

# The Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit Practitioner Guidance

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A toolkit to assist with the  
identification of Neglect of a  
child or young person

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**IF YOU ARE  
CONCERNED THAT  
A CHILD MAY BE AT  
IMMEDIATE RISK  
OF SIGNIFICANT  
HARM CALL 999**

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# THE PURPOSE OF THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS TOOLKIT AND PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

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

The toolkit can be used in a number of ways:

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

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

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

## WHAT IS NEGLECT?

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

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

- a. Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)**
- b. Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger**
- c. Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)**
- d. Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment**

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

## HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT:

The Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit focuses on six key areas of need and considers the extent of the parents / carers ability to care and the extent to which children and young people's needs are being put first or are secondary to the needs of the parent / carers. If information needs to be shared between agencies, parental consent is required in accordance with the guidelines.

### SIX KEY AREAS OF NEED:

#### 1: PHYSICAL CARE

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

#### 2: HEALTH

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

#### 3: SAFETY & SUPERVISION

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

#### 4: LOVE & CARE

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

#### 5: STIMULATION & LEARNING

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

#### 6: CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Acceptance of issue  
Taking responsibility  
Sustaining change

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

The descriptors we are using are:

- **UNIVERSAL NEEDS**
- **ADDITIONAL NEEDS**
- **COMPLEX / INTENSIVE NEEDS**
- **ACUTE / SPECIALIST NEEDS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## BEST PRACTICE

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

# GAINING A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING

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

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

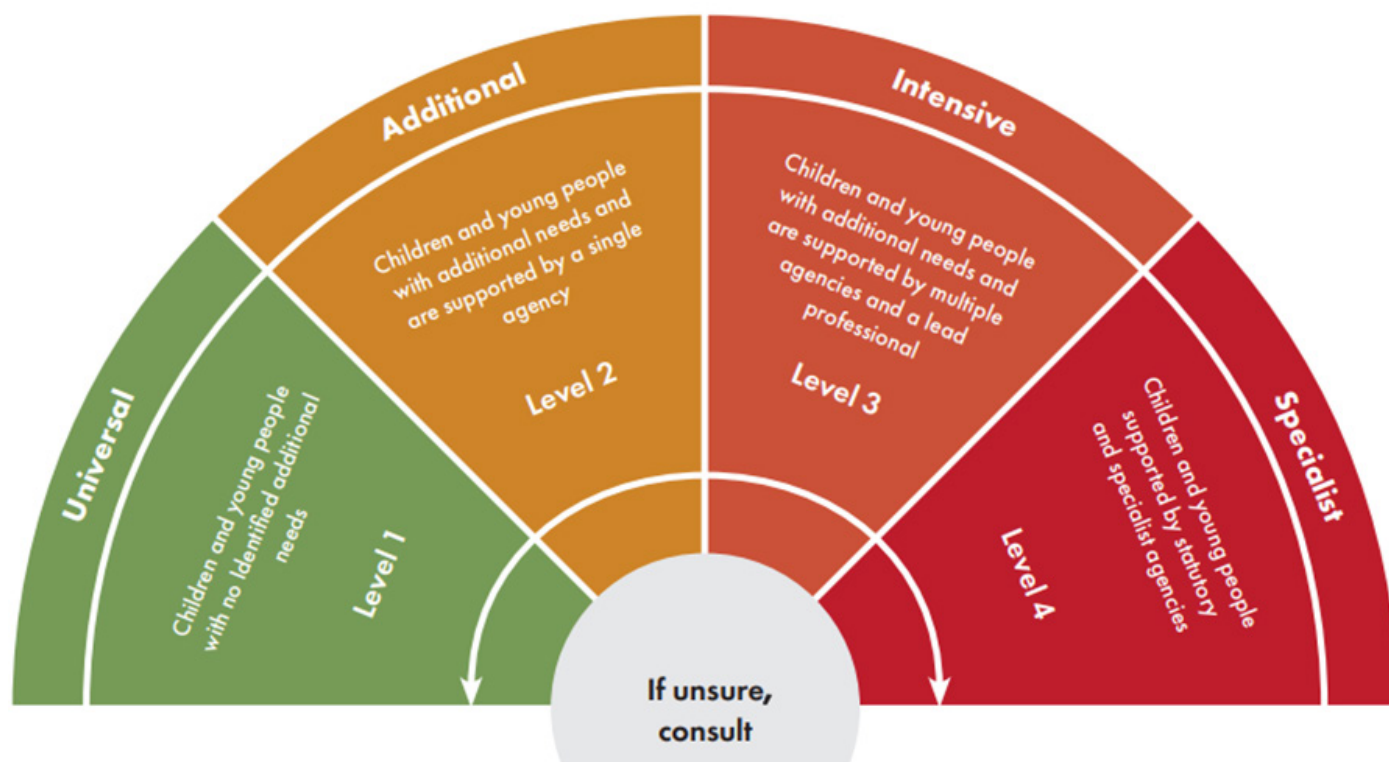
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## CONTINUUM OF NEEDS AND SERVICES

