Think Family Procedure

“Think Child, Think Adult, Think Family”
The purpose of the Think Family guidance documents is to support agencies to work together to meet the assessed needs of children and families. There are five documents:

**Think Family Joint-Working Protocol**
This is an overarching multi professional guide to working with families. This will inform practice related to local strategy, procedure and tools. In a system that ‘thinks family’, both adults’ and children’s services join up around the needs of the family.

**Think Family Brief Guide**
This is a concise introduction for anyone working with Children, Young People and Families.

**Think Family Continuum of Need**
This is a refreshed continuum. Its aim is to assist practitioners and managers in assessing and identifying a child or young person’s level of need, what type of services/resources may meet those needs and what processes to follow in moving from an assessment to a provision of services.

**Think Family Procedure**
This is a comprehensive procedural guide for managers and practitioners

**Think Family Catalogue of templates**
This contains all the templates required and referred to in the Think Family Procedure
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1. **Context**

This document should be read in conjunction with the Think Family Template Catalogue, Think Family Protocol and the St.Helens Continuum of Need, all of which can be found at [www.sthelenslscb.org.uk](http://www.sthelenslscb.org.uk), St.Helens Council website (Safeguarding page) and St.Helens Guidebooks.

1.1 **Introduction**

The objective of services to children in need as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is to strive to ensure that all children should:

- grow up healthily from conception to adulthood
- gain full advantage from education
- behave well and keep out of trouble with the law
- have a strong sense of personal identity and self-esteem
- be safe from harm
- acquire essential personal and social skills

These values and aspirations underpin all planning, development and delivery of services for children who have an additional need for support.

Following the Families at Risk Review, the “Think Family” approach was developed to improve the support offered to vulnerable children and adults within the same family. Individual needs are looked at in the context of the whole family, so those who use services are seen not just as individuals but as parents, carers or other family members.

Identification of children in need of support and delivering services to meet those needs is the responsibility of all agencies. Services in St.Helens have been developed to ensure that children at Levels 2 and 3 of the St.Helens Continuum of Need receive a planned and reviewed service from the agencies involved in their lives, as an improvement in children’s life chances is linked to early identification of difficulties, to clear assessment and to collaborative services which provide positive outcomes for children and families.

This approach is supported by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The Common Assessment is a standardised approach to assessing children and young people’s needs for services. It is designed for children with additional needs and has been developed for practitioners in all agencies to enable them to share information and work more effectively together.

The Think Family Procedure has been developed to provide a philosophy and structure within which services to children and their families in need of support in St.Helens may be planned, delivered and reviewed by all agencies under the direction of the St.Helens Children’s Trust and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. They should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding
Policies and Procedures (www.sthelenslscb.org.uk) and be used by any agency involved with a family, as they apply to the services they provide.

2. Responding to children and young people in need of support

2.1 The System

Children and their families in need of support and protection are the responsibility of all agencies in St. Helens who work with children under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004, with each agency delivering different elements of service to meet the needs of children and families.

Consultation should always take place with other agencies so that judgements benefit from as full an analysis as possible.

To help agencies identify and assess need, it is important that there is:-

- A common method of assessing need, and
- A common procedure for agencies to meet and agree plans for delivery of co-ordinated services to children in need of support, which has equal status with child protection procedures

When the protection of a child is not the issue, but a child’s health and development would be impaired without the provision of services, a Family Action Meeting is the forum for multi-agency planning of services and the provision of family support. (Level 2 and 3 of the Continuum of Need)

When the analysis of information concludes there is a need to protect a child from significant harm (under Section 47 Children Act 1989), a Child Protection Conference must be called. The responsibility for this lies with Social Care under the Child Protection Procedures (Level 4 of the Continuum of Need).

2.2 System Principles

Any agency can take responsibility for co-ordinating a response to emerging issues/concern about a child through the Think Family Procedure.

The following common principles will therefore be applied:-

- All agencies should respond to any information-sharing request, satisfying themselves that consent has been obtained from the family for such information to be shared
- All agencies with information about a child must respond to a request to attend Family Action Meetings, attend with a written report or send a written report, in their absence, with apologies
• Parents and children will be fully informed and supported to participate in Family Action Meetings and services

• Unless there are very exceptional circumstances, meetings should not take place without the consent of parents and children of sufficient age and understanding. (See sections 2.3 and 5.1 for guidance if consent is withheld)

• The Common Assessment format will be used by all agencies to inform the meeting

• Children and families should not be subject to multiple assessment and planning activity by agencies

• Agencies will work together to share information, knowledge, skills, resources and responsibility

2.3 Consent and Information-Sharing

Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 states that everyone has the right to respect for their private and family life, their home and their correspondence. Workers who have access to information about children and families must therefore treat any information confidentially.

This article applies to children who are classified as in need of support under Section 17 Children Act 1989.

The consent of parents and young people of sufficient age and understanding is therefore required for agencies to share information or to hold a Family Action Meeting.

