



Early Help Strategy 2022 – 2026

Introduction

“We are delighted to introduce the new early help strategy for Devon which supports our Children and Young People’s plan. We are grateful to practitioners from across the partnership who contributed to the development of this strategy through our workshop in May 2022. Practitioners from health, education, social care and Children’s Centres brought their ambitions and vision for early help. This strategy reflects the feedback we have received across the partnership, communities, and families. This strategy is central to

delivering our partnership ambition for children, young people, and their families to achieve their potential, with opportunities to thrive, have the best start in life and be protected from harm and receive early support.

We are proud of the collective response to the Covid-19 pandemic of partner agencies and local communities to support and protect children, young people, and families when they needed it most. The pandemic has confirmed the significant role of communities in supporting one another and the incredible impact that we can have as a local partnership by working collaboratively. The proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' underpins our strategy and we will work with and support our communities to ensure every child is able to grow up and access support in their community. It is vital that we, as joint partners work to ensure that we provide effective, co-ordinated support as early as possible when children and families need our help.

There has been significant work in early help over the years, and this strategy is just the beginning; we know there is more to do to embed restorative practice and to shift the balance of power so that our work is led by the voice and experience of the children, young people, and families we are privileged to work with. The right support in the right place at the right time is our joint ambition. We want partners and practitioners to feel well supported, knowledgeable, and be able to meet the needs of children and families as early as possible. We are a restorative service.

This ambitious strategy sets out how we work with our communities and our partners to ensure that no one in Devon is left behind. We know this will take time, but we believe that this is the right thing to do for children and families in Devon.”

Children and Young People’s Plan 2019-2023:

<https://www.dcfp.org.uk/children-and-young-peoples-plan-2019-2023/>

Darryn Allcorn

(On behalf of Devon Children and Families Partnership)

Cllr Andrew Leadbetter

Lead Councillor for Children’s Services

**In Devon,
we believe
that:**

Early Help in Devon

Early help is the way we all support children and families when they need extra assistance in their lives. This can happen to any family at any time. The aim is to build on existing strengths and increase resilience so that all children and families can flourish. Early help is everyone's responsibility and is not a specific service or team.

It may also involve individual support for children and families who may need some extra help for a set period of time to overcome challenges that they may be experiencing. Early help also assists children and families who have previously been supported by Children's Social Care. We know that early help is most effective for children and families when everyone takes responsibility.

Children are best brought up in their families and communities where they will have relationships that enable them to thrive.

We support families to find their own solutions and offer Family Group Conference to support this.

Children and families will receive the help, support, and protection they need at the earliest opportunity.



Early help is like an Ecosystem; it can be a single agency or several agencies all coming together to support a child/ren and family and respond to the presenting needs. Our early help offer is a partnership and includes a range of services and resources, that come together to support our children and families in Devon. This includes:

