

Frequently Asked Questions

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The Basics

What is Families First? Is it a new service?

Families First is not a service; it is Hertfordshire's branding for Early Help provision. In Hertfordshire, early help services come together under the 'Families First' umbrella to work together to support families, adopting consistent principles, practice and processes.

The 'continuum of needs' document produced by Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board is clarifies the levels of need covered by Families First partners.

Does Families First replace the Thriving Families teams?

Under Families First the Thriving Families teams will continue to support the most intensive early help cases, just as they do now. The only thing that has changed is their name: **they are now known as the Intensive Family Support Teams.**

Families First Hubs

What is a Families First local hub?

The hub will include a mix of staff from different services in that area. Whilst it is unlikely there will be a physical location for each hub, partners may wish to share work space where possible. The main aim of the Families First hubs is to support the way Families First is delivered in each of the areas with an emphasis on cohesive pathways for families and improved joint working.

Each hub will have:

-  local delivery and governance arrangements
-  Families First Panels – Action and Impact and Triage Panels. Triage requests for targeted and intensive support; thus reducing contacts into Children’s Services and in particular the high proportion of contacts which result in advice and guidance only.
-  Families First Co-ordinators providing a rapid response and timely support to families at the earliest opportunity and supporting partners to understand their roles and responsibilities
-  Families First Keyworkers based within different teams and partner agencies that will coordinate the delivery of the family support plan
-  Multi-disciplinary teams responding locally to need and taking responsibility for ensuring that the needs are supported within the locality rather than the ‘referral on’ culture. This builds on the learning from the Family Safeguarding Teams.

What will the areas be? When will the local hubs be rolled out to them?

There will be a local hub in each of Hertfordshire’s district areas, with the exception of Watford and Three Rivers who will have one between them, so there will be nine in total across the county.

I’ve heard people talking about Families First Triage Panels. What will these be?

Triage Panels are small, multi-agency groups which meet weekly in each of the Families First Hubs to triage and allocate new cases, including some cases stepped down by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).. Primary carers must give consent before their case can be discussed at Triage Panel.

Each Panel will:

- agree the initial level of vulnerability at 2 (targeted) or 3 (intensive)
- triage cases which require a multi- agency support and allocate the lead agency/ Family Key Worker.
- support the step down process
- enhance the effectiveness of multi- agency working, ensuring that services are coordinated not duplicated
- identify, manage and coordinate responses to escalation in risk factors where the safeguarding threshold has not been met.
- ensure multi – agency commitment in achieving successful outcomes for children, young people and their families.

- provide advice and guidance on cases being discussed
- promote evidence based interventions, mediation, family group conferencing, brief therapy, motivational interviewing, parenting programmes.

Will Action & Impact Meetings stay the same?

There is no anticipated change to the Families First Action & Impact Meetings. These meetings will continue to support practitioners by reviewing cases which have a Families First Assessment in place and which are causing practitioners concern i.e. cases which have made little or no progress.

I have a family who are not progressing. How do I ensure they get the support they need?

If you have a family who have a Families First Assessment and are not progressing, or you are not sure what else you can offer, you can present the case at your local Families First Action & Impact meeting. This is a monthly meeting of professionals from your area who will review the case with you and consider what other approaches or support avenues could be appropriate. Guidance about referring and discussing cases is available on the [Families First Portal](#).

Can I observe an Action & Impact Meeting to see what they're like?

We're always happy to have observers at the meetings, as long as your line manager is happy for you to attend. You can download the observer form from the [Families First Portal](#).

How will you avoid the nine areas running things differently?

It's fine ok for the nine areas to work in different ways! In fact we expect them to work differently so that they can prioritise their local needs. We will however, ensure each area stays true to the Families First Model by operating under the same Families First principles.

How will we develop an understanding of local needs and future needs within our area, and act on this?

