



Early Support Toolkit for practitioners



We want all children in Warwickshire to be...



HEARD



SAFE



HEALTHY



SKILLED



HAPPY

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1. What is Early Support and how does it work?

Early Support is everyone's responsibility.

The first person to offer early support to a child, young person and their family should be the professional identifying the issue. Every person working with or engaging with children and families, regardless of organisation, status, or position, has a responsibility to support the delivery of early support.

Many children and young people require some additional support. Parents and carers usually access these services for their children by applying directly to them or by asking the relevant universal service to help them. Some services can be accessed directly by young people. Children with additional needs are best supported by those who already work with them, such as children and family centres, early years, schools to organise additional support with local partners as needed.

The Pathway to Change provides a framework to start conversations with parents and children and can be used to identify what agency support may be required. This should be considered as soon as there is a concern that a child and family have additional needs and/or several services are involved.

Advice and guidance on early support can be accessed primarily by your locality Early Support Officer or through [Family Connect Warwickshire](#).

Services that work together to meet the child, young person's and family's needs will be co-ordinated by a team or service that knows the child or young person best. This can include parenting support, school holiday and short breaks provision for disabled children or extra health support for family members.

This is not additional responsibility for practitioners but an essential part of the 'day job' for all people working with Children and Families.

2. What is Family Help and how does it work?

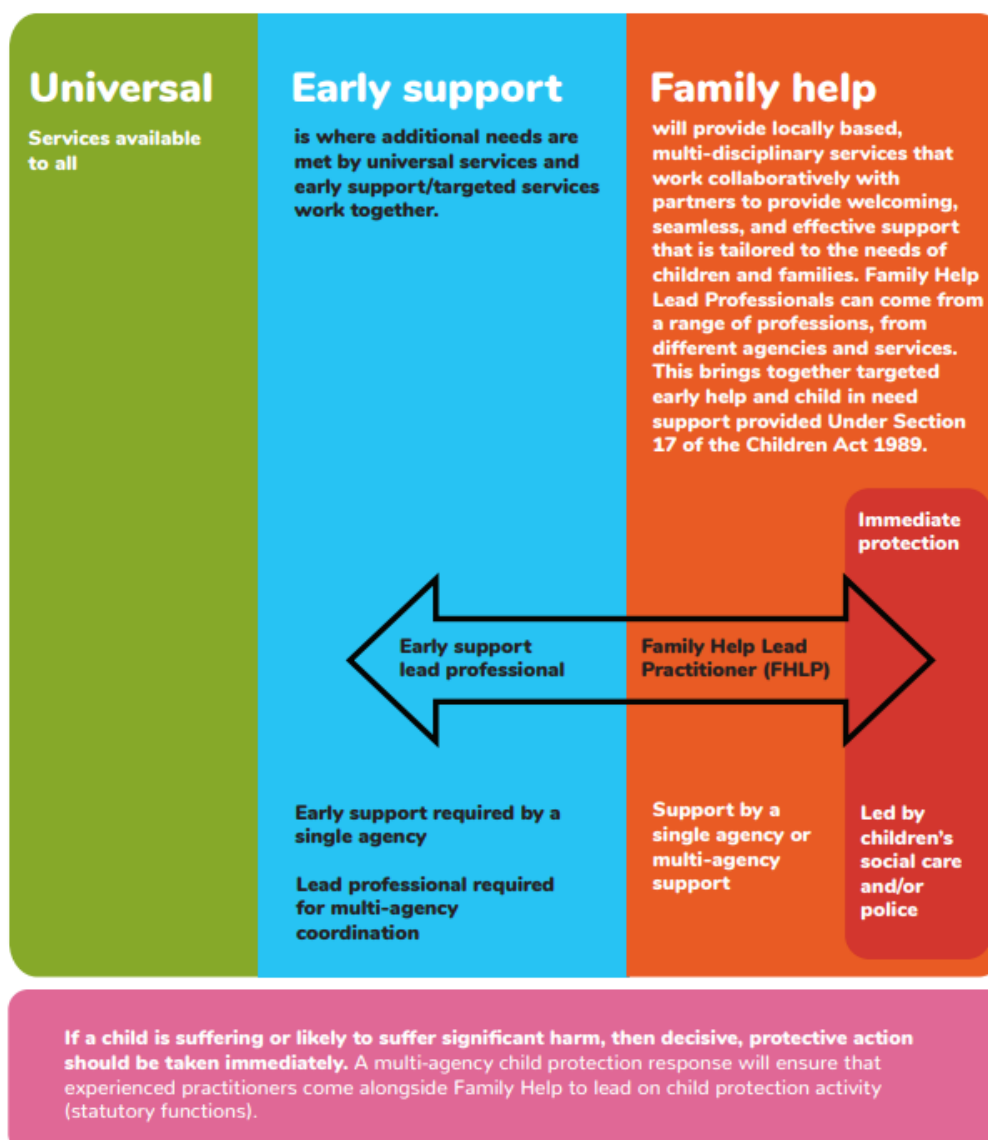
Family Help is the bringing together of support in what was previously called Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care responses.

