

## North Somerset Children's Services

# Early Help

2023 - 2026



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## Introduction

Early Help means using the network of support around the family to provide timely and effective care in our community. It involves a family-centred approach to identifying needs and intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent concerns from escalating.

At the heart of this is having open conversations with children, young people, and their parents or carers and coordinating between local community services to deliver the right support, at the right time, from the right people. Early Help can be accessed by anyone and as many times as needed, even if they are already receiving support from the local authority or other organisations.

This strategy recognises that children and young people thrive in a nurturing environment which prioritises early intervention and prevention. It is designed to guide professionals to:

- understand levels of need
- match needs to the right level of support
- communicate and collaborate with local organisations
- deliver swift and impactful intervention
- support the well-being and development of children, young people, and families
- involve children, young people, and their families in decisions from the outset
- use tools which offer a coordinated method of supporting families

*Early Help is not a single organisation, tool, or assessment; it is a safety net of services in the community who work together to ensure every child, young person, and their family thrives and reaches their full potential*

# The Continuum of Need

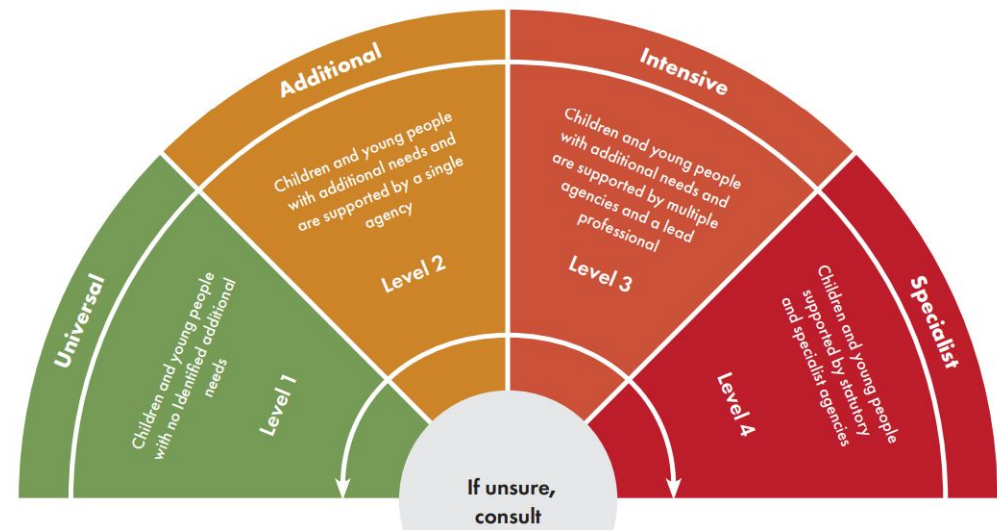
The Early Help Strategy is part of a system-wide approach to supporting the needs of children and their families. To this effect, the strategy works alongside:

- All ages mental health strategy
- Right Service, Right Time
- Education Strategy
- Early Years Strategy
- Child in Care Mental Health Strategy
- SEND Improvement
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy

In particular, this strategy draws on the 'Continuum of Need' in *Effective Support for Children, Young people, and Families*.

The 'Continuum of Need' helps professionals match support services to the child's specific needs based on their progress in their health and development, education, and family/social environment.

Using the 'Continuum of Need' is not about making a judgement about the child or their family; it's about working together to figure out how much support they need with whatever might be happening in their life at that moment.



The Continuum of Need, *Effective Support for Children, Young People, and Families*

By doing so, we can work with the family to plan clear steps for what to do next. This could be:

- signposting and guidance
- a single or multi-agency response
- getting Early Help
- stepping up to Family Wellbeing or Children's Support and Safeguarding

# Supporting Families Programme

Early Help is most effective when we draw on resources across our community to help families in need.

Therefore, one element of the tools we have developed involves talking with the family to understand if they can access the Supporting Families Programme. This is a programme which helps vulnerable families thrive by building their resilience through whole-family support.

