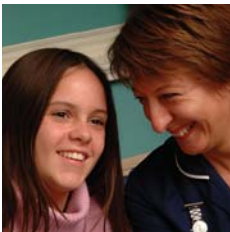


The lead professional: Practitioners' guide

Integrated working to improve outcomes
for children and young people



Every Child Matters
Change For Children

This guidance is for practitioners who want to find out more about the lead professional and for those who are already carrying out lead professional work. It is part of a set of materials for practitioners covering three inter-linked elements of the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme:

i. The Common Assessment Framework for children and young people (CAF)

– framework to help practitioners assess children’s additional needs for services earlier and more effectively, develop a common understanding of those needs and agree a process for working together to meet those needs. Guidance and support materials are available.

ii. The lead professional

– person responsible for co-ordinating the actions identified in the assessment process and being a single point of contact for children with additional needs being supported by more than one practitioner. As well as this guide, a managers’ guide and training materials are also available.

iii. Information sharing

– process for helping practitioners work together more effectively to meet children’s needs through sharing information legally and professionally. Guidance and training materials are available.

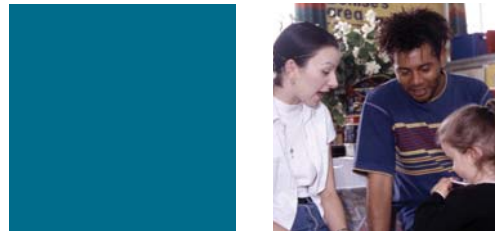
SEE ➤ [Back cover for available resources](#)

Please note: for simplicity and ease of reading, the terms ‘child’ and ‘children’ are used throughout this document to refer to babies, children and young people aged 0 to 19.

Contents

1. About the lead professional	3
2. How the lead professional fits into Every Child Matters, Youth Matters and the Children’s National Service Framework	5
3. Being a lead professional	9
What skills will I need?	9
Working with children with additional needs	10
Working with children with complex needs	12
Training for lead professionals	12
What else will I need?	12
Management, supervision and workload	13
Hints and tips	14
Annex A: Taking the lead role in cases involving children with complex needs	15

1. About the lead professional



1.1 A lead professional is someone who takes the lead to co-ordinate provision and be a single point of contact for a child and their family, when a range of services are involved with that child or family and an integrated response is required.

1.2 The lead professional is not a job title or a new role, but a set of functions to be carried out as part of the delivery of effective integrated support. These functions are to:

- **Act as a single point of contact** for the child or family, who they can trust and who can engage them in making choices, navigating their way through the system and effecting change.
- **Co-ordinate the delivery of the actions agreed by the practitioners involved**, to ensure that children and families receive an effective service which is regularly reviewed. These actions will be based on the outcome of the assessment and recorded in a plan.
- **Reduce overlap and inconsistency** in the services received.

1.3 Here are some examples of the tasks a lead professional may need to carry out to deliver the functions above:

- Build a trusting relationship with the child and family (or other carers) to secure their engagement and involvement in the process.
- Be the single point of contact for the family and a sounding board for them to ask questions and discuss concerns. In some cases other practitioners will need to make direct contact with them, and it will be important for them to keep the lead professional informed of this.
- Co-ordinate the effective delivery of an agreed set of actions which provide a solution-focused package of support and a process by which this will be regularly reviewed and monitored.

- Identify where additional services may need to be involved and put processes in place for brokering their involvement (this may need to be carried out by the line manager rather than by the lead professional themselves).
- Be the single point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering services to the child, including staff in universal health and education services, to ensure that the child continues to access this support.
- Continue to support the child or family if more specialist assessments need to be carried out.
- Support the child through key transition points but, where necessary, ensure a careful and planned 'handover' takes place if it is more appropriate for someone else to be the lead professional.

2. How the lead professional fits into Every Child Matters, Youth Matters and the Children's National Service Framework



2.1 *Every Child Matters* and *Youth Matters* are about improving outcomes for all children and young people so that they can all achieve the following outcomes:

- being healthy;
- staying safe;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution;
- achieving economic well-being.

