

Having Conversations in Early Help-

A guide to Lincolnshire's Early Help
Assessment for Partner Agencies

September 2021



Contents page:

Rules	3
Who, When, Where and How	3
Language	4
Section 1: Child, Family and Friend Details	5
Section 2: Child, Young Person and Family Overview	6
Section 3: What do the Children and Young People Think?	7
Section 4: Worry Statements and Goals	8
Scaling Questions	9
Section 5: What happens next?	10
Section 6: Permissions	10
Young Carers	10
Healthy Minds	11
ESCO	12
Early Help Consultant Support	12
Acknowledgements	13

This guidance was created in collaboration between practitioners from across a wide range of services for children (including health, children living in Lincolnshire and staff from Lincolnshire County Council. The guidance is set to match each of the sections within the assessment.

Before undertaking an Early Help Assessment with children and their families, please read and consider the rules below. These rules were created by a group of children in Lincolnshire who have all had Early Help Assessments written about their lives:

Early Help Assessment Rules:

- You must ask me questions
- You can let me be the teacher and you be the kid and we can take it in turns asking questions
- Take me to the sofa on my own and talk to me
- Ask me why I'm naughty at home
- Ask me questions on my own and don't tell my friends what I told you
- Don't tell me off and help me to deal with my problem myself

“The worst thing you could do is don't speak to me and leave my problems. That would make things a lot worse” Laylee, age 8

Please remember that the focus for the assessment is on the child. Parents may be experiencing difficulties themselves and although this is to be acknowledged, it is the impact of these difficulties on the child that needs to be understood.

Who, When, Where and How:

When a worry has been identified for a child or young person in line with the Early Help Pathway the best place to start is by having a conversation with them and their family or friends about what is going on in their life right now.

The best person to speak to the family is the person they have the best relationship with. It may be that one professional has a good relationship with a child but a different professional has a good relationship with the parent. You can both have conversations and bring them together using the Early Help Assessment. It is good practice for agencies to work together to complete the assessment if this is the case however, clear communication that the family are in agreement with this will be needed. All agencies have agreed as part of Lincolnshire's Early Help Strategy 2021 to use the assessment as a tool to aid these conversations.

Try and remember to ask the parent or child if they want to talk on their own or if they want to have someone from their family and friends to be with them, be led by what the child and family feel comfortable with. The family's own support network can be involved in these discussions if this is what the family want. This could mean inviting Aunties, neighbours and people the family find supportive. Learning what support is around the family and who could potentially help is crucial when building on the strengths that already exist for families.

This assessment should always be completed WITH the family in an open and honest way, TAC should be explained clearly and simply and an open and honest conversation held about safeguarding. TAC parent information available at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac

Top Tips from practitioners,

"I think the main thing is knowing the family, the person conducting the EHA needs to have a good relationship with them as this makes it easier to ask some of the difficult questions"

"If you are the one with the better relationship then it is easier to ask the harder questions"

"Keep it simple it is just a conversation with a family"

**"Families do not want to have to repeat their story to different professionals". Julie Lydon
Health Visitor**

"It is important to remember that each service/agency will have a different perspective on the problem or worry".

Language:

When recording your conversations into the assessment the language we use to describe children and families is crucial in developing and maintaining relationships. Families have told us that they prefer us to use factual and compassionate language. There are some example words below to describe behaviours in children and adults with some more compassionate examples next to them.

Emotive language examples	Compassionate language examples
Bossy	Natural born leader, is confident in telling others what to do
Defiant	Determined, will stand their ground when they feel they are right
Demanding	Needs time and attention
Hyperactive	Has lots of energy
Rebellious	Not afraid to do things differently
Stubborn	Confident in their decisions
Attention seeking	Needs positive reassurance

If using language to describe a particular behaviour, for example, withdrawn, cautious, over friendly be clear as to what you are seeing that leads you to make this judgement.

Section 1- Child, Family and Friend Details:

Preferred names and pronouns:

When asking a child or young person about their gender please ask the question "what is your preferred name and how would you like to be known". If a child or young person is comfortable on sharing their gender with you they will choose to tell you without being asked.

Further guidance created by transgender young people in Lincolnshire can be found at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac

Friends and Family (Networks):

Think about a time in the past when you were really struggling. Who did you want to help you? Imagine you are experiencing the lowest point in your life, who in your life would you want to be in your corner? We want to empower families to make changes for themselves and often the issues can be overcome through support from friends and family. When you are having conversations with families who are struggling, they will often feel that they are alone and don't have any help. However by asking questions slightly differently, we can help families to see that people do care and are there to help. Below are some examples of best questions to find out who helps a family:

Who was the last person (who doesn't live in your house) that you sent a text message to?