Family Help at a Targeted Early Support level refers to support provided to children, young people, and their families who are experiencing specific challenges that require more focused intervention than universal services or early support can offer. This type of help is designed to address issues early on, preventing them from escalating into more serious problems that might require statutory intervention.

Decisions will be made in Family Connect, as to whether threshold for Family Help has been met and whether this should be led by a Family Help Lead Practitioner from a Community Partner or from a Children and Families Team (Family Help Team, FAST and CWD). It is expected that majority of families at this level will be supported by a Community Partner and it will often make most sense for this to be same person who has been who has been supporting the family already.

Children and young people with acute or severe needs or a child in need of protection fit within Family Help but will be supported by a social work qualified Family Help Lead Practitioner, this is a requirement for children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Spectrum of Support



3. Children and Family Centres

By offering accessible support through our **Children and Family Centres** we aim to prevent the needs of a family from escalating and becoming more complicated. Children & Family Centres deliver a range of early years services both in the centres and as outreach provision as commissioned by Barnardo's, who run 13 of the 14 sites. St Michael's in Bedworth is operated independently by St Michael's Church of England Academy.

This could involve advice on levels of need, having difficult conversations or how to coordinate and manage a Family Support Meeting.

There are 14 children and Families Centres in:

- **North Warwickshire:** Atherstone,
- **Nuneaton & Bedworth:** Camp Hill, Stockingford, Riversley St Michael's
- **Rugby:** Claremont, Boughton Leigh, Long Lawford
- **Leamington & Warwick:** Kingsway, Lillington, Westgate
- **Stratford:** Stratford, Lighthorne Heath, Alcester

4. Family Information Service

Family Information Service (FIS) is part of Family Connect Warwickshire and provides advice and guidance on a variety of areas including:

- ✓ Help with money issues - information and support on managing household debt, benefits and free school meals applications.
- ✓ Help with housing – information on tenancies and rent, housing related benefits, evictions and housing conditions.
- ✓ Information on funded early education and childcare for two-, three- and four-year-olds.
- ✓ Help and support with childcare costs, including childcare for working parents.
- ✓ Help finding childcare – we maintain and update the details of registered providers in the county.
- ✓ Help with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) including benefits advice and support for parents and carers.



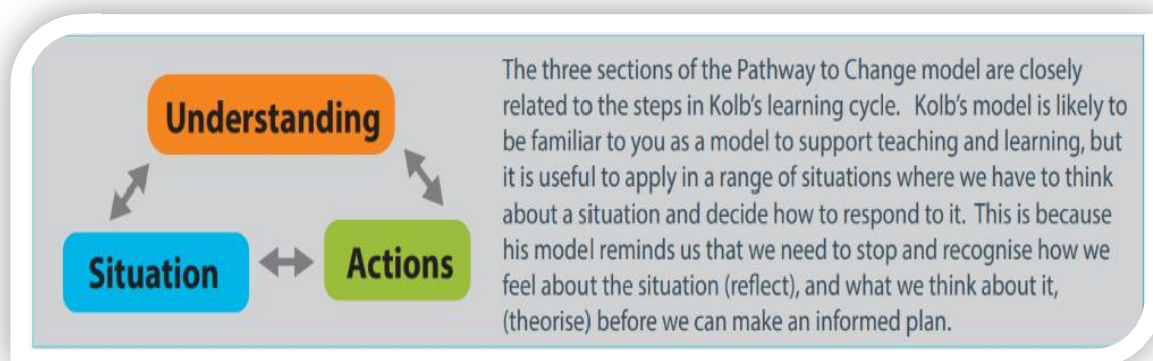
5. Completing an Early Support Assessment - Pathway to Change (part 1)

5.1. When to complete an Early Support Assessment

As a practitioner, if you have identified that a multi-agency action plan is needed for a family, you should seek consent from the family to complete an Early Support Assessment (Pathway to Change) with them.