2.2 *The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* (Children's NSF) has set standards in health and social care for improving service delivery, particularly concerning health and well-being, delivering child-centred services, safeguarding and promoting welfare, supporting those who are disabled or who have complex health needs and promoting mental health and psychological well-being.

2.3 The lead professional, together with the CAF and better sharing of information, has an important contribution to make to these key Government policies. These processes will help change the way that services are delivered, shifting the focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place. This will help more children and young people to achieve the five outcomes above.

2.4 Children and families may experience a range of needs at different times in their lives (see **Figure 1**). All children require access to high quality universal services. Some children are at risk of poor outcomes and will require extra support from services. These are **children with additional needs**. Their needs will in many cases be cross-cutting and might include:

- disruptive or anti-social behaviour;
- overt parental conflict or lack of parental support/boundaries;
- involvement in or risk of offending;
- poor attendance or exclusion from school;

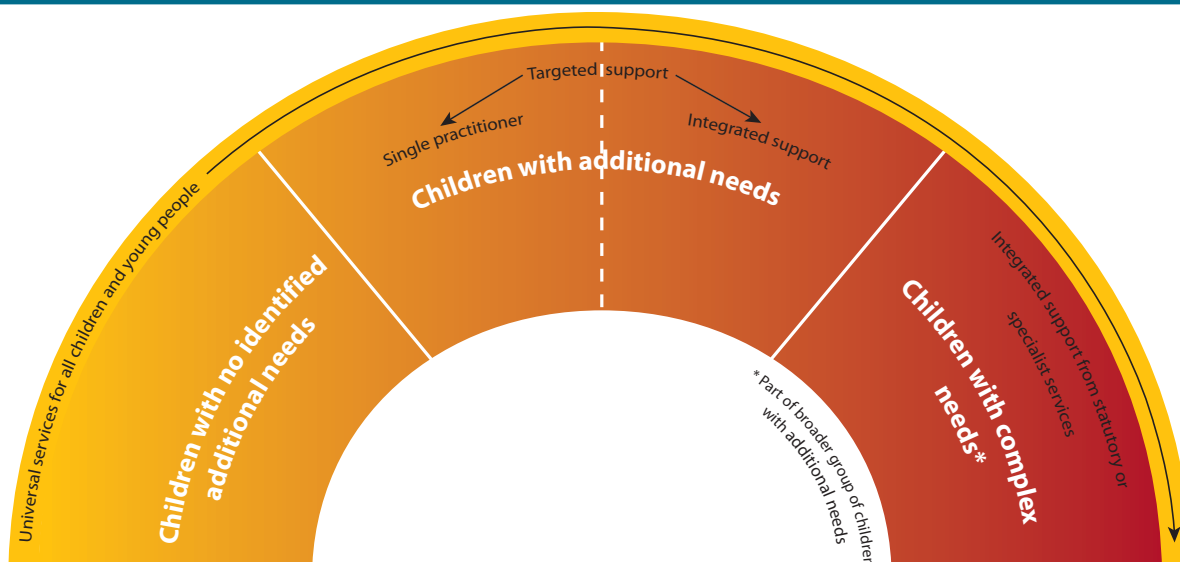
- experiencing bullying;
- special educational needs;
- disabilities;
- disengagement from education, training or employment post-16;
- poor nutrition;
- ill-health;
- substance misuse;
- anxiety or depression;
- housing issues;
- pregnancy and parenthood.

Within this group, a small proportion have more significant or **complex needs** which meet the threshold for statutory involvement.