It is accepted that in some police interventions it will not always be possible to obtain written consent before making a request to Social Care for a service.

Consent will be obtained by agencies at the earliest opportunity and professionals in St.Helens will make families aware that, in order to provide appropriate services, agencies need to share information about the needs of the families.

In obtaining consent, parents, carers and young people should be given an explanation about the issues/concerns the agency has and information about the duties and responsibilities of agencies towards children in need of support or protection.

The Think Family Privacy Notice should be used to record consent to information-sharing.
The options if consent is withheld are:

- The combination of the concerns and the refusal to consent to enquiries being made may result in the concerns being defined as child protection concerns. In this case, information-sharing may proceed without parental consent. The consultation and the decision to proceed without consent must be recorded on the case papers.
- For another agency familiar with the child and family to make the approach about information-sharing to the family.
- No information-sharing should take place.

Every effort should be made by agencies working with the family to gain consent for information-sharing. A failure to obtain consent to share information should always be discussed with the practitioner’s supervisor and/or manager and subsequent decision-making should be recorded on the case papers.

Agencies should work within the St.Helens Information-Sharing Protocols and their own agency procedures on information-sharing.

Practice Note:
When consent is withheld for consultation, referral to another agency or holding a meeting, the agency with the concern should make a decision about the level of risk to the welfare of the child in not sharing information, making the request for service or holding the meeting. The practitioner should speak to their manager and they may need to consult with Social Care.

The Think Family Privacy Notice can be found at Template D.

2.4 The Continuum of Need

All agencies in St.Helens operate within the St.Helens Continuum of Need levels for delivery of services.

St.Helens Continuum of Need identifies 4 levels for delivery of services. For a visual representation of these levels and guidance, please see the full document found on the LSCB Website, St.Helens Council Website and St.Helens Guidebooks.

Most services to children and families will be delivered within Levels 1 and 2 of the Continuum of Need by single agency involvements. When an individual agency identifies needs that cannot be
met by their service alone, consent to refer to an appropriate service should be obtained from parents or carers. In most cases, service provision will still fall within Level 2 of the Continuum of Need.

Interventions with families under the Think Family Procedure will be at Levels 2 and 3 of the Continuum of Need.

Child Protection issues emerging at Level 4 of the Continuum of Need will be assessed and led by Social Care and will be managed within the Child Protection Procedure.

The Continuum of Need and process triggers

3. Common Processes

3.1 Single View

Single View is an electronic gateway, which enables professionals to obtain an holistic view of a child without having to search multiple systems. It allows them to confirm basic demographic details, identify if a child is known to other professionals, whether a Common Assessment Framework has been completed, whether a Lead Professional has been identified or whether a child is allocated to a social worker.
The system currently provides the professional with data from ICS (Integrated Children’s System), eCAF and Capita ONE education system, with the aim to eventually include multi-agency partner systems information through a Single View.

3.2 The Common Assessment Framework

The Common Assessment Framework introduces a framework for assessment by all agencies prior to the involvement of Children’s Social Care. The Common Assessment Framework is one of the many national changes introduced in the Children Act 2004, and plays a major part in improving services to children and families in order to improve the following outcomes for children and young people:

- being healthy
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- achieving economic wellbeing

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a standardised approach to assessing children and young people’s needs for services. It aims to help all those whose work brings them into contact with children and families to identify children with additional needs and intervene much earlier to help them. Research shows that ‘low level’ needs that do not meet the criteria for statutory intervention often remain unaddressed, as no one takes responsibility for identifying and co-ordinating services. The needs of the babies, children and young people in this situation often escalate. The Children Act 2004 seeks to ensure earlier intervention and an improvement in the co-ordination of services.

The Common Assessment Framework consists of:

- A common process for understanding and articulating the range of needs of an individual baby, child or young person, their parents or carers
- A common format to help practitioners record the findings from the assessment in a systematic way, which will evidence the analysis of need while being understandable to parents, carers and practitioners from other agencies.
- A common format for sharing assessment information with other agencies as appropriate, with the consent of the young person, parent or carer

The principles underlying the approach to common assessment are that it:

- Is undertaken with consent, and therefore needs to be built around partnership and co-operation;
• Looks at the whole child, not just the policy focus and statutory obligations of a particular service;

• Takes account of strengths as well as needs and understands the role of parents/carers and a wide range of family and environmental factors on child development;

• Is simple to use and geared towards the practical delivery of support to children, young people and their family members;

• Is empowering for families, completed in partnership with children and families at all stages, where possible enabling them to take the lead, and ensuring they have a copy of all the relevant documentation;

• Enables and encourages information held by agencies to follow the child, e.g. as they get older, change schools or move house, subject to controls to protect confidentiality;

• Is a tool to support practice; is not used mechanistically or when it adds little value; and supports and enhances ongoing and effective communication within and between agencies. Communication should not end with the completion and forwarding of the Common Assessment Framework

**Practice Note:**
The Common Assessment Framework is an initial assessment tool.

a) Before a Common Assessment is started, contact should be made with the First Response Team (01744 676993) and a unique identifying number obtained.

b) The completed document will be forwarded to the First Response Team.

