



THE FAMILY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS TOOLKIT

A TOOLKIT
TO ASSIST
WITH THE
IDENTIFICATION
OF NEGLECT
OF A CHILD OR
YOUNG PERSON

**PRACTITIONER
GUIDANCE**

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**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED THAT A CHILD MAY BE AT RISK
OF, OR MAY BE SUFFERING SIGNIFICANT HARM, CALL
SOMERSET DIRECT ON: 0300 123 2224**

THE PURPOSE OF THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS TOOLKIT AND PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

The Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit is designed to assist you in identifying and assessing children and young people who are at risk of or experiencing neglect. It is to be used when you are concerned that the quality of care of a child or young person you are working with suggests that their needs are being neglected.

The toolkit can be used in a number of ways:

- Working in partnership with parent/carer's to identify areas of strength and levels of concerns.
- Working with a young person to assist them in understanding their lived experience.
- Identifying priority areas for your intervention and areas of focus and change.
- Used within supervision to support and develop your assessment of a family's strengths and needs.

By using this toolkit in partnership with families it should support your practice and enable you to have honest conversations regarding levels of care and recognise strengths which can be extremely motivating for families when faced with professional worries. This tool does not replace assessments such as the Early Help Assessment or children's social care assessments but is used to inform them if you have concerns that a child may be experiencing neglect. The toolkit summary page can also be used to track improvements, deterioration or drift.

Throughout the document there is reference to parent/carers as research shows that consideration of both parents, whether resident or non-resident, is beneficial to the child and increases the engagement and participation of both parents/carers.



WHAT IS NEGLECT?

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) defines neglect as:

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- A. provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)**
- B. protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger**
- C. ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)**
- D. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment**

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

[For more information about types of neglect and its impact on children, follow this link.](#)

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT:

The Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit focuses on six key areas of need and considers the extent of the parent/carer's ability to care and the extent to which children and young people's needs are being put first or are secondary to the needs of the parent/carer's. If information needs to be shared between agencies, parental consent is required in accordance with the guidelines in [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#).

SIX KEY AREAS OF NEED:

1: PHYSICAL CARE

Food
Quality of housing
Stability of housing
Child / Young Person's clothing
Animals
Hygiene

2: HEALTH

Safe sleeping arrangements and co-sleeping for babies
Appropriate sleeping arrangements for older children
Seeking advice and intervention
Disability and illness

3: SAFETY & SUPERVISION

Safety awareness and features
Supervision of the child / young person
Handling of baby / response to baby
Care by other adults
Responding to adolescents
Traffic awareness and in car safety

4: LOVE & CARE

Parent / carer's attitude to child warmth and care
Boundaries
Adult arguments and violence
Young caring
Positive values
Adult mental health
Substance misuse

5: STIMULATION & LEARNING

Unborn
0-2 years
2-5 years
Learning opportunities
Physical activity and leisure
Friendships
Addressing bullying

6: CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT TO CHANGE


Acceptance of issue
Taking responsibility
Sustaining change

The **descriptors** in the toolkit will help you assess how care is provided to children and young people. The descriptors we are using are:

- **UNIVERSAL NEEDS**
- **ADDITIONAL NEEDS**
- **COMPLEX NEEDS**
- **ACUTE NEEDS**

Used within supervision to support and develop your assessment of a family's strengths and needs, the toolkit should be used in its entirety, rather than simply jumping to the areas where you believe concerns already lie.

By considering all elements of the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit, you may identify other needs that had not previously been considered. Through evaluating individual sections you should be able to identify strengths which can help to keep children safe and support positive change.



In exceptional circumstances, you may wish to use individual sections, for example, where there are areas of strong resistance, but it is recommended that the tool is used in its entirety with almost all families.

