



Principles of the Family Hub model

The family hub model addresses two core needs – two typical gaps in provision that need to be filled - **prevention** and meeting the needs of **families with children aged 0 to 19 years**. Taking ‘**prevention**’ first; when families experience difficulties which could escalate and/or lead to poor outcomes, support needs to be readily accessible. Also, dove-tailing with safeguarding and child protection is important - so that there is somewhere to step families down to, after they have received intensive or targeted support.

And secondly, meeting the **needs of families with children aged 0-19** (and up to 25 if SEND). Challenges don’t stop when children start school and families need be able to access help and support whenever they occur during childhood. The easiest pre-schoolers can turn into the most challenging teenagers and these families need support as much as those with children in the early years.

So, the Family Hub model addresses these needs with core **principles**:

Families with children 0-19 (up to 25, with SEND)

Early years’ excellence

Early help and prevention

Integrated

Whole family approach

Access

Relational culture

Relationship support

Working with the voluntary sector, embedded in community

The model is not prescriptive. rather it is intended to be flexible to be adapted to suit each context, to meet local need and to evolve as circumstances and need change over time.

These principles have been derived from FHN’s engagement with a range of early adopter local authorities and policy reports (available on the [Family Hubs Network](#) website) which introduced and expanded the concept of Family Hubs. These similarly drew on good practice in existing Hubs, the evidence base from Children’s Centres and learning from the Family Centres specified in the Children Act 1989 (and the National Audit Office in 1994). A significant body of literature has grown up around certain principles such as integration/joint working and the need for a relational culture when families are seeking help.

Principle of ‘families with children 0-19’

Because of the recognition that families can face challenges at any time, not just in the early years. The Family Hub model maintains the importance of a focus on the early years but extends family support to families with children aged 0-19.

The Family Hub model starts with the early years recognising the importance of this period and prioritising the need to support parents to ensure children have the best start in life. Building on the heritage and experience of Sure Start children’s centres, the Family Hub model places importance on further developing these services so that outcomes improve.

During the early years, families build trusted and valued relationships with the people they meet in family support. Rather than sever this relationship when a child reaches five, parents can continue to contact a familiar team and access trusted resources of information, advice and guidance. This might lead to finding the right help online, over the phone or in person, either at the Family Hub or at another delivery site, where services for families with older children are available.

Families do not segment neatly into age bands. They can be moving in and out of early years services over an extended period. And it makes sense for families to have a main point of access (place, phone and/or website) through these years to which they can repeatedly return and from where they can source a range of help for all the issues that can impact upon families, including their young children.

Principle of ‘Early Help and prevention’

As prevention is a priority in the Family Hub model, a local authority’s Early Help strategy is an essential element of any local design of the Family Hub model. Family Hubs are the ‘Early Help Front Door’ where families can get help in the right way at the right time.

Early Help and early years often go hand in hand. The pace of change, progress and emergence of issues is particularly swift in the early years and Early Help, to prevent issues becoming entrenched challenges, is essential.

Principle of ‘integrated’

To achieve better outcomes for families, ‘practice-based evidence shows that integration makes a significant difference’. Within the Family Hub model, integration is applied in several ways:

- **Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams** working together closely and in a coordinated way so that families get the support they need in a way which puts helping them solve their problems at the heart of the process. It’s not about a series of referrals or interventions. It’s about practitioners working together to make the difference that’s needed. An indication that a Family Hub is working well is when a family need tell their story only once and services and people then work together to give that family the support they need. Achieving cross organisation buy-in to create integrated working is essential and local authorities can learn from others’ [experiences](#).

- Working with **health and CCGs** into the Family Hub is especially important for early years, to reach and support expectant parents. See, for example, what’s offered in Stockton-in-Tees, below. All perinatal services including ante-natal appointments; ante- and post-natal education classes; health visiting; post-natal support; and maternal and infant mental health can be co-located or coordinated from within Family Hubs. Different ways of local authorities working with health are explored [here](#). Family Hubs’ [Advisory Boards](#) can facilitate multi-agency working and collaboration can be achieved in a number of [ways](#).

CASE STUDY: Stockton-on-Tees

Kellie Wigley, Community and Partnership Manager, Stockton-on-Tees describes how:

“The Family Hub model promotes a more integrated way of working with services and developing a wider offer to families with children aged 0-19. The concept is around strengthening the approach to preventative work with families, prior to the point of escalation to statutory services, with the integration of Health Visitors and School Nurses on site. We also accommodate midwifery services on each site and an independent nursery provider within each setting. We have four Family Hubs across the Borough which provide a range of services. The Family Hubs act as a one-stop-shop to allow families to access a range of services under one roof. Staff are upskilled and have a broad knowledge of other services outside of our provision, to enable them to signpost families more effectively.

Weekly meetings are held within Early Help to identify the most appropriate support available to families and to allow for a more joined up approach across services.”

