



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL



STOCKPORT MULTI AGENCY RESPONSE TO NEED

Guidance for professionals working with children, young people and families to know when advice, help or an urgent response is needed

Quality Assurance

To be reviewed every 2 years

Version	Date	Authors	Issue Reason	Revision date
1	March 2023	Katie Cooper and Katie Bates	Refresh of level of need (threshold) document	
2	May 2026	Rachel Rollings and Katie Bates	Refresh in line with Families First Partnership Programme	Review April 2027

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Introduction

We want Stockport to be the best place for children to grow up happily, healthily, with confidence, ambition and surrounded by love, care, and kindness. We want them to have the very best start in life and to thrive through-out growing up and beyond. We want families to be supported where necessary to provide this care and we believe that families are the best place for most children to grow up. We believe that agencies working with children and families play an integral role in achieving this.

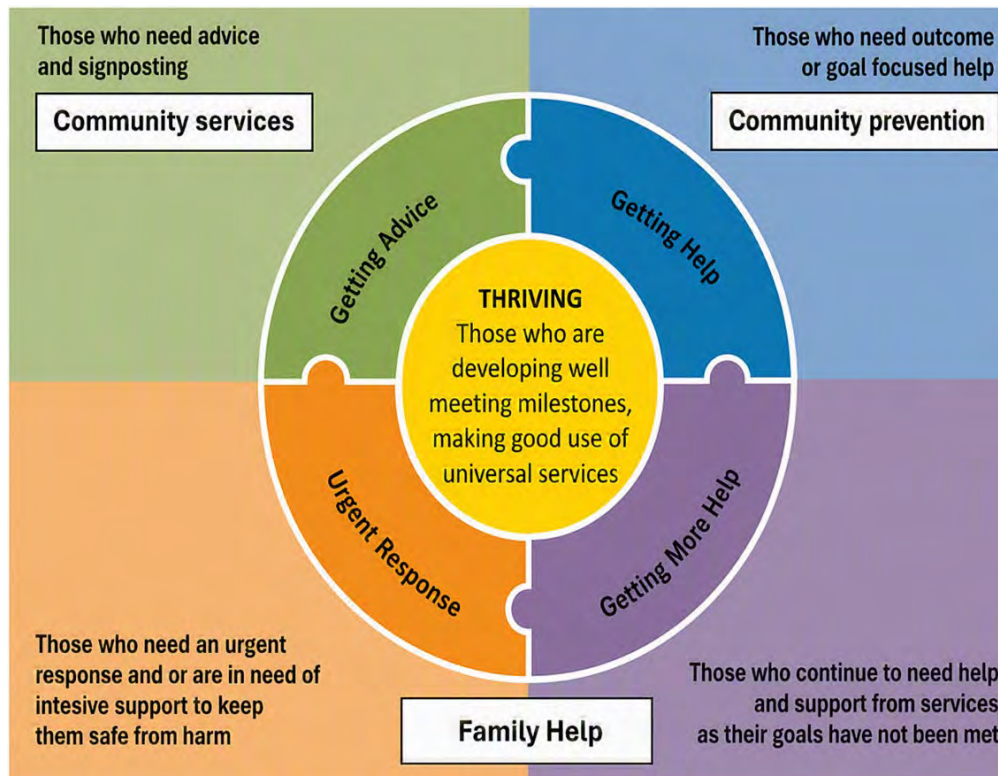
This multi-agency response to need model provides guidance to agencies and professionals working with children and families to understand the role they play in ensuring that children and their families get the right level of advice, support, and response at times of need. It is underpinned by sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004, which set out duties to cooperate and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

In developing this guidance, we talked to families, they told us what they need from agencies working with them. They told us they need professionals to focus on getting the right support and advice at the right time with a common use of language. This feedback is at the heart of this document.

We know that for some children and families, despite the best efforts of all, needs may increase and require a more coordinated response. This guidance reflects Family Help as set out in the Department for Education Families First Partnership Programme guide (March 2026) and is aligned with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. It supports a more seamless system of help, support and protection, bringing together targeted early help and section 17 child in need support through one assessment, one plan and one lead practitioner where this is needed, while ensuring that child protection responsibilities remain clear when there is risk of significant harm.

In this guidance, the term child means anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This includes 16- and 17-year-olds living independently, in further education, serving in the armed services, in hospital, or in a young offenders institution, as they remain entitled to support and protection under the Children Act 1989. This guidance is also relevant and applicable to unborn babies. For the purpose of this guidance, this also includes disabled young people up to the age of 24.

2. The multi-agency response to need model and applying it to practice



3. The model further explained

Thriving

Children and families that are thriving are usually those that are making the best use of universal community services, such as health, childcare and education and are making good overall progress in all areas of their development. In Stockport we believe there are five essential ingredients to be thriving.

