



Defence
Children
Services

Early Help toolkit

Family action planning: The SMART way



Introduction

SMART planning helps practitioners develop family action plans that are clear and address the identified risks and needs. The basic principle of effective early help is the gathering and analysis of information, identifying strengths and worries to generate a SMART family action plan that focuses on achieving a positive outcome. This should always be done in a collaborative way alongside the child and family, and with their full engagement.

The development of the plan is everyone's responsibility; all practitioners involved, the child, and family. It should draw upon the resources available to both the family and the practitioners; their skills, expertise, and knowledge, and should always demonstrate the needs, wishes, and feelings of the child.

The most common errors made in SMART plans are that the statements are vague, not outcome based, not measurable, and unachievable.

What does a SMART plan look like?

When developing an early help family action plan to meet the needs of the child, young person, or family it needs to be Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, and Timely (SMART).

- **Specific:** All aspects of the plan should be as specific as possible. The plan should state when and how the support will be provided, how frequently, and what the intended outcomes are.
- **Measurable:** All aspects of the plan should be measurable. This enables both practitioners and families to be clear about the progress made and quickly identify when a plan is not working, this minimises the risk of drift in any early help support. A measurable plan includes a date of completion of a program of work. The views of the child and family about progress must be obtained in addition to practitioners.
- **Achievable:** An achievable plan is one which is developed in partnership and agreed by children, their parents, and practitioners. A Family Action Plan is most likely to succeed, and actions achieved when all involved invest in and take ownership of the plan and its delivery.
- **Realistic:** Family Action Plans need to be realistic, based on the knowledge and understanding of the family including the specific developmental needs of the child. Realistic family action plans are more likely to succeed in meeting the identified outcomes and long-term goals for the family. Small steps are often the key to successful outcomes which are sustainable over time.
- **Timely:** The family action plan should contain realistic timescales with some being broken down into stages to make them more achievable. This staged approach enables everyone clarity around what is expected of them, by when, as well as allowing progress to be monitored. For example, if the family or practitioners are going to be away or under a period of stress (deployment,

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training, or workload commitments) this should be taken into consideration unless doing so presents risks for the child or young person.

Key points:

- Ensure the plan contain as much detail as possible including details on who, why, where, which and what.
- Ensure the plan is clear in what you are trying to achieve and how effectiveness of the intervention will be measured.
- Ensure the plan is written in family and child friendly language.
- Ensure the plan clearly identify who is responsible for each action and provides realistic timescales for completion.
- Ensure all expectations are realistic, appropriate and respond to the needs of the child, young person, and family.

How will things look when the family have achieved their goals?

What are the family aspirations: what would they see or notice if things were different for them. This question may be asked throughout the work with the family; as they are building on their strengths and recognising what they can achieve, the answers may change or be amended over time.

What would the daily lived experience be for the individual, the child, the young person, and the parent / carer if their goals were achieved. The goals may be different for each individual family member, everyone has a role to play in achieving successful outcomes.

The early help process is collaborative and inclusive, it is important practitioners and services have embedded stronger and more culturally aware practices when working with families.

Think about the success criteria – as a practitioner what are your aspirations for the family? How will this be communicated to them in an inclusive and transparent way?

Setting Goals

From the assessment and TAF meeting there may be identified long term goals and short-term goals. The goals are a way of evidencing the progress made by the family. Long term goals may require a range of services or specialism, or there may be a learning or development needs which may need ongoing support. Short term goals may be a quick fix, providing information, resources or services that are readily available.

It is important to review and reflect on the impact when the goals are not being achieved. What is the reasoning for this, what may need to change or how can the work be managed differently?

Identifying Actions

The contribution from each person within the TAF meeting is to think about their role in working with the individual child, young person, and parent/carer to help and support the family to achieve their goals.

- What are they going to do and how are they going to do it?
- Consider who is the best person or service to undertake the action. Is there an opportunity for inclusive partnership working or shared learning?
- Does the action require specialist support or targeted intervention? Is a referral or consultation required with another service?

Reviewing Interventions

Practitioners should discuss the individual's engagement in the work and be able to share any strengths and any difficulties. If any issues have been identified, how were these managed. If the issues weren't resolved, the TAF members should be able to explore workable solutions to achieve the successful outcomes: A lack of measurable progress at reviews, despite apparent effort and co-operation from professionals and parents may indicate disguised compliance see Early Help Resistant Families Practice Guide.

Gaps in resources and services in location

The multitude of early support services available to families in the UK will not be available in the same way in our overseas locations. It is important that early help plans identify all support required, when support isn't available any risk this poses to the child and family must be considered and recorded in the plan.

Information about gaps in provision and risk to the child and family must always be discussed with the early help coordinator and should be recorded on the DATA Notification form which is then forwarded DCS via the early help coordinator.

When gaps in services significantly impact families consideration should be given to whether it needs to be raised as a risk through the LSPB.