

There are some circumstances where children's needs involve two or more agencies working together delivering services to the child and family. Where this happens, in all cases, a lead professional will be needed. The lead professional becomes the person within the network of practitioners supporting the child and family who will make sure that the different agencies act as a team and the help they are all offering fits together seamlessly to provide appropriate support for the child and family.

### **Different ways of establishing the need for a lead professional**

There are three ways in which the need for a lead professional may arise:

1. Where those working with the child and family in the universal services of health and education have evidence that suggests a coordinated plan involving two or more agencies will be necessary, and then a Child's Plan should be drawn up. This could be very short and straightforward. The need for a coordinated plan may have arisen out of a growing concern over time, noted in the universal record of the child or it may have been triggered by a particular change in the child or an event or behaviour of the child or family. If it is at all possible and appropriate, the practitioner in the universal services who has been working with the child will coordinate help. This supports the *Getting it right for every child* principles of help being provided in a way that avoids children and families being passed from one agency to another. Agencies will have their own mechanisms for triggering and coordinating action. In some cases, a plan and action may be taken without a formal meeting. Allowing for a more informal coordination of assistance between agencies without formal meetings supports the principle of timely and proportionate help. In many cases, health and education practitioners are already coordinating help for children as part of their day-to-day practice. The lead professional role in *Getting it right for every child* reinforces what is already happening.

2. In some circumstances, it becomes clear that the child needs more complex and specialist help but still primarily from the universal services. However, in such cases, it may be more appropriate for another, perhaps more specialist, practitioner from the universal services to become the lead professional. This could be, for example, a practitioner who can coordinate a plan for a child with complex health needs with the help of other services. It might be that the child needs a plan that is focused on additional support for learning or a coordinated support plan where this may include some health and social work services.
  
3. There will be cases where children's safety is the primary issue, or there is a statutory requirement for a lead professional, such as where a child is looked after. In such cases, coordinating help from the universal services may not be appropriate. A worker from another agency will need to take the lead. In many cases this is likely to be social work. If a practitioner from another agency outwith health and education is to take on the role of lead professional, it is more likely that this would happen through a formal meeting, but this will depend on the individual circumstances. It is important that children and families are fully involved in any decisions about who is to be the lead professional and they understand why this person is the best practitioner to coordinate help for them. It is also important that help is not delayed while arrangements are being put in place.

When the Child's Plan has been agreed, the lead professional will:

- usually be the point of contact with the child and family for the purpose of discussing the plan and how it is working, as well as any changes in circumstances that may affect the plan;
- be a main point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering help to the child to feedback progress on the plan or raise any issues;
- make sure that the help provided is consistent with the Child's Plan, that services are not duplicated;

- work with the child and family and the practitioner network to make sure that the child and family's views and wishes are heard and properly taken into account and, when necessary, link the child and family with specialist advocacy;
- support the child and family to make use of help from practitioners and agencies;
- monitor how well the Child's Plan is working and whether it is improving the child's situation;
- coordinate the provision of other help or specialist assessments which may be needed, with advice from other practitioners where necessary, and make arrangements for these to take place;
- arrange for the agencies to review together their involvement and amend the Child's Plan when necessary;
- make sure the child is supported through key transition points and ensure a careful and planned transfer of responsibility for these roles when another practitioner becomes the lead professional, for example if the child's needs change or the family moves away, or the named person resumes responsibility for the child when a multi-agency Child's Plan is no longer needed.

The lead professional will be responsible for ensuring an agreed multi-agency Child's Plan is produced. The plan will be based on an assessment of needs and will incorporate any current single agency plans. The plan will identify when a review is needed and the lead professional will arrange for the production of materials for the review if this is to take place at a meeting. Materials will be circulated to everyone involved, especially children and families.

The lead professional will not do all the work with the child and family; neither does he or she replace other practitioners who have specific roles or who are carrying out direct work or specialist assessments. The lead professional's primary task is to make sure that all the support provided is working well, fits with involvement of other practitioners and agencies and is achieving the outcomes specified in the Child's Plan.

## **Pointers to choosing the most appropriate lead professional**

The lead professional should be the person best placed to coordinate the help agreed in the Child's Plan. A lead professional should be able to provide confident leadership and should be familiar with the remit of different agencies. In all cases, the child's and family's views on who they would see as best placed to be lead professional should be taken onto account in the decision-making processes.

Choosing the lead professional will also be influenced by:

- the kind of help which the child or family needs;
- previous contact or a good relationship with the child;
- any statutory responsibility to coordinate work with the child or family.

In some cases, to make sure the child and family get the best possible help, because the child has identifiable complex needs, or there is a statutory obligation defined in law towards a child, the lead professional will need to come from a particular agency.

Examples where statutory requirements need to be accounted for are:

- where a child needs a Coordinated Support Plan for children's additional support for learning;
- a child is formally *looked after* which includes the child being subject to a requirement from a children's hearing or where a child is voluntarily looked after and accommodated;
- a child is the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order.

There will also be other administrative categories where compliance with procedures will help ensure a child's safety, for example, for a child whose name is on the child protection register.

## **The relationship between lead professionals and others in contact with the child and family**

It is the lead professional's responsibility to make sure everyone is clear about the different roles they have and the contributions they have to implement the Child's Plan. In some cases, although much of the day-to-day work with the child or family may be carried out by practitioners other than the lead professional, the lead professional should at least have sufficient direct contact with the family to ensure that they are well informed and that the Child's Plan is working properly and to good effect.

Over time, circumstances may change and it may be appropriate for a different practitioner to take over the role of lead professional. Whenever this happens, as at any other time, the child and family need to be fully involved in any decisions and changes that affect them.