These children are:

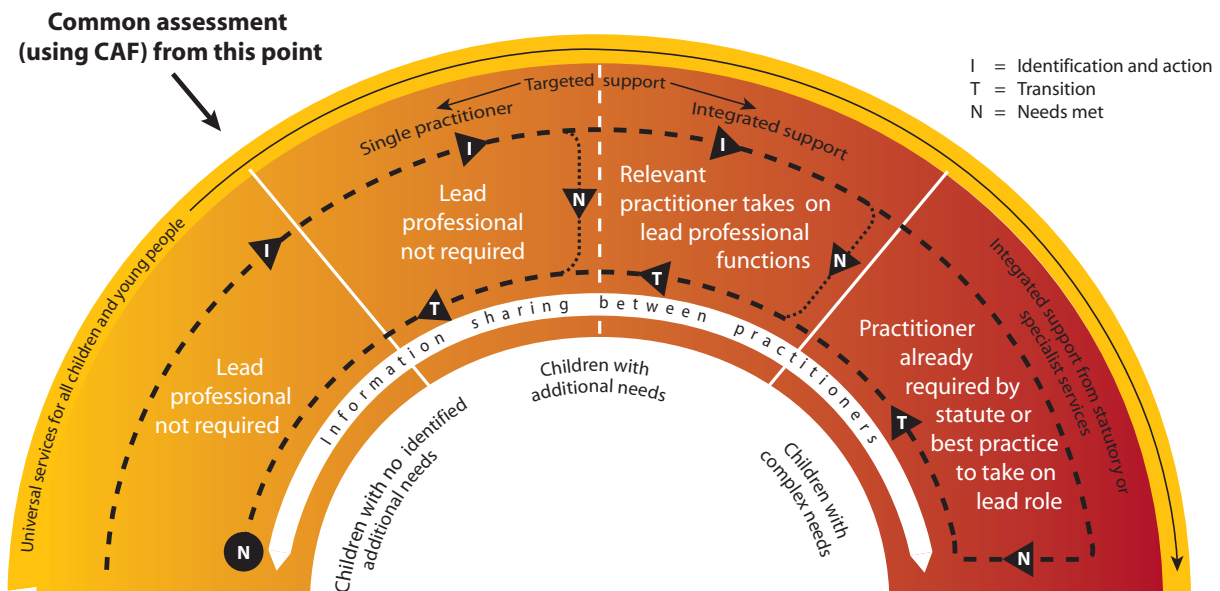
- children who are the subject of a child protection plan;
- looked after children;
- care leavers;
- children for whom adoption is the plan;
- children with severe and complex special educational needs;
- children with complex disabilities or complex health needs;
- children diagnosed with significant mental health problems;
- young offenders involved with youth justice services (community and custodial).

Figure 1: Continuum of needs and services



2.5 Children and families are supported most effectively when CAF, the lead professional and information sharing procedures are planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way, to offer integrated support across the continuum of needs and services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Processes and tools to support children and families



2.6 Effective integrated working is underpinned by two broader aspects of the *Every Child Matters* integrated working strategy:

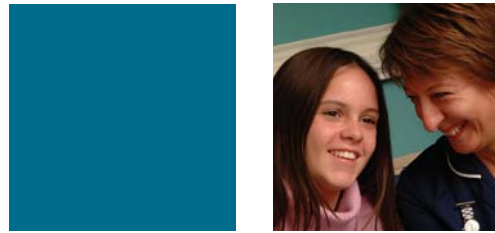
- **Workforce reform:** including the introduction of the *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children’s Workforce* to ensure all professionals have the knowledge and skills to work effectively with children and families, and access to training when relevant.

GO TO www.ecm.gov.uk/workforcereform

- **Multi-agency working:** bringing professionals from different agencies together to meet the needs of children and families and jointly agree the delivery of the action plan arising from a common or specialist assessment. The multi-agency resource signposted below has information on different models of service provision and a toolkit for practitioners.

GO TO www.ecm.gov.uk/multiagencyworking

3. Being a lead professional



What skills will I need?

3.1 Emerging practice suggests that there are a number of skills which may help you deliver the lead professional functions. These are shown in **Figure 3** below.

Figure 3: Useful skills for carrying out the lead professional functions



3.2 Lead professionals, like all practitioners, should also understand information sharing procedures and issues around client confidentiality. Don't worry if you feel there are areas you need to develop – use **Figure 3** as the basis for a discussion with your line manager.

