

EARLY HELP ASSESSMENT INFORMATION FOR PROFESSIONALS

Guidance

Information to support
practitioners to complete an early
help assessment (EHA)

Herefordshire Council

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1. Early help Assessment

The Early Help Assessment is part of Herefordshire's Early Help Strategy to provide help to families at the earliest point of identification, and to reduce the need for more specialist or statutory service interventions at a later stage. In order to intervene at the earliest point, and target help and support in a way that makes a difference to the lives of families, a good quality assessment and action plan is required.

An early help assessment can be used for families that meet level 2 and 3 of the Herefordshire Right Help Right Time levels of need. For more information, visit Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership website: <https://herefordshiresafeguardingboards.org.uk/right-help-right-time-levels-of-need>

When completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA) practitioners are advised to use the ethos of [Signs of Safety](#) (SofS), a strength based approach to work with children and families. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) states that for an assessment to be effective "*it should be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents or carers, involving the child and family as well as all the practitioners who are working with them. It should take account of the child's wishes and feelings wherever possible: their age; family circumstances; the wider community context in which they are living.*"

Any practitioner can complete an assessment with the child, young person and family when consent is given.

The Early Help Assessment provides a consistent approach, using a common language and a holistic assessment of the child and family's needs. It is not simply a referral form. The family should be involved in the assessment and encouraged to work in partnership with professionals to achieve their goals. The assessment enables the practitioner to:

- Assess, plan and review a package of support to meet the family's identified needs and goals.
- Share information within the Team around the Family meeting (TAF).

The assessment should explore:

What is going well for the child and their family?

- Child and family strengths
- Safety factors

What are we worried about?

- What is happening now
- Areas where needs are not being met

Presenting risks and concerns

- Worries that are impacting on the child's health and wellbeing

What needs to change to improve the outcomes for the child and their family? (*Ensure the child and families views are captured within this*).

- Identify next steps, actions required and desired outcomes

Consider each of the assessment areas from the whole perspective, starting with the strengths and then concentrating on the presenting issues/concerns. Wherever possible, base comments on evidence, not just opinion and indicate what the evidence is. It is important to distinguish between fact, opinion and observation when recording the information. The assessment must be completed with the child and their family to ensure their views are captured and they are at the centre of the assessment. See appendix for useful notes sheet.

2. When should I complete an early help assessment?

Here are some examples of situations when you may want to consider completing an assessment. This is not an exhaustive list, but gives you examples of things to consider:

- **Vulnerable children and their families with multiple needs or whose needs are more complex, such as children and families who:**
 - **have a disability resulting in complex needs**
 - **exhibit anti-social or challenging behaviour, including the expression of radicalised thoughts or intentions.**
 - **suffer some neglect or poor family relationships**
 - **have poor engagement with key services such as school and health**
 - **are not in education or work long- term**

Consult Herefordshire's Right Help Right Time for more information:

<https://herefordshiresafeguardingboards.org.uk/right-help-right-time-levels-of-need>

3. Consent

Before completing the Early Help Assessment, consent should be gained from the family. Early help enables integrated working across services, with the aim of delivering effective intervention so the assessment will need to be shared with relevant professionals.

Please refer to the council's Data protection guidance for storing and sharing of information. For details on the council's privacy notice, please visit:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/privacy_notice

Please also adhere to GDPR guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation>

4. How to write an effective assessment

The basic principle of an effective assessment is the gathering and analysis of information, identifying strengths and worries, in order to generate a plan of action, which focuses on

achieving a positive outcome. This should be done in a collaborative way alongside the child and family with their full engagement.

It is important when carrying out an Early Help Assessment to have a meaningful conversation with the child and their family to ensure action plans and decisions are fully informed and agreed with the child and parent/carer. This should include ensuring the child and family's goals and wishes are directly included in the plan along with identified actions to achieve these goals.

Good quality assessment provides a holistic analysis of the family's strengths and needs and is also:

- **Accurate** – The assessment provides an accurate representation of the strengths and needs of the child and their family.
- **Clear** – The assessment is concise and understandable by all those involved, particularly the family and any professionals who may be involved, or who take responsibility for the case at a later stage.
- **Inclusive** – The assessment ensures that the child and their family are fully involved and their voices are evident throughout.
- **Promotes equal opportunities** – The assessment is not biased and gives positive expression to the opinions and experiences of the child and their family without prejudice or discrimination.
- **Authentic** – The assessment is an accurate and evidence-based record of the discussion.
- **Professional** – The assessment is non-judgemental.
- **Solution-focused** – The assessment focuses on what the child and their family wants to achieve.
- **Systemic** – The assessment focuses on the various systems within which the children or young people operate (home, setting/school, community, extended family, etc.).
- **Practical** – The assessment clearly identifies the strengths and needs of the child and their family and there is an appropriate action plan to address those needs, as well as information on what could happen if no action is taken.
- **Child Centred** – The child is seen and kept in focus throughout the assessment and that account always taken of the child's perspective.

If at any point, you are concerned about the safety or welfare of the child or young person, seek immediate advice at the end of the discussion using your organisation's safeguarding procedures.

