

Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex – June 2026

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board’s document, Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex, was first published in April 2013. This is the sixth revision, published in June 2026 and updated to reflect current practice and experience in Essex, as well as changes in legislation and national policy. The Lead Safeguarding Partners for Essex (Essex Police, Essex County Council and the Essex Health Integrated Care Board) are responsible for producing and agreeing this guidance, in consultation with the “relevant agencies, including education. The guidance recognises that however complex a child’s needs are, universal services e.g. education and universal health provision, will always be provided alongside any additional support.

This guidance is for everyone who works with children and young people and their families in Essex. All children and young people will receive Universal Services, such as maternity services at birth; health visiting, school nursing and family support delivered from Family Hubs; school and youth services for older children. Universal Services seek, together with parents and families, to meet all the needs of children and young people so that they are happy, healthy and able to learn and develop securely. Universal services are provided as of right to all children, including those with additional and intensive needs. However, some children, either because of their own additional needs or because of less advantageous circumstances, will need extra help to be healthy, safe and to achieve their potential. In Essex, we want to offer help and support to these children and their families at an early point, in a voluntary way that does not leave them feeling singled out as different.

The Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex document

- Sets out operational models for identifying and assessing need, and supporting children and families; and
- Clarifies roles and responsibilities.

The content includes:

- Principles of working with children and families in Essex
- Families First Partnership Programme
- Multi-agency working and private fostering
- Consultation opportunities
- The Effective Support Windscreen and levels of need
- Indicators of need
- Challenging decisions and escalating concerns
- Resources

Families First Partnership Programme

Following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, in 2022, Government is committed to rebalancing the children’s social care system to ensure that children and families are supported at the earliest opportunity, making sure that their voices are amplified and being heard clearly. The government has set out its Plan for Change - committed to rebalancing the children’s social care system through the rolling out the Families First Partnership programme.

Statutory partners are currently working together to implement the Family First Partnership programme across Essex by March 2027.

A review of the Effective Support for Children & Families Guidance is scheduled for September 2026. A multi-agency working group of the Statutory partners and relevant agencies will work together to review the existing document and update it to reflect the changes to practice and pathways that the implementation of the Family First Partnership programme will incorporate. The amended version of the document is scheduled to be published early in 2027.

What is NOT changing to the existing system in Essex?

- Our strengths and relationship-based approach to practice.
- The quality of care and service.
- Keeping children and families at the heart of everything we do.
- Working collaboratively with partners.
- No change to thresholds (except for the alignment of Targeted Early Help and Children In Need).
- Families will continue to be supported to access the right services at the right time in the right place.

What is changing due to the implementation of the programme?

The FFP programme will look to implement national reforms to establish a Family Help offer, including:

- An Integrated Front Door - A more joined up-front door where agencies work together to make timely and informed decisions when concerns are raised about a child.
- Family Help - A single, clear Family Help offer that brings together Early Help and Children in Need support. This means families will receive support through one coordinated approach, rather than separate pathways.
- Multi-agency Child Protection Teams - Child protection will be led by teams made up of professionals from different services, ensuring timely and appropriate information sharing and decision making.
- Single Assessment - One assessment that can be used across services, reducing duplication and making sure the focus stays on the needs and strengths of the family.
- Family Group Decision Making - A stronger focus on involving families and their networks in decision making, so they play a central role in planning support and keeping children safe.
- Family Help Lead Practitioner and Lead Child Protection Practitioner roles - will provide clear leadership and continuity for families

The guidance identifies **four levels of need: Universal, Additional, Intensive and Specialist**. Services for children with additional and intensive needs are sometimes known as targeted services, such as behaviour support, additional help with learning in school, extra support to parents in early years or targeted help to involve young people through youth services.