Each area will have a local implementation group which will make decisions about how Families First should work best locally. These groups are expected to continue beyond the initial phase, but how long they continue will be determined locally. There will also be support provided by Children's Services Families First team to help monitor performance and trends in each of the areas.

How will you manage the risk of repeated requests for support for the same family where co-ordinated support is needed?

Requests for support which result in signposting, advice or guidance will be recorded on the EHM (Early Help Module) computer system. This will be the IT system central to Families First and will be used by the weekly triage panel to see any previous contacts, even where a family has moved around the county.

Workforce and practice

How will you make sure that the workforce has the skills they need to work with families?

In collaboration with the local hubs, we are developing a comprehensive learning and development programme for Families First partners respond to the Families First and Domestic Abuse Improvement Board training needs analysis which was undertaken last year as well as identifying any future training needs.

The Workforce Shadowing programme offers the opportunity to improve your understanding of a range of roles and responsibilities outside of your own service area. We hope that this will help to create a shared understanding of Families First and enable more effective partnership working. We are continually adding more services to this programme.

You can find details regarding Families First learning and development opportunities, including the Workforce Shadowing programme on [the Portal](#).

How will I request support for a family?

Requests for support will be made on a local basis by emailing the relevant hub (email addresses will be publicised when the hubs roll out to each area). The request will be discussed by the Triage Panel to see what kind of support is needed. The Families First service request form will be found on Early Help Module as well as the [Portal](#).

How will information sharing be facilitated between partners?

There is an information sharing protocol which will be used within each local hub; in addition to this there may also be locally signed protocols developed within each local hub (as required). You may want to check the [Families First Portal to see if there are any templates already in use](#).

[Of course, you will still need to ensure that you have consent from the family before you share their details with partners or the local triage panel.](#)

What is happening to the CAF and ecaf? What is the Families First Assessment and EHM?

The Families First Assessment (FFA) has replaced the CAF/eCAF. All new assessments for families will be completed on the Families First Assessment (FFA) paperwork and process. The eCAF system will cease to operate after June 30th 2017. All CAF's need to be closed or transferred to the new system by this date.

Early Help Module (EHM) which is the IT system where Families First Assessments and support plans are completed, has replaced the eCAF system.

In order to complete a Families First Assessment practitioners must attend a half day training on the IT system, EHM. Details of dates and locations for EHM training can be found on the [FFA training page](#) of the [Families First Portal](#). The Families First Co-ordinators can provide you with support if you are struggling to use or access EHM.

In time we will also be introducing a 'single view' element to EHM which will allow multi-agency partners working across EHM and other linked systems (including social care) to see basic shared information about each family.

Will you be developing guidance for practitioners and operational guidance?

Yes – these are being worked on at the moment and will be shared once they're ready.

I have tools that I use with families that I think would be useful to other practitioners. Can I suggest resources for the Practitioner Area of the Families First Portal?

Yes! We are actively encouraging professionals to share the resources and tools they use on a daily basis to support other practitioners. [This form](#) allows you to provide us with details about those resources including web links, downloadable worksheets, useful research reports and publications. All submissions are reviewed for suitability before they're added to the portal. If you have any queries please contact familiesfirst.support@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Families

Can families self-help?

Yes they can. Although some families may not want support from a service, they may still have concerns that they can address themselves with the right information and tools. The [Families First Portal](#) is the 'go-to' place to find information about all sorts of problems that may affect families, so they can help themselves.

What resources will be available for families being supported by agencies in the Families First way?

There will be a range of resources available through the Families First hubs, including (but not exclusively):

- a continuation of the personalised commissioning arrangements currently available for CAFs
- access to couple counselling, mediation, brief therapy, motivational interviewing and family group conferencing

Are you involving families in how Families First is developed?

We spoke to a lot of families and service users early on in the development of Families First to hear what they want and expect from early help services. We're working at the moment to run some more consultation groups to revisit what they need from services, how self-help can best work for them and to seek their views on the [Portal](#).