Using the summary sheet gives you a visual picture of the areas of good and worrying care, to help you to prioritise your involvement with a family. If your assessment identifies descriptors mainly in the right-hand column and you have detailed examples of the negative impact on the child, there are clear causes for concern and these should be discussed with your named/designated safeguarding lead/line manager to identify the best course of action based on the findings. This must be done as soon as possible so that a clear plan of support can be agreed and actioned.

The summary sheet can also provide a clear representation of a family's circumstances and points to consider. Are the concerns global about all aspects of a child's care, or just specific to one area? If there are strengths in one area but clear needs in another, then why is this and how does this inform your involvement to support change?

When reviewing the toolkit, the summary sheet can show you which areas have improved and which have not and should be shared with the family. Where any needs have increased, the summary sheet also allows you to consider possible reasons behind any changes.



BEST PRACTICE

- Always use the child's name in discussion with parents/carers.
- Ensure you are familiar with the area headings in the toolkit.
- Decide how to involve the parents/carers and child/young person and, where necessary, your safeguarding lead, and how you will share the results with them.
- Undertaking a home visit will be key to making observations. Failing that, try to have a conversation with someone who has done a home visit, or who has used the toolkit on your behalf (with parental consent).
- As far as possible, consider the usual state of the house – is this normal for this family, or has there been a change and, if so, what may have triggered this?
- Ideally, complete the toolkit in partnership with the parent(s)/carer(s), and ensure you listen to the voices of children, non-resident parents, extended family members/friends and other professionals in order to form a holistic understanding of the circumstances.
- Be aware of external factors, such as the family support worker arranging for the house to be cleared or cleaned, and assess the parent/carer's ability to contribute and sustain this.
- Where explanation does not match observation/assessment, this should raise significant concern.
- Agree the actions you are going to take and set out any goals that a future plan may need to address, as part of an agreement with parents about how you are going to work with them. With their agreement, you may need to request the involvement of other service(s).
- Review the toolkit with families to demonstrate where improvements have been made in meeting the needs of their children, or to show that concerns about the children are ongoing or increasing.

GAINING A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING

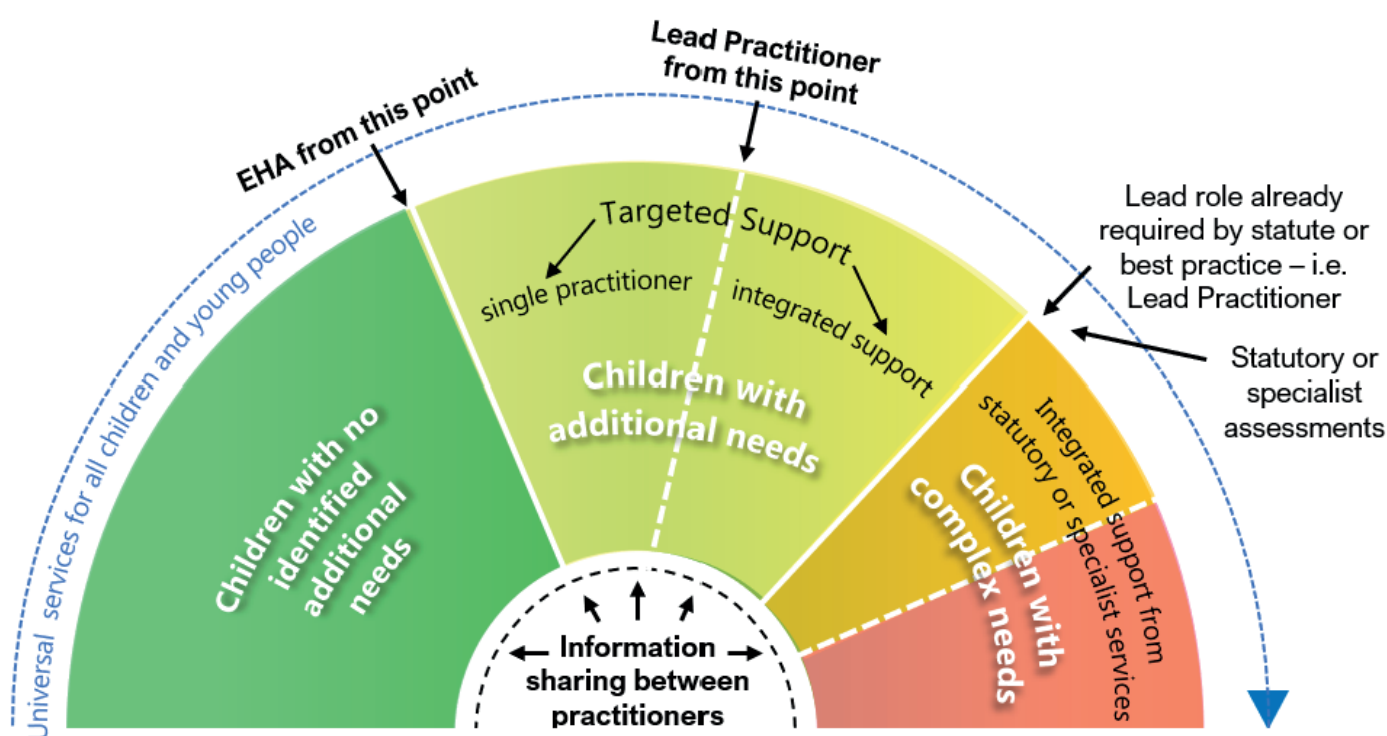
Where there are multiple children within the household it is important to consider each individual child, as well as any common areas that impact them. Some areas are likely to affect all children in the household, such as poor or unhygienic housing conditions, but they may have different impacts on the children depending on their age, ability or other factors; while for some other areas, such as Love and Care, the circumstances may vary widely between children. If there are large differences between the children's lived experiences, consider what the additional impact of this may be, seeking support from other services where necessary if children span age ranges.