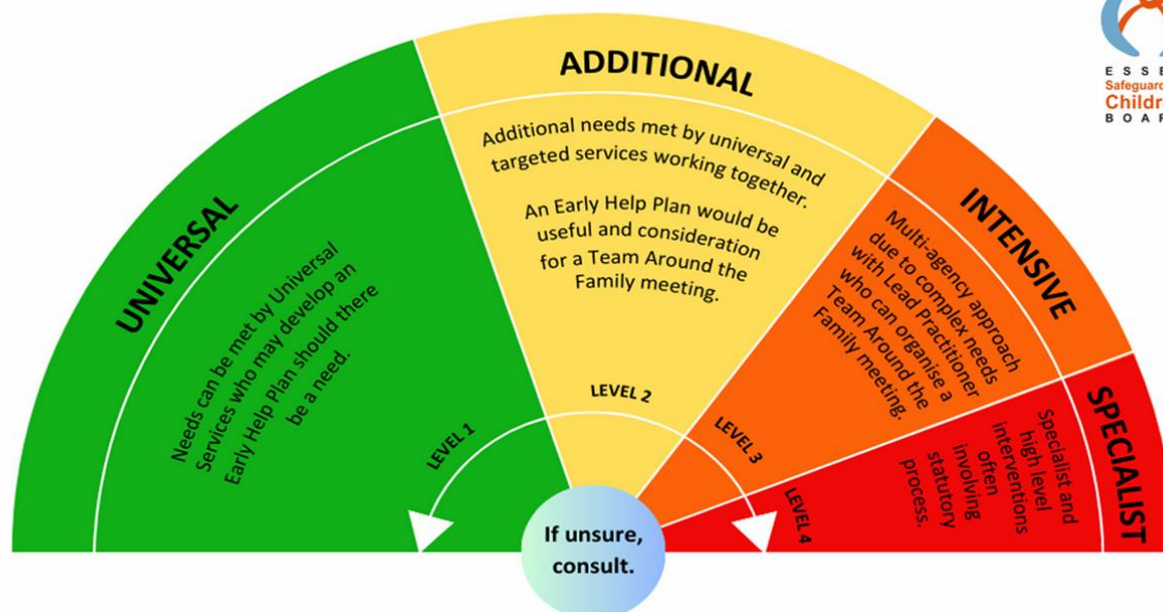
Indicators of possible need

Pages 13 -46 of the document set out the indicators of possible need, to help staff determine the vulnerability and needs of individual children. The 2024 version has expanded the list, providing practitioners with a tool to assist assessment, planning and decision-making, when considering the needs of children in relation to safeguarding concerns.

The Essex Effective Support Windscreen

The conceptual diagram has been restructured to better reflect the proportions of children and young people at each level of need.

The Effective Support Windscreen



Level 1 and 2 -Early Help

Early help can and should be provided by anyone who is working alongside children and families in Essex. Early help can support families to build resilience and sustain better outcomes. There are [many resources](#) available to support practitioners including how to guides and videos.

Early help can be provided by a single agency and the services involved may change over time.

It can be helpful to develop an early help plan with the family so that everyone understands what they are expected to do as part of the support plan. The use of chronology, to demonstrate the impact of events for children can be useful.

Early Help Plan

- An Early Help Plan is a tool to use with the family to discuss and record the needs, strengths, goals and views that they identify, leading to a plan to support them.
- Practitioners may choose to use or amend assessment and planning tools from within their own agency. For example, schools use often use One Plan.
- The Early Help Plan can be registered with the Hub.
- A completed Early Help Plan remains the responsibility of the support agency/service to retain, in accordance with their own record keeping procedures. A copy of the

completed Early Help Plan should be given to all family members that were involved, including children and young people (age and understanding permitted).

Team Around the Family meeting

- Where there is more than one service working alongside a child and family, it is helpful for the family and involved services to hold a Team Around the Family meeting.
- The child and their family is at the centre, the aim of the TAF is to provide effective support and guidance to help them solve problems and find solutions at an early stage.

The team shares information and co-ordinates the Early Help Plan together

The Essex County Council website has a [template and guidance on formulating an early help plan](#).

Level 3- Intensive Needs

Children and families with Level 3 Intensive Needs require a coordinated multi-agency response due to the complexity of their circumstances. These families often face significant challenges that impact their ability to function effectively without substantial support. Effective support at this level involves coordinated efforts from various agencies, including social care, health services, education, and the voluntary sector. This collaboration ensures that all aspects of the family's needs are addressed comprehensively.

In Essex, the Family Solutions Service is an additional service that will work with families who have a range of complex needs and uses the Supporting Families Outcome Framework to define these needs as follows, with three or more needs requiring intensive support at level 3. (When requesting support at level 3 it is important to evidence how the family has been supported up until now, what has worked, what worked less well in supporting the child and family and what support is needed now):

- Families with children who have poor school attendance, poor engagement and/or Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND)
- Parents who are struggling to provide their children with good early years developmental milestones.
- Families who are living with physical or mental health difficulties which is having a significant impact on the family's emotional wellbeing.
- Families living with drug and alcohol use or dependency including the exposure and impact on children.
- Families who are suffering from poor family relationships and/or in need of parenting support.
- Families where children exhibit significant behavioural difficulties.
- Families where children are unsafe or at risk of exploitation.
- Families with members involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.
- Families affected by current or historic domestic abuse.
- Families who are in insecure housing.
- Families who are at risk of financial instability this could be due to loss of or lack of employment, hours worked or significant debts.

When working with a family the Family Solutions family worker will usually act as the lead practitioner to work with the family to help them find solutions to their needs.