This requirement will stand until the professional using the assessment tool has completed eCAF training, at which point a) and b) will become redundant.

eCAF

eCAF is an online solution allowing the professional to generate a CAF, complete reviews, undertake meetings and draft plans electronically. It allows a team of professionals providing support for a family to collectively contribute to a single electronic case record and, if necessary and in consultation with a manager, progress a request to social care for a service.

### 3.3 The Lead Professional

When children, young people and families are assessed as having additional support needs, they may require a co-ordinated approach from more than one professional in order for those needs to be met effectively.
When just two support services are involved and there is no duplication or higher level of concern, telephone contact may be all that is necessary.

If several professionals are involved in the provision of support to a child/young person within a single agency or there is a need for multi-agency involvement, the support needs to be co-ordinated by one professional. **At this point, a Lead Professional should be identified and will assume the co-ordination of the support being provided by services to the family.** A Family Action Meeting will be convened and a Family Action Plan must be agreed, recorded and circulated to all involved.

**Role of the Lead Professional**

It is the responsibility of the Lead Professional to:

- Arrange date/time/venue of meetings by telephone and standard follow-up letter
- Ensure Chair for meeting is identified
- Act as the central point of contact for the family
- With colleagues, identify gaps in service delivery and ensure they are filled for that particular case
- Ensure that service delivery is not duplicated
- Ensure CAF documentation is updated where necessary and/or modify Family Action Plan as appropriate

**Criteria for identifying the Lead Professional**

A Lead Professional is identified from among the group of practitioners working with the child, young person or family. They are chosen through a process of discussion and agreement between those practitioners who are involved and in consultation with the family.

Potential short-term interventions should not prohibit the practitioner from assuming the Lead Professional role.

Practice suggests that it is important to have clear criteria for choosing Lead Professionals and a clear process to facilitate this. Disagreements or confusion are less likely when these are in place.

Criteria should include:

- What are the predominant needs of the child or family?
- Which agency has main responsibility for addressing the child or family's needs
• Statutory responsibility. Social Care will always be the Lead Professional in statutory cases (Children Act 1989)
• Does anyone have an ongoing relationship with the child or young person?
• Who would the family prefer as their central point of contact?

Taking the lead role in cases involving children with complex needs

All children in need of support:
Any relevant practitioner can be the Lead Professional for any other child in need of support. Where social care remain involved in ongoing assessment or commissioning of services, it will be appropriate for the social worker to assume the Lead Professional role.

When the social worker is the Lead Professional during the assessment phase and the case is to remain open beyond the initial phase, the social worker will maintain the Lead Professional role.

Child Protection case:
The named social worker (the key worker) is responsible for acting as the Lead Professional for the inter-agency work with any child subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Child Looked After:
The named social worker is the Lead Professional for those children looked after. They may also have a key worker in the home/school who provides day-to-day support. The social worker will link with both the child and the key worker in delivering an effective monitoring/co-ordination role.

Care leaver:
The personal adviser or the child’s social worker is the Lead Professional. Where care leavers remain looked after (‘eligible children’), they should usually have a social worker who, where appropriate, will assume the personal adviser role. Roles and responsibilities will be allocated between them, but the lead statutory accountability will lie with the social worker.

Where care leavers have left care before their 18th birthday (‘relevant children’), the Lead Professional will usually be a personal adviser who may be attached to a specialist leaving care service. The personal adviser must participate in assessment, planning, intervention and review of the young person’s needs and maintain their pathway plan.

Adoption cases:
For children for whom adoption is the plan, the child’s social worker is the Lead Professional.
**Children with special education needs:**

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator may, where appropriate, be the Lead Professional. Where these special needs require input from a range of professionals outside the school setting or a high degree of family support is required, it may be appropriate for someone else to take on the lead role. During Year 9, for pupils with statements, the Connexions personal adviser takes on responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the transition plan and is likely to be the Lead Professional.

**Child with complex disabilities or complex health needs:**

Where the child or family have a key worker, they are the Lead Professional. Key worker models are increasingly in place for children with severe and complex disabilities or health needs, as recommended by the Children’s National Service Framework.

Key workers tend to be deployed in one or two ways: (i) as a ‘non-designated’ key worker, in which they carry out the key worker functions alongside the practitioner role for which they are employed or (ii) as a ‘designated’ key worker in which they are employed and paid specifically to carry out a key worker role. Both roles deliver the functions of the Lead Professional.

Where a key working service is not in place, or where the level of support required is less intense, another practitioner should be appointed to take on the Lead Professional, functions for a disabled or seriously ill child.

**Child with mental health needs:**

If a child/young person is referred to or is receiving support from a specialist mental health service and the key worker meets the criteria for identifying the Lead Professional, they should then assume this role.