If a family needs help to meet any three of the following outcomes, they may be eligible for the programme:

- getting a good education
- improved mental and physical health
- promoting recovering and reducing harm from substance abuse
- good early years development
- financial stability
- secure housing
- improved family relationships
- safe from abuse and exploitation
- safe from domestic abuse
- crime prevention and tackling crime

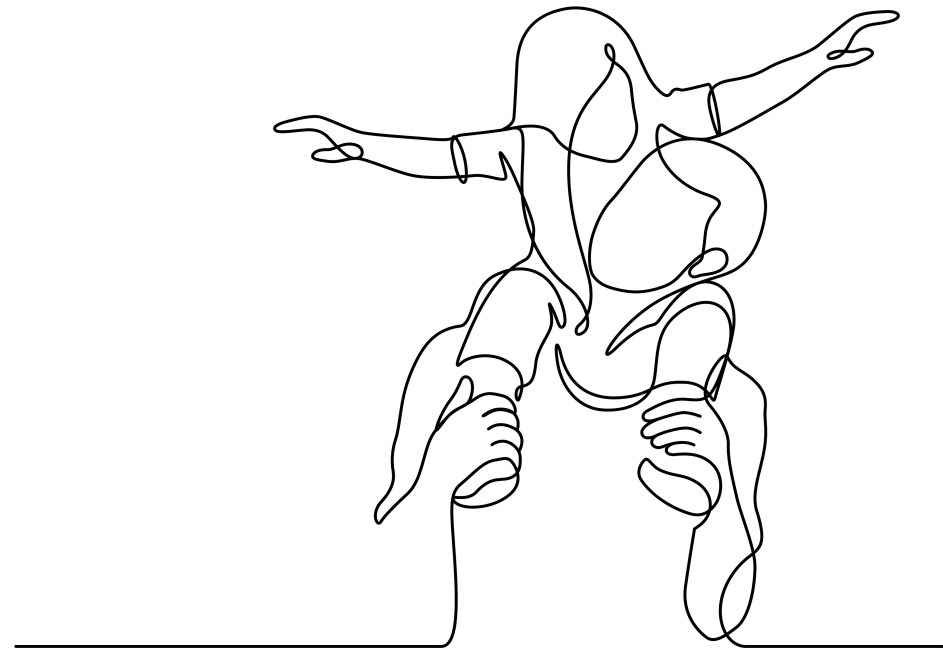


Families eligible for the programme will work with the Supporting Families Link Worker in North Somerset Council

# The Early Help System

The Early Help System relies on a robust network of services that collaborate to deliver integrated and holistic support for:

- parenting
- family relationships
- childcare
- mental and physical health
- special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support
- housing
- money
- employment
- youth justice
- social care
- education



It is integral that organisations across these areas are coordinated and responsive to the specific needs of individuals and families. As part of developing Early Help in North Somerset, we will ensure that there are ways for these organisations to effectively share information and work together to secure the best outcomes so that families only need to tell their story once before they receive the care and support they need.

# The Early Help System - examples of Early Help in North Somerset



# What Early Help looks like

There are two types of Early Help in North Somerset – Community Early Help and Intensive Early Help. Both types of Early Help have some important things in common:

- Both are non-statutory services that require full consent from families
- Both work toward a defined set of improved outcomes
- Both identify concerns and act as quickly as possible to prevent them from escalating
- Both work with professionals in the local area to establish resources, guidance, and support networks
- Both can be supported by the North Somerset Council's Supporting Families link worker if the family meets three or more Supporting Families Outcomes

There are also some key differences between the two types of Early Help.

## Community Early Help

- is provided at the 'additional' level on the Continuum of Need, where a response from a professional or service is needed to support what will likely be short-term needs around a child's health, education, or social development
- can be offered by any professional agency, organisation, or service that works to support children and families, e.g. a school, a mental health charity, a children's centre, a community nurse, or a housing service
- is led by the safeguarding lead in the relevant organisation or the trusted person that identified the need
- is generally accessed informally through a conversation with a professional that will help families understand what support they can receive
- should be organised by professionals using the Let's Talk Tool and Early Help Planning Tool to understand a family's needs and plan a response

## Intensive Early Help

- is provided at the 'intensive' level on the Continuum of Need, where the child or young person is at significant risk of not achieving expected outcomes and requires a holistic and coordinated approach
- is offered by the Family Wellbeing Team, which is part of Children's Services in North Somerset Council
- is led by a Family Support Worker
- is accessed solely through the Front Door to Children's Services by completing a Request for Support
  - This will be assessed and then passed to the Family Wellbeing Team if it is appropriate for them to work with the family
- involves a formal Early Help Assessment for the whole family (completed within 45 days from first contact) and then the development of a plan to help them achieve their goals
  - If a family has already talked to a professional using the tools in this strategy, their response can be used at this stage to inform an Early Help Assessment