GO TO www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing

3.3 If you are working with **younger children** or a child who is developmentally young, you will need to use ways of communicating which are meaningful to the child. You will also be working closely with their adult carers. In these cases, the lead professional functions are more likely to draw on skills related to:

- communicating with the child using forms of communication appropriate to their age, level of understanding and preferred method of communication (e.g. pictures, gestures or a personalised communication board);
- engaging parents and carers;
- understanding key transition points in a child's life, for example beginning a new school.

3.4 If you work with **young people**, in particular through targeted support, your main challenges as lead professional are likely to centre on:

- Enabling young people to choose the practitioner they want to act as their lead professional balanced against 'best fit' and specific agency requirements.
- Gaining their trust and respect, being able to challenge them when necessary and help them move on in their thinking.
- Helping them make an effective transition to adult services where necessary.

Working with children with additional needs

3.5 Lots of practitioners in the children's workforce might be a lead professional at certain times for some of their cases. The following list gives some examples (but is not exclusive – practitioners from other backgrounds might sometimes take on the functions too).

- personal advisers
- health visitors
- midwives
- youth workers
- family workers
- substance misuse workers
- nursery nurses
- education welfare officers
- Sure Start Plus and teenage pregnancy advisers
- project workers
- community children's nurses
- school nurses
- occupational therapists
- school support staff
- housing support staff
- play workers

3.6 As well as the school support staff referred to above, in some cases it may be appropriate for other school staff to take on the lead professional functions. For example, a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) may, where appropriate, act as lead

professional for a child with special educational needs. In some cases primary headteachers have also taken on the lead professional functions. In both cases, this works well when they are the person with the strongest relationship with the family, where the child's needs are primarily school-based and where it is useful for the school to hold the overview. Where the child's needs require input from a range of professionals outside the school setting or a high degree of family support is required, it may be appropriate to identify someone from another service to take on the lead professional functions.

3.7 It is helpful to have clear criteria for choosing lead professionals and a clear process to facilitate this. Experience suggests that disagreements or confusion are less likely when these are in place. These criteria could include:

- the predominant needs of the child or family;
- the level of trust built up with the child or family;
- the wishes of the child or family;
- the person with primary responsibility for addressing the child or family's needs;
- a clear statutory responsibility to lead on work with the child or family;
- a previous or potential ongoing relationship with the child;
- the skills, ability and capacity to provide leadership and co-ordination in relation to other practitioners involved with the child or family;
- an ability to draw in and influence universal and specialist services;
- an understanding of the surrounding support systems which are available to manage and sustain this.

Using a flexible system like this means that the lead professional will be the practitioner who is most relevant to the child or young person's plan and who has the skills to carry out the lead professional functions.

3.8 If it is not clear who is best placed to be the lead professional, it may be helpful to hold a multi-agency meeting to discuss the issue and find a solution. Alternatively managers may need to discuss the situation with service managers in partner agencies, to agree a strategic approach.

Remember that when you are being the lead professional you are accountable to your home agency for delivering the lead professional functions. You **are not** responsible or accountable for the actions of other practitioners or services.

A clear line of accountability for lead professionals would run from the practitioner, through line management in the home agency, through co-ordinated arrangements in the children's trust, and ultimately to the director of children's services on behalf of the local authority. This also applies to the decision-making process for choosing lead professionals.

Working with children with complex needs

3.9 For children with complex needs (see page 6 for definition), there is already legislation or best practice guidance in place which seeks to ensure these children have a named practitioner to oversee and co-ordinate the delivery of a multi-agency programme of support, as well as other functions which may be set out in statute. Examples include the named social worker for looked after children or the key worker for children with complex disabilities or complex health needs. See **Annex A** for the full list.

Training for lead professionals

3.10 The Government is developing a training programme to support the move to integrated working. The materials will be available online, on CD ROM or through training organisations and professional bodies. The modules of most interest to practitioners taking on lead professional work are:

- *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* – key messages;
- Introduction to the lead professional;
- The lead professional in practice;
- Introduction to CAF;
- Introduction to information sharing;
- Introduction to the IS index.

GO TO www.ecm.gov.uk/iwtraining

What else will I need?

