outcomes for families (and ways of measuring these outcomes) embedded across partners' case management system(s)?		
10	Is there a common case management system or interoperability between case management systems across the partnership?		

Communities	Answer	What are you doing/planning to do?
1 Have you mapped local community assets, community groups, voluntary sector support and faith groups and made this information available to local staff and residents e.g. through a website or local offer?		
2 Are you building a positive working relationship between voluntary and community sector groups and public sector bodies where all understand they have a contribution to make to the Early Help System? Are you improving the connectivity between voluntary and community sector activity and formal early help activity?		
3 Are staff across the partnership embedded in and do they understand the local communities they work in?		
4 Are you building capacity in communities? e.g. through training or developing residents, or connecting voluntary and community organisations to the Early Help system.		
5 Is your community capacity-building at a big enough scale that it will help to significantly reduce service demand?		
6 Do the local authority and partners work collaboratively with residents to promote and develop community spaces?		

7	Are businesses encouraged to support their communities, with impact? E.g. making every contact count, supporting education and apprentices, safe places for young people, contributing to the local environment, building connections in the community.		
8	Do families and communities help to design local services?		

<b>Workforce</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>What are you doing/planning to do?</b>
1 Is early help understood and seen as everyone's business across the partnership? Is there a shared culture and set of principles across the wider early help system?		
2 Is there a shared practice model and set of processes for professionals in partner agencies working across the wider early help system?		
3 Is there a multi-agency workforce development plan which helps all partners to understand and identify need early, and work in a whole family way?		
4 Is there a dedicated professional family support service that is practicing whole family, strengths-based working?		
5 Do social workers practice whole family working, and act as whole family workers when appropriate?		
6 Do health partners practice whole family working and act as whole family workers when appropriate e.g. health visitors, mental health services, speech and language, midwifery?		

7	Do education services practice whole family working? e.g. nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, further education, pupil referral units? Do professionals act as whole family workers when appropriate?		
8	Do housing partners practice whole family working and act as whole family workers when appropriate?		
9	Do criminal justice services practice whole family working and act as whole family workers when appropriate? e.g. youth offending services, police officers, probation.		
10	Do voluntary, community and faith sector partners (as appropriate) work in a whole family way?		
11	Do you know the quality of early help practice (practice model, assessments and plans) across professionals including health and education sectors? Do you directly support professionals in partner organisations to quality assure and improve their practice? e.g. through supervision and guidance.		
12	Are professionals integrated and/or co-located with other partners in local hubs where this makes sense for local residents? e.g. clusters of schools, primary care networks and GP surgeries.		

13	Are relevant professionals working together in a team around the school approach to anticipate and respond to the needs of the school?		
14	Is family and individual level hard data available to those who support families to inform their work?		

<b>Leaders</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>What are you doing/planning to do?</b>
1 Do local leaders at different levels focus on building productive relationships with partners and do they trust one another?		
2 Is there collective responsibility for improving outcomes, recognising that no one organisation delivers a specific outcome on their own? i.e. systems leadership.		
3 Do structures, governance and performance frameworks enable organisations to take collective responsibility, share risks and jointly invest in early help? For example, is the development of the Early Help system a central consideration of local safeguarding arrangements?		
4 Are services evaluated and evidence collated to show the local impact of early help, and return on investment?		
5 Is there partner-wide joint commissioning around the needs of the local area and neighbourhoods?		
6 Is there a strategy for shared estate that will help to integrate or co-locate public sector staff in neighbourhood hubs?		



7	Are you able to jointly analyse regular and detailed need and outcome data to inform joint needs assessment and strategic decision making and predict which families need help?		
8	Are prevention focussed initiatives coordinated and seen as interdependent? e.g. crime, serious violence, child poverty, obesity, integrated communities.		
9	Is there a Senior Responsible Officer for transforming the early help system? Is there a board that steers and coordinates the many programmes affecting the early help system?		

