



Early Help Policy

Date created: November 2025

Created by: Mr P Marsden

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This policy is informed by the principles of the Children Act 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023 consultation draft), and the National Supporting Families Outcome Framework. It adapts the framework from Wigan's Early Help and Prevention Partnership Strategy 2024-2027 to suit the context Active Futures Academy, an alternative education provision, focusing on supporting vulnerable young people who may be at risk of exclusion, disengagement from education, SEND or facing family challenges.

1. Foreword

Providing early help to young people and their families is a core priority for Active Futures Academy, aligning with our commitment to safeguarding, inclusion, and educational outcomes. As an alternative education provision, we work with young people who often face complex barriers to learning, including behavioral challenges, mental health issues, family instability, or social disadvantages. Early help ensures we intervene proactively to build resilience, prevent escalation to statutory services, and foster positive futures.

We recognize the importance of a strength-based approach, where support is accessible, coordinated, and delivered early to empower families. This policy sets out our commitment to a shared vision for early help over the next three years (2024-2027), adapting best practices from local authority strategies like Wigan's to our educational setting. By embedding prevention at the heart of our work, we aim to reduce the need for intensive interventions and support young people to thrive academically and personally.

While most young people in our provision will succeed with targeted support, this policy acknowledges the rising challenges they face and invests in early help to avoid high-cost, crisis-led responses. Young people, families, staff, and partners must collaborate through our integrated model to shift demand towards prevention

2. Our Vision and Commitment to Young People and Families

Under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, educational providers have a duty to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve children's welfare, making early help everyone's responsibility. In line with this, Active Futures Academy is committed to a co-produced vision for early help:

"We want all young people in our provision to be happy, healthy, and safe; to be listened to and reach their full potential. Early help is everyone's business. When young people or their families need support, we will provide it at the right time, by the right people, and in the right place, considering the needs of the whole family."

Active Futures Academy's Early Help Commitment Includes:

- Early help as everyone's responsibility.
- A shared vision across staff, partners, and families.
- Providing support as soon as needs arise, from those best placed to help (e.g., tutors, mentors, or external agencies).
- Strengthening our focus on prevention through collaboration with local authorities commissioning schools, health services, and voluntary sectors.
- Aligning with national frameworks to develop a mature early help system.

3. Why Do We Need Early Help? Challenges and Context

Evidence shows that timely early help improves educational and life outcomes for young people, reducing the risk of exclusion, disengagement, or involvement in statutory services. In the context of post-Covid recovery, rising mental health concerns, and economic pressures, early help is essential to manage demand on specialist services.

As an Alternative Education Provision, we support young people who may have experienced mainstream school exclusion, trauma, or family issues. National data indicates increasing demands on alternative provisions, with challenges like attendance issues, behavioral needs, and family deprivation.

3.1 Young People's Voice and Experience

The voice of young people and families will be central to our approach. We will endeavor to conduct feedback sessions and surveys with the young people who experience our provision.

This aligns with our strategy, ensuring young people shape our support.

4. What Do We Mean by Early Help in Alternative Futures Academy?

Early help is voluntary, consent-based support to prevent needs escalating to statutory levels. It ranges from simple advice (e.g., attendance strategies) to multi-agency plans. We adopt a whole-family approach, identifying needs early to improve outcomes regardless of age.

Support enables asset-based conversations about strengths and concerns, avoiding statutory interventions where possible. Early help is collaborative, involving schools, health, social care, and voluntary sectors to meet varied needs like education access, mental health, or family stability.

5. Our Early Help Approach and Practice – How Will We Deliver This Policy?

It is everyone's responsibility to identify needs through asset-based conversations and plan support. We align with local Threshold of Need frameworks (levels 1-4):

- Level 1 (Universal): General educational support.
- Level 2 (Earliest Help): Single-agency response, e.g., mentoring for attendance.
- Level 3 (Early Help): Multi-agency Team Around the Family (TAF), coordinated via assessment.
- Level 4 (Safeguarding): Statutory referral if risk of harm.

For this policy, early help covers levels 1-3. We align with Working Together to Safeguard Children by:

- Promoting welfare early.
- Identifying needs and providing targeted support.
- Using 'lead practitioner' roles (e.g., our DSL or tutors).

