

Team Around the Family meeting guide

1. Before the meeting

Plan with the family, not for the family. Preparation should be proportionate, inclusive and focused on what matters to the child, young person and family.

Focus	Good practice
Consent and information sharing	<p>Explain clearly what information may be shared, with whom and why; record informed consent in line with current GCC guidance.</p> <p>Do not allow paperwork to delay proportionate help. Follow safeguarding and legal information-sharing duties where consent is not required or cannot be obtained.</p> <p>Agree how the family would like information communicated and check any language, literacy, sensory or accessibility needs.</p>
Build the Team Around the Family	<p>Agree with the family which relatives, friends, community supports and practitioners should be involved.</p> <p>Invite only people who can contribute to agreed outcomes; request a brief update when someone cannot attend.</p> <p>Make the meeting welcoming and manageable. Consider timing, travel, childcare, remote access and the family's preferred venue.</p>
Hear the child or young person	<p>The person with the strongest relationship should gather their views in an age-appropriate and accessible way.</p> <p>Offer meaningful choices about attending, contributing for part of the meeting, using an advocate, or sharing views through words, pictures or other communication.</p> <p>Explain how their views will influence the Earliest Support Plan and provide feedback after the meeting.</p>
Understand strengths, needs and safety	<p>Bring together what is working well, existing family strengths, worries, unmet needs and any risks.</p> <p>Practitioners should discuss concerns with the family before the meeting wherever safe and appropriate. There should be no avoidable surprises.</p> <p>Check whether immediate safeguarding action is needed. The Earliest Support Pathway does not replace statutory safeguarding procedures.</p>
Prepare the Earliest Support Plan	<p>Review previous assessments, plans and support so the meeting builds on learning rather than starting again.</p> <p>Draft a clear purpose for the meeting and identify decisions that need to be made.</p> <p>Ensure the latest Earliest Support Plan format is available for recording outcomes, actions, ownership and review arrangements.</p>

Practice principle: listen first, use plain language, build on strengths and keep the child or young person visible throughout.

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2. Opening the meeting

Create a safe, respectful space where family members understand the process and have the first opportunity to say what matters to them.

Focus	Good practice
Welcome and comfort	Check privacy, seating, refreshments, breaks, accessibility and emotional wellbeing. Allow the family time to settle and explain that they can ask questions, request a break or correct the record.
Introductions and roles	Everyone should explain who they are, why they are involved and what support they may be able to offer. Use plain language and explain professional roles in a way the child or young person can understand. Confirm apologies and identify who will follow up any missing information.
Agree how the meeting will work	Confirm the chair and who will update the Earliest Support Plan. These roles should be separate where possible. Agree respectful ground rules, confidentiality boundaries, the available time and how decisions will be reached. Use the plan as the shared record. Avoid unnecessary lengthy minutes or duplicated recording.
Restate consent and purpose	Confirm the family understands who will receive the plan and how it will be stored or shared. Agree the purpose in the family's words. A useful opening question is: What would make today's meeting helpful for you?
Start with the family voice	Invite the child, young person and parent or carer to share what is going well, what they are worried about and what they want to change. Use the child's preferred communication and refer to any direct work completed before the meeting.

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3. Agreeing the plan

Turn the discussion into a small number of meaningful outcomes and coordinated actions that are realistic for the family and the people supporting them.

Focus	Good practice
Build a shared understanding	<p>Explore strengths, relationships, protective factors, needs, worries and the effect on daily family life.</p> <p>Include the whole family context while keeping the child or young person at the centre.</p> <p>Distinguish facts, professional judgement and the family's views; record differences respectfully.</p>
Learn from what has been tried	<p>Review earlier plans and interventions. Identify what helped, what did not, and why.</p> <p>Avoid repeating activity without adapting it. Consider barriers such as access, timing, trust, culture, communication or service thresholds.</p>
Agree meaningful outcomes	<p>Use a small number of specific, measurable and meaningful outcomes written in plain language.</p> <p>Describe the change the family wants to see, how progress will be recognised and a realistic timescale.</p> <p>Ensure outcomes are agreed with the child, young person and family, not imposed on them.</p>
Agree actions and ownership	<p>Record exactly who will do what and by when, including the family's own chosen actions.</p> <p>Identify referrals, warm handovers and practical support needed; name the person responsible for each step.</p> <p>Include contingency actions: what should happen if circumstances worsen, support is unavailable or an action cannot be completed.</p>
Agree the Lead Practitioner	<p>Choose the practitioner with the family, considering trust, relationship, availability and ability to coordinate the plan.</p> <p>Record the Lead Practitioner's role: maintain contact, coordinate updates, support joined-up working and arrange reviews.</p> <p>Confirm how the family can contact the Lead Practitioner and what to do if they are unavailable.</p>
Set the review arrangements	<p>Agree the review date before closing wherever possible. Match frequency to need and risk.</p> <p>Decide what progress information is required and how the child or young person will contribute to the review.</p>

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4. After the meeting and review

Keep momentum by sharing the plan promptly, completing agreed actions and checking that support is making a meaningful difference.

Focus	Good practice
Check back with the family	<p>Ask whether the meeting felt respectful and whether they were able to say what mattered.</p> <p>Check that the family understands the outcomes, actions, contacts and review arrangements.</p> <p>Correct any factual inaccuracies and provide the plan in an accessible format.</p>
Finalise and share securely	<p>Update the Earliest Support Plan promptly and share it only with agreed people through approved secure systems.</p> <p>Record consent, information-sharing decisions, contributors, outcomes, actions, owners and review date.</p> <p>Provide useful contact details and service information in the family's preferred format.</p>
Complete and coordinate actions	<p>Each person completes their actions within the agreed timescale and tells the family and Lead Practitioner when progress changes.</p> <p>Use warm handovers where possible rather than expecting the family to repeat their story.</p> <p>Raise delays, barriers or new concerns early so the plan can be adapted.</p>
Maintain communication	<p>The Lead Practitioner keeps proportionate contact with the family and coordinates practitioner updates.</p> <p>All members of the Team Around the Family share significant changes promptly and lawfully.</p> <p>If risk increases, follow safeguarding procedures immediately rather than waiting for the review.</p>
Review progress and next steps	<p>At review, consider evidence of change against each outcome and the child or young person's current views.</p> <p>Agree whether to continue, change, step up, step down or close support, explaining the reasons clearly.</p> <p>When closing, record progress, remaining support, the family's network and how they can seek help again.</p>

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