5.2. How to complete an Early Support Assessment

Pathway to Change is a model to support assessments which are restorative and rigorous. It builds on the practice of holding restorative conversations with families about what has happened, who has been affected and what needs to happen now. It enables us to think carefully about what is happening now that needs to change, what is preventing that change from happening, and what harm might happen in the future that we want to prevent risk.



Conversations should involve shared decision making and outcomes of conversations should be clearly communicated to relevant practitioners to avoid anyone working in isolation.

Someone working with the family should act as the Lead Professional. They will lead on coordinating the plan and the involvement of practitioners who can help. The Lead Professional is the key point of contact for the family during the time the plan is open.

The Lead Professional role can also change from one practitioner to another once improvement is made and sustained for an agreed period, services will reduce or end their involvement to maintain a family's independence.

The plan should identify strengths as well as needs and demonstrate that children, young people and their families have been an integral part of the process

5.3. Step by step guide to completing an Early Support Assessment – Pathway to Change

- **SITUATION**

The **blue boxes** in the model record information about what is **happening currently** and **what has happened in the past**. There is a specific box to capture **strengths and positive** features of the situation.

When you are meeting with families and other professionals to gather information, it will not necessarily be helpful to work through the boxes in order, you will probably want to work backwards and forwards between them as the stories unfold. Remember to capture information about the context for the family, for example housing or low income. Reflecting and recognising how we feel about something is essential in relational practice. In this model it is structured by asking the question ‘who has been affected and how?’

It is important to recognise how you as a professional feel about the situation, although you will need to think carefully about what is helpful to include in the family’s assessment. You may want to discuss this with your supervisor.

- **UNDERSTANDING**

The **orange boxes** in the middle, described as ‘**understanding**’ correspond to theorising in Kolb’s model. These are used to explore what is maintaining the current situation that we are worried about or want to change, and what harmful things could happen in the future, ie risk, if change doesn’t happen.

- **SHARED INTENDED OUTCOME**

The **green** box records what we want the **shared intended outcome** to be.

We often talk about assessment as a continuous process. What this means is that if something about the situation changes, we need to identify who has been affected by the change, revisit our understanding, and consider whether to revise the plan.



What should I include in each section?



	What has happened? What is happening now? Who is affected and how?
SITUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History is very important to help us understand the present and make judgements and what could happen in the future. • We are interested in patterns and expectations to patterns. • You should review/ update the chronology and summarise relevant patterns, exceptions and significant events here.
	What positives and strengths are there?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are the resources used to build the plan. • Identify supportive relationships, community resources and individual strengths.
UNDERSTANDING	What keeps the issue going?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are interested to understand what factors maintain the current situation, because the plan will need to tackle these. These might include competing needs and priorities, power, relationships and patterns of service delivery. • If you have not been able to agree a shared view with either the family or another partner agency about what needs to change, and what could happen if things don't change, this would be a relevant factor to include.
	What could happen in things don't change?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section looks at risk i.e harm that could happen in the future. • If members of the family and professionals have different worries, note these separately. • Detail any differing views between family members and/ or professionals.
SHARED OUTCOME	What is the shared intended outcome of the child(ren)?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and note what the plan is setting out to achieve

5.4. The Child and Family Plan

The plan developed should enable the family to recognise what needs to change and to have a clear understanding of what they need to do differently and how they will be supported by the professional network to achieve and sustain the changes.

The **outcomes** and **actions** should be identified from the information collected within assessment. The actions should be **focused on the outcomes** and must be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely

The **same plan template** should be used for both **Early Support Assessments** and **Family Help Assessments**.

More detailed guidance is available on how to develop an effective outcome focussed SMART plan is available [here](#).