**Young Offender:**

For young people on community orders or sentences, the Youth Offending Service (YOS) will allocate a YOS supervising officer. For young people in custody, the supervising officer oversees the management of the case as a whole, linking with the key worker/personal officer in the establishment. The YOS supervising officer in such situations may be the Lead Professional, but where the young person is looked after or on the child protection register, the Lead Professional must be the social worker. In all situations where a YOS is involved, the decision as to who should be the Lead Professional must be agreed locally. If it is agreed that the YOS supervising officer should be the Lead Professional, this must be with support of relevant mainstream agencies.
**Conflict resolution**

Wherever possible, practitioners should endeavour to resolve any disputes about who should assume the Lead Professional role within the multi-agency group.

If there is no agreement, this will need to be resolved at management level between partner agencies, to agree a strategic approach.

It is not always practical to expect individual practitioners to be able to resolve difficult issues or draw together practitioners from other agencies without an effective management, supervisory, conflict resolution and accountability structure around them.

This could place undue pressure on those individuals and could also result in continuing fragmentation and inability to deliver co-ordinated action for children, young people and families.

Remember that Lead Professionals can change over time as the needs of the child or young person change.

The successful delivery of a Lead Professional role is dependent on having a broad, cross-agency management framework in place which sets out:

- The line of accountability from the Lead Professional, through line management in their own agency, through co-ordinated arrangements in the children's trust and, ultimately, to the Director of Children and Young People’s Services
- Escalation/resolution processes for overcoming difficult issues and ensuring that Lead Professional support is put in place quickly. Professionals/practitioners need to be aware within their own agency/organisation of the agreed escalation procedure

**Practice Note:**

See Escalation Procedure (Template P) for advice and format to share issues raised regarding the Think Family process that may include resistance to assuming the LP role. See the full Lead Professional guidance document for more information on choosing the Lead Professional within the context of a cross-agency management framework.
4. **Think Family - The Procedure**

4.1 **Consultation**

Agencies providing services to all children within universal services will seek additional support from within their organisation or from a partner when a specific problem is identified, e.g. hygiene issues, lateness in school attendance.

Permission to share information will be obtained by the consulting agency from the parent and child when a consultation with another agency is needed.

Consultation may be a single telephone call or contact between a number of professionals.

Consultation may lead to the generating of a CAF or the need to review and update an existing CAF. It may lead to the lowering of concern, provision of services, or the decision to call a Family Action Meeting. Responsibility remains with the agency seeking the consultation to generate a CAF, if appropriate, or call a Family Action Meeting, unless the child is already being reviewed within the Think Family Procedure.

Seeking a consultation is not a referral to any other agency and responsibility for the case remains with the agency seeking the consultation.

4.2 **Consultation Outcomes**

When a worker from any agency identifies a concern about any child or family, they must form the professional judgement within their normal management arrangements about whether the child is at risk of significant harm. If it is thought that a child is in need of protection and the risk is not one manageable outside of the child protection system, an immediate referral must be made to the Contact Centre (01744 676600) Social Care and/or the police for a Section 47 enquiry.

If it is thought that the child is in need of services under S17 of the Children Act 1989, the Think Family Procedure should be used and the consent of the family should be obtained to discuss their needs with other agencies that may be able to provide services. It may be appropriate at this point to generate a Common Assessment Framework within which any discussions with the family and subsequent support identified can be documented and reviewed.
Practice Note:
Section 17 General Assessment of Need is a statutory initial assessment undertaken by social workers when families are identified as having complex family support needs which are having a detrimental impact on the child/ren's welfare.

Section 47 enquiry/investigation is an investigation involving the Police and Social Care when an allegation of abuse has been made against a child/young person and when a child/young person is considered to be at risk, or likely to be at risk, of suffering significant harm.

The outcome of the consultation may be:

- A discussion between the consulting agencies as issues/concerns may require continuation of single agency provision only
- Agreement between the agencies about the actions they will pursue within their own agencies to provide additional services
- A professional view that the child/young person may benefit from a Common Assessment Framework
- Referral to another agency for service provision to the family as a simple single agency response. If a Common Assessment Framework has been generated, this action will be documented on the Common Assessment Framework Action Plan
- Agreement to convene a Family Action Meeting if issues/concerns at this level are assessed to be such that a Family Action Plan is required to co-ordinate multi-agency activity and identify a Lead Professional
- Request for a service from Children and Young People’s Services via the Contact Centre (01744 676600). The referrer will be asked to forward a First Response request for service form, accompanied by a Common Assessment Framework, to the Contact Centre to inform the request
- Referral to Children and Young People’s Services via the Contact Centre (01744) 676600 for a Section 47 enquiry to be undertaken if the concerns reach the threshold of significant harm
4.3 Common Assessment Framework Pre-Assessment Checklist

The Common Assessment Framework pre-assessment checklist can be used by practitioners as an aid in deciding whether a Common Assessment Framework is appropriate. See Template F.