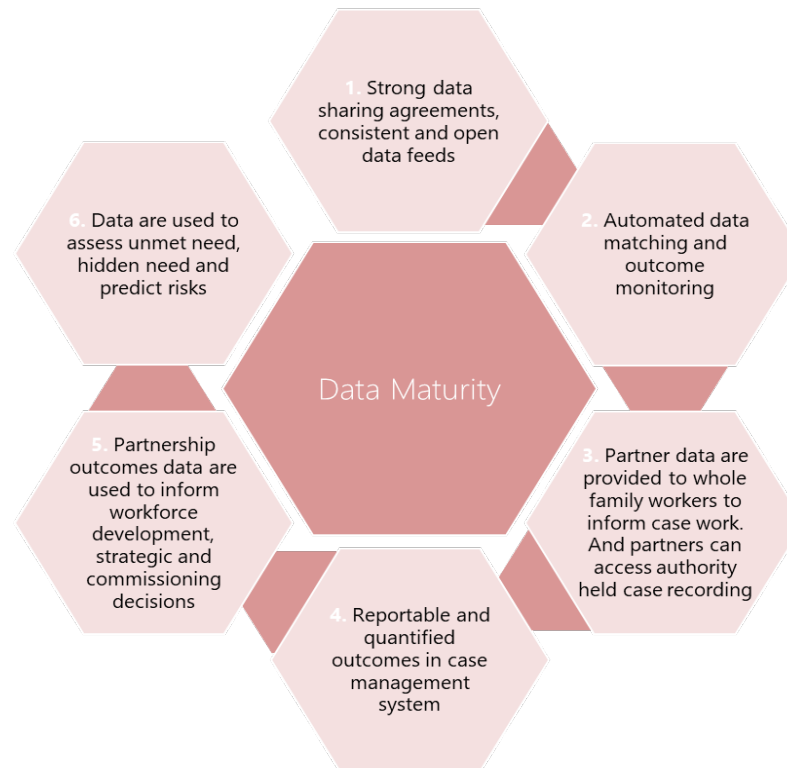
## Data Maturity

Data is hugely important for understanding needs across a local area, identifying hidden need, optimising services and support and efficiently evidencing successful family outcomes. The data maturity model, below, has been developed to help areas understand the progress they must make in six areas.

We understand a data model to mean the way that data is used to support, inform and monitor the early help system. A strong data model is made up of several elements, which the diagram below illustrates. Use this diagram to help you understand where you are now and to work up your own local design for where you want to get to.

This work should not be done by data analysts in one partner organisation alone, it should be done jointly across the partnership and must involve strategic leaders to ensure the thinking and plans are linked to delivery needs as well as longer term digital strategies.

## Data maturity model



## Data maturity model (plain text)

The data maturity model outlines six key elements of success, which are designed to guide professionals in local areas leading early help system work.

1. Strong data sharing agreements, consistent and open data feeds. 2. Automated data matching and outcome monitoring. 3. Partner data are provided to whole family workers to inform casework and partners can access authority held case recording. 4. Reportable and quantified outcomes in case management systems 5. Partnership outcomes data are used to inform workforce development, strategic and commissioning decisions. 6. Data are used to assess unmet need, hidden need and predict risk.

## The Big Questions

The Big Questions	Answer
<p>How do you want to use your Troubled Families data to improve Early Help?</p>	
<p>Is your Troubled Families / Early Help data model a <i>proof of concept</i> to expand to a whole council or whole partnership approach to data? In what way?</p>	
<p>How does your data model plan fit with your wider digital transformation strategy?</p>	

## Data Questionnaire

The following questions are building blocks to achieve strong data maturity. **Please respond to these questions as yes, mostly yes, mostly no, or no**, and provide your thinking about where you want to be next year and include how this feeds into longer term plans.

Do use your judgement, as we know not everything is straight-forward. This is not an exhaustive list, and when you submit your return to the national team there will be an opportunity to share other work you are doing on innovation and progression.

