



Minute Briefing

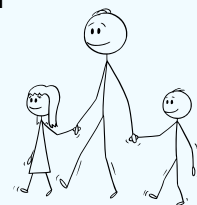
Early Help: management oversight and quality assurance

what is early help?

Early help is a way of services thinking and working collaboratively when they are supporting families. It describes any service that helps families to find solutions as soon as problems emerge to prevent or reduce the need for more targeted help or statutory intervention. Examples of early help include parenting classes, emotional wellbeing sessions, support with school attendance, finances or housing. Early help can be provided by local authorities, schools, health services, youth services, family hubs and charities.

why is early help important?

Early help can prevent children from coming to harm from issues like substance misuse, domestic abuse, housing problems or crime. When families face problems, getting the right support at the right time is essential. It can be what stops a minor problem becoming a crisis. Stepping in as soon as problems arise can help to provide safer and happier childhoods, keep families together and reduce the long term impact of adverse childhood experiences. It means that children can be better prepared for adulthood. Early help can also prevent new challenges arising in specific circumstances, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan when a child returns home from a period in care.



early help: core principles

- **assessment:** practitioners using an agreed tool to identify what is going well for a family and what help is needed.
- **prevention and early intervention:** acting early to stop issues from becoming entrenched or severe and not waiting for a crisis.
- **think family approach:** considering and addressing the needs of children, their parents and the whole family unit.
- **voluntary:** families choosing to accept or decline support but practitioners promoting the benefits of engaging.
- **right agency, right time:** practitioners from different services like health, education and community organisations providing needs-led support and working together where appropriate.
- **focusing on strengths:** identifying a family's strengths to help create sustainable change and build resilience so that future challenges can be overcome.

why is management oversight important?

Management oversight is crucial to ensuring that children and their families receive high quality, purposeful help. It provides support and safety for practitioners when underpinned by the values of strengths-based practice, helping them to make informed decisions about children's needs in a proportionate and timely way and guiding them to respond to risk and vulnerability to help make a positive difference to children's lives. Effective management oversight creates a shared understanding of children's circumstances and ensures that their voices, experiences and progress is clearly visible within assessments, plans and decision-making. **Supervision** is central to management oversight offering practitioners a space to reflect, where support and constructive challenge promotes curiosity and a focus on the child and on the desired outcomes. Consistent and reflective oversight enables safeguarding to become a shared responsibility, where risks are identified early, progress and support is actively reviewed and children are helped to achieve greater safety, stability and wellbeing.



management oversight: core principles

- **case allocation:** ensuring that casework is allocated to practitioners with the right skills, experience and capacity and that assessments, plans and records are child-centred and clearly linked to improving outcomes for children and families.
- **risk awareness:** supporting practitioners to identify, understand, manage and respond to risk and vulnerability, particularly where harm may be immediate. This includes helping to identify concerns early, preventing drift and ensuring that plans reduce risk and support progress to prevent escalation to child in need or child protection.
- **practitioner support and supervision:** providing regular, reflective supervision that offers support and challenge. This includes testing assumptions, keeping the child's voice central, exploring the emotional impact on practitioners and supporting confident decision-making that balances safety, progress and the family's capacity for change.
- **quality assurance and guidance:** supporting practitioners to work in line with expected standards and procedures, using supervision, discussion and other forums to reflect on practice quality. Promoting trauma-informed, strengths-based practice and drawing on learning from audits and case reviews to continually improve outcomes for children in line with their changing needs.
- **focusing on impact and progress:** actively reviewing whether early help is making a difference to children. Testing whether plans are leading to meaningful change and supporting timely decisions about increasing or reducing support or ending early help as appropriate.
- **understanding patterns, drift and effectiveness:** looking beyond individual cases to identify wider themes and patterns. Recognising when progress is slow or stalled, challenging drift and ensuring that attention remains on whether the child is experiencing real progress.
- **alignment with safeguarding frameworks:** ensuring practice reflects safeguarding responsibilities and local and national guidance, where there is prompt, proportionate responses and clear escalation when early help is no longer sufficient to meet a child's needs.
- **leadership, accountability and escalation:** taking responsibility for safeguarding arrangements, delegating clearly and creating robust systems and a culture where practitioners are confident to raise concerns and escalate decisions in the best interests of the child.
- **multi-agency working:** working collaboratively with partner agencies to manage risk and respond to need, ensuring coordinated support for children and families and reducing duplication through effective joint working.
- **clear communication:** promoting clear, jargon-free and child-centred communication and recording so that children's voices, progress and outcomes are easily understood by everyone involved.



why is quality assurance important?

Quality assurance is crucial as it ensures that the services provided to children and their families are effective, consistent and meet their needs. It is important to understand the quality and impact of services to help improve outcomes for children and their families. Effective quality assurance answers a key question: **does our work help children to thrive?**

quality assurance: core principles

It is important to evaluate how effective early help is for children and their families by using quality assurance approaches that include the following core principles:

- **child centred:** primarily focussing on the experiences, progress and outcomes for children.
- **strengths based:** examining whether practice has identified and built on family's strengths and existing support networks.
- **timely and proactive:** considering whether early help support has been provided at the earliest opportunity and whether it has been responsive to emerging need, including whether concerns have been addressed quickly.
- **outcomes focused:** placing attention on the tangible difference made to children's lives and the outcomes achieved rather than focussing just on compliance with processes and procedures.
- **collaborative:** children, their families and involved agencies helping to assess the quality of services by giving and receiving feedback.
- **learning oriented:** promoting a continuous learning culture where findings inform future practice and professional development.
- **evidence based:** examining practice decisions to see if there is a clear rationale based on evidence and not opinion or assumption.
- **professional curiosity and relationships:** examining how curious practitioners have been with families and considering how much that has helped to understand children's circumstances and their needs. Exploring relationships between agencies and with families to understand how well children have been supported.

quality assurance: key activities

The core principles of quality assurance can be applied through various activities that should form a cycle of continuous improvement of early help work including:

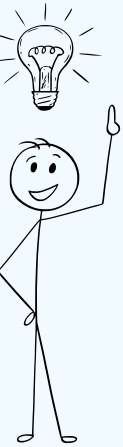
- **auditing:** regular auditing cases, dip sampling and undertaking thematic audits to assess the quality of recording, practice and outcomes.
- **observing practice:** managers and peers observing interactions with children and their families and providing coaching and feedback.
- **gathering feedback:** routinely collecting feedback from children, families and practitioners to gain perspectives on the quality and impact of early help work.
- **data analysis:** using quantitative and qualitative data to identify trends, strengths and areas that require improvement.
- **action planning and implementation:** acting on the findings of quality assurance activity to develop and embed improvements in practice, policy, procedures, guidance and training.



By embedding the core principles and key activities of management oversight and quality assurance, organisations can make sure that they are providing a high standard of early help support, ultimately improving the safety, well-being and outcomes for children and their families.

what next?

Reflect on the core principles in team meetings, supervision sessions and with your colleagues and incorporate them into your agency's training programme. Consider the management oversight and quality assurance processes and frameworks in your organisation: **has an environment been created where practitioners are supported to critically reflect and where practice is collaborative, confident and decisive?** Is the impact of early help practice understood and are findings from quality assurance activity used to support the continuous development of the workforce to help improve outcomes for children and their families?



useful resources:

[Action for Children: what is early help?](#)

[Department for Education: the families first partnership programme guide](#)

[Department for Education: working together to safeguard children 2026: a guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children](#)

[Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership: providing early help](#)

[NSPCC: early help and early intervention](#)

[Research in Practice: early help](#)