Stockton offer the following services:

<p>Sleep Workshops Healthy Baby Weigh-In A number of parent/volunteer led groups Midwifery appointments First Aid Courses/Home Safety equipment. Sleep Clinic – 0-18 years Health clinic - baby weigh Cafes Evidenced-based parenting courses (0-19) Baby yoga Baby massage Smoking cessation Change, Grow, Live (CGL) Drug and Alcohol Service – Drop in sessions</p>	<p>Drug and alcohol awareness sessions Harbour (domestic abuse) – Drop in sessions Benefits advice Job Club – 16-29 years CAMHS – Workshops Joint groups with Youth Direction General relaxation for parents SEND Drop-in advice service Cooking on a budget; Maths and English Courses; Amazing You (learning and skills) and Mental Health Awareness Courses E-Solihull Relax Kids</p>
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- The ability to [register births](#) in Family Hubs provides an opportunity to alert expectant parents to the support services available and reduce any [stigma](#) associated with going through the doors. It also ensures Hubs get the birth data they need to plan services.

- By working in this way, and delivering a system for everyone from those with [universal through to intensive](#) need, families can experience **seamless transitions** from one level of help to another. If a family's crisis escalates, through practitioners working together within a well-designed system, they receive more intensive support without delay, or starting from scratch with a new referral, and without experiencing stigma. Similarly, when a family makes progress, they can move to a lower level of support, without facing a cliff-edge moment when intensive support comes to an end.
- Being 'integrated' also means [sharing data](#). This can be a stumbling block but we have seen how agencies can overcome this so they can work together better, by ensuring that new IT systems are compatible with other agencies' software (for example in Brent). And by asking families for consent to share information, in the right way at the right time (for example in Yeovil/South Somerset, where hub deliverers have sensitively adapted their processes and as a result have high levels of consent and engagement among their families).
- And the fourth area of integration, which may sound quite ambitious but is highly valued by those who practice it, is having [shared outcomes](#) (see Essex study below). This means that all agencies involved in supporting families agree the shared outcomes they are working towards and then work out, who is going to do what, to make sure those outcomes are achieved. This can involve, for individual families, creating a Family Plan (e.g. City of Westminster) and/or more broadly working together to achieve county-wide targets (such as Essex, where this also involves an innovative approach to [budgets](#)).

CASE STUDY: Doncaster

Doncaster's system collects extensive data to demonstrate the outcomes of their work.

Slides: <https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/>

Video of presentation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5Caj4CMKMQ&list=PLSBqP_HC1oQgEvcUo0p-nTlhK47lLeaXp&index=6

From an early years' perspective, we perceive some specific benefits:

- Co-locating access to universal, targeted and specialist services, helps to reduce the stigma that new parents may feel when seeking help
- By ensuring that health services are accessed through the hub and/or its delivery sites which are working in partnership with other service providers, the Family Hub model facilitates the pathway for new families from medical appointments to birth registration to family support offer
- By having shared outcomes, early years goals are more likely to be met

CASE STUDY: Essex

In Essex, the local system design of the Family Hub model illustrates how integrated can work effectively and achieve good outcomes.

Slides: <https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/>

Video of presentation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY46CeqVKWk&list=PLSBqP_HCIoQgEvcUo0p-nTlhK47lLeaXp&index=2&t=1s

Principle of ‘whole family approach’

Rather than focus solely on the child or member of the family needing support, in isolation, those practising the Family Hub model consider the child within the context of their core relationships and the people around them, understand the issues within that context and tackle the problems with interventions that will work within this context. Quite often, **the presenting problem is not the core challenge**: extremely difficult toddler behaviour can be the presenting problem but unemployment, housing issues or substance abuse can emerge as significant factors and this is where the ‘whole family approach’ identifies this and, because of the connectedness within the system, is able to tackle it (e.g. Isle of Wight case study below).

Coupled with this is the way in which Family Hubs prioritise **supporting relationships** within the family. We can be in the habit of addressing the problem of the child or parent. Quite often, it’s weaknesses in the relationships between the family which are causing distress as well as hindering progress. Family hubs provide counselling and programmes to address child-parent violence, couple relationship as well as parenting skills as part of family support. The DWP’s interest in reducing parental conflict and, with MoJ, in post-separation support features in this part of hubs’ work.

The early years have a particular influence on the whole family. The arrival of a baby sends ripples - or a tsunami - throughout the family unit/context. Therefore, the ‘whole family approach’ is crucial to understanding a family’s needs and tackling related issues as well as the presenting ones e.g. a toddler’s sleeping problems can put enormous strain on couple relationships and in this situation, providing relationship support may be just as important as establishing better sleeping patterns.

So, how does the Family Hub model provide family support, for families with children 0-19, which prioritises prevention, the whole family in an integrated way? It’s about creating a system where **access** is key families know where to go and get help. Access must be straightforward and this is especially important in the early years when families need convenient and speedy help, with the demands that an infant makes.

Principle of ‘access’

Family Hubs have a central point from where services are accessed, whether this is a building named a Family Hub, a building with another title, or a virtual access point, by phone, email or online form. This access point is often called the Early Help Front Door, Integrated Front Door, or One Stop Shop.