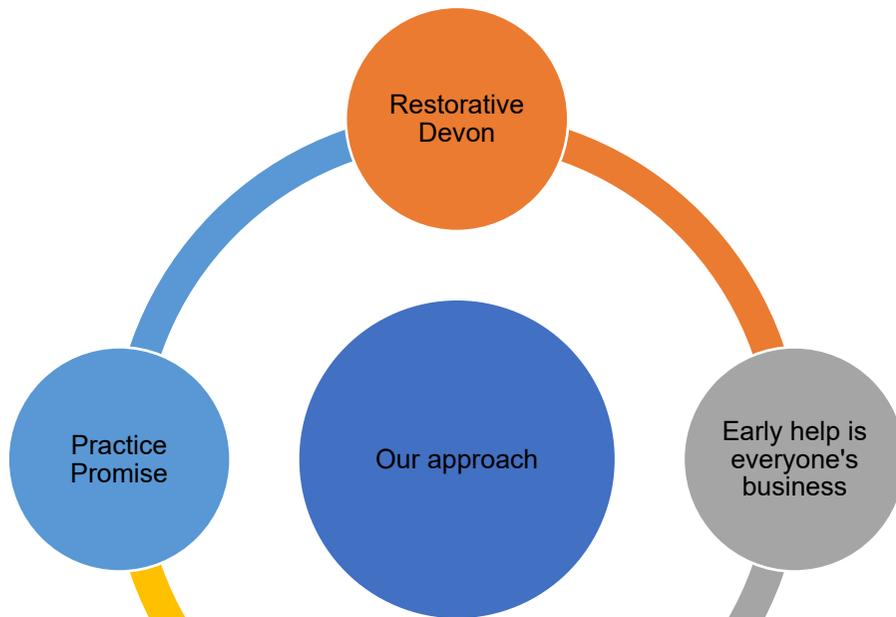
- **Community services**, such as family and friends, online support groups, faith groups, and community services.
- **Universal and early help services**, such as education, early years, children's centres and youth centres, GP surgeries, libraries, maternity services, specialist public health or community nurses and community co-ordinators.
- **Targeted early help services**, such as family support, children's and adult social care, accident and emergency departments, allied health professionals, mental health services, special education needs support services, jobcentre plus, school attendance and exclusion support, domestic abuse services, alternative education provision, housing services, police, substance misuse services, fire and rescue, youth offending and targeted youth services.

As a partnership we will continue to take every opportunity to explore how we can strengthen our work to benefit children and families in Devon. We will review our local processes together to ensure that our offer is dynamic and adaptable to the changing

needs of Devon's children and families. Crucially we will strengthen our work with local communities offering support to empower them to provide the support for children in their community.

Devon's Approach to Early Help

Early help practice is underpinned by four practice components and begins with a commitment that early help is everyone's business and responsibility. It includes developing strong relationships and holding regular conversations with children, families, and partners.



Early Help
 Every family builds positive relationships with family members and positively to families Devon, our workforce is when families request support from another agency; it may be a conversation, supporting a child or family to research support in their local community, or by providing a space for a child or family to talk about how they are feeling. We know that when we all take responsibility for early help, we can support families early and prevent the issue from escalating.

is everyone's business
 interaction is a chance to change for children and includes peers, adults, family communities. Everyone will respond when they request support. Across committed to listening and acting support. We know that this isn't always

Practice Example
 "Our 4-year-old daughter was not sleeping well and was crying constantly. Both of us felt tired and hopeless as parents; we didn't know what to do.
 We spoke to our health visitors, and the conversations were positive; we both left feeling that she understood us and was going to help us. She gave us practical advice, tips and tools that we used. She called us weekly to see how we were getting on and told us about the local group at the Children's Centre.
 We went and met other parents, and now our daughter is interacting with more people, sleeping better and not always crying."

'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' statutory guidance re-emphasises the crucial role of early help: 'Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help can also prevent further problems arising'.



Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is Devon’s way of working. It is about creating a shared language and culture, where we focus on building relationships that support good outcomes for children and families in Devon. We put strong, meaningful, and trusting relationships at the heart of how we work with children and families. We know that families are the experts in their own lives and that working with children and families means offering supportive relationships combined with clear goals focused on the needs of children. These five principles of our practice wrap around families to deliver one vision: to offer consistently good support to every child in Devon that needs our help.

We know we are working restoratively when we embody the following principles:

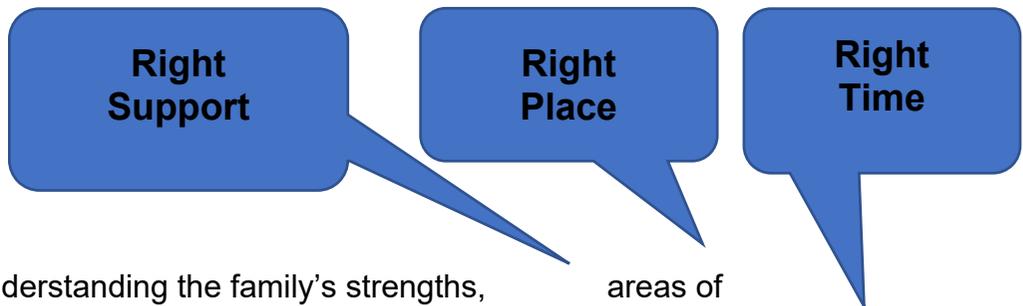
- **Reflective:** Flexible, responsible and outcomes-focused.
- **Relational:** Trustworthy, caring and collaborative.
- **Respect:** Participatory, honest and inclusive.
- **Responsibility:** Empowering, informed and risk-aware.
- **Resilience:** Trauma-informed, curious and patient