When completing the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit try to gain an overall view of the situation for all the children, however if there are widely varying circumstances in some areas you can identify these on the summary sheet by marking more than one area and noting this in the text boxes available.

CONTINUUM OF NEEDS AND SERVICES

The continuum of need is intended to provide professionals with a shared understanding and common language around needs and risks.

The Family Strengths and Needs toolkit is not intended to be a scoring exercise, but as a tool to help you assess the strengths and needs of a family and guide professional judgement. The descriptors are not exhaustive, but guidelines to support you in your decision-making.



What to do once you have completed the toolkit?

USING THE SUMMARY SHEET IN YOUR ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

The summary sheet of the toolkit can help to tell the story of the family and factors that may be impacting upon the child(ren) and it is important to spend time reflecting on what this is telling you and how this guides plans and interventions to improve the lived experience of the children.

For example, factors you may want to consider are:

- Are the needs global (across all areas of the toolkit) or just specific to one area, and what does this tell you?
- Has the situation always been like this, or has something impacted on the care of the children (such as a relationship breakdown, bereavement, poor mental health, or drug and alcohol use)?
- Can any identified strengths be used to help improve the situation (including non-resident parent, extended family members, good relationship with an agency)?
- What underlying factors may be influencing the care of the child(ren)?
- How does the parental response to the concerns raised influence your approach to providing support? Do they recognise and share the concerns or lack an understanding of how to meet their child(ren)'s needs?
- What do the children tell you? What do they feel needs to change? How do they feel support can help? Does what the child tells you match what parents or other practitioners tell you?
- Where are the priority areas to focus support / are there any immediate concerns to address to safeguard the child (such as a young child being left unsupervised or hygiene risks that could cause harm)?
- What actions are now needed to help improve the situation?

PLANNING YOUR SUPPORT OR THE INVOLVEMENT OF OTHERS

When developing plans to support a family it is important to ensure that these are SMART, (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) and that it is clear who will be responsible for the each of the actions.

