



# **Multi-Agency Threshold Document**

**Guidance for all practitioners in West Sussex working together with children and their families to provide early help targeted and specialist support.**

Updated February 2024

## Foreword

We are very pleased to introduce this guidance for the application of thresholds in West Sussex.

This guidance is the result of consultation with safeguarding partners from a range of organisations who work with children, young people and their families, including schools, children's social care, early help, health colleagues from a range of different organisations, early years' settings, the police and a number of representatives from the voluntary sector, as well as practitioners and managers within West Sussex.

### **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children'** states:

"The safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document, which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, evidence-based, accessible, and easily understood. This should include:

- the process for early help assessments, and the type and level of early help and targeted early help services to be provided under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care for assessment and for statutory services under:
  - section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need, including how this applies for disabled children)
  - section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm)
  - section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders)
  - section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to accommodate a child)
- clear procedures and processes for cases relating to:
  - the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children
  - children managed within the youth secure estate
  - disabled children"

Our vision – In West Sussex we put children first. We work with children, young people, families, communities, our partners and schools in a restorative, strength-based way. Strong relationships are at the heart of what we do

The vision for the West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership is to develop “an assured Safeguarding Partnership, which collectively engages with children and their families, enabling them to thrive.”<sup>1</sup>

Working with vulnerable children, young people and their families is uniquely rewarding but occasionally very challenging. This work requires skill and considerable levels of knowledge and expertise. It also requires the willingness to accept that decisions we make about how best to support families will often carry with them a degree of risk. We hope that this guidance on the application of thresholds in West Sussex strikes the right balance between supporting practitioners from all settings to identify situations where children and young people might be at risk of significant harm and recognising the vital role of professional judgement in assessing the impact of risk and protective factors on long term outcomes for individual children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.westsussexscp.org.uk](http://www.westsussexscp.org.uk)



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## 1. Introduction

This document provides a framework for professionals who are working with children, young people, and their families; it aims to help you identify when a child may need additional support to achieve their full potential. It introduces a continuum of help and support, provides information on the levels of need and gives examples of some of the indicators that a child or young person may need additional support. By undertaking assessments and offering services on a continuum of help and support, professionals can be flexible and respond to different levels of need in different children and families. Along this continuum, services become increasingly targeted and specialised according to the level of need. Children's needs are not static, and they may experience different needs – at different points on the continuum – throughout their childhood years.

The levels of need descriptors are a way of developing a shared understanding and explaining the West Sussex approach across all our services and partnerships, ensuring a consistent response is applied by all.

It is a vital tool that underpins the way we can work together, being stronger together, taking a strengths based whole family approach to children and their families. Supporting parents and carers, working alongside them, and developing their confidence through providing the right support at the right time in order to promote the welfare and safety of vulnerable children and young people to enable them to fulfil their potential. Families tell us that support works well when they are respected and listened to by the people who work with them, or they approach for help. This is more likely to be successful with practitioners who show empathy and work with families to explore how problems have come about and how to make changes.

Some children and young people experience significant harm beyond their family and home. There is a need for professionals to recognise the different relationships children have in their schools, peers groups, online and in their community. Parents and carers may have little influence over these contexts and children's exposure to extra-familial abuse can impact negatively on the parent and carer to child relationship. It is important that professionals understand the risks to children through exploitation and wider extra-familial harm within their local communities.

As a professional working with children, young people and their families, it is important that professional judgement is used to identify the level of need the children, young people and their family are experiencing in line with the [West Sussex Continuum of Need](#) and legislation.

In West Sussex, we want to ensure that all professionals working with children and families can identify the help that is needed by a child and their family as early as possible. This document is therefore intended to assist professionals in identifying a child's level of need (whether intra or extra familial) and what type of service/resource may best meet those needs – appendix 1.

## **Raising an immediate or urgent concern**

If you think a child is at immediate risk of harm call 999.

If you are unsure what support you require or have an urgent safeguarding concern that requires a same day response, phone: 01403 229900 (Monday-Friday, 9.00am-5.00pm).

For out of hours enquiries, including weekends and bank holidays, contact our Emergency Duty Team on 033 022 26664.