Our approach to restorative practice is rooted in the evidence of what works. We use Motivational Interviewing as a tool for instigating change in a framework that balances strengths and risks with equal rigour.

Conversations based on Respect

Our practice relies on the relationships we form with each other, and we know that this starts with the quality of the conversations we have together. Conversations enable everyone to be clear on the concerns and respond to the needs. We will focus on providing support at the right time and in the right place to ensure that children and families are supported before the issue escalates.

The right support means understanding the family’s strengths, areas of concerns and actions that are required, often completed through an early help assessment. By having regular conversations



with each other, we can ensure that we respond to the individual needs of families in a flexible and timely way. This approach promotes the principles of responsibility, resilience, respect, and family-led decision making.

Practice Promise

Our practice promise is entwined with Restorative Devon, and it sets out our principles of working in partnership with children and families.

Practice Example

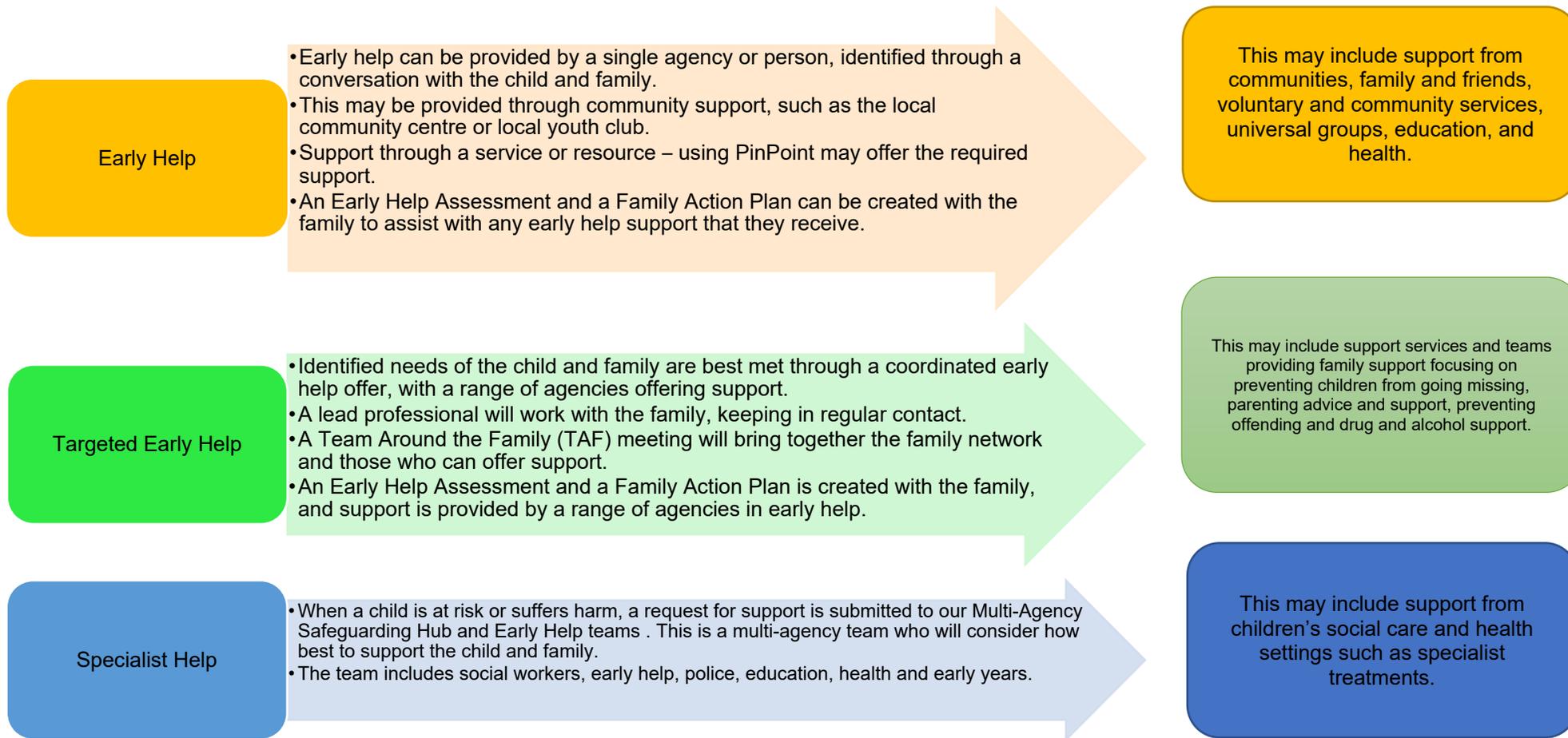
"My 14-year-old son was not enjoying school, and I was struggling to get him there. The school were supporting, but his attendance was still low. The school completed an early help assessment and spoke to my son who shared that he was struggling with his relationship with his dad. School arranged for a family meeting to take place, which dad attended. It was powerful. My son now has a mentor, and it is really helping him to manage his emotions. His dad is also seeing him more frequently."