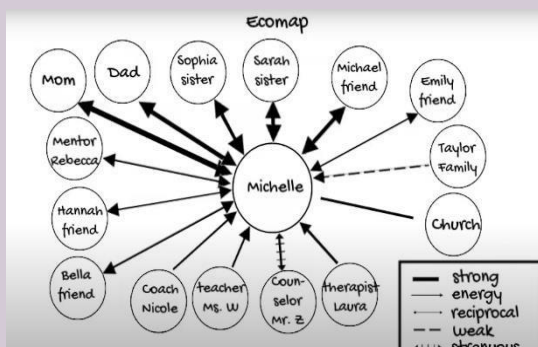
You have to go to hospital in an emergency, who will look after your children?

"Who has been your Go To Person in the past and why?"

"Tell me about the person that helps you the most, what do they do that makes the biggest difference"

Asking Children and Young People about their networks:

It's important to ask the children or young people about who they are seeing on a daily, weekly, monthly basis and who they would like to be part of their Team. This includes adult family friends, people they are related to, neighbours. This can sometimes be different from the people that parents or carers may say will be helpful. It would be useful to write all of the people that the family identify into the networks section and be clear with how they offer support and who to. You may wish to ask the children directly and complete an 'Eco Map' and/or a simple family tree and attach these to the assessment. For further information on Eco Maps this short clip is useful <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTjrkFneXr8>



To establish any other professionals that may be supporting the family it is important to ask who may also be currently helping them. You may wish to contact the other professionals to take part in the assessment, you will need to get permission from the family to do this see the section at the end of this document on Information sharing and [1.9 Protocol on Sharing Information in Order to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

For families where parents are separated and have shared care of the child, consider which addresses you might want to include. Does the child move between parents' homes regularly? You might want to explore this in terms of impact for the child and impact on future TAC planning and support networks. Planning the conversations you have with each parent will be important to help with this process.

Section 2 - Child/Young Person and Family Overview:

We use Signs of Safety in Lincolnshire to help us to talk about any problems the family may be having (please see the TAC Handbook for more information on Signs of Safety www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac).

Make sure the information you record in here is about what you have seen or heard or what others have seen or heard that relates to the children. Ask what everyone thinks (the children, parents/carers, family and all professionals). If everyone thinks differently that's ok, your recording can reflect this.

This part of the assessment is about gaining the story and each child's/young person's story will be different and that is fine, the key is you understanding their story.

Keep in mind this is an assessment about life for the child, so be sure to record everything in terms of what that means for the child. If parents talk about issues that are affecting them (such as their health or finances), asking how that affects the child is important to keep the focus on them.

Asking key questions about what good days look like, when things are at their best, things that help make the situation better can really help the family keep a solution focused approach and give them hope and optimism about their situation.

Top tips from practitioners.

"If I can't visualise what life looks like for the child then I have not asked enough questions"

Ask "At this point, what were you thinking and feeling?" (Taken from the restorative practice Timeline Tool). I use this to bring feelings into the assessment; I think it opens up the conversation. Health Visitor

Below are examples of relationship questions you could ask to gain a different perspective.

"If I asked mum what would she say the best thing about you is?"

If dad was here mum what would he say you worry about the most? "

In addition to this section you may want to use the 'Timeline Tool' this can be a useful tool for focusing on a specific problem or theme in more detail. A copy of the tool can be found at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac

Section 3 – What do the Children/Young people think?

When you are worried about children and their families you must speak to the children and put their wishes and feelings at the centre of any decisions that are made. You can record the conversation you've had with the young person or child however you like into the assessment. You could simply ask questions around the three houses and record their words or they might have drawn a picture that you want to attach to the assessment. Gathering the child's voice before you complete the assessment with the family will give you an opportunity to share their thoughts with the family (if they aren't already aware). The child's wishes and feelings do not have to be captured directly by the person who is writing the assessment. It may be that they have completed some work with another professional that shows everyone how they feel about the worries. It is fine to attach this to the assessment instead.

Be creative and use resources linked to the child or young person's interests. For more support and ideas around gaining and using the Voice of the Child please contact the Early Help Consultants at earlyhelpconsultants@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Unborn

When writing an assessment about an unborn baby it can be useful to reflect on the following questions with parents:

- Is Mum attending her anti-natal appointments?
- What noises is baby hearing?
- What feelings is mum having and by proxy baby may be having?
- What is Mum eating/drinking/smoking and what impact will this be having on the baby? Is mum taking vitamins and prescribed medication?
- How is mum getting used to being pregnant, what is she doing to strengthen the relationship between her and baby? For example stroking her belly, talking/singing to baby?
- Exploration around how mum thinks her life will change when baby arrives is any support needed around this?