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

The Family Strengths and Needs toolkit is not intended to be a scoring exercise, but as a tool to help you assess the strengths and needs of a family and guide professional judgement.

The descriptors are not exhaustive, but guidelines to support you in your decision-making.



# WHAT TO DO ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE TOOLKIT

## USING THE SUMMARY SHEET IN YOUR ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

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

For example, factors you may want to consider are:

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

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## PLANNING YOUR SUPPORT OR THE INVOLVEMENT OF OTHERS

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

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

For example:

Universal Needs	Additional Needs	Complex / Intensive Needs	Acute / Specialist Needs
<p><b>4.3 Adult arguments and violence</b></p> <p>Parents/carers interact positively with each other when in the presence of child/young person, even in times of difficulty.</p> <p>Parents/carers have a good understanding of the impact of conflict on the child/young person and is sensitive to this.</p>	<p>Parents/carers sometimes argue in front of child/young person, but there is no threatening behaviour from either party.</p> <p>Parents/carers recognises the impact of conflict on the child/young person's wellbeing, but personal circumstances sometimes lead to arguments breaking out being witnessed.</p>	<p>Parents/carers frequently argue aggressively in front of the child/young person and this may at times lead to abuse and/or threatening behaviour.</p> <p>There is minimal awareness and understanding of the impact of the conflict and abuse on the child/young person and little attempts are made to resolve conflict away from them.</p>	<p>Parents/carers frequently argue aggressively in front of the child/young person and this leads to frequent violent and threatening behaviour.</p> <p>There is a resistance, indifference or inability to understand advice provided on the impact of violence or coercive behaviour on child/young person and no attempts are made to resolve conflict away from them.</p>



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

## MAKING A JUDGEMENT

Once concerns about neglect are identified, practitioners need to make judgments about the appropriate intervention that is required and what should happen next. The practitioner or agency that has identified the concerns must evaluate the seriousness of their concerns, consider the risk as well as protective factors, and decide what the appropriate response should be using the **NSSCP Effective Support for Children, Young People and Families Guidance** for all who work with children and families.

If, after reviewing, you remain unsure about the best course of action to take, you can contact the Professionals Consultation Line for advice on **01275 888 690**.

Decisions following the identification of neglect may include:

- Talking about your concerns with the family and continuing to support and monitor the situation as a single agency.
- Family Wellbeing / Early Help Intervention.
- Requesting the involvement of additional support, e.g. from other early help services.
- Requesting the involvement of Children's Social Care as Child in Need where needs are acute.



- Use the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit to establish a clear understanding of the level of need.
- **If you are concerned that a child may be at risk of, or may be suffering, significant harm then direct involvement of children’s social care under section 47 Children’s Act 1989.**

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

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

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

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



Somerset Safeguarding  
**Children Partnership**

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