- Loving, nurturing relationships with parents and carers
- A safe home free from stress and adversity
- The right help to develop good language and other cognitive skills
- Support to manage behaviour and regulate their emotions
- Good physical and mental health and access to healthcare

If a family member or professional identify that one of more of these important areas is not secure, this should prompt a conversation about what advice, help or support may be needed.

Getting advice & Signposting

At times, people of all ages may need advice in different areas of their lives. Children and families should be able to understand what support is available to them and how to access it. Advice may be needed once or on an ongoing basis until it is no longer required. Sources of advice and signposting include accessing the Family Hub app or website, SEND local offer and through speaking to trusted professionals.

Family Hubs offer early advice and signposting, helping families access the right support before needs escalate, and providing practical guidance on issues such as parenting, health, and wellbeing, and support families to access community services. Their role is to connect families with the most suitable support, ensuring timely help.

Getting help

There can be times when a person or family needs help to achieve their goals and ambitions. People have the right to know what support there is available to them and how to access it; they also have the right to know when professionals believe they need help. Getting help can be a one-off event, for example, an additional home visit from a health visitor to focus on one area of support or it can continue for a brief period of time, for example, supporting parents via the Togetherness online programme. Help should only end when the child, adult or family feel their goals are met. If goals are not achieved, for whatever reason, professionals need to talk to the child and family about this, this may include about how to get more or a different kind of help to ensure a good outcome for the whole family.

Getting more help

There can be times when a child, adult or family need a targeted package of support from more than one service. This is where Family Help brings support together through one joined up assessment and plan that is centred on the child, shaped with the family and coordinated across agencies. In line with the Families First Partnership Programme guide (March 2026), Family Help will provide a seamless offer across targeted early help and section 17 child in need support, so families experience one clear response rather than multiple separate pathways. Family Help is for children and families whose needs cannot be met by advice, signposting or single service help and support alone and where coordinated multi-agency help is required to improve outcomes, reduce risk and prevent needs escalating.

Assessments should be undertaken in partnership with children and families, with informed consent and involvement central to the process, considering whole family needs. A family help lead practitioner will oversee the assessment, plan and review, ensuring support is coordinated and responsive. Where progress is identified, this should be recognised and built upon. Where worries remain, risks increase, or there is concern that a child may be a child in need under section 17 or at risk of significant

harm under section 47, there must be timely discussion with the front door and, where appropriate, consultation with the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) so that children and families receive the right level of help, support or protection at the right time.

Urgent Support

On occasion a child or family may need urgent or more intensive help because there are worries about a child's safety or wellbeing, or because longer-term outcomes could be affected. In these situations, this will often mean support is offered by a social work qualified family help lead practitioner. Wherever possible this should be discussed with the parent, carer and/or child in a way that is right for their age and understanding. The only time this may not happen straight away is if talking about it could place the child at greater risk (section 7). If this is the case, professionals will act quickly to make sure the child is safe and will speak openly with the child and their parent or carer as soon as it is safe to do so. Where concerns indicate that a child, who isn't supported via a lead professional, may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, this will require referral through MASSH and involvement of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) as part of the child protection response. Professionals may decide that without urgent and/or intensive support a child may be at risk of serious harm, or their long-term outcomes may be impaired.

4. Applying the model in practice with children and families

This model is not meant to be followed in a straight line. It is flexible, so support can change as a child, young person or family's needs change. It also works alongside each agency's responsibility to help keep children safe. When using the model professionals should always think about what advice, help or support is needed so that a child is able to thrive within their community.

5. Family Help Assessment

All agencies working with children and families in Stockport are committed to providing effective support. In line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and the Families First Partnership Programme guide (March 2026), help, support and protection should be flexible, coordinated and wrap around a family at the point of need. As needs emerge, a Family Help Assessment provides a shared way to understand what is working well, what is worrying us, and what support is needed. It should build on family strengths, reduce duplication and support a single multi-agency plan. Family Help includes targeted early help, section 17 child in need support, and section 47 safeguarding responses, with the intensity of intervention flexing in line with the child's needs and level of risk. A Family Help Assessment should be completed with the family, not done to them. The assessment and support

can be completed by a wide range of professionals including health visitors, education colleagues, youth workers, family help lead practitioners and social workers.

A family help assessment aims to:

- Be child and family friendly
- Build on strengths and understand what matters to the infant, child and family, listening to voice of the child
- Recognise that families are experts in their own lives and should be central to all decision making
- Brings together the wider family network, when helpful
- Promotes conversation with families and reduces the need for them to repeat their experiences
- Focus on what the family want to achieve
- Encourage families to help shape the support they receive

When a family needs more help or an urgent response, support may involve more than one service and sometimes statutory services too. At these times, a family help lead practitioner should be identified to help bring this support together for the child, young person and family. When a child protection plan is necessary, the family help lead practitioner must be a qualified social worker.

it is important that support is well coordinated so families do not have to repeat their story, can understand the plan, know what everyone is working towards, and feel involved in shaping the help they receive.