Local Family Hub system designs (see box below) make the most of the **buildings/delivery sites** they have available and respond to [local need](#), for example, ensuring the access points in buildings are in areas of greatest need (e.g. deprived housing estate) or with greatest reach (e.g. library, civic building). But the system can only work well if the access points are well connected with services and practitioners based in other buildings.

Local system design

The connectedness of the Family Hub model and its outworking in the relationship between buildings and teams in a local area is most easily grasped as a **'hub and spokes' model**, where one building is nominated as the main hub and other buildings are delivery sites connected to it. When this is well communicated to families and is central to the thinking of staff, family support is easily and effectively accessed through the hub and delivered through the delivery sites (as well as the hub in most local designs).

When a physical hub building is not used as a hub, the hub and spokes model is not redundant but works differently. In this **'virtual hub'** design, connectedness is just as important and communication to families about how the virtual hub operates is more important as there is no physical manifestation of that intention.

In local system designs, the hub and spokes model tends to evolve into a system of connectedness which can seem, to the outsider's eye, more complex but is in fact evidence of a local authority adapting their existing estate and connecting with other delivery sites (operated by the voluntary sector for example) to capitalise on existing infrastructure and meet local need.

Having 'hub' buildings which are physical centres of the family support offer are an advantage. They help make the whole offer more tangible for families. Sometimes the hub is positioned within a building known for another service, sometimes the building is called the Family Hub (or similar name), and other services are co-located there.

Often children's centres are used for this purpose (following [consultation](#)). This works well for families, who have accessed services at Children's Centres in their children's early years, and it makes sense to continue to access services through a place which is trusted and familiar. Some children's centres have become Family Hubs, some children's centres host a 'Family Hub'.

CASE STUDY: Isle of Wight

On the Isle of Wight, the local system design lifted children's services out of special measures and transformed family support delivery. On this journey, children's centres were repurposed as part of a comprehensive strategy to reach and support families more effectively.

Slides: <https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/>

Video of presentation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_uOPo9hPaE&list=PLSBqP_HC1oQgEvcUo0p-nTlhK47lLeaXp&index=5

Video of integrated working on Isle of Wight:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke6QFBZL9NI>

Other facilities which host a Family Hub include: local libraries, GP surgeries, health clinics, [schools](#), registry offices, community centres, church and faith venues and Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The diversity of how buildings are used within the Family Hub model illustrates the extent to which local Family Hub systems should and do reflect the local situation – this is a core strength of the model but also introduces complexity when trying to compare one local system with another.

Alongside access via a building, there is **virtual access**. This is equally important to those delivering the Family Hub model. Families need to be able to look online or pick up the phone. Family Hubs need to ensure that this information is well publicised and that such access points are well serviced, delivering a timely and helpful response, in a relational way.

The centre where families access help is well connected to the full extent of the local offer of family support. Without this **connectedness** it cannot deliver the help families need. This means connectedness with practitioners, services (both local authority and voluntary sector), buildings and knowledge of the **digital online offer** which has become more important than ever during the 2020 Covid crisis in not only publicising but also delivering universal services.

Principle of ‘relational culture’

Many families’ enthusiasm for children’s centres was derived from the relational approach they had experienced. The Family Hub model takes this a step further and prioritises a relational culture to infuse service delivery, across public and voluntary sector, in all areas of family support.

Relational culture is about understanding the value and impact of how we relate to each other. This applies to the system as a whole and specifically, staff to families and staff to staff. An example of the how this is implemented within the Family Hub model is in the London Borough of Westminster, where a relational culture is achieved in part through delivering a workforce training programme to both local authority staff and their partners in voluntary sector organisations.

Principle of ‘relationship support’

As mentioned above when explaining the ‘whole family approach’, ensuring that relationship support is available and taken up, such as counselling, parenting programmes, couple relationship support, is an essential part of delivering family support and better outcomes.

Families with a young child(ren), are often under strain and relationships need resilience to endure during this period. Some relationships, despite support, may not last and in these situations, families often need help with that transition. The Family Hub model doesn’t just list relationship support programmes (parenting, couple) within a directory, it champions the value and importance of this kind of support and challenges the taboo of not talking about relationship health for fear of judgement. DWP’s Reducing Parental Conflict is often delivered in Family Hubs.

Principle of ‘working with the voluntary sector’

The voluntary sector’s role in Family Hubs is extensive and valuable. From providing universal services through to being partners in delivering statutory services, national and local community-based voluntary sector organisations enable local authorities to reach more families and provide a greater offer. We mentioned above the importance of working in an integrated way with the voluntary sector but there is a further point. By more broadly connecting families to the wider voluntary sector offer, local authorities not only reduce pressure on their own services (enabling the local authority to focus on those with greater need) but also provide families with the opportunity to build their relationships and network in the community which has longer-term and far-reaching benefits. This is particularly valuable for new parents as this is an important time to build their own network of support in the community.

Enabling [local authorities](#) and the [voluntary sector](#) to work together in partnership is an important factor in their success and the Family Hub model is prompting both to re-evaluate how they can learn and benefit from their respective perspectives.

For more information, please email info@familyhubsnetwork.com