Discussing difficult issues can be challenging for the child, family and practitioner. Herefordshire Early Help Hub is a helpline to offer advice, guidance and signposting to families and professionals. They can also support professionals with the completion of an Early Help Assessment.

For help and guidance call the Hub on 01432 260261 or email dutyearlyhelp@herefordshire.gov.uk

5. Completing the EHA form

The Herefordshire EHA is a web-based document that is submitted via a portal. It can be accessed via the Herefordshire Council Website where there is full guidance to support professionals: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/support-schools-settings>

The information you will need to provide:

a) The child's details

Record the details of each unborn baby, child and/or young person aged 0-19 who is part of the assessment.

b) People in the family/household and other people who are important to the family

Record the details, where known, of each parent/carer and any significant others involved with the unborn baby, child or young person. Include details of who has parental responsibility for the unborn baby, child or young person and if a significant other is included, record what their relationship is to the unborn baby, child or young person.

c) Separated Parents

In some families, one of the parents may not be living with the family. In this case, you should encourage the primary carer to contact the separated parent, so that you can ask him/her to be involved with the Early Help Assessment. Ensure you are fully aware of the family's circumstances before you do this however, as there may be particular risks to consider before contacting the family.

d) Services working with the family

Record the details of other services already involved with the family, particularly involvement with schools, health and specialist services. Gathering information from agencies involved with a child triangulates information enhancing the assessment and providing a more holistic picture and collaborative approach to meeting the needs of the child and their family.

e) Reason for the Early Help Assessment

Identifying the strengths and worries of the family enables the development of a plan to identify what needs to change and who can support the family to make this change. We understand that you may not be able to complete all sections of the form in full, however you are encouraged to complete all sections as fully as possible, based on your professional knowledge of the child and the information the child and the family share with you.

The content of the Early Help Assessment should be open and transparent, and written with the family using language that the family understands. Parents should be given a copy of the completed Early Help Assessment. If safeguarding concerns are identified during the assessment, a discussion should be held with the child/parent so that they understand that there is a need to make a referral to MASH.

f) Child and Family's views

It is essential that the voice of the child is captured throughout the assessment, even if the child is aged under 5 or non-verbal. There are a number of tools to help you to capture the voice of the

child and examples of these are included in [the Appendix](#). It is also important to record the parents/carers' views of the assessment and Action Plan. You can use scoring to gauge where the family think they are; 0 being low to 10 perfect! Assessment can only be effective where they are conducted with families in a true sense of partnership.

This involves hearing and incorporating the views of family members within the assessment and any plans for the child. It involves maintaining respectful, open and honest relationships with parents, carers and children. It involves good information sharing and communication with all family members keeping them aware of timescales and next steps within the assessment process. Central to all this is the importance of keeping the child's needs at the heart of the assessment.