We will:

1. Work restoratively and with the whole family.
2. Be ambitious for children and families and set high expectations.
3. Be clear as to why we are supporting the family.
4. Ensure children and their families are involved in decision making.
5. Give opportunities for children and families to express their thoughts and feelings about family life, parenting and what help they need.
6. Be curious about the child's network of support and offer opportunities for family-led plans to be created and implemented.
7. Review progress to celebrate success and set new objectives for key areas of work.
8. Work with children and families to support change and be clear on expectations.
9. Be respectful, open, and honest and communicate clearly throughout our involvement.
10. Work as a part of a multi-agency team and ensure we are accessible.
11. Provide opportunities to provide feedback on our involvement.

Pathways to early help

The pathways to access early help in Devon rely on practitioners supporting a family to identify the needs, by having conversations and completing an early help assessment. Through the assessment, we can establish who is best to support the family to address their concerns in a timely way, to prevent escalation and ensure positive outcomes.



Context

Devon is not alone in experiencing growing challenges, but we know we have resilience communities and a strong workforce who are both committed to making a positive difference for children and their families.

Devon is a large and predominantly rural county, with around 150,000 children and young people (0-17 years old); a fifth of the area's total population¹. As a result, there are significant differences in the experiences and outcomes of children and young people growing up in different neighbourhoods across the county.

We expect the total population of Devon to expand by around 3.6%² between 2018 and 2023, with every district area seeing a rise. Most of this is expected to come from domestic and international migration into the region, with average fertility rates dropping for the sixth year running to 1.65 from 1.7 in 2018³.

Devon remains a predominantly white population, with 2.5% of the total population reporting as either Black, Asian, or ethnic minority⁴. There is significant variation in the size of black, Asian or minority ethnic populations between district areas, ranging from just 1.3% in Torrington up to 7.5% in Exeter (according to the 2011 census⁵). As a result of migration and birth rates within those populations, the overall proportion of people from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background in Devon is now estimated to be between 3 and 5%⁶. There is an opportunity for Devon to become more vibrant in its diversity.

