

## Why have a Lead Professional?

The introduction of the Lead Professional role is a central strand of the Change for Children program. It is intended to improve the coordination of multiagency activity following a common assessment, undertaken to improve outcomes for children with unmet needs. Implementing the role is aimed at reducing families' experience of repeated lengthy meetings, conflicting or confusing advice and uncertainty about who to approach for up-to-date information.

This should not be considered a new role as in many cases practitioners are already delivering these functions. It is rather a minimum set of requirements which need to be carried out to deliver an effective coherent service to all children with additional needs requiring an integrated response. It should ensure that children and young people and parents and carers have access to a named practitioner who supports them in obtaining the help they need, problem solving if required and ensuring they receive the right help at the right time, delivered by the most appropriate agencies.

## How is the lead professional nominated?

Where children have no additional needs or where their needs require a response from just one practitioner, a lead professional is not required.

Where CAF has identified that a child has additional needs requiring an integrated response, a relevant practitioner from among those supporting the child is identified to carry out the functions of the lead professional.

A lead professional can be any appropriate practitioner from any agency with their line managers agreement, whether they are trained to be a CAF assessor or not.

In some cases a child's needs may be more complex and they may receive a specialist assessment through frameworks such as Asset, the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs or specialist mental health assessments. In these cases, statute or good practice require that someone is in place to take a lead role in linking up with other services and being a single point of contact for child and family. Where this is being carried out effectively, this person carries out the functions of the lead professional. Examples include:

- named social worker for looked after children
- named social worker for child on child protection register
- key worker for children with complex disabilities or complex health needs
- personal advisor or social worker for care leaver

The Lead professional will, in many cases, be nominated on completion of a **Multi-Agency meeting** resulting from a common assessment.

A multi agency meeting should always be held in order to co-ordinate activity and facilitate support to a family where three or more agencies are working together to meet similar or related needs.

There will be times when even two agencies working alongside the family identify the need for a Lead Professional to be assigned. Discussions would then need to take place with the agencies and the Family to agree who should be put in place to be the Lead Professional.

Where a Multi-Agency meeting does take place, there should not be an allocation of a lead professional to someone who is not at the meeting or has not been involved in the assessment or plan thus far, unless it is explicitly agreed beforehand that they are willing to act as lead professional.

The Lead professional should be identified from among the group of practitioners working with the child, young person or family, through a process of discussion resulting in agreement between the family and the practitioners involved.

When deciding who should be the lead professional the following criteria should be considered:

- What are the predominant needs of the child or family?
- Which agency has main responsibility for addressing those needs?
- Which practitioner has a previous or ongoing relationship with the child or young person?
- Does a specific professional have an ongoing responsibility to carry out such a role?
- Who has the skills and knowledge to provide a coordinating role in relation to all the practitioners involved with this child?
- Who has the ability to draw in and influence universal and specialist services?
- Who has an understanding of the surrounding support systems available to manage and sustain the necessary multi agency work?
- Who has capacity to take on this role?

Where it is not clear who is best placed to take on the lead professional role, a meeting should be convened to discuss the issue and find a resolution. Where agreement cannot be reached, managers should discuss the situation with service managers in partner agencies to agree a strategic approach. The CAF coordinator can also offer support and engage senior managers through Children Leeds executive and its subgroups.

In order to carry out these functions, it is vital that practitioners have access to good professional supervision and management, and where appropriate, additional training. This should enable them to acquire the appropriate knowledge skills and understanding needed for the role, including the ability to assess the needs of the child, their own skills to intervene, the need for additional support from other practitioners and the need for specialist referral.

### **What are the roles and responsibilities of the Lead Professional?**

It is important to emphasise that a lead professional is not responsible for the work of other practitioners following on from a multiagency plan. They do not line manage or supervise other practitioners who have a responsibility for delivering services as part of the plan. Their role is one of coordination and advocacy which will include the following;

- Acting as a single point of contact for the child or family
- Coordinating the delivery of agreed actions by the practitioners involved
- Reducing overlap and inconsistency in the services received

The following information is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive, but rather an example of the activities allocated to a lead professional following their nomination.

- Building a trusting relationship with the child and family to secure their engagement in the process and ensuring that they feel empowered and remain central to any decision making.
- Being a single point of contact for the family and for other practitioners identified on the CAF database.

- Coordinating the effective delivery of an agreed set of actions, which provide a solution focused package of support.
- Supporting the involvement of other services by making referrals and co-ordinating multiagency meetings.
- Implementing an agreed process by which the multiagency plan will be regularly reviewed and monitored, taking into account the following;
  - the changing circumstances and needs of the child over time
  - progress made towards the intended outcomes
  - the child, young person / families satisfaction with services
  - the views of other practitioners on the effectiveness of support provided
  - the need to adapt and amend the plan to take account of developments
  - the need to signpost to local services or refer to more specialist services
  - an appropriate exit strategy back to mainstream services
  - work taking place within an appropriate timescale
- Continuing to support the child or family, if more specialist services are involved.
- Supporting the child through key transition points encountered during an "episode".
- Ensuring a careful and planned "handover" to other agencies, or subsequently appointed lead professionals, takes place as appropriate
- Ensuring the CAF Database is up-to-date with current activity

### **How is the nominated lead professional supported and developed?**

Managers have the responsibility for identifying practitioners within their agencies, services or teams, to undertake the lead professional role. They should ensure that practitioners will already have or will be supported in acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding as well as the capacity within their workload to successfully carry out the role.