When considering the desired outcomes for children, you can use the descriptors in the toolkit to tell you what you want the end goal to be, as well as breaking down the stages are needed to get there. This can help everyone to be clear about any progress made and enables the family to be clear about what the expectations are.



For example:

Universal Needs	Additional Needs	Complex Needs	Acute Needs
1: PHYSICAL CARE 1.1 Food Child/young person is provided with necessary quality of food and drink, which is appropriate to their age and stage of development. Meals are organised and there is a routine which includes the family sometimes eating together. Child/young person's special dietary requirements are always met. Parent/carer understands importance of foods and a balanced diet.	Child/young person is provided with reasonable quality of food and drink and seems to receive an adequate quantity for their needs, but there is a lack of consistency in preparation and routine. Child/young person's special dietary requirements are inconsistently met. Parent/carer understands the importance of food and routine but sometimes their personal circumstances impact on ability to provide.	Child/young person receives low quality food and drink, which is often not appropriate to their age and stage of development and there is a lack of preparation or routine. Child/young person appears hungry. Child/young person's special dietary requirements are rarely met. The parent/carer is unable to provide or is indifferent to the importance of appropriate food for the child.	Child/young person does not receive an adequate quantity of food and is observed to be hungry. The food provided is of a consistently low quality with a predominance of sugar, sweets, crisps and chips etc. Child/young person's special dietary requirements are never met and there is a lack of routine in preparation and times when food is available. Parent/carer is unable to provide or is actively resistant to advice about appropriate food and drink and the need for a routine.



Consider what may be done differently, if anything, to make the outcomes and steps towards them more achievable for the family.

MAKING A JUDGEMENT

Once concerns about neglect are identified, practitioners need to make judgments about the appropriate intervention that is required and what should happen next. The practitioner or agency that has identified the concerns must evaluate the seriousness of their concerns, consider the risk as well as protective factors, and decide what the appropriate response should be using the [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#).

If, after reviewing, you remain unsure about the best course of action to take, you can contact the **Early Help Hub** for advice about an early help response. Advice given may include how to complete an Early Help Assessment.

If you feel that the needs may meet the criteria for Children Social Care to undertake a statutory Children & Families Assessment (C&F), or you want to discuss your analysis/understanding with an experienced child protection social worker, you can contact the Consultation Line for advice on **0300 123 3078**.

Decisions following the identification of neglect may include:

- Talking about your concerns with the family and continuing to support and monitor the situation as a **single agency** through the development of an Early Help Assessment (with consent from the family), Early Help Plan and by reviewing the circumstances through the Team Around the Family (TAF) process and revisiting the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit.
- Requesting the involvement of **additional support**, e.g. from other early help services.

- Requesting the **involvement of Children's Social Care** as Child in Need where needs are acute.
- **If you are concerned that a child may be at risk of, or may be suffering, significant harm you must contact Somerset Direct on 0300 123 2224 immediately to discuss the best way to meet those needs, and follow up with an Early Help Assessment within a 24 hour timescale.**

Making a decision not to involve any other services may be a suitable response if there is potential to effect positive change and if the risks to the child are felt to be manageable with a single agency response.

Within these situations it is also important that the parents have a level of understanding and acceptance of the practitioner concerns and the motivation to work with others to improve things. It is important to clearly record any decisions made and the rationale behind this and use the Early Help Assessment process to keep these decisions under review.

Consideration of appropriate support for a family should be **reviewed** at regular intervals with your supervisor or line manager with the following considerations:

- **Is the plan working** and is this making a difference for the child?
- In view of the signs, indicators and risk factors that originally caused concerns, **has there been any change?**
- **Have the needs escalated** and, if so, is the involvement of other services now required?
- **Is there an indication that the child is at risk of significant harm** and may be in need of protection? If so, refer the matter urgently to Children's Social Care (see above).
- **If there has been an improvement, has this been sustained over time? Is there scope to reduce the support provided to the family?**