There are pockets of poverty and deprivation in all parts of the county. This is most acute in Northern Devon, with neighbourhoods in Ilfracombe and Barnstaple among the top 10% most deprived in the country. Beyond Northern Devon, some neighbourhoods in Teignbridge and Exeter are in the top 20% most deprived, while some areas in Exmouth, Dartmouth and Tiverton are in the top 30% most deprived⁴.

Household deprivation is largely characterised by insecure and low-quality housing, rising debt burdens, fuel poverty, digital poverty, and food poverty. While entrenched poverty and inequality manifests itself in declining access to local public services and community spaces, limited public transport and low-wage and seasonal employment opportunities.

Since the pandemic, increasing numbers of children are now eligible for free school meals. There are currently over 17,000 pupils, across all types of school, in Devon who are eligible⁵. Devon has an above average proportion of children and young people with

¹ Mid-year 2020 population estimate for Devon County Council [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/population-demography/population/population-estimates)

² Devon population projections, published by [DCC](#)

³ Births in England and Wales: 2019, published by [ONS](#).

⁴ 2011 United Kingdom census data, published by [ONS](#).

⁵ Schools, pupils and their characteristics, published September 2020 by [ONS](#).

⁶ Education, Health and Care Plans, published May 2020 by [ONS](#).

SEND – In spring 2021, there were 13,624 children and young people receiving SEN support in Devon schools (this excludes independent schools and those receiving SEN support in FE colleges)⁶. Almost half (47%) of all children and young people receiving SEN support in Devon schools had a primary need of either speech, language and communication needs (25%) or social, emotional and mental health (22%).

At the time of writing (July 2022), there are:

- 490 MASH referrals per 10,000 0-17 year-old population (annualised rate covering the last 6 months). This is up from 304 during 2020-2021, and compares to 396 among Devon's statistical neighbours
- 192 'Children in Need' per 10,000 0-17 population. This is down from 213 during 2019-2020 and compares to 283 among statistical neighbours.
- 38 children with a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 0-17 population. This is up from 34 during 2019-2020 and compares to 35 among statistical neighbours.
- 54 children in care per 10,000 0-17 population. This has remained steady during the pandemic, but is up from 51 during 2019-2020. Devon's rate of children in care compares to 63 among statistical neighbours.
- In 2019, 1839 Early Help Assessments were completed with children/families. This rose to 1922 in 2021.
- In 2021/2022 there was 2,502 children in Devon who were electively home educated and of these, 217 had a Education, Health and Care Plan. 505 children were home education due to their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- In 2021/2022, 144 children were excluded from school with the highest reason being persistent disruptive behaviour. 129 of these exclusions were permanent.

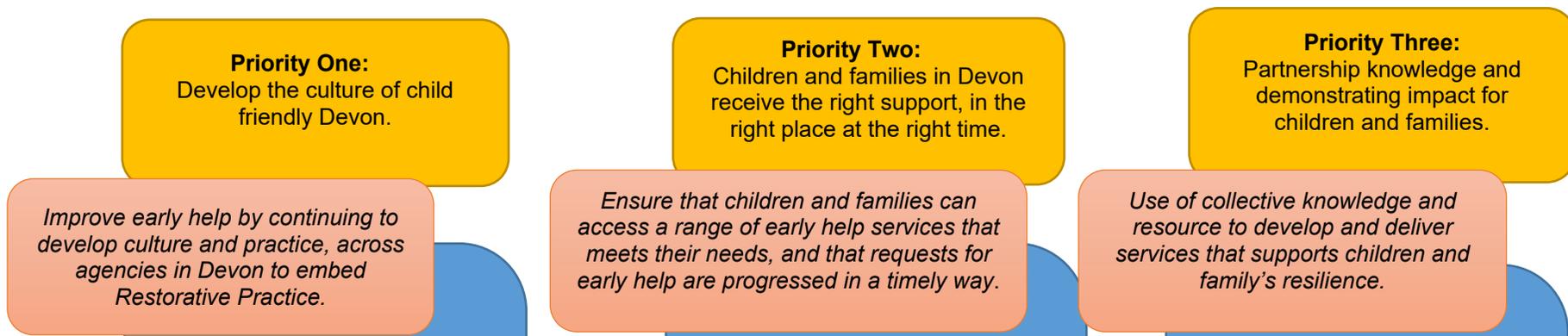
Practice Example

“Our family was new to Devon, and our children started a new school – they were all nervous. The school really helped them settle in by arranging visits before they started, sharing names of other children in their class and allowing them to go for breakfast club. This really supported the transition.”