## How Early Help works

Early Help is more effective when all partners use a consistent approach so that children, young people and their families get the right support at the right time, wherever they turn. North Somerset Council has worked with professionals across health, social care, and education to produce a series of tools which target Early Help in our community. These tools are not designed to replace any pre-existing tools an organisation may use. Instead, we hope that by bringing professionals together on the same page we can make sure that:

- Early Help is prioritised by all professionals in North Somerset through a consistent approach
- we work together to help families at the earliest opportunity
- families only have to tell their stories once, and are involved in decision-making throughout their support
- professionals work with the child and their family in a relational, strengths-based way

## Using the tools

### When a concern arises

- Contact is made between a family and a professional
- There are a variety of ways this could happen, including:
  - family approaches an organisation to ask for help
  - a parent or carer talks about their concerns with a trusted professional they already know
  - professionals working with children notice something not quite right and contact their parents/carers

### Consent

- The family consents to getting Early Help support by letting the professional know they need additional help with an issue or concern they have

### Let's Talk tool (appendix 1)

- The professional has an initial conversation with the family using the Let's Talk tool
- This conversation is about gathering as much information as possible and understanding the whole family picture of what is and isn't working well
- This should be an open conversation based on primary areas of need like health, education, and family life – example questions have been included in the tool to help guide this conversation, if needed
- The responses during this conversation help the professional understand what kind of support they need, and they should use this to inform their next steps. They may decide to ask for support from another agency and can agree with them what sections of the tool they require help with - as long as the family isn't made to repeat their story multiple times

## Continuum of Need tool (appendix 2)

- Based on what they have learned from listening to the family, the professional uses the Continuum of Need tool to identify what level of support the family needs
- The outcome of this determines what they should do next, and the Pathway Tool helps to visualise this

### Level 1 - Universal Support

- if the family's needs require universal support, the professional will offer signposting and guidance to universal services in the area and let the family know what to do if any issues arise

### Level 2 - Additional Support

- If their needs are 'additional', they will use their professional judgement and knowledge of all the resources available to them to come up with a plan for supporting the family
- They will use the Early Help Planning Tool to record the actions they will take and the outcomes that they're working towards, then return to it to record progress over a set period of time

### Level 3 - Intensive Support

- If any of the needs are 'intensive', the professional will need to make a judgement about which service would be most appropriate to support the family using Effective Support for Children, Young People, and Families, and then make a referral to that service
- This could be Intensive Early Help, but it may also be another intensive services like North Somerset Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or the Youth Justice Service

### Level 4 - Specialist Support

- If any of the needs are 'specialist', the professional will take immediate action to refer the child to specialist statutory services, using the guidance provided in Effective Support for Children, Young People, and Families

*It is crucial that the response from professionals is always informed by the highest level of need. For instance, if the response is level 2 for four of the five areas, but level 3 for one of them, then the overall level of need should be deemed level 3.*

The Continuum of Need tool contains non-exhaustive examples of what needs may be present for families at each level to help professionals accurately identify and respond to concerns.

## Early Help Planning tool (appendix 3)

- If the child, young person, or family's needs are at level 2 of the Continuum of Need, they would benefit from receiving Community Early Help
- Professionals can use the Early Help Planning tool to agree on next steps for support with the family
- The Early Help Planning tool covers the same areas as the Let's Talk tool, which means the professional and the family can use what they've already discussed to set clear actions and aspirations across:
  - Basic safety and protection
  - family and environmental factors
  - developmental, physical and mental health
  - education and learning
  - housing and finance

There are three columns in the planning tool which help create a plan for support

### What are we going to do?

- This column is about recording actions that the professionals will take to support the family with the things they are worried about

- These actions can also include things which the family can do independently, but support should always be offered to ensure they feel safe, supported, and cared for
- It is important that actions are achievable and will have a positive impact on the child, young person, and family
- The Supporting Families programme can be accessed at any level of need, and a column is included on the planning tool to help professionals agree with the family which outcomes they would like support for

### How will we know when things have improved?

- With actions in place, the professional and family should agree on outcomes which promote high aspirations, are measurable, and provide the family with confidence that they will be supported to achieve them
- This means deciding 'what good looks like' for the family