7. The role of the Multi Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub (MASSH) is the front door for members of the public and professionals to request advice, share information about a child and family, and report concerns. In line with the Families First Partnership Programme guide, front door arrangements should support clear, timely and proportionate decision making about whether a child and family need advice and signposting, preventative help offered by universal services in the community, coordinated Family Help, section 17 child in need support, or a child protection response. MASSH is therefore a key part of the seamless system of help, support and protection.

You can contact the MASSH to:

- make a referral concern about a child's immediate welfare and safety (more help / urgent support and response) – see section 8.
- request targeted support for a child and family (getting more help)

- request advice about making a referral or advice about a child you are working with (getting advice and signposting)

There are two ways to contact the MASSH. If you are worried that a child has been harmed or may be at immediate risk, please call 0161 217 6028 and select **option 1**.

If a child or family needs help and support, the best way to get in touch is through the MASSH portal page via [Contacting the MASSH - Stockport Council](#) on the Stockport Council website.

Where concerns indicate that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, decision making must involve the appropriate safeguarding and child protection processes. The Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) provide expertise and oversight of the multi-agency child protection response for children who require this level of intervention. Clear interfaces between MASSH, Family Help teams and MACPT are essential so that children and families experience a joined up response, with support stepping up or down in line with changing need and risk.

8. When safeguarding concerns exist

The Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) said that 'risk sensible' and not 'risk averse' practice is an essential component of an effective child protection system. Munro said that risk adverse practice usually entails displacing the risk onto someone else. This thinking is at the heart of this framework.

Managing uncertainty and risk is part of working with children and families. Professionals should know their role in identifying when a family may need extra help, advice or support and in responding when concerns begin to grow. Family Help should be understood as the seamless offer of targeted early help and section 17 support, led through one assessment and one plan where coordinated multi-agency help is needed. The key threshold difference is that section 17 applies where a child is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without services, or their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired without support, whereas section 47 applies where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. If a professional believes that a child may meet either statutory threshold, they must make a referral to children's social care straight away and ensure all relevant information is shared promptly.

- A child is in need as defined under s17 of the Children Act 1989 when:
 - (a) is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part.
 - (b) the health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or

(c) is disabled

- A child is need of protection under s47 of the Children Act 1989 if there is reasonable belief that he/she is or likely to suffer significant harm

When a professional is concerned that a child needs coordinated help that cannot be met through a single agency response, they should consider whether a Family Help response is needed and whether the child may meet the threshold for section 17 child in need support. Where there is concern that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, this requires a child protection response under section 47. In either case, a referral to children's social care through MASSH must be made without delay.

When a professional or organisation is worried that a child may be at risk of harm, local safeguarding procedures must be followed. This can be a difficult and worrying time for families, so the support of a trusted professional is especially important. Good relationships can help families feel informed, supported and better able to make progress.

8. Working restoratively with children and families and shared decision making

In Stockport we encourage the use of restorative approaches that put relationships with children and their families at the heart of any work we do support children to thrive. We want professionals working with children and families to develop strong relationships so that when families identify that they may need more support they know who can help them, or when a professional identifies a family needs support, they can talk to families about this.

Working restoratively encourages professionals to work as a team with families to support them to thrive. It requires professionals to try to understand each family's unique situation and support them to identify their goals and achieve great outcomes.

Professionals can also access partnership supervision, where they are supported to think systemically with others about families when positive change is delayed.

To understand more about restorative practice, then please visit the website <http://www.restorativestockport.co.uk/>

9. Step up and step-down

Children and families should experience support as joined up, consistent and responsive to their needs. In Stockport, the aim is for families to not feel that they are being passed between services, but for the right professionals to work together

around one plan, with clear communication and shared responsibility for helping children to thrive and be safe. As needs change, support should adjust around the family in a way that feels seamless and proportionate. The family help assessment and plan are central to this joined up approach and can be led by a range of professionals.

When a family no longer need a family help lead practitioner to coordinate their plan, support should not end abruptly if help is still needed. Instead, where progress has been made and with the family's involvement, coordination of the existing plan can transfer to another professional who is already part of the team delivering that plan and knows the child and family well. This helps maintain trusted relationships, avoids families having to repeat their experience and ensure continuity while support continues for as long as needed.

10. Useful Resources and References

- Stockport Safeguarding Children Partnership website: this website holds a range of practice guidance and specific policies and procedures <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/stockport-safeguarding-children-partnership-sscp>
- For guidance on safeguarding practice, you can access the greater Manchester procedures: <https://greatermanchesterscp.trixonline.co.uk/>
- The Designated Officer for the Local Authority, previously known as LADO, is the single point of contact for all professionals to report concerns, request advice and share information when there are concerns about a professional working with children. For further information and to notify the LADO of a concern please click the following link: [Contact the LADO - Stockport Council](#)