3.11 For the lead professional concept to work successfully it is also important that:

- CAF has been established as the central vehicle for initially identifying and addressing additional needs and there is a cross-agency commitment to multi-agency working.

- There is a commitment to, and a clear understanding of, information sharing processes. This will be underpinned (from 2008) by the IS index. This will contain name and contact details for a child's lead professional. The Integrated Children's System will be in place from 2007 for managing information about looked after children and children in need.
- There is a commitment to this way of working from the practitioners you are working with in each individual case, so that they carry out their agreed actions.
- There is a clear and transparent management framework in place with effective systems for line management, training, accountability and dispute resolution.

SEE

www.ecm.gov.uk/caf

and SEE

www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing

Management, supervision and workload

3.12 Good management and supervision arrangements will help you work more effectively as a lead professional. The following points can be used as the basis for discussion with your managers if you are not sure what arrangements are in place locally.

- Do any of my management and supervision arrangements change? (for example in some areas, integrated service managers are in place to co-ordinate the implementation of lead professional working and support the work of lead professionals, though they will not be direct line managers)
- When can we discuss my professional development needs in this area?
- Can I request extra meetings with my supervisor if I am facing particular professional challenges in my lead professional work?
- Who should I go to if I have any problems with other agencies in carrying out my work as a lead professional?
- Will there be opportunities to meet up with other lead professionals to share practice and look at development and training opportunities?

3.13 It is not possible to be prescriptive about the time and workload implications of providing lead professionals for children and young people with multiple additional needs. Clearly, the time taken up by lead professional functions will vary according to the level of the child's needs, the number of practitioners involved and the length of the intervention. However, the experience of the information sharing and assessment trailblazers suggests that:

- Being the lead professional can be more time-intensive than being a supporting practitioner in the same case.

- However, the lead professional will not always be the same person, and the time pressures involved in delivering the lead professional role can be offset against other cases they may be involved in where the demands on their time may be less significant.
- These variations need to be considered by senior managers when setting up a lead professional system.
- They also need to be taken into account by operational managers when setting and allocating caseloads.
- There are particular implications for staff who may be working part-time in a multi-agency setting and part-time in their home agency. Clear communication is necessary between both services so that the individual is not overwhelmed with lead professional and caseload responsibilities.

3.14 Speak to your manager to ensure that they take account of any lead professional responsibilities in setting your workload, and that your performance in delivering the lead professional functions is recognised and recorded.

Hints and tips

- Always ensure that the family and other workers involved in the case have your contact details.
- Make sure you have the contact details of the other practitioners.
- Set a review date at the first support meeting.
- Plan your contacts with the child and family so they know you will be actively involved. Check back with them at regular intervals to see how it is going.
- Remember you are part of a team working collaboratively with the family and not expected to do everything!
- Be clear about the circumstances in which other practitioners will need to contact you, for example if the family is not co-operating with an aspect of the support plan and the practitioner needs your input and support.
- Be prepared to reconvene a meeting if things aren't going according to plan.
- If another practitioner is not carrying out their contribution as agreed, raise this with them and find out the reason. Hopefully this will focus them back on the plan.
- If this continues, raise it with your manager and they will need to speak to the other practitioner's manager.

With thanks to Coventry Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership for these tips

Annex A: Taking the lead role in cases involving children with complex needs



Status	Who has the lead role?
All children in need	<p>Social worker is the lead professional during the children in need assessment phase. After the initial and core assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• social worker is the lead professional for looked after children;• social worker is the lead professional for children on the child protection register and subject to a child protection plan;• any relevant practitioner can be the lead professional for any other child in need once decisions have been made about the provision of services. Where social services remain involved in delivery or funding, it may still be appropriate for the social worker to be the lead professional.
Child protection case	<p>The named social worker (the key worker) is responsible for acting as the lead professional for the inter-agency work with any child on the child protection register and subject to a child protection plan.</p>
Looked after child	<p>The named social worker is the lead professional. For those children in residential settings, their social worker will be their lead professional and they will have a key worker in the home/school who provides day-to-day support. The social worker will link with both the child and the key worker in delivering an effective monitoring/co-ordination role.</p>