Data sharing	Answer	Where do you want to be in one year and how will this feed into longer-term plans?
Do you receive data feeds from our statutory partners (except health)?		
Do you receive data feeds from health partners?		
Do you receive open data feeds from a range of sources that is sufficient to inform frontline and strategy decisions?		
Do you have data sharing agreements in place to support both the identification and monitoring of Troubled Families, the needs of families referred to Early Help and the identification of unmet need?		

<b>Data matching</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Where do you want to be in one year and how will this feed into longer-term plans?</b>
Do you primarily match data feeds manually?		
Do you have primarily automated data matching?		
Do you use a data warehouse to match and report data?		
Do you use a data lake to match and report data?		
<b>Case management systems</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Where do you want to be in one year and how will this feed into longer-term plans?</b>
Do you have a case management system which allows for accurate whole family case recording?		
Have you embedded all individual outcomes in our case management system from notification / assessment to closure?		
Can you report from your case management system (and design these reports yourself)?		

Can you use reports from your case management system to monitor soft outcomes?		
Do all Whole Family Workers record on the same case management system, or interoperable case management systems, that ensure workers can view records from partners?		
<b>Reporting and analysis</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Where do you want to be in one year and how will this feed into longer-term plans?</b>
Are your reports generated on all issues faced by families and outcomes achieved?		
Are reports able to project families' outcomes into the future?		
Do you complete analysis of outcomes and effective interventions?		
Do you complete analysis of need (including unmet and hidden) in the population?		
Do you use data and analysis to predict risks?		

Use of data	Answer	Where do you want to be in one year and how does this feed into longer-term plans?
Are your data all published in one place for the authority and partners to access to enable aligned data analysis?		
Do partners' data directly inform current work with families?		
Are your outcomes data consistently used in all Children's services and commissioning decision making?		
Are your data used in partnership boards to understand the contribution of all partners to the whole Early Help system?		
Are your data used to inform workforce development and practice?		
Are your outcomes used as part of population level performance frameworks?		
Do you use needs data in future demand and resource planning?		

## Strategy

We think it would be helpful for your local early help strategy to reflect the national early help vision, relate to all partners that are part of the early help system and to respond to the priorities identified through your answers to the questions, data maturity and the big actions you are taking.

Some areas have a specific early help strategy for children and families, and some have a strategy which covers a wider brief including statutory arrangements, or also support for vulnerable adults and older people. A number of areas have structured their work into a place-based approach. Here we are not suggesting a new or different strategy, however, below we set out some thoughts around how a good strategy would work and can influence change.

An early help strategy will boil down to what the thousands of staff in health, education, justice and care sectors will understand and then do differently. A strategy is not a 40-page carefully crafted document, but a set of principles, an inspiring vision and actions that can be done easily by the many. Of course, this is underpinned by programme plans and governance documents and agreements and contracts, but it's the strategy (or similar publication or engagement) that can make the biggest difference.

It is important that the early help strategy speaks to the different services and support that help families to be resilient and tackle their problems. Each area is different, but the system diagram describes some of the elements and services that should be engaged and potentially covered in an early help strategy.

Alongside the strategy should be a plan to communicate to professionals, which might sit alongside a communication plan to families and residents. And there is likely to be a portfolio plan that supports the senior responsible officer and board of partners to manage the early help transformation work.

Actions in the early help strategy might form a workstream of the Sustainability and Transformation Planning process. The Health and Wellbeing Board could take responsibility for delivery of a whole system early help transformation programme. To deliver the strategy there may be a large engagement piece with local residents, or with staff in schools, nurseries and health trusts. And if you have a Combined Authority there might be an agreement to champion early help and coordinate investment across the sub-region. The early help strategy should set out, communicate and guide these ambitions.

Please share your early help strategy (or equivalent) as evidence of the transformation work, which is creating a more sustainable early help system, and improving family outcomes.