EXAMPLE

A Child and Family Plan has been developed based on the fictional situation below to support you to write an outcome focused SMART plan with the family.

Fictional family scenario - parental mental health

Kyan (10) and Jason (7) live with their mother, Leanne. Leanne has a history of mental health issues and school have noticed that she seems anxious and low at pick up and drop off.

There are some concerns about the cleanliness of the home and Leanne is reluctant for the family support worker to visit her and the children in the home.

The boys' school have noticed that their physical presentation has deteriorated over recent months and Kyan and Jason are presenting as more anxious.

When spoken to, they did not seem aware of their mother's mental health issues and spoke very little about life at home. They could not name adults outside of school that they trust. They have only sporadic contact with their father who school have never met.

EXAMPLE

What is the outcome we are working towards?	What action needs to be taken to achieve the outcome?	Who will be responsible for this action?	Timescale
Leanne feels willing and able to get the right support for her mental health issues. We want to feel reassured that the boys are safe and well in their mother's care.	A referral to be made to mental health services to enable Leanne to access support	Family Support Worker	16/01/2025
	Leanne to visit her GP to discuss how she is currently feeling	Leanne	07/02/2025
Kyan and Jason to understand more about their mum's difficulties and know she is getting help, how to spot if she's getting unwell and how they can get help	Family Support Worker and Leanne to meet with the boys together to talk this through.	Family Support Worker and Leanne	07/02/2025
Kyan and Jason to have an increased network of support and to have people that they can talk to and share their worries with.	Referral to be made to Kids Time Workshop for young carers support.	Family Support Worker	21/02/2025
	Boys to be invited to join 'emotions and feelings' group during lunchtime.	Family Support Worker and boys	08/02/2025
	Grandparents to collect the boys from school every Wednesday and keep them for dinner.	Grandparents	14/02/2025

5.5. Family Agreement

Check with the family that the information throughout the form is accurate and if they are happy to sign the agreement section. For children under 16, it is essential to obtain consent from parents or carers who have parental responsibility. If the young person is 16 or older, they can give their own consent.

- Print two copies and ask for both copies to be signed.
- Provide one to the family and keep one for your records, ensuring you follow your organisation's storage and retention procedures.

If you are unable to do this immediately due to the location of the meeting, please provide a copy for the family to sign as soon as possible.

If the family are not happy to sign the Family Agreement section, this means you cannot share with or refer into other services. Unless the lack of agreement raises safeguarding concerns, please signpost the family to appropriate universal resources and support services that are available at <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/children-families>

5.6. Reviewing the Child and Family Plan

It is good practice to schedule a review meeting with the family before they leave the assessment meeting. Ensure that the family and all involved agencies are invited to this review meeting, which should take place **within 6 weeks** of the assessment date.

Involving families in the review process is essential. They are often experts in their own strengths, challenges, and needs. Involving them in reviewing their plan not only builds trust and strengthens relationships but also leads to more effective and sustainable solutions.

5.7. Ending the plan

Please indicate within the review paperwork if the plan is ending and send the paperwork to earlysupportdocumentation@warwickshire.gov.uk

6. Completing a Family Help Assessment (part 2)

6.1. When to complete a Family Help Assessment

Sometimes, a family's situation may escalate and require a more targeted and coordinated approach than what early support can provide. This is known as Family Help. Family Help is more universally described as requiring support at a Targeted Early Help level or as a Child in Need.

Please refer to the Indicators of Need section of the [Spectrum of Support](#) for guidance.

If you feel Family Help is required, a conversation should be held with your Early Support Officer (previously known as TSO) who will work with you to determine the best course of action. This may include a discussion with the Family Help Consultant Social Worker within the Family Help team.

Following a conversation with your Early Support Officer and/ or Family Connect, it may be agreed that part 2 of the assessment is needed known as a Family Help Assessment. In this scenario, you do not need to undertake the Early Support Assessment – Pathway to Change (part1) again, although you may need to update it to reflect the current situation if there has been changes.

The Family Help assessment should build on the information already gathered about the family to prevent them from having to repeat their story. This approach allows for mor seamless intervention.

If you are concerned that a child may be at risk of significant harm, then a phone call should be made to Family Connect 01926 414144 without delay.