Status	Who has the lead role?
Care leaver	<p>The personal adviser or the child’s social worker is the lead professional. Where care leavers remain looked after (‘eligible children’), they should usually have a social worker who, where appropriate, will assume the personal adviser role. However in some authorities eligible children will have both a social worker and a personal adviser. Roles and responsibilities will be allocated between them, but the lead statutory accountability will lie with the social worker.</p> <p>Where care leavers have left care before their 18th birthday (‘relevant children’) the lead professional will usually be a personal adviser who may be attached to a specialist leaving care service. The personal adviser must participate in assessment, planning, intervention and review of the young person’s needs and maintain their pathway plan. Accountability for their work will be with their line management on behalf of the local authority responsible for supporting the young person to meet the needs set out in their pathway plan.</p>
Adoption cases	<p>For children for whom adoption is the plan, the child’s social worker is the lead professional.</p>
Child with special educational needs	<p>The SENCO may, where appropriate, be the lead professional for children with special educational needs. Where these needs require input from a range of professionals outside the school setting or a high degree of family support is required, it may be appropriate for someone else to take on the lead role. During Year 9, for pupils with statements, the personal adviser takes on responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the transition plan and is likely to be the lead professional.</p>

Status	Who has the lead role?
Child with complex disabilities or complex health needs	<p>Where the child or family have a key worker, they are the lead professional. Key worker models are increasingly in place for children with severe and complex disabilities or health needs, as recommended by the Children’s NSF. Key workers tend to be deployed in one of two ways : (i) as a ‘non-designated’ key worker, in which they carry out the key worker functions alongside the practitioner role for which they are employed or (ii) as a ‘designated’ key worker in which they are employed and paid specifically to carry out a key worker role. Both roles deliver the functions of the lead professional as defined in paragraph 1.2.</p> <p>Where a key working service is not in place, or where the level of support required is less intense, another practitioner should be appointed to take on the lead professional functions for a disabled or seriously ill child.</p>
Child with mental health needs	<p>Where a care programme approach (CPA) is being followed, the care co-ordinator is the lead professional. Where a CPA is not being followed, it is still appropriate to appoint someone as the lead professional to oversee the delivery of services via a multi-agency approach.</p>
Young offender	<p>For young people on community orders or sentences, the youth offending team (YOT) will allocate a YOT supervising officer. For young people in custody the supervising officer oversees the management of the case as a whole, linking with the key worker/personal officer in the establishment. The YOT supervising officer in such situations may be the lead professional but where the young person is looked after or on the child protection register the lead professional must be the social worker. In all situations where a YOT is involved, the decision as to who should be the lead professional must be agreed locally. If it is agreed that the YOT supervising officer should be the lead professional this must be with the support of relevant mainstream agencies.</p>

Other resources:

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk Information and publications relating to all aspects of the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme.

Lead professional managers' guide: Guidance on implementing a lead professional model of working. Available locally in hard copy or online at ecm.gov.uk/leadprofessional

CAF practitioners' guide: Guidance on carrying out common assessments. Available locally in hard copy or online at www.ecm.gov.uk/caf

Information sharing: Guidance for practitioners and other supporting documents are available online at www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing

Training materials: National core training materials are available at www.ecm.gov.uk/iwtraining

Working Together to Safeguard Children: This guidance is available in hard copy or can be downloaded at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/safeguarding

Key worker for disabled children: Practitioners delivering a key worker service to a disabled child and their family are, by definition of this role, taking on the lead professional functions. The following sites may be helpful:

- www.ccuk.org.uk The website of Care Co-ordination Network UK has information and resources relevant to working with disabled children and their families
- www.earlysupport.org.uk Early Support is the central government mechanism for achieving better co-ordinated, family-focused services for young disabled children and their families. The Early Support family file and family support plan can be used to deliver a multi-agency response to a family's needs.

You can download this publication online at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/leadprofessional or search www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications using the ref: 0335-2006BKT-EN

Comments should be sent to lead.professional@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2006

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged

ISBN: 1 84478 705 2