0-5s

Some younger children will be able to articulate and tell us what they think and feel. For other children you may need to include observations on their ages and stages of development. Further information on ages and stages can be found here at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1007446/6.7534_DfE_Development_Matters_Report_and_illustrations_web_2_.pdf

It also may help you to consider the situation from the child's perspective:

- **Who/what is important to me? – Who is special to me, do I have any special toys/comforters, do I have any places that are my favourite places to go?**
- **How do you know what I want/need? – do I communicate my wants/needs by crying, gestures, spoken words, signs?**
- **What may I need help with? – do I need help to communicate, play with my friends, use the toilet, understanding my emotions?**

Guidance provided by - Carly Shaw, Early Years Practitioner for East Lindsey, Lincolnshire County Council

Non-verbal children

For children who aren't able to tell you directly how they feel you could include photos, anyone's observations of any changes in the child's behaviours, body language, facial expressions, responses and reactions. If you are trained you could use alternative communication methods such as pecs and Makaton (or any technology that may help).

Guidance provided by - Anna Hagens, Social Worker, Children with Disabilities Team, Lincolnshire County Council

Simple craft activities can be used too, consider what the child likes to do; draw or paint for example. Role play activities, setting up a play kitchen or a hospital may help children to act out their thoughts and feelings and are a good way to help you understand what is going on in their life.

Older Children

Consider their interests and where they feel relaxed, this may be playing a game on a console, kicking a ball around or watching a film. Older children may not open up to you straight away so building up a relationship with them is key; again consider who is the best person to gain their voice.

Section 4 - Worry Statements and Goals:

After gaining the story from the child and family this part is the analysis of that information. What is the main worry? It may be that there are many worries and in discussion with the family you can then decide which one/s are a priority.

Please see the TAC Handbook for an explanation on what worry statements and goals are and their structure (www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac). For the worry statements think about what life may look like for the child/ren in the future if nothing changes. For the goals make sure you include outcomes for the child. Think about what life could look like for the child/ren if the problems are sorted out and include this in the goal. It's important to work with families and other professionals on the worry statements and goals so that everyone is clear what the problems are and what needs to happen to improve things. Remember that the worries and goals may change dependent on the families circumstances and what is going on in the child's life at the time, it needs to reflect the current situation and be a priority that all involved agree with.

Top tips

"Remember to use the words the family and child would use and imagine you are talking to them, what words would you be using then? Keep it simple and factual. Families have said that they need to understand what people are worried about"

"I always ask the family if the worry statements and goals are still relevant, if not what do they think the priority needs to be, how would they like me to write it etc" Pastoral Lead from a Primary School.

"Worry statements do not need to be lengthy to be meaningful and productive".

"Use quotes from the child or young person to develop your worry statement and goals".

Scaling

Please see the TAC Handbook for an explanation about scaling (www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/tac) In this section you are recording the family's reflections as well as the professional judgements. It is important for all professionals involved to scale and be prepared to explain where they are and what has led to them making that decision. Please remember that the explanation why someone is that number is more important than the number itself.

Ask the family lots of questions about their number such as:

- **What made you choose that number today?**
- **What got you up to a (4)? Why weren't you a (3)?** □ **What needs to happen to get up to a 7 from a 6?**

Scaling with children:

To scale with younger children you could use a range of tools to help you with scaling, such as Lily pads numbered 1-10 and a toy frog.

If children do not want to scale that is ok, Lincolnshire's Young Inspectors recommend using a wide range of tools such as an emoji tool for example (see below).



Section 5 – What happens next?

For this part of the assessment you will need to record the conversation around the next steps and what everyone is going to do to help. Some of the information in here will be similar to what is recorded in the next steps column in section 2. However this section is around smart (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) planning and will incorporate clear actions and timescales for everyone. This is an important part of the assessment as families tell us that if we are not clear with them on what everyone is going to do and what will happen next, they are left feeling anxious and frustrated.

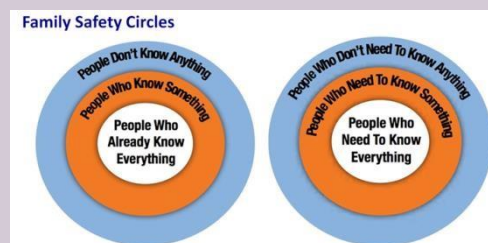
Professionals have said that this is a useful check at the end of the discussion so that all are clear on what everyone is going to do, including the child and family.

Section 6 – Permissions:

You will need to follow your agency’s privacy information, policies and procedures around information sharing. Please ensure you speak to all members of the family to see if they are comfortable with you sharing all of the information you have with other agencies and family members. Consider if there are any family members or agencies that the family don’t want to share everything with? Explore why the family may want some people to know and not others. It is the law to explain to people what will happen to their information so please be clear about the Early Help Front Door Screening process and Children’s Services Recording systems.

The family may verbally agree for you to share the information so please make a note of this on the assessment. Families also tell us that sometimes we can make their situation worse by telling people private information about their lives that they don’t want them to know. There are resources that

can help you with this such as family circles (please see below). Please speak to your Early Help Consultant for further information and guidance.