**Other welfare concerns about a child or young person please refer through the IFD portal - Request support or raise a concern about a child - West Sussex County Council**

## **2. Core Principles when Working with Children, Young People and their Families**

- Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility; everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play;
- Services should intervene early to tackle any problems as soon as they emerge. For children who need additional help, every day matters;
- The child should be at the centre, their needs are paramount. They must be listened to by professionals and have their voices heard;
- Any services provided to safeguard children and young people must be clearly focused on the outcomes for the child.

Professionals should consider: **The Welfare Checklist to which courts will have regard when deciding whether to make an order in respect of a child (s.1 Children Act 1989):**

- a. The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his/her age and understanding);
- b. His/her physical, emotional and educational needs;
- c. The likely effect on him/her of any change in his/her circumstances;
- d. His/her age, sex, background and any characteristics which the court considers relevant;
- e. Any harm which s/he has suffered or is at risk of suffering;
- f. How capable each of his/her parents, and any other person in relation to whom the court considers the question to be relevant, is of meeting his/her needs.

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires each local authority area to publish a local assessment protocol which sets out clearly the arrangements for how cases will be managed once a child is referred into local authority children's social care. The assessment protocol should ensure that assessments are timely, transparent and proportionate to the needs of individual children and their families.

**Effective assessment requires all those working with children, young people and families to:**

- Be alert to children and their needs;
- Remember that the child's needs are paramount. Where professionals provide services to adults they must consider the adult service user in their role as a parent or carer and assess the risks to any children in their care or with whom they have contact;
- Understand their individual role in keeping children safe, and the role of others; and
- Be able to identify symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect and share information with other professionals in a timely way.

### **3. The Four Levels of Need**

#### **Universal needs (Level 1)**

Children whose needs are fully met and thrive.

Children with no additional needs – there are children with no additional needs; all their health and developmental needs will be met by the universal services. Most children living in West Sussex require support from universal services alone;

#### **Emerging needs (Level 2) Universal Plus**

Families who can meet their children's needs with some additional support, usually in the short term. Children with some emerging needs that may require support of a single agency response and/or partnership working with the family alongside universal provision **Early Help** support may be appropriate for some children at this level.

#### **Children with multiple and Complex Needs (Level 3) Universal Partnership Plus**

Children and families with multiple and complex needs who need targeted support without which they would not meet their expected potential. These children live in families where there is greater adversity and a greater degree of vulnerability. An **Early Help Plan** and a **Team around the Family (TAF)** may be required where there is a whole family approach, led by a lead practitioner or a targeted coordinated response from multi-agency professionals which enables the family to meet the children's needs.

#### **Safeguarding/Specialist Needs (Level 4) Safeguarding**

Children with acute needs including those in need of protection. Complex Special Education Needs (SEND) Families need multi-agency response which may include specialist intervention from Children's Social Care.

Families who need a multi-agency response including specialist intervention from children's social care. Specialist services are required where the needs of the child have been significantly compromised, they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm or impairment and statutory and/or specialist intervention is required to keep them safe.

There is an accumulation of unmet and complex needs with evidence that a child is at risk of harm. A safety plan that protects the children and ensures the family can meet their needs is required.

Assessment and Interventions under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, Section 47 Children Act 1989, Child provided with accommodation by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, those children requiring the intervention of the Court and requirement of a Care Orders under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

#### **4. The Integrated Front Door (IFD)**

All enquiries/referrals for both Social Care and Early Help come through a single front door referred to as the Integrated Front Door (IFD), this is the only public contact point for Early Help and Children's Social Care. The IFD for West Sussex Children Services ensures that all enquiries and referrals are triaged upon receipt and directed to the appropriate service to support with the query, providing a seamless process with children receiving a service proportionate to their needs in a timely way. This expertise of the team comprises of qualified Early Help specialists, qualified Social Care specialists, qualified managers, Customer Service Centre Agents and social care referral advisors.

The Integrated Front Door model allows Early Help and Social Care teams to provide a holistic view at the front door of the child/family. Children's Services would create one pathway to support and publicise one number for all worries relating to children regardless of risk and complexity. This simplifies the process for the public and professionals and potentially reduces unnecessary social work interventions as we shift the focus to ask if the child's needs can be met by Early Help.

Children will only enter the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) system of triage if the threshold is not clear from the initial screening. The aim is to move children more quickly to the right level of support without the need for extensive checks, delays, and multiple contacts.