g) Next Steps

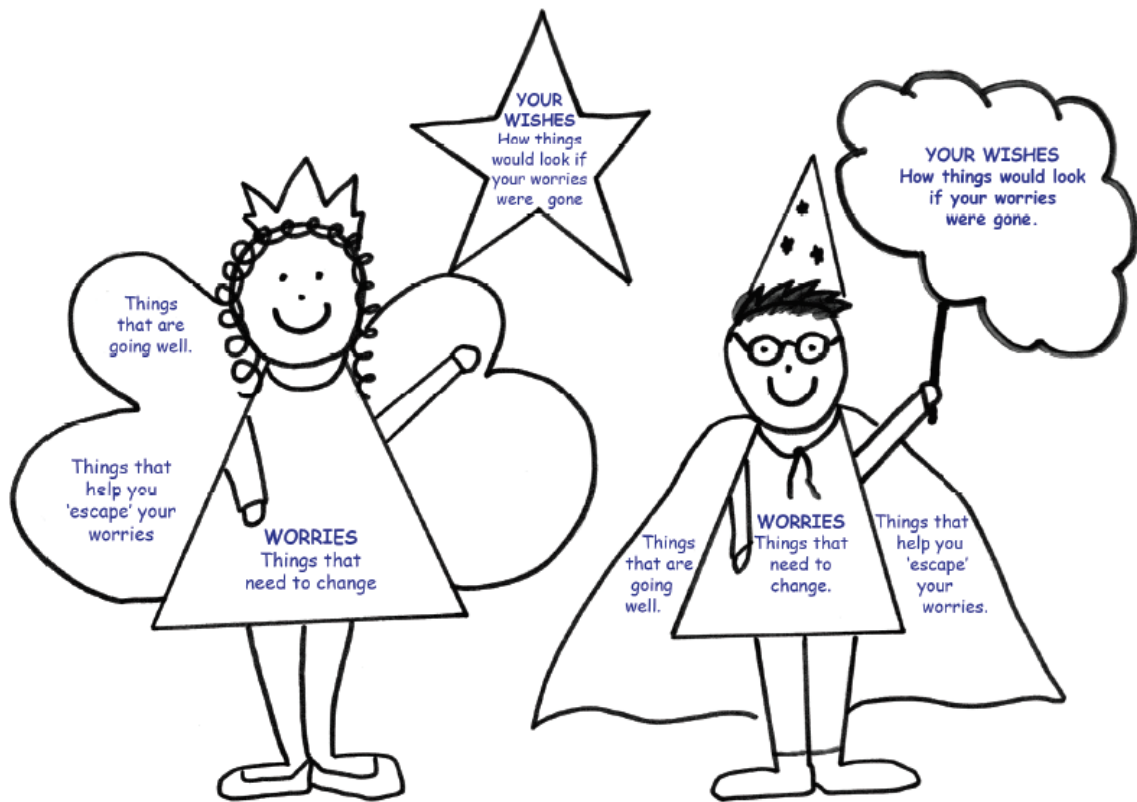
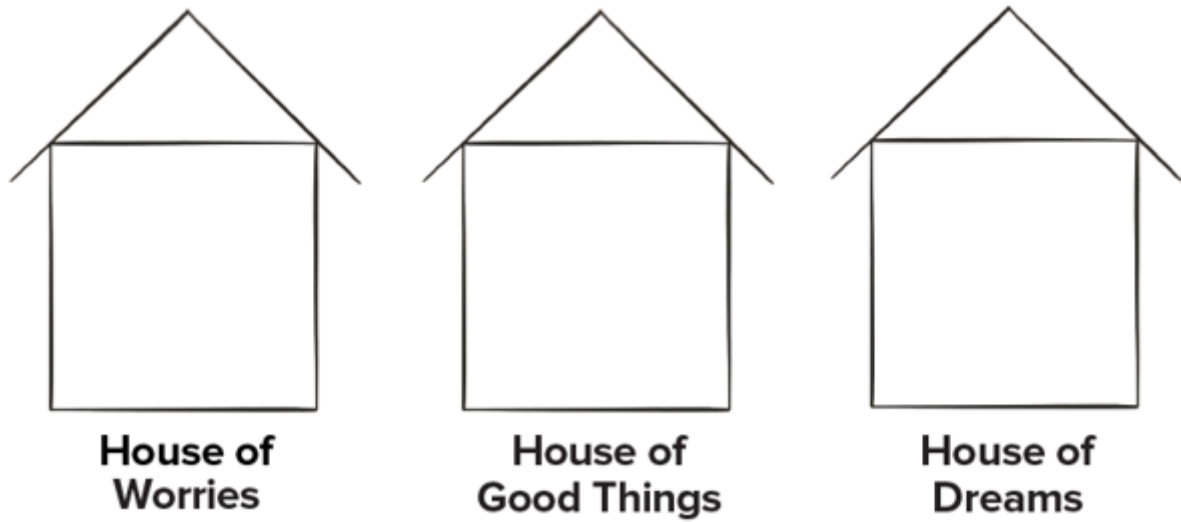
There should be a clear link between the assessment information gathered, the family's goals, and the action plan. The plan should be written in a language that is understandable and ownership of the plan must be given to the child and their family. Actions need to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely (SMART). It is good practice – and a way of empowering a family – to give actions to individual family members.

The purpose of the Early Help Assessment is **not** to make a child and/or family dependent on a professional and/or a service intervention; it is to empower the child, family members and services to achieve positive outcomes for themselves.

Guidance documents to support the completion of the EHA are available from the website.
<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/support-schools-settings>

Appendix

Gaining children's experiences and feelings- useful tools



Ref: www.Signs of safety.net/workbook

Notes sheet for writing an EHA.

PART A) FAMILY & ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Family history, functioning and well-being, wider family, social relationship and community resources, housing, significant events

What are you worried about? (Past concerns or future issues, complicating factors)	What's working well? (Existing support and family strengths)	What needs to happen? (for future well-being)

PART B) CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT NEEDS (INCLUDE FOR EACH CHILD)

Family and social relationships, health, behaviour, emotional and identity, self-care skills, learning, participation and aspirations, caring responsibilities

What are you worried about? (Past concerns or future issues, complicating factors)	What's working well? (Existing support and family strengths)	What needs to happen? (for future well-being)

PART C) PARENT/CARER/ADULT

Health, parenting, social relationships, community elements and resources, employment, training and education

What are you worried about? (Past concerns or future issues, complicating factors)	What's working well? (Existing support and family strengths)	What needs to happen? (for future well-being)

Using a "miracle" question

"Imagine that tonight, while you are asleep, a miracle happens and your hopes from coming here are realised (or the problems that bring you here are resolved), but because you are asleep you don't realise this miracle has happened. What are you going to notice different about your life when you wake up that begins to tell you that this miracle has happened?" (George et al 2006, p11).

Looking for strengths or solutions

Discussing useful strengths from previous experiences. Typical questions for eliciting resources include:

“What did it take to do that? What helped you to achieve that? How did you get through that time/experience/deal with the trauma?”

Looking for exceptions to the problem - Tell me about the times that you cope despite feeling anxious? I guess that there are times that you resist the urge – how do you do that? What about the days when you have a little bit of hope? What’s different about them?”