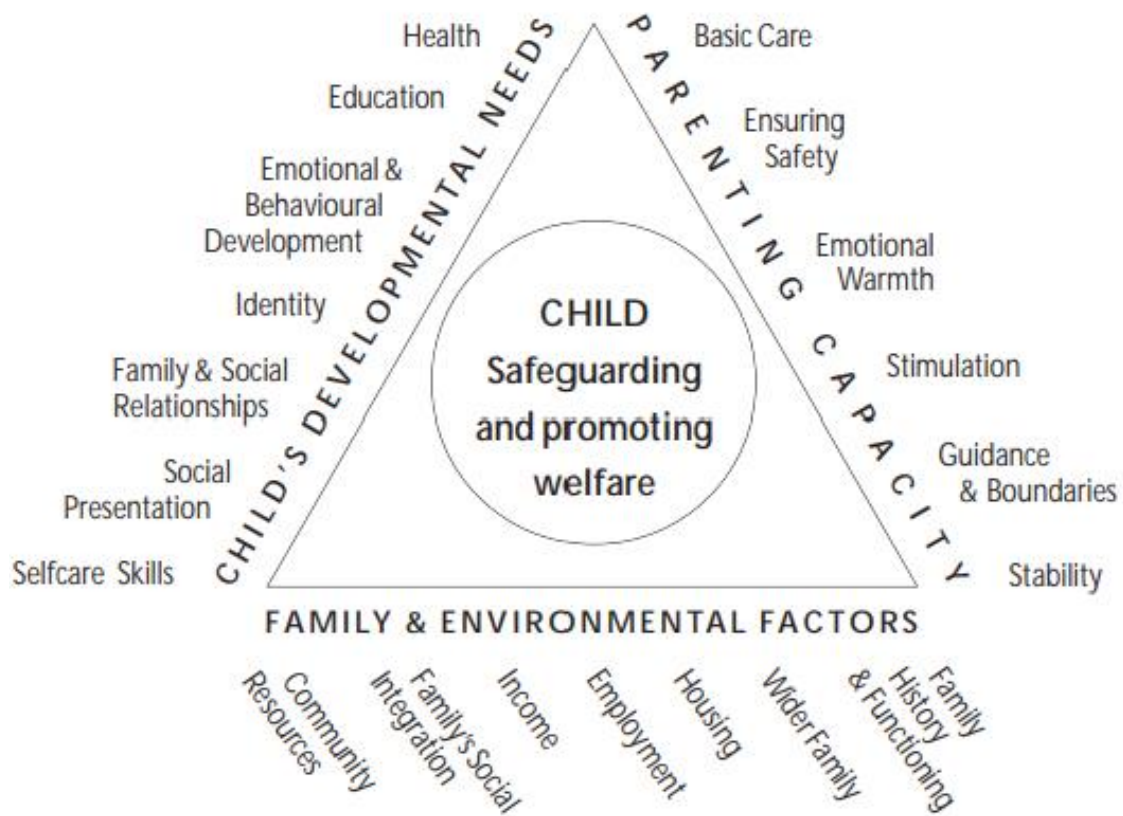
6.2. How to complete a Family Help Assessment

The Family Help Assessment is to be used for the assessment of children where the concerns suggest that support is required at a Family Help level as set out in the [Spectrum of Support](#).

It will build on the information already gathered in the Pathway to Change. The assessment will be based on the Pathway to Change model alongside the Assessment Framework triangle.

The **Assessment Framework** requires practitioners to consider the interaction between or the influence of these three dimensions on each other in a child's life and allows professionals to differentiate effectively between different types, and differing levels of need.

Assessment Framework



Once a decision has been made for a Family Help Assessment to be completed (either with your ESO or by Family Connect) the child must be seen by a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner, who does not have to be social work qualified, as soon as possible or within 3 working days.

A Family Help Assessment should be completed and sent to earlysupportdocumentation@warwickshire.gov.uk within 10 working days where possible.

6.3. Step by Step Guide to completing Family Help Assessment

What should I include in each section?

Reason for completing assessment

- Detail the reason for a Family Help Assessment being undertaken.
- What has happened to trigger this response.

Child(ren)'s developmental needs details (growth and learning)

Health

- Are there any known medical concerns or developmental delays?

Education

- Is the child on track academically?