Having a dedicated triage team (IFD) ensures focussing on the enquiries and referrals at first point of contact so that the services delivered become more effective and efficient. All enquiries and referrals will be triaged by the dedicated IFD team ensuring support from the appropriate service is provided swiftly.



## 5. Consent to make a referral

The expectation is that all professionals will discuss their concerns openly and honestly with the child, where appropriate, and their parents or carers/ those with parental responsibility, except where to do so might place the child or another person at immediate risk of harm or prejudice the prevention or detection of crime. Where this is the case, consent to refer concerns is not required and contact should be made with the IFD and with a Social Worker as soon as possible.

In emergency situations, contact should be made with the Police.

Consent to make a referral will always be needed where a practitioner is requesting support of services on behalf of a child or family - this is regardless of whether they are seeking support from early help services or from Children's Social Care for child in need [Children Act 1989, Section 17] services.

If a family refuse prevention or early help services, this does not mean that specialist safeguarding services will become involved. Children's Social Care will only become involved if there is a risk of significant harm to the child or where the information provided indicates that significant harm is likely to happen if statutory intervention does not take place.

Where families are refusing to engage with early help services and where practitioners can see that there is the likelihood of a long-term impact on outcomes for the child or young person, they should continue to engage with the family and seek to persuade them of the benefit of accessing additional support.

Where practitioners are concerned about the long-term impacts on outcomes for a child or young person, they should consult with their safeguarding lead or seek advice and support from the IFD by contacting the consultation line on **01403 229900**.

## 6. Information Sharing

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 states that effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CPSR), have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children

It is important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice and do so confidently.

It is also important to remember there can be significant consequences in not sharing information as there can be in sharing information. You must use your

professional judgement to decide whether to share or not and what information is appropriate to share. If you are unsure seek expert advice from the safeguarding advisors within your organisation.

Data protection law reinforces common sense rules of information handling. The law is there to ensure personal information is managed in an appropriate way. It helps agencies and organisations to strike a balance between the many benefits of public organisations sharing information and maintaining and strengthening safeguards and privacy of the individual.

It also helps agencies and organisations to balance the need to preserve a trusted relationship between practitioner and child and their family with the need to share information to benefit and improve the life chances of the child.

The following are guidelines to help practitioners decide whether they should share information or not. They are based on the 2018 information sharing guidelines published by the government, with additional consideration of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the updated Working Together 2018:

1. Remember that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately.
2. Be open and honest with the individual (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. Seek advice from other practitioners, or your information governance lead, if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.
4. Where possible, share information with consent, and where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to having their information shared. Under the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be clear of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you do not have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.
5. Consider safety and well-being: base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, adequate, accurate, timely and secure: ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those individuals who need to have it,

is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

### **Necessity, proportionality and relevance**

Once a professional has considered the legality of sharing a person's personal information and decided about the matter of consent, they need to consider three further tests before they share any personal information with another professional or organisation. Some professionals find it useful to remember this as the NP and R test. It is vital all three tests are considered, not either or.

N – The amount and type of information shared should only be that **necessary** to achieve the lawful aim.

P – Information is always to be considered in terms of its **proportionality** in each set of circumstances, but it must always be remembered that the right to life is paramount.

R – Only **relevant** information should be shared. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, it is also useful to consider two very simple questions before sharing information with another professional or organisation: does the person or organisation 'need-to-know' the information, or is it really a case of it being nice for them to know?

**For further guidance on Information Sharing and Working Together please visit the documents below:**

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)
- [Information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people and carers](#)
- [The Data Protection \(Fundamental Rights and Freedoms\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#)
- [A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children](#)
- [West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership Information Sharing Agreement](#)
- [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## 7. Problem Resolution/Escalation

### **Pan Sussex Professional Difference Statement:**

It is acknowledged that when working in the arena of safeguarding, it is inevitable that from time to time there will be professional differences. This is a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice and effective multi-agency working. During this meeting practitioners, irrespective of their seniority are encouraged to say if they feel that decisions, practice or actions do not effectively ensure the safety or well-being of the child/children.

Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion and/or meeting within a time scale, which is acceptable to both of them, usually within a working week or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

In many cases most decisions are reached by consensus due to the multi-agency working within the IFD. However, there may be occasions when professionals disagree. If this is the case the partnership escalation policy should be followed – [7.2 Resolving Professional Differences | Sussex Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures Manual](#)