Young Carer’s Guidance

Every young carer has the right to an assessment of their needs, which in Lincolnshire is through using the Early Help Assessment. We encourage families to consider this as an opportunity for the young carer's voice to be heard - to share what is going well, what they are proud of and also what they may need some help with. A young carer is someone under 18 who is helping or supporting someone with a disability, long-term or life-limiting illness, mental health condition, sensory impairment or substance misuse problem. They may not live in the same house, but visit some/ most days to help; they may be providing emotional care for someone; they may have a diagnosis themselves; they may be engaging in criminal activity or be on the fringes of this in order to support a struggling family member. Be aware however, that not all young people who have this going on in their lives class themselves as young carers. It is important to ask what things look like for them, as this will tell you whether they do or do not need to be identified as such.

Always explore in all assessments whether there is a Young Carer. For example if you know a parent is struggling with their mental health ask the child or young person about the things they do to help their parent. It could be that they stay up late at night talking to them to help them feel calm. This means they are a young carer. More information on Lincolnshire’s Young Carers can be found here <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/support-carers/young-carer-support>

If after you have had conversations with the family and completed the assessment you recognise that the child or young person may need the support of another agency or

professional it is important to be clear in the assessment as to what has led you to that decision. Ensure you detail what support has been tried already, what worked and what worries still remain.

Healthy Minds

Healthy Minds Lincolnshire provide emotional wellbeing support for children and young people up to 19 years old. Please click on the following link for more information: [Healthy Minds Lincolnshire :: Lincolnshire Young Minds \(lpft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.lincs.nhs.uk/healthy-minds)

When completing the EHA for a request for support from Healthy Minds please include the following specifically:

- In section 1 please state the child's legal name so their medical records can be found
- State clearly what school the child attends
- State if a child or young person is a Child in Local Authority Care

You may wish to use the following document to gather the child or young person's voice and attach it to the assessment.



HM Voice of the
Child.pdf

For further information or support or if you wish to speak in person to a professional please call: Boston (01205 446949) Grantham (01476 858277) Horncastle (01522 307366) Lincoln (01522 421699)

If you are unsure if a child needs support from Healthy Minds or CAMHS please call the 24 hour professionals helpline on 0800 234 6342.

Guidance provided by Charis Newby, Clinical Lead Practitioner, Healthy Minds Lincolnshire

ESCO

ESCO is a LCC service. Early Support Care Coordination (ESCO) helps to **coordinate support for children who are disabled, or have significant and complex additional needs which mean they** need additional support during much of their daily lives. For more information on the ESCO service please follow this link <https://lincolnshire.fsd.org.uk/kb5/lincs/fsd/service.page?id=scoyyvENRuA>

When completing a request for ESCO support you will need to include the following additional information:

- Include details about the child's additional needs or diagnoses
- Provide as much detail as possible with range of worries impacting the family and in particular in relation to children with disability/additional needs.
- Remember to include any complicating factors and strengths relating to the child's additional needs such as: equipment needs at home, support they are already receiving etc
- Include details of what you would like ESCO to do
- Consider how the EHA will be reviewed if the request for ESCO support is declined.

Early Help Consultant Support:

1. Early Help Consultants can support with any aspect of completing an assessment, gaining the voice of the child, understanding worry statements and goals in fact anything that has been mentioned in this guidance.
2. Both internal and external professionals are encouraged to access the workshops and forums the team offer and these are themed; for example, questioning and professional curiosity, worry statements and goals, support networks. The workshops allow for discussion, shared learning and gaining a greater understanding of how these areas support children and young people.
3. The forums are an opportunity for multi-agency networking and updating knowledge around specific agencies and the support that is available to both children and families. All of the workshops and forums can be found on the Enable booking system and some are free to attend. <https://safeguardinglincolnshire.vc-enable.co.uk/Events>
4. The team also operate a duty system where a professional can speak to a consultant at a day and time that suits them. This can be booked in through TAC admin tacadmin@lincolnshire.gov.uk or the generic consultant email address. earlyhelpconsultants@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

Thanks and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many professionals and staff that have been involved in the production of this guidance.

Special thanks to;

Julie Lydon – Health Visiting Team

Sam Boccock – Spalding Parish School

Sarah Watts – Priory Academies

Maxine Roberts – Steps 2 Change

Lucy Nelson – Midwifery

Charis Newby – Healthy Minds

Ronda Ironmonger – Boston Witham Academies Federation

Shona Malkinson – Housing

Cranwell and Grantham Early Years settings

Laura Maher – Early Help Worker

Carly Shaw – Early Years Practitioner

Anne Faulkner – ESCO

Ann Hagens – SEND Social Worker

Steve Stephens – Youth and Community Development Worker