Devon Children and Families Partnership Outcomes

Life Chances	Healthy and well	Feel Safe	Be Protected from Harm
All children achieve their potential with the opportunities to thrive, children having the best start in life and as they grow into young adults have good routes into ongoing training, education, employment and apprenticeships.	Have the best start in life, stay well and thrive, with good information and specialist help when they need it.	Be protected from neglect and supported when vulnerable.	Be protected from harm, abuse, and exploitation.

The early help strategy will support the Devon Children and Families Partnership overall outcomes for children by addressing three priorities areas.



Young Carers

What will success look like?

The service will seek to achieve the priorities through direct work with children, young people and their families, advice sessions, signposting support, group activities, and parenting programmes. Early help is delivered through a whole family approach.

The following outcome indicators will demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategy and its implementation:

- a. Increase in the number of families supported through a multi-agency early help plan.
- b. Increase in children and families accessing identified information, advice, and guidance points.
- c. An increase in families who have previously been supported by early help recommending early help to other families who may benefit.
- d. Improved school attendance, with few absences relating to health and wellbeing needs.
- e. 80% of families supported through early help report that the support/intervention they received made a positive difference to them and their family.
- f. A reduction in the number of children and young people being suspended or excluded from school.
- g. Increase in the number of families making progress against the goals in their early help plan, and positive scores on Outcome Star.
- h. Increase in the use of the Graded Care Profile 2 across the partnership.
- i. Increase in the number of families who are satisfied with the support they receive
- j. All children who have been supported by Children's Social Care are offered early help support and families take up the offer.
- k. Children receive support by Children's Social Care where this is appropriate, and early help work informs the next steps.
- l. Increase the number of early help audits with a greater proportion of being considered 'Good'.
- m. Increase the number of parents trained in parent-led parenting programmes.
- n. Increase the number of multi-agency practitioners trained in Family Network Meetings.
- o. Increase the number of multi-agency practitioners trained in Motivational Interviewing, Levels of Needs, Team Around the Family, Lead Professional and Trauma Informed approach training.
- p. Increase in the number of early help plans in place at the time of a request for an Education Health Care needs assessment.
- q. Continued reduction in first time entry into the youth offending team.

As a result of the strategy, we know we will be making a difference to children and their families in Devon as more children will be supported earlier within their families and communities with support from services wrapping around. Families will know where to access support and feel confident to reach out.

Working together to deliver outcomes

The underlying principle is that the delivery of the Early Help System requires multiple partners to work together, providing integrated and joined up early help support.

The Early Help Strategic Delivery Group is a countywide multi-agency group that is accountable to the [Devon's Children and Families Partnership](#) Executive Board.

To support the Early Help Strategic Delivery Group there are ongoing workstreams to continue developing early help practice further. These are:



Linked Strategies

Corporate Strategies

- [Devon County Council Strategic Plan](#)

Safe, healthy, and thriving children, young people, families, and communities

- [Children and Young People's Plan](#)
- [Devon Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- SEND Strategy
- Sufficiency strategy
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- A Place Called Home
- Restorative Practice Framework

Robust, equitable and vibrant local economy and labour market

- NEET Reduction Strategy
- [Devon's financial budgets](#)
- Equality and Diversity Policy

Positive places to live and grow up

- Housing and homelessness strategies
- Community development strategies and plans

Why do we need to early help?

'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' sets out the statutory guidance for Local Authorities and their partners. 'Keeping children safe in education (September 2018)' sets out the statutory guidance for schools and colleges.

Why we offer Early Help support?