Emotional and behavioural

- Does the child demonstrate age-appropriate emotional regulation and behaviour?
- Any observed emotional challenges or behavioural issues?

Identity

- Consider the child's gender identity, religion, culture, and any disability - including those that are not visible.

Family and social relationships

- Are there social skills or peer relationships to note?

Social presentation

- Consider the child's demeanour (playfulness, mood, suspiciousness, fear, blankness) and their presentation (cleanliness/hygiene/nourishment).
- This is also especially important with non-verbal/pre-verbal children or children with limited verbal communication skills.

Selfcare abilities and skills

- Is the child able to complete age-appropriate self-care tasks?

Parenting (ability to take care of child(ren))

Think about how well the parents/carers can take care of the child and consider their ability to:

- Provide basic care
- Ensure the child is safe
- Provide and demonstrate emotional warmth
- Provide appropriate stimulation
- Provide appropriate guidance and boundaries
- Provide stability and security

Family and Environmental factors (family and surroundings)

Think about:

- Who's who and significant in the family
- The community and community resources
- The family's social integration in the community
- The family's income, employment and housing
- The extended family network
- The family's history and how they function as a family

What is this telling us? What does it mean for the child and family? What needs to happen next?

What is this telling us?

- Consider and summarise key observations and findings from the information gathered throughout the assessment.
- Highlight any patterns or significant events.

What does this mean for the child and family?

- Consider and summarise how the findings affect the child's daily life, learning and development.

- Consider the emotional impact on the family.

What needs to happen next?

- What is your recommendation?
- What does the family want to happen?
- Record identified actions within the child and family plan.

Are there concerns around homelessness?

- Detail any concerns in relation to homelessness for the family.

What might make us more worried for the child(ren) and what would happen then?

- A contingency plan is designed to identify a possible future event or circumstance.
- It will supplement the main plan for the child by considering risks which are not expected but are identified as being possible.

Confirm relevant (necessary) information from assessment/plan has been shared. This should include involved family members, as well as other agencies or professionals (where appropriate). Ensure views of the family members are included with regards information sharing and how it will be managed

- Detail who the plan has been shared with and when this has happened or is due to happen.

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Check with the family that the information throughout the form is accurate and if they are happy to sign the agreement section. For children under 16, it is essential to obtain consent from parents or carers who have parental responsibility. If the young person is 16 or older, they can give their own consent.

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6.6. Ending the plan

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7. Support for practitioners

7.1. Clinics

Early Support Officers will arrange and participate in clinics within designated settings to offer support and guidance to lead professionals who are supporting families. The purpose of the clinics is to ensure that lead professionals have the necessary resources and advice to effectively support the families they are working with.

7.2 Family Help Network Meetings

Family Help network meetings aim to provide advice, support and guidance to trained Lead Professionals or partners interested in finding out more about Early Support prior to accessing training.

Early Support Officers lead the meeting sharing useful information, explore needs in the area and further strengthen the Early Support process to support children and families whilst enabling networking opportunities between organisations.

7.3 Family Support Duty line

Duty Family Support Worker based within Family Connect 01926 414144 (Monday – Friday 9-4pm) This will enable a family or practitioner to have a same day telephone consultation regarding parenting or behaviour concerns.

8. Support for parents

Parenting Support will be available through a variety of mediums, including outreach:

- [Online parenting support information](#) accessed via Family Information Service.
- Duty Family Support Worker based within [Family Connect](#) 01926 414144 (Monday – Friday 9-4pm) This will enable a family or practitioner to have a same day telephone consultation regarding parenting or behaviour concerns
- [Short 2-hour courses](#) in a range of subjects such as sleep, routines and boundaries and challenging behaviour.
- A variety of [parenting groups](#) available to meet a variety of needs.
- Families are encouraged to access support by contacting Family Connect or attending a drop-in session held at the [Children & Family Centres](#) where Family Support Workers are based. Depending on the family's level of need,

consideration will be given to the allocation of a family support worker to provide direct support to the family.

- Additional [emotional well-being and mental health support](#) for parents.

9. Useful information

- [Family Information Service](#)
- [Early Support webpages with links to assessment and review forms](#)
- [Family Help Assessment – leaflet for parents](#)
- [Family Help Assessment – leaflet for children](#)