

Delivering a Continuum of Integrated Support: Indicators of Need and Service Response

1. Introduction

The foundation of the Indicators of Need and Service Response is based on Gateshead's Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Protocol. The Protocol states that every child and young person in Gateshead, whatever their circumstances, will have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

Effective multi-agency working and the Lead Practitioner role are key elements of improving outcomes for children and young people through the provision of integrated support. Team Around the Family (TAF) is a framework for joint and multi agency working for all children, and young people and families with additional needs.

All children and young people with additional needs, and particularly those who require integrated support from more than one practitioner, should experience a seamless and effective service. This includes the lead practitioner taking overall responsibility for coordinating support and services through a written CAF / TAF plan that achieve agreed outcomes.

2. Aim

Gateshead Council and partners recognise that early intervention and preventative work with children, young people and their families can reduce the risk of abuse, family breakdown and social exclusion. It is Gateshead's aim to reduce and attempt to eliminate the extent to which vulnerable children and young people are at significant risk of harm and/or their life chances are impaired through a co-ordinated approach to the CAF, TAF and support plans by universal, targeted and specialist services.

3. Using the Indicators of Need

Professionals from a variety of agencies, particularly health, education and community services, are often in the best place to identify whether a child or their family are experiencing difficulties and have additional needs. The indicators of need framework is intended as a guide to assist practitioners in deciding, either at the initial screening stage or following an assessment, whether a child has additional needs and at what level or by what agency those needs could best be met:

- **Level 1: Baseline = Universal Services**
- **Level 2 : Moderate = Targeted Services**
- **Level 3: High = Specialist Social Care Services**

These indicators of need are not prescriptive and are designed to assist practitioners in using their professional judgement to gauge what level of intervention will be most appropriate.

Level 1: Baseline = Universal Services

If a child's needs are being met in accordance with this baseline level, this would indicate that the child is making good progress across all areas of their development and there would be no need for any additional supports other than those accessed through universal services.

If a child's needs are mostly being met in accordance with this baseline but there are one or two needs identified in Level 2 below, this would indicate that overall the child is making good progress across most areas of their development but may need additional support from a single agency to maximise life chances. A CAF may help to focus the support needed and the strengths within the family to maximise future resilience.

Level 2: Moderate = Targeted Services

If some of a child's needs are being met in accordance with the baseline (Level 1), but there is a cluster of needs identified in Level 2, this would indicate that they have some significant needs that are not being met and without intervention or support their health and wellbeing will be impaired. If ignored, these issues could develop and lead to adverse outcomes where risks increase over time leading to statutory intervention.

These children will require a co-ordinated multi-agency response. The interim lead practitioner would undertake a CAF assessment to identify the needs and initiate a Team around the Family meeting bringing together practitioners from the services required to meet the identified needs, develop a single multi agency support plan, and identify the most appropriate person to undertake the lead practitioner role.

Tools for undertaking a CAF assessment and initiating a TAF are available here:

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/childrenstrust/caftools/CAF.aspx>

Level 3: High = Specialist Services

If a child's needs are mainly clustered in level 3 (or in the level 2, but there are some needs identified at level 3) this would indicate that they may be at serious risk of significant harm or are suffering significant harm. These are our most vulnerable children and need a multi-agency response led by a Social Worker.

Further information about how to make a referral to social care is available here:

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/lscb/Worriedforachild.aspx>

4. Professional judgement

Professional judgement should be used at all times; the indicators of need are not exhaustive and children's needs do not always clearly fit into specific levels. Therefore if the needs are spread across the levels, a judgement should be made as to where the greatest need lies and an assessment should be undertaken to analyse these needs, drawing on the strengths of the family and protective factors to balance risk and determine the best way to support the family.

Needs change over time and therefore the service response is expected to be used flexibly so that the child and their family are supported by a range of professionals through a continuum of seamless integrated working.

If professionals feel they need support or advice in making a judgement they should discuss this with their line manager and / or contact the following service for advice:

Referral and Assessment Team on 0191 4336553 or 4333269

5. Planning

Effective planning requires agencies and professionals to work in partnership with each other, the child and their family; this will ensure support is appropriate, co-ordinated and tailored to the assessed needs.

At the conclusion of a CAF, Initial or Core assessment where the assessor has identified further support would be beneficial an interagency team around the family meeting or signs of safety meeting should be held. The purpose of the meeting will be to draw together the findings of the assessment and formulate any plan required, including a contingency plan, identify who would be most appropriate to lead the plan and agree timescales for review. The person completing the assessment will have responsibility to organise the meeting.

6. Specialist Services - Referral and Assessment Team

The role of all professionals working with vulnerable children is to safeguard and minimise risk of harm, promote positive lifestyles, and develop resilience for children to maximise life chances. However, where there are clear concerns that a child is in need of protection you should contact the Referral and Assessment Team immediately, including in the following situations:

- A child with an unexplained or suspicious injury.
- Observed injury or suspicious bruising.
- A child who has alleged physical or sexual abuse.
- A child who is suffering specific incidents of emotional abuse or neglect that is harming, or likely to harm their health and/or development (including non-organic failure to thrive).
- A child who is physically injured in an incident of domestic abuse (even inadvertently).
- A child living in a household where a person deemed to be a risk to children has moved or has plans to move or there is regular contact.
- Suspected induced or fabricated illness.
- Serious concern about the risk of significant harm to an unborn baby or where children have been previously removed or adopted.
- A young/vulnerable child left alone (if the child is known to be alone the police should be contacted immediately at that time).
- Sexual activity in children under the age of 13.
- Concerns about sexual exploitation or trafficking.

The following children are also entitled to an initial assessment:

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Young carers.
- Homeless 16 and 17 year olds.
- Disabled children (referrals for disabled children should be made to the Disabled Children's Team - there is a separate indicators of need framework for disabled children).

Other Useful links

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/lscb/OurProcedures.aspx>

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/lscb/Missingchildrenandyoungpeople.aspx>