4.4 Common Assessment Framework

When issues/concerns about a child’s welfare continue despite services being provided by agencies or if the child and family have complex needs requiring a multi-agency plan for provision of services, a Common Assessment Framework will be completed.

The Common Assessment Framework may be triggered at Level 2 of the Continuum of Need. It may identify the need for additional support services for a child or young person. If a Family Action Meeting is convened at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Need, the Common Assessment Framework will inform that meeting.

The implementation of this process for all agencies and the avoidance of duplication of assessment activity would be assisted if the Common Assessment were adopted by all agencies as their foundation assessment document.

Common Assessment Framework Action Plan

If a Common Assessment is completed, the author may identify several actions that will be recorded on the Common Assessment Action Plan at its conclusion. These actions may not require a Family Action Meeting but will need to be reviewed in accordance with the timescales referred to in 6.

If the Common Assessment Framework is completed and used to inform a Family Action Meeting, the recommendations from that meeting will be documented on the Family Action Plan.

Practice Note:
All agencies should ensure the accurate and timely recording of concerns and consultations. Agencies may use a Think Family Consultation Form for this purpose if they do not possess their own internal recording pro forma; alternatively, they may use their own recording systems as appropriate. See Template E.
Common Assessment Framework Action Plan Review

If, following the completion of a Common Assessment Framework, actions are identified that require minimal, perhaps single agency intervention only, a Family Action Meeting may not be required. In this instance there is a requirement of the author of the assessment to continue to review the CAF Action Plan whilst the CAF episode remains active, in accordance with timescales set out in 6.1. Whilst the review does not require a formal meeting, the family should be included and be fully aware and have contributed to any decisions made regarding its modification.

Practice Note:
The review of the Common Assessment Framework Action Plan should be documented on the CAF Action Plan Review, which can be found at Template H. A copy should be retained for the file, given to parents/carers and forwarded to the Think Family Liaison Officer. These requirements do not apply if created using the eCAF system.

If it becomes necessary to convene a Family Action Meeting, the CAF Action Plan will be superseded by the Family Action Plan.

4.5 Family Action Meeting (Level 2/3)

A Family Action Meeting can be convened:

- Following the completion of a Common Assessment Framework and there being an identified need to co-ordinate the activity of several professionals or agencies
- When consultation between professionals within a single agency concludes that the complexity of the family’s needs requires a multi-professional plan needing a Lead Professional to co-ordinate activity (Level 2) or when several agencies conclude that the complexity of the family’s needs requires a detailed multi-agency plan (Level 3) but where concerns have not reached the threshold for involvement at Level 4 of the Continuum of Need
- When the consent of parents and children of sufficient age and understanding has been obtained for a Family Action Meeting to take place

All professionals invited to the Family Action Meeting are required to complete the Report for a Family Action Meeting. If unable to attend, a representative should be identified to attend the meeting with the completed Report. If this is not possible, the Report should be forwarded with apologies to the Chair of the Meeting to share with those present at the Meeting.

The agency with the initial concerns and/or who completed the Common Assessment Framework/Child Initial Assessment will be responsible for convening the meeting. If the issues
are being addressed by the completion of a Core Assessment (social care) and the family are allocated within Social Care at Level 3, the social worker will act as Lead Professional. Whoever arranges the meeting will arrange the invitations and the venue and will be responsible for identifying a Chair for the meeting. They will also be responsible for ensuring that the Family Action Plan agreed at the meeting is circulated in accordance with timescales. However, another agency may agree to facilitate the meeting if the agency with the initial concerns does not have the resources to do this.

The meeting will be chaired by a member of staff with experience of chairing meetings from the initial agency raising the concerns, unless another agency has agreed to facilitate the meeting (see section 5 for Guidance on chairing meetings).

Meeting participants will share information documented within their Report for a Family Action Meeting and relevant to the dimensions and domains of the Assessment Framework outlined in the Common Assessment Framework.

During a meeting it may be agreed by agencies that the family would benefit from the involvement of Social Care. The family will be advised of the reasons for this and, with consent, Social Care will be informed of this outcome by the Lead Professional.

Parents and children who are subjects of a Family Action Meeting will be given written information about the meeting by the agency convening the meeting. They will be invited, prepared and supported by that agency to attend the meeting or offered an advocacy service to represent their views.

The meeting should agree a date to review the plan. If, during the meeting, agreement cannot be reached regarding the plan, the Lead Professional should refer to their manager who should make efforts to assist with resolution.