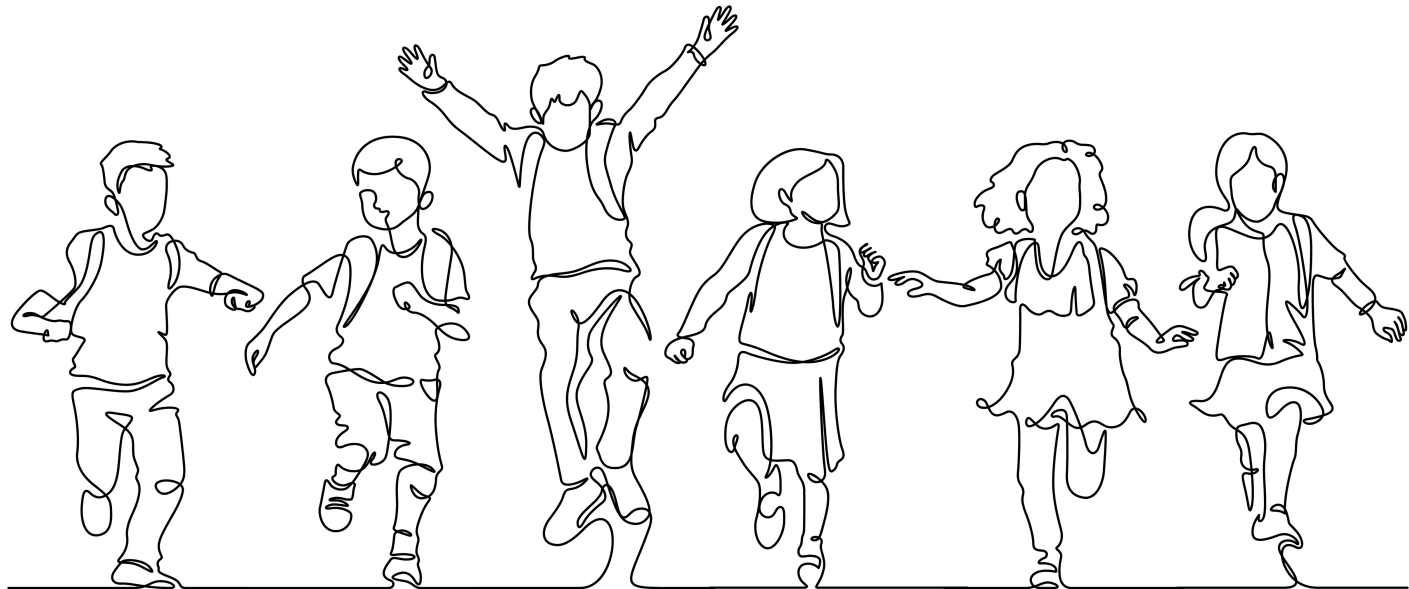
### What progress has been made?

- The final column ensures that professionals and families revisit the actions and outcomes they have decided after an agreed amount of time
- They should discuss if any progress has been made, what has changed about their needs, and what else they may need to do if something isn't working or they need more support
- Part of this process may mean stepping up to Intensive Early Help if their concerns have escalated, or similarly, stepping down to universal support if the family feels they no longer need Community Early Help
- When discussing the progress of the child or family, professionals should consider both their own judgement of this progress and the child or family's own feelings about their progress

## Outcomes for children and their families

The Early Help Governance Board will be responsible for monitoring the progress and outcomes of Early Help in North Somerset to make sure we are listening to the voices of our children and families and providing the support they need to thrive.

These objectives will inform an action plan for the board and serve as guiding principles to shape the implementation and development of Early Help in North Somerset. Each objective will have key performance indicators which will use data to set targets and track our performance toward them. We are committed to working collaboratively, involving stakeholders, and adapting our approach based on emerging evidence and the evolving needs of our community.