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022

"The power of a strong community network should not be underestimated. People with stronger social relationships show a dramatic reduction in their risk of mortality beyond reductions seen through quitting smoking, with evidence suggesting well socially connected individuals have a 50% increased likelihood of survival compared to those with weaker social relationships (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Communities and places can both positively affect health through the services they provide and the resources they have, as well as through supporting the development of "social capital" (referring to the networks and social trust we hold which facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit) (Putnam, 1995), cohesion and feelings of safety – all of which are associated with lower stress and better physical and mental health (Marmot et al., 2020)."

Realising the Potential of Early Intervention – Early Intervention Foundation 2018

"Leaving problems unresolved in childhood doesn't only impact on the lives of individuals and families it also impacts on society and the economy, by undermining the wellbeing of communities and reducing people's opportunities to live positive and successful lives. Acting early to support children at risk of poor outcomes can build healthier, happier, and more productive communities, and produce a range of economic benefits that significantly outweigh the costs of intervening.

Early intervention is not a panacea for all of society's problems, nor is it a financial coping strategy for local or central government. It is a vital way of providing children with the skills and resilience they need to succeed in life, and of mitigating the negative impacts of poverty and other forms of disadvantage."

[Early Intervention: The Next Steps – Graham Allen January 2011](#)

“I recommend that future expansion of early intervention programmes should favour those which combine strong evidence bases with impact of crucial stages in the development of social and emotional bedrock in children, and the present network of children’s centres should use such approaches to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.”

[The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, a Child- Centred System – Eileen Munro](#) ‘Preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services. Many services and professions help children and families, so coordinating their work is important to reduce inefficiencies.’

[Fair Society, Healthy Lives – Michael Marmot 2010](#)

‘The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual, and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during those early years, starting in the womb, has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing, from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational and economic achievement. Later interventions, although important, are considerably less effective if they have not had good early foundations.’

[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#)

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are negative experiences in early life and childhood that can have an impact on future health and wellbeing throughout life. There is a significant and growing body of evidence that stressful experiences during childhood have a profound impact on an individual’s life chances.

Glossary of Terms

1. [Devon Children and Families Partnership](#)

Devon Children and Families Partnership Board brings together all services for children and young people in the county to focus on hearing the voice of children and young people, improving outcomes, and keeping children safe.

2. Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)

An Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is a legal document that is established to describe the needs, detail the provision, and name an educational placement for a child or young person.

3. Family Group Conference

A Family Group Conference is a family-led meeting in which the family and friends network come together to make a family plan for the child. The process is supported by an independent coordinator who helps the family prepare for the meeting.

4. Graduated Response

The 'graduated response' approach is a way of meeting needs through effective implementation of support before moving a child or young person onto higher levels of support by following the assess, plan, do and review cycles.

5. Early Help Assessment

An Early Help Assessment is an initial assessment and planning tool that facilitates and coordinates multi-agency support. It helps everyone to look at the strengths and areas for support and focuses on what support might be required. The assessments focusing on everyone within the family.

6. Interventions - Intervention is about putting a particular service or plan in place to help a family get through their problems. An intervention will be short to medium term and will involve a plan for what happens when the intervention finishes. It could be something like attending a course or going through a specified programme of support.

7. Multi-agency - When a team consists of professionals from more than one agency or more than one skill, they are known as being multi-agency or multidisciplinary.

8. Outcome star – An evidence-based tool for measuring and supporting change when working with children and families.

9. Partnerships – Partnership is often about agencies working together with each other, but it can also be about agencies working together with families.

10. Restorative practice – While traditional methods of conflict solution start by seeking blame and administering punishment, restorative solutions start by seeking understanding. Restorative practice is a way of behaving rather than a theory or process. Restorative

practice offers a chance to rebuild relationships that have been broken, giving everybody a chance to explain their actions and building solutions together for the future.

11. Strategy – A strategy is a high-level document outlining a vision for where we want to be and how we want to work.