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<td>The setting of objectives and timescales within the plan are vital if the case is to be monitored appropriately. If progress is not made, then the meeting should always consider if a higher Level has been reached. See Template I for the Family Action Meeting checklist and Template J for Report for a Family Action Meeting and Template O for standard invitation letters.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Family Action Plan

The Family Action Meeting will agree a Family Action Plan to meet the child and family’s assessed needs that clearly states:

- The overall objectives of the plan
- The services to be provided and what their purpose is
- Responsibilities for each aspect of the Plan
- Identify the Lead Professional who will circulate the plans, arrange meetings, monitor progress and arrange reviews
- The timescales for provision
- Review arrangements

The Family Action Plan ensures:

- that all children and young people have clearly stated objectives for them to gain maximum life chance benefits from education opportunities, healthcare and social care
- that there is a strategy for achieving these objectives
- that consideration is given to factors which protect children from emotional, physical, sexual abuse and neglect

A contingency plan will be agreed in case a plan is not actioned or does not result in improvement. This will be recorded on the Family Action Plan.

Copies of the Plan should be circulated to the child/ren/young person, family and participants in the planning and review group in accordance with timescales set out in 6.
4.7 Family Action Plan Review Meeting

The Family Action Review Meeting will be convened by the agency with Lead Professional responsibility. For timescales, see 6.

At each review, progress against the action points of the Family Action Plan will be monitored in terms of the outcomes achieved. The meeting will agree any modifications needed to the Plan and will set the date for the next review meeting. The meeting may also consider the change of the Lead Professional if appropriate.

Whilst minutes are not essential, a short summary of the discussion had at the meeting may be documented on the Family Action Plan and Review Plan documents in the absence of Reports for a Family Action Meeting. See 6. for timescales for circulation.

When the review concludes that:

- the outcomes specified in the Plan have been achieved
- the Family Action Plan is no longer required
- satisfactory arrangements for the continuing promotion and safeguarding of the child’s welfare are in place, the Plan will no longer be applicable and no further review meetings will be arranged

Practice Note:
Family Action Plans and the review of the Family Action Plan should be drafted in accordance with the pro forma found at Templates K and L. Plans should be documented carefully, removing the need for formal minutes. The substance of what is discussed should be contained within the reports presented to the meeting by invited professionals.

After each Family Action Meeting, whether initial or review, a Family Action Audit Form should be completed by the Lead Professional and forwarded to the Think Family Liaison Officer. See Template N.

This requirement will not apply if using the eCAF system.
4.8 Significant Harm Concerns

The Think Family and Child Protection systems are co-terminus, so it is expected that children’s needs can be reclassified in the light of changing circumstances.

When information received identifies risk of significant harm, this information should be shared immediately with Children and Young People’s Services through the Contact Centre (01744) 676600. The information shared should be documented on the CYPS First Response Service Request Form (see Think Family Template A) and forwarded to the First Response Team within 48 hours of the contact.

**Practice Note:**

It is essential that if a Child Protection concern is identified, there is no delay in sharing the information with the Contact Centre Advisor; Tel. (01744) 676600

The fact that a Common Assessment Framework may not have been completed should not delay referral (see St.Helens Safeguarding Procedures for further guidance).

5. Family Action Meetings Guidance

5.1 Introduction

Family Action Meetings can be called by any agency to co-ordinate a response from a number of agencies at Level 2 and 3 of the St.Helens Continuum of Need. If concerns arise about a child or family who are already involved with an agency which is operating in a multi-agency forum, e.g. YOS or Connexions, multi-agency meetings should be held under the Think Family Procedures to avoid the family being subjected to multiple meetings.

Concerns emerging at Level 4 of the Continuum of Need should be referred to Social Care and must be taken to involve any existing Lead Professional in the amendment of an existing Family Action Plan. Any change of Lead Professional should be clearly documented at this meeting and the family involved in the decision-making. As stated, Social Care will always be identified as the Lead Professional if statutory involvement is agreed.

The permission of the family is required for the convening of a Family Action Meeting. If consent is withheld, it may be helpful to consider whether another professional involved with the family may be better placed to approach the family for consent. In exceptional circumstances and if professionals perceive it to be in the best interests of the child/young person, a meeting may go
ahead without consent. Advice must, however, be sought from the Think Family Liaison Officer in these circumstances. It may also be necessary, in the absence of consent, for the Lead Professional to review the information to decide whether a referral to Social Care is necessary for Section 17 or 47 enquiries to be initiated.

It is the responsibility of the professional organising the meeting to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child/young person. Every effort should be made to facilitate the child/young person in attending the meeting, if appropriate. It should be explained to the young person that they may only be invited for part of the meeting and they must be given the reasons for this. See Template O - standard invite letter to the child/young person and Template T, Children and Young People Participation Report.

5.2 Chairing Meetings

The role of the chairperson in any meeting is vital to ensure the integrity, rigour and fairness of the meeting. **It is not appropriate for the Lead Professional to chair a Family Action Meeting.** The meeting should be chaired by the Lead Professional’s manager or an experienced colleague.