## Outcome 1: Improve the overall health and wellbeing of children and young people

- Foster positive emotional well-being and resilience
- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Encourage active participation in community life
- Strengthen partnerships with healthcare partners to ensure timely access to healthcare services, including mental health support
- Provide targeted interventions and counselling services to address specific health needs and promote well-being
- Ensure children with an additional need or disability receive the support they need

## Outcome 2: Strengthen family resilience and promote positive parenting

- Provide accessible and tailored support to families
- Strengthen parenting skills and knowledge
- Promote healthy family relationships
- Address issues that impact family stability and cohesion

## Objective 3: Reduce disparities in educational outcomes and life chances

- Identify and address barriers to educational success
- Enhance educational support and engagement
- Address socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to inequalities
- Promote social inclusion and equal opportunities

## Objective 4: Enhance collaboration and partnership working among local agencies

- Foster effective multi-agency collaboration and information sharing
- Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and protocols for partnership working
- Promote joint planning, decision-making, and shared accountability
- Develop integrated systems to streamline service provision and avoid duplication

## Objective 5: Embed a culture of early intervention and prevention across all services

- Promote a proactive approach to identifying and addressing needs at the earliest opportunity
- Strengthen the capacity of professionals to recognize early signs of vulnerability and risk
- Develop a robust system of early identification, referral, and assessment
- Encourage a preventive mindset that prioritises long-term positive outcomes

# North Somerset Early Help: Let's Talk Tool

Child(ren)'s name(s) and pronouns:  
Parent(s) or carer's name and pronouns:

## Family and environmental factors

Who lives at home with you? Do you get on well?  
Are there people around that can help when you need it?  
Is there anyone in the family that needs extra help or support?  
Has anyone you know been in trouble with the police recently? Do you ever worry that they might be?  
Are there any worries around substance use?

## Basic safety and protection

What's good about being at home? Is there anything that could make you feel happier there?  
Do you feel safe at home and with the people you spend time with?  
Do you feel well-supported and confident to meet the needs of everyone in the household?

## Developmental, physical and mental health

Do you feel well in yourself? Have you been to the doctors for anything recently?  
Do you have friends you're close with? Can you tell me about them?  
Do you ever feel especially low or worried?  
Do you or your child have special educational or additional needs, and are these being supported in a way that works for you?  
Have you noticed anyone in the family being over or under sensitive to light, noise, smells, taste, touch, or other senses?  
Do you notice any differences between how your child speaks, learns or acts, compared to other children their age?

## Learning and education

Have there been any problems at school? If there were, did you feel well-supported to deal with them?  
Do you go to school and/or work? How do you find it?  
What do you enjoy/feel you're good at?  
Do you get any extra support to help you learn? Has it been helpful?  
Do you feel like you have everything you need to support learning or playing together at home?

## Housing and finance

What's your home like? What do you like about it? Is there anything you wish was different?  
Do you feel safe where you live?  
Are there people in the family who work? What kind of work do they do?  
Are there any worries around paying for food or bills?

## What's working well?

This is where you record the good stuff! What do you/your family enjoy? Think about what you feel good about and the things that make you happy. What kind of support are you already benefitting from?

## What are we worried about?

Think about what's important to you and your family. This is where we record your concerns and what we have identified as a concern. What do you think could be better? What have you tried already?

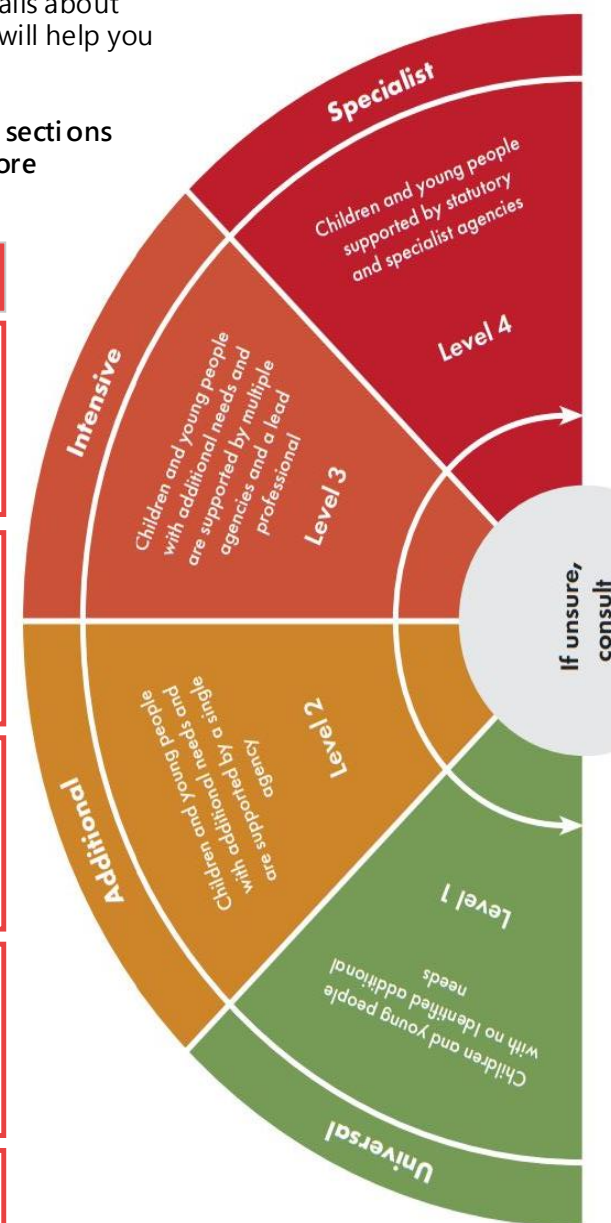
If you need guidance about how to use this tool to have a conversation with the family/child and how to plan the next steps, read the Early Help Strategy. *The questions provided under each headings are prompts only - you do not need to ask every one and they should be adapted according to who you're talking to and what the main worries are.*