Level 4- Specialist

Children and families with Level 4 needs require specialist interventions due to the severe and complex nature of their circumstances. These situations often involve significant risk of harm to the child, necessitating immediate and intensive support from statutory services. At this level, comprehensive and coordinated multiagency interventions are crucial to address the high-level needs and to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

Child in Need

A child assessed as being a Child in Need (Section 17, Children Act 1989) is one where:

- They are unlikely to achieve, maintain or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development; or
- Their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired without the provision for them of such services; or
- They are disabled*

Where any one of these criteria are met and services are provided under Section 17 by consensual agreement with the parent(s)/carer(s) this should be led by Essex County Council Children's Social Care.

*The Children Act 1989, defines all children who are disabled as children in need. Some children and young people that are legally defined as disabled, may require specialist level 4 intervention which includes Essex County Council Children and Young People with Disabilities Service. For many children with disabilities their needs can be met by alternative provisions.

[Further information on Child in Need.](#)

Child Protection

If there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm child protection procedures should be initiated and these child protection enquiries should always be led by a social worker under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Significant harm refers to a situation where a child's health or development is being seriously affected, or is likely to be seriously affected, by abuse or neglect. This can include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect, and it requires immediate intervention to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

[More information on Child Protection Conferences, expectations and the process.](#)

Multi- agency working

When children and families require support and multi- agency intervention is needed, it is helpful for everyone to work together and identify a lead practitioner who can co-ordinate the plan of care for the children and family.

Working with families at all levels of the windscreen requires consent. Those working with families should be as open and transparent as possible by telling families what information they are sharing and with whom unless the child or children are at risk of significant harm or to seek consent may put the child at risk of harm. Whilst it should always be the primary intention of any professional to obtain consent to work with a family or share their information there will be occasions when a child is likely to come to significant harm and seeking consent will increase this risk obtaining consent is not required. On these occasions professionals should record the legal basis for sharing this information without consent.

Consultation opportunities

There are a number of opportunities to have discussions about concerns about children and their families, this may be a discussion within your organisation with your safeguarding lead or it may involve using other opportunities such as:

- The virtual early help drop-ins, where anyone can take an anonymous case for discussion to seek information and advice on the action to take. For more information on the early help drop-ins see the [ESCB website](#).
- For Level 1 and 2 consultation email TAFSO@essex.gov.uk
- Southend Essex and Thurrock Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) practitioner consultation line Mon to Thurs 10am – 12pm 0300 300 1996 <https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/set-camhs/>
- Essex Domestic Abuse Helpline 0330 333 7444 <https://www.essexcompass.org.uk/>

For safeguarding concerns, practitioners can call the Essex County Council Children and Families safeguarding consultation line, you will then be put through to a social worker to discuss the case anonymously and seek advice. The practitioner making the call needs to record the discussion and advice given. This will not be recorded on Essex County Council Children’s Social Care records. The safeguarding consultation line can be reached by calling 0345 603 7627 and asking for the safeguarding consultation line.

If a child is considered to be at IMMEDIATE risk of significant harm, professionals – including the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the school - should telephone the Children & Families Hub on 0345 603 7627 and ask for the Priority Line.

Additional information about systems in Essex

Directory of Services to support children and families in Essex

The Effective Support Directory is available for anyone to access (including families). It lists services that are available to children and families, it can be accessed here [Directory of services | Essex County Council](#) It is categorised by area of need and into local areas although there is also national information.

Lead Professional

- The Lead Professional is not a job or a new role, but a set of functions to be carried out as part of the delivery of effective integrated support.
- At the Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting the Lead Professional should be agreed upon and that person will co-ordinate provision for the child or young person and their family.
- When a range of agencies/services are involved, the Lead Professional will help to make sure that all involved work together and share information to achieve the best outcomes for the child or young person as part of an early help plan
- All practitioners taking the role of Lead Professional should have full support from their senior and line managers, including time to undertake the role.
- Each agency is responsible for ensuring that services are provided as agreed in the early help plan and that the Lead Professional is supported and advised of any changes in need or provision.

Additional guidance and further reading

- Essex Safeguarding Children Board <http://www.escb.co.uk/>
- Effective Support - Children & Families Hub 0345 6037627
<https://www.essex.gov.uk/what-happens-when-you-call-the-children-and-families-hub>
- Request for support form
<https://socialcareportal.essex.gov.uk/s4s/FormDetails/FillForm?formId=1>
- Effective Support Directory
<https://www.essex.gov.uk/directory-of-services>
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2024)
- Young Carers in Essex <https://youth.essex.gov.uk/young-people/young-carers/>
- Information Sharing Protocol
[https://schools.essex.gov.uk/data/information-governance/Pages/Whole-Essex-Information-Sharing-Framework-\(WEISF\).aspx](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/data/information-governance/Pages/Whole-Essex-Information-Sharing-Framework-(WEISF).aspx)