Assessments use strength-based tools like the Your Family Early Help Assessment, stored securely and shared with consent. We address key issues like school exclusion risks, online harms, or family domestic abuse.

As part of our development, we offer training via an internal Early Help Team, weekly drop-ins for staff, and referrals to local services (e.g., via professional portals).

5.1 Our Programme of Work

To achieve our vision:

- Gather young people's voice.
- Foster a shared workforce culture.
- Enable whole-family approaches.
- Develop integrated support models using our provision as a 'hub'.
- Use evidence to demonstrate outcomes.

Workstreams include:

- Creating partnerships for family engagement.
- Training staff in early help assessments.
- Mapping local services to fill gaps.
- Embedding a 'hub' model for on-site and outreach support.

Our Offer: We believe in the creation of effective partnerships with young people, their families, commissioning schools and the local authority. We want to have a positive impact on the lives of the young people that we work with. Contributing to Early Help intervention will be vital, targeting the needs of students and supporting in the delivery of targets that may arise from single/multi agency input. We act as a 'hub' for families, providing non-judgmental access to education, mental health, and social support through physical spaces, virtual tools, and outreach.

Key Principles:

- Collective leadership and accountability.
- Value professional contributions.
- Collaborative, child-centered work.
- Whole-family focus.
- Learning from voice and best practice.
- Tackling inequalities.
- Place-based approaches.

These align with safeguarding priorities like professional curiosity and SMART planning.

6. What Difference Will It Make?

We will develop a performance framework measuring outcomes across domains like education, health, family stability, and crime prevention. A dashboard will track metrics quarterly, reported to our leadership team, focusing on family voice, sustainable change, and reduced escalations.

7. Our Governance Arrangements

Active Futures Academy's Safeguarding mechanism oversees this policy, with links to local safeguarding partnerships. An Early Help Working Group supports delivery, reviewing annually.

8. More Information

- Internal Contacts: Designated Safeguarding Lead – [pete@activefuturesacademy.co.uk/07841021322]. Early Help Coordinator – [pete@activefuturesacademy.co.uk/07841021322].
- External Links: Working Together to Safeguard Children (GOV.UK). Early Help System Guide. Local Authority Referral Portal.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and aligned with national guidance.

- Date Approved: November 2025
- Review Date: November 2026
- Responsible Person: Mr P Marsden - Designated Safeguarding Lead / Headteacher
- Applicable To: All staff, volunteers, and partners working within Active Futures Academy Ltd

Appendix

Based on the provided document and image, the Threshold of Need Framework from Wigan's Early Help and Prevention Partnership Strategy 2024-2027 outlines a multi-level approach to support children, young people, and families. Here's a concise summary tailored for an alternative education provision in the UK:

Threshold of Need Framework

The framework operates across four levels, reflecting a continuum of need and corresponding interventions:

- Level 1: Universal Services

- Provides universal support for all children and families through general services (e.g., education, health).
- Focus: Accessible, preventative support for all, with no immediate concerns.

- Level 2: Earliest Help (Single Agency)

- Targets children with emerging needs (e.g., attendance issues, mild behavioral concerns).
- Response: Single-agency support, such as mentoring or pastoral care, introduced early to prevent escalation.
- Example: A tutor addressing a young person's disengagement from education.

- Level 3: Early Help (Multi-Agency)

- Addresses more complex needs requiring coordinated support (e.g., family instability, mental health challenges).
- Response: Multi-agency Team Around the Family (TAF) approach with a lead professional, supported by an Early Help Assessment and SMART plan.
- Example: Collaboration between the AEP, social care, and health services for a young person at risk of exclusion.

- Level 4: Safeguarding (Social Care or Statutory Response)

- Applies to children at risk of significant harm (e.g., abuse, neglect).
- Response: Statutory intervention with a social worker, referred via the Child First Partnership Hub or Professional Referrals Portal.
- Example: Immediate action for a young person experiencing domestic abuse.