# North Somerset Early Help Continuum of Need Tool

This tool should be used alongside *Effective Support for Children, Young People, and Families*, which provides more details about the levels of need and what you should do at each level. The responses to the questions in the Early Help Let's Talk Tool will help you place the child or family on the Continuum of Need.

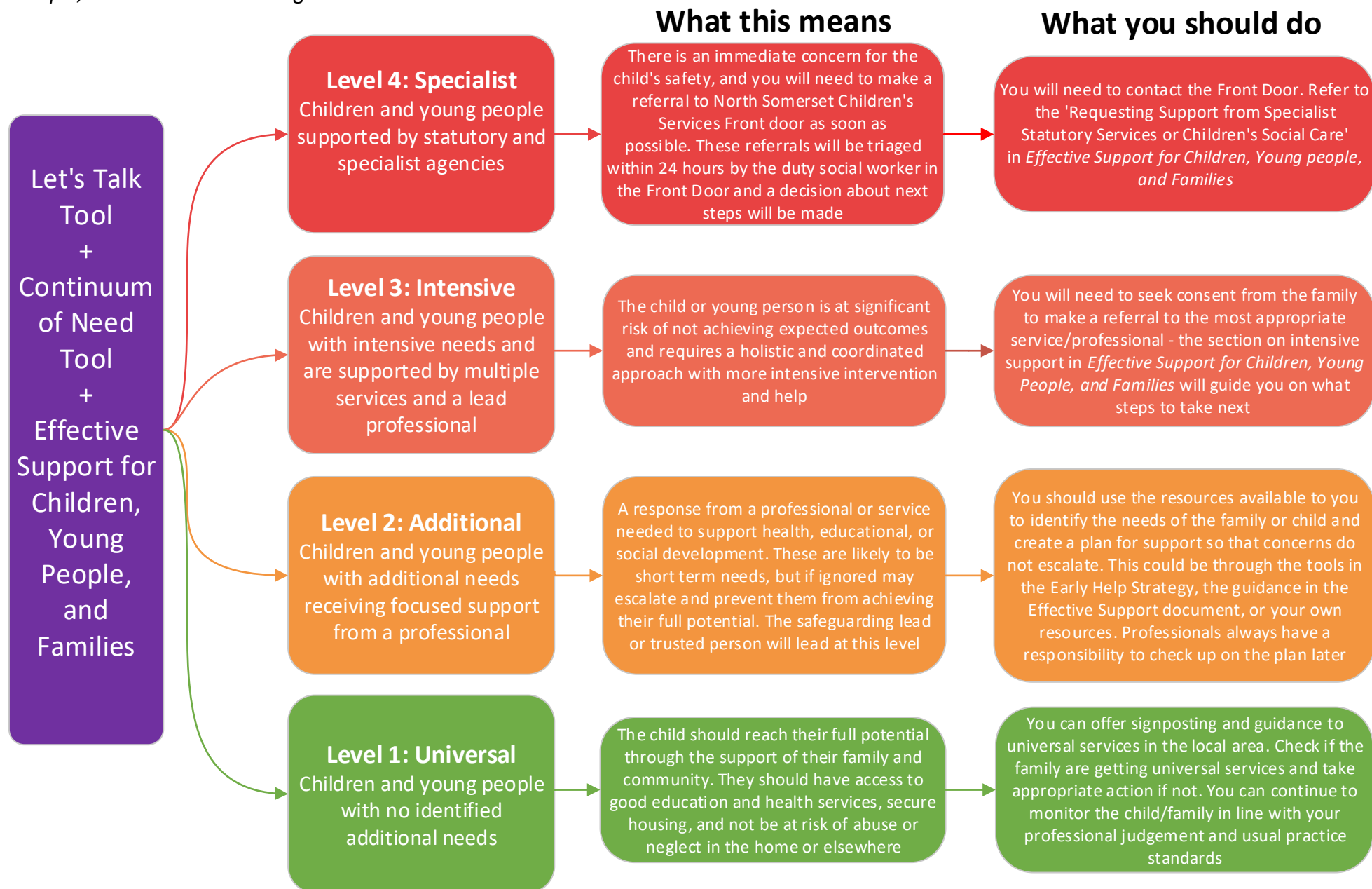
Your response should be informed by the highest level of need. For instance, if the response is additional for 4 of the sections below, intensive for 1, then the overall level of need should be deemed intensive. Read the *Early Help Strategy* for more guidance.