The Chair should:

- Facilitate the exchange of information and the inclusion of all those attending the meeting
- Facilitate the participation of parents, carers, children and young people, whether or not they attend
- Ensure the meeting follows the agenda and that the meeting keeps to time
- Help members to interpret the information and focus on the relevant issues
- Manage any conflict and facilitate discussion of opposing views
- Encourage clear, jargon-free communication and challenge the evidential base of any judgements given
- Summarise regularly to ensure all involved are aware of what is happening

The Chair should have an understanding of Think Family issues and knowledge of the Child Protection Procedures.
5.3 **Meeting Agenda**

**Introductions**

(i) Ask people to state their name, agency, and their involvement with the family. Remember that family members may not be used to introducing themselves and you may have to help with this.

(ii) Clarify the purpose and intent of the meeting.

(iii) Check family details – involve family members in this (dates of birth or names may be wrongly recorded on files).

**Meeting Ground Rules**

(i) Confidentiality:

‘Parents and young people have given their permission for information about them to be shared at this meeting, for the purpose of ensuring that their children’s needs are met. Participants should remember that this information should not be shared outside of this meeting unless there are concerns about the safety of a child.’

(ii) Organisation:

‘Everyone will have the opportunity to speak at the meeting and it is my role as Chair to ensure this happens. To do this, I will ask everyone in turn for their comments, including parents and young people. To make sure everyone is heard, I ask that everyone listens to others and that all remarks are addressed to me.’

Do not allow personal criticism. This is less likely if all information is communicated through the Chair. Clarify the role of any advocate or supporter who is attending the meeting.

**Information-Sharing**

(i) Professionals should be asked to summarise their reports or information, starting with the professional who has completed the Common Assessment. Ask them to explain technical terms or jargon so that everyone fully understands.

(ii) Check parent’s view of information given by professionals after each contribution. Parents find it easier to contribute to meetings if the Chair keeps eye contact with them, establishes some rapport by meeting them before the meeting and keeps them involved in the process.
It helps to ask open-ended questions such as ‘What is your view on…..?’ “How do you feel about that?”

(iii) Take information about each child/adult separately – the issues may be different.

Summary

(i) Summarise information, pointing out strengths and areas of concern, and identify what it is essential to address and what would be desirable.

(ii) Clarify that the agreed level of concern is appropriate, given the information shared. If necessary, recommend a referral is made to Social Care.

(iii) Summarise the discussion by formulating recommendations which will need to be implemented within identified timescales and transferred following the meeting to a Family Action Plan, and circulated within 10 days of the initial meeting.

Recommendations

- Facilitate the construction of a realistic plan bringing together the needs and the available resources
- Check with parents what help is acceptable – there is no point identifying services parents will not accept, but be clear if a refusal to accept services means additional risk to the child
- Include services that are available in the plan and who is to provide them
- Identify and report the need for unavailable services where they affect the plan
- A review date should be set one month after the initial meeting and thereafter a maximum of three-monthly, dependent on the family’s circumstances. Time and venue must be confirmed
- Identify who will be involved in the Review Meeting
- Agreement should be reached regarding a change of Lead Professional, if appropriate
- Any professional disagreement in this regard should be discussed outside the meeting and reference should be made to the Lead Professional criteria. If agreement cannot be reached, the Lead Professional should consult with their manager and, if necessary, refer to the Escalation Procedure
5.4 **Attendance**

Representatives from all agencies who have contact with the child will be invited to the meetings if appropriate, along with any other agency working directly with the family or who may be able to offer a service to the family.

Parents/carers and young people of sufficient age and understanding should be encouraged to attend with the support from the most appropriate agency, and be engaged in the Think Family process by the agency convening the meeting who will discuss the issues with them, provide written information and prepare the family for the meeting. The family should be informed that the meeting might, in exceptional circumstances, go ahead in their absence but that they will still receive the minutes of the meeting, any Plan drafted and face-to-face feedback.

Consideration should be given to the timing of the meeting to facilitate the attendance of family members. Crèche facilities need to be considered where necessary.

5.5 **Venue**

Ideally, the venue should be familiar to the family and able to provide comfortable, family-friendly surroundings.

Consideration should be given to the accessibility of the venue for all those family members invited to attend.

5.6 **Supporters and Advocates**

A positive partnership between parents and agencies is a fundamental principle underpinning the successful promotion of children’s welfare and the protection of children. However, parents may need independent support, information and advice to be able to participate fully in the system processes from an informed position, particularly where there is a divergence of views.

Accommodation should be made in meetings for parents/carers and children to be accompanied by an advocate or supporter if they choose to have this support or need independent support because of their vulnerability or having additional needs.

An advocate is generally someone employed by an advocacy organisation or a specialist solicitor without personal involvement with the service user.

A supporter will have an informal relationship with the service user such as friend, relative, member of self-help group.
The role of the child’s advocate is distinct from that of the parent’s advocate as they each represent the views of their own client.

The goal of advocacy in the child in need process is:

- To empower parents and children to participate in the process from an informed position
- To promote good communication between parents, children and professionals

6. **Timescales**

6.1 **Common Assessment Framework:**

If it is agreed that a Common Assessment Framework may benefit a child/young person, the assessment should be completed within 20 working days of the decision to undertake the assessment. All decision-making should be clearly recorded.