Application in an Alternative Education Provision

- **Identification:** Staff identify needs through asset-based conversations and refer accordingly using the Threshold Framework.
- **Flexibility:** Support moves up or down levels as needs change, ensuring timely and appropriate intervention.

- **Collaboration:** Active Futures Academy works with local agencies (e.g., health, voluntary sector) to deliver Levels 1-3, escalating to Level 4 when safeguarding is required.

- **Family Voice:** Young people and families are central, shaping support through their input, aligning with the Participation Strategy.

This framework ensures early help is everyone's responsibility, preventing escalation to statutory services where possible, and supports AFA's mission to help vulnerable young people thrive.

The Level 3 Team Around the Family (TAF) process, as outlined in Wigan's Early Help and Prevention Partnership Strategy 2024-2027, is a multi-agency approach designed to provide coordinated support for children, young people, and families with complex needs. This level falls within the Threshold of Need Framework and is intended to address escalating concerns that require more than a single-agency response but do not yet necessitate statutory safeguarding intervention (Level 4). Below is an explanation of the TAF process tailored for an alternative education provision context:

Overview of Level 3 TAF Process

- **Purpose:** The TAF process brings together professionals from various agencies (e.g., education, health, social care, voluntary sector) to create a tailored support plan for a family. It aims to prevent needs from escalating to a point requiring statutory intervention by addressing complex issues early.

- **Trigger:** Identified when a child or family's needs are beyond the scope of universal (Level 1) or earliest help (Level 2) services, often involving multiple risk factors such as educational disengagement, mental health concerns, or family instability.

- **Consent-Based:** The process requires written consent from the family to coordinate support and share information.

Steps in the TAF Process

1. Identification and Referral:

- A lead professional (e.g., a tutor, mentor, or Designated Safeguarding Lead in an AEP) identifies that a young person's needs align with Level 3. This could involve issues like risk of exclusion, behavioral challenges, or family support needs.

- Referral is made, often through a professional portal (e.g., Wigan's Professional Referrals for Children Portal), to initiate the TAF.

2. Early Help Assessment:

- A comprehensive assessment, such as Wigan's Your Family Early Help Assessment, is conducted. This assesses the needs of the whole family, considering how they impact one another.

- The assessment is strength-based, focusing on family assets and support requirements, and is stored centrally on the Early Help Module (EHM) database.

3. TAF Meeting:

- A multi-agency meeting is convened, including the lead professional, family members, and relevant practitioners (e.g., AEP staff, social workers, health professionals).
- The family's voice is central, ensuring their input shapes the support plan. The meeting agrees on a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) plan to address identified needs.

4. Coordinated Support Plan:

- The TAF develops a coordinated plan with clear actions, responsibilities, and timelines. This may involve support from the Start Well Service or other partners.
- The lead professional oversees the plan's implementation, ensuring agencies work collaboratively.

5. Review and Monitoring:

- Regular reviews are scheduled to assess progress, adjust the plan as needed, and measure outcomes against the National Supporting Families Outcome Framework (e.g., improved education, family stability).
- The process continues until the family's needs are met or escalate/de-escalate to another level.

Key Features

- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Involves professionals from education (e.g., AEP staff), health, and voluntary sectors, ensuring a holistic approach.
- **Family Involvement:** Families are active participants, co-creating the plan to build resilience and achieve sustainable change.
- **Prevention Focus:** Aims to avoid statutory intervention (Level 4) by addressing needs early, such as supporting a young person at risk of exclusion through targeted education and family support.
- **Lead Professional:** A designated individual (not necessarily a social worker) coordinates the TAF, providing continuity and accountability.

Application in an Alternative Education Provision

- **Context:** An AEP might initiate a TAF for a young person struggling with attendance, behavioral issues, or family challenges impacting their education.
- **Example:** A tutor notices a student's disengagement and learns of family stress. After consent, a TAF meeting includes the tutor, a school counselor, and a family support worker to create a plan addressing both educational and home needs.
- **Outcome:** The plan might include mentoring, family support sessions, and mental health referrals, reviewed monthly to ensure the young person remains engaged and supported.

This process aligns with Working Together to Safeguard Children, emphasising early intervention, family engagement, and a whole-family approach to improve outcomes effectively.