Lead professionals will benefit from the support of their managers and the commitment from other practitioners to this way of working and to their carrying out their agreed functions. It is also important that they have personal and professional development opportunities in line with the requirements of the “**Common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce**”, to ensure they have the opportunity to develop the skills they need.

Relevant skills and knowledge would include the following examples of core competencies;

#### Effective Communication and Engagement with Children and Young People

- Develop strong communication skills, diplomacy and sensitivity.
- Establish positive, successful and trusting relationships.
- Empower children /families to make decisions and challenge when appropriate.
- Support and enable children and families to achieve their potential.

#### Child and Young Person Development

- Understand appropriate child development
- Recognise possible developmental delay
- Recognise the important role of play and recreation
- Interact with children in a way that supports their thinking and learning
- Behave in a way that is appropriate to the child's level of development

#### Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of the Child

- Understand the different forms of abuse, and their impact on child development
- Have awareness and knowledge of current legislation
- Have awareness and knowledge of local policies, procedures and practice guidance

- Be aware of own roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and promoting welfare of children and young people
- Understand the implications of assessment in relation to risk and protective factors.
- Be able to discuss concerns with parents/carers and children and young people

#### Supporting Transitions

- Manage the process of transition in a timely way
- Act to ensure the timely transfer of information transitions
- Know about the likely impact of transitions such as divorce, bereavement, puberty

#### Multiagency Working

- Work effectively with practitioners from a range of services.
- Convene meetings and initiating discussions with relevant practitioners.
- Acquire knowledge of local and regional services.
- Understand the boundaries of one's own skills.
- Have the confidence to challenge practice including one's own

#### Sharing Information

- Make good use of available information and be able to identify gaps
- Recorder summarises, shares and feedbacks information using IT when appropriate
- Understand the importance of and limits to confidentiality, including the application of policies and procedures around information sharing.

Clear and transparent systems developed and agreed at a strategic level in relation to the line management, accountability, professional support and dispute resolution should be implemented across all agencies. It will be each Agencies responsibility to draw up their own Guidance in relation to how they support and develop their own lead professionals; however any Guidance should relate directly and support the **Children Leeds Interagency Practice Guidance for Practitioner Undertaking Common Assessments.**

Management and supervision should address the following;

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of the lead professional
- Promote good quality services to children, young people and families
- Provide a positive environment to discuss and review practice
- Share decision-making and accountability
- Identify appropriate resources and support access to them
- Encourage and support continuous professional development
- Ensure participation and involvement of children young people and families
- Adhere to relevant policy and procedure, including data protection, equal opportunities and child protection

#### **How is the role of the Lead Professional monitored and evaluated?**

Lead professionals should receive professional support, supervision and access to continuous professional development within their own agency. They will be accountable in the first instance to their own agency for their performance as a lead professional. The nature of multi agency working also requires agreed routes for all partners to escalate issues or concerns arising from joint working. This will in the first instance also be individual practitioner's line managers.

Practice can be evaluated using the following examples of competencies;

- Developing successful and productive relationships with diplomacy and sensitivity
- Communicating successfully with the child/family, other practitioners without jargon
- Supporting the child and family to;
  - identify realistic and relevant goals,
  - implement a range of strategies,
  - make decisions,
  - agree appropriate outcomes
  - challenge others when appropriate
- Convene meetings and discussions with a variety of people
- Use the common assessment framework
- Develop support plans based on the five outcomes
- Coordinate the delivery of effective early intervention work and ongoing support
- Work in partnership with other practitioners to deliver a solution focused support plan
- Communicate effectively to ensure support is fully coordinated
- Understand the implications of assessment, in particular risks and protective factors
- Have up-to-date information on local and regional services of children and families
- Understand, information sharing procedures and issues around confidentiality and data protection
- Have a realistic view of the boundaries of their own knowledge skills and understanding

Each agency should ensure that there are clear lines of accountability and escalation routes for individual lead professionals through line management within their own agency.

A lead professional will continue to support a child/family for the duration of the Common Assessment “episode”, that is until the satisfactory progress towards goals identified within the CAF has been agreed at a review meeting, or until a new lead professional has been allocated.

If other issues arise later resulting in another CAF “episode” the nomination of a new lead professional will follow the same identified format.

Where a lead professional for a family has to change this should be done in discussion with the family and practitioners to ensure the most suitable person is nominated.

Where there are issues nominating a lead professional these should be resolved as quickly as possible. An informal route for resolving problems should begin with the practitioners who are engaged and if necessary escalate to their line managers. If the problem remains unresolved the local ‘integrated processes coordinator’ may be able to mediate or if necessary escalate it to the local manager’s forum.

For more information on the role of the lead professional see the [national guidance](#).