This timescale is a maximum regionally agreed timescale. If it is agreed that a child would benefit from a Common Assessment Framework, best practice would encourage the conversation to be held as soon as is reasonably possible after the decision is made.

If the Common Assessment Framework Action Plan identifies the need to signpost a child/young person to other agencies, it is important that any request for service made is followed up to ensure the services are being provided. Dependent on the number of other professionals to whom the author signposts, it may be appropriate to convene a Family Action Meeting. Requests for services made to other agencies should be followed up within a month of them being made. The need for a Family Action Meeting will be considered at the time of the drafting of the CAF Action Plan by the author.
6.2 Common Assessment Framework Action Plan Review:

In the absence of a Family Action Meeting being convened following assessment, the author will document their review of the CAF Action Plan using the CAF Action Plan Review document. This review will take place one month after completion of the CAF and thereafter three-monthly.

If a Family Action Meeting is called within the review period, the Family Action Plan will supersede the CAF Action Plan.

6.3 Family Action Meeting:

A decision to convene a Family Action Meeting should be clearly recorded on the child/young person’s file. The Family Action Meeting will take place within 15 working days of the date this decision was made. Any exceptions to this should be clearly recorded on the family/child’s file and/or the eCAF system.

6.4 Family Action Plan:

The Family Action Plan should be circulated to all parties within 10 working days of the Family Action Meeting.

The Family Action Plan should be reviewed within one month of the initial Family Action Meeting and thereafter a maximum of three months.

Any modified Family Action Plan generated from a Family Action Review Meeting should be circulated within 15 days of the Meeting.

6.5 Frequency of contact with a child/young person subject to the Think Family Procedure:

The frequency of contact with a child/young person by the Lead Professional should be a minimum of 42 days (6 weeks).

Social Care: a child should be seen within these timescales at home and spoken to.

Other agencies/organisations: contact may take place within these timescales in school, clinic, Children Centre, etc.

Practice Note:
Best practice would encourage and promote the child being seen within the home environment.
7. **Monitoring the Think Family System**

The Family Action Audit Form should be completed following all Family Action Meetings including Reviews, and returned to the Think Family Liaison Officer by the Lead Professional. (Template N).

This requirement will not apply if using the eCAF system.

The Think Family Audit Form requires the author to document a Unique Identifying Number. This number is the number obtained when a CAF is first generated.

This requirement will not apply if using the eCAF system.

8. **Complaints, Compliments and the Escalation Process**

Complaints should be recorded and investigated using the procedures of the agency identified in the complaint.

Complaints about the process of the meeting should be investigated using the procedures of the agency chairing the meeting.

Complaints and compliments should be notified to the Think Family Liaison Officer.

The Escalation Procedure should be referred to if there is professional disagreement about a child or young person’s vulnerability or the transfer of the Lead Professional role. Guidance regarding this process can be found at Template P.

9. **Case Transfer (Authority/temporary accommodation/cross-border)**

When a family who are the subject of Think Family Procedure moves to another Local Authority, reference should be made to the Regional CAF cross-border protocol and Regional children and young people in need of support cross-border protocol (see Template R and S for guidance).

When/if a family transfers into alternative accommodation (moves house) locally, the Lead Professional should satisfy themselves that the household details have not changed. If the household details have changed, the Lead Professional should check Single View and consider the need, in consultation with their manager, to contact Social Care and request appropriate checks are made of anyone previously unknown to them. Advice in this respect can be sought from the Safeguarding Children Unit and Designated Liaison Officers regarding the need to contact other agencies such as the Police. Any decisions made that result in adults unknown to the service not being checked should be clearly recorded.
10. Participation and Reporting Success

CAF Cards

CAF Cards have been developed to help practitioners fully engage and empower children and young people 8+ years in the common assessment process.

The set of 19 cards, which have been designed with young people, can be used in one-to-one situations, in groups and with families. They act as a starting point for discussions with children and young people, enabling them to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to the 19 CAF elements and so aid completion of the CAF form.

Early Years CAF Cards

The EYCAF Cards are designed to empower the child (foundation age+) and family. A pack including cards and a puppet are easily used by the child to play with and create meaning.

The puppet can be used by the child to express themselves, with the cards then being used to ask questions using the prompts.

User Questionnaire (Children, Young People, Parents and Carers)

User Questionnaire consists of 3 documents available to practitioners to record with parents/carers or children and young people their experience of the Think Family process and its impact. Guidance found at Template U suggests when and how to use. All completed documents should be retained on file and copied to the Think Family Liaison Officer.

Practice Note:
Please see the Regional Cross-Border Protocol for CAF Co-ordinator contacts Template R. Good practice encourages permission from family to be sought before information is shared. In the absence of consent, the child/young person's welfare and proportionality must remain the paramount considerations.
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