	Universal	Additional	Intensive	Specialist
Family and environmental factors	Stable relationships with caregivers, siblings, peers and age-appropriate friendships	Parents/Carers have relationship difficulties or there is frequent conflict which may affect the child	Risk of family relationship breakdown leading to need for child to become looked after outside of family network	Adults who present a risk to children living in the home. Family characterised by conflict and chronic relationship difficulties
Basic care, safety, and protection	Parents/Carers provide care for (unborn) child's needs and protect from danger in the womb, home, and elsewhere	Requiring advice/support on safe and appropriate childcare arrangements and safe home conditions	Parents/carers unable to protect from danger or significant physical or emotional harm in the home and elsewhere	Parents unable to provide adequate and safe parenting and child is immediately at risk of abusive situations
Developmental physical, and mental health	Health appointments, including antenatal, are kept and advice given is acted upon when required	Concern regarding diet/hygiene/clothing. Persistent minor health problems. Not attending routine appointments	Physical and emotional needs compromised/at risk. Not receiving support to reach developmental milestones and at risk of serious health concerns	Severe physical and mental health risks including substance abuse, sexual exploitation, FGM, physical and psychological abuse
Learning and education	Consistently attending an education provision appropriate to age and ability	Poor school or early years attendance/punctuality. Behaviour likely to lead to risk of exclusion	Child is not attending education regularly enough to achieve expected outcomes and may be excluded from school or attending PRU	Child is excluded from education or not attending an education/training provision of any kind.
Housing and finance	Living in suitable accommodation which presents no concerns around health or development. Not at risk of living in poverty	Inadequate/overcrowded housing. Living with poverty affecting access to services to meet child's additional needs	Overcrowded or poor-quality housing likely to impair health or development and no access to funding/community resources	Frequently missing from home or left home alone without adequate adult supervision or support and at risk of significant harm in the household



# North Somerset Council Early Help/Continuum of Need Pathway

After using the Let's Talk Tool to have an initial conversation with the family and the Continuum of Need Tool to work out where they may be on the continuum, you can use this pathway flowchart to plan next steps. You can read the *Early Help Strategy* and *Effective Support for Children, Young People, and Families* for more guidance.



# North Somerset Early Help Planning Tool

If you have circled 3 or more supporting families criteria in the Let's Talk Tool, then contact the Supporting Families Link Worker at:

	<b>What are we going to do?</b> This is where you record the actions that professionals will do to support the family with the things they're worried about.	<b>How will we know things have improved?</b> What outcomes are we trying to achieve? What does 'good' look like for this child, young person or family?	<b>What progress has been made?</b> Leave this column blank and then return to it after a set amount of time has passed. Has progress been made? What's changed? What else might we need to do?	<b>Supporting Families Outcomes</b> Please circle any that apply.
Family and environmental factors				Needs support with: 1) Family relationships 2) Substance misuse 3) Issues with crime
Basic safety and protection				4) At risk of domestic abuse 5) Children at risk of abuse and exploitation
Developmental, physical and mental health				Needs support with: 6) Physical and mental health 7) Meeting developmental milestones
Education and learning				8) At risk of not getting a good education
Housing and finance				9) Insecure housing 10) Financial instability

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