Guide to the Strengths and Needs (S&N) - Prompts to support conversations

Professionals

This guide is to help you to have conversations with families to understand their strengths and needs.

Families want professionals to support them to understand that it is OK to ask for help, every family, at some point in their lives, hits a stumbling block. We know that families can find it hard to ask for help.

Through the Children's' trust, professionals in Oxfordshire have signed up to the statement of intent, which outlines how they will work in partnership together with children and families:

- Ask, not assume, what is happening in a family's life and what would help
- Act by seeking to understand the families lived experiences, and work with them
- Discuss with families their choices and how they can safely feel in control
- Respect and value, families and the people who care about them
- Work as a team – with the children, families and with each other as professionals – so that everyone's ideas and knowledge are used
- Be honest with families and communicate clearly in a way that people can understand
- Focus on who and what helps families to feel safer, and where families feel safer
- Work with families at their own pace wherever possible – but if things aren't improving fast enough for families, or if we need to immediately protect children, we will act quickly and decisively

In addition to the above Families in Oxfordshire have taken part in the development of the Strengths & Needs (S&N) and have specifically said in relation to working with professionals around Early Help, they need professionals who can speak with them in a way that:

- Respects the families lived experience
- Is not judgemental
- Demonstrates empathy and understanding
- Supports families to gain skills and confidence in parenting
- Helps families co-ordinate support from other services so families don't get passed from one service to another
- Sees and respects all families as having unique strengths as well as needs
- Not treating all families, the same

This way of working makes it easier for families to open up and feel OK to share some of the difficulties they are having and ask for help.

Sometimes it may feel difficult, but the families we work with have told us that they want to have open and honest conversations that looks at what's going well for them

but also what some of the difficulties and challenges are. Having honest conversations where practitioners demonstrate the above skills, enables there to be a full understanding of the child and families lived experience.

Not all the topics of conversation are relevant or appropriate for every family, but they will help you to be curious as well as supporting families to think about their own strengths/needs.

The early help skills sessions explain how you should use these to ensure difficult topics are spoken about and clear understanding of needs identified – this is to ensure children and families get the most appropriate help from their community organisations and wider family networks.

Families

These questions will ensure you get the right advice and co-ordinated support from a range of local organisations and agencies. We know that many of the issues mentioned below impact a lot of families and you will not be the first family to need help.

It might feel hard to talk about, but research tells us that if left unaddressed children's wellbeing and future outcomes can be negatively impacted. It is always OK to ask for help and using this form as a starting point is a great place to start.

Section: Parent / carers view

Can we talk about your child(ren)'s needs?

Their health

- Tell me about routines in your house? It can sometimes be difficult to get children washed and dressed in the morning or on a regular basis – how is that going?
- What does your child like to eat? You might be finding it financially hard re food? Do you rely on foodbanks/any other help? Any picky eating that you think might become a bigger problem?
- How often are visits made to the doctor, dentist and optician – if low attendance what prevents them? Finances / transport? Child fear? Learning needs? What would help?
- Any other additional health needs? Sexual health needs?

Their education inc. early years

- What are the attendance figures for each child? If below 90% - why, what would help?
- Is the child persistently absent from school / missing? Why, what would help?
- (If 16+) Is the child NEET or out of learning? If so contact **eetreferrals@oxfordshire.gov.uk**
- Are they achieving academically? Anything that makes it hard to learn? What could help?
- How do child/ren behave at school? Anything that you think would help?
- What seems to trigger difficult behaviour at school / home / out and about?
- Any special educational needs?

Their emotions or behaviour

- Do you have conflict issues due to divorce / separation that could impact your child? Does the child feel, or do they appear to be upset by this?
- Any significant life events? (death of a family member, house move, new partners)
- How does the child/ren behave at home? How do you manage this? What does it look like?
- Does the child threaten to, or actually harm themselves, other people, or objects? Is behaviour and emotions different at home to school? Why might that be?
- Any concerns about emerging threats such as criminal exploitation, radicalisation or child sexual exploitation?
- Has the child experienced bereavement of someone significant in their life?

Your child's view of themselves

- Does your child have positive self-esteem?
- Does your child self-harm or talk about harming themselves?
- Does your child have positive friendships? How do they spend their time?
- How do you think they would describe themselves?

How they care for themselves – age appropriate
• Are any of the children providing physical or emotional care for a family member due to illness / disability / substance use? • Are there any caring tasks that pose a risk to the child? Is the amount / type of care the child is providing impacting, or likely to impact on their health, development, education, social opportunities? If Yes please complete the Young Carers Questionnaire and send in with the S&N Form (You will find it here: Early Help and the Locality Community Support Service (LCSS) - Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (oscb.org.uk) • Are they physically clean – if not why? What would help? • Are they appropriately dressed (e.g., for weather) if not why? What would help? • Are they increasing skills for independence (age appropriate) e.g., dressing / feeding?
How they communicate and access learning
• How is the child's speech, language and communication skills? Does this impact learning and if so, are they supported adequately to access education and build relationships? • If there are communication needs, do you feel equipped to communicate with your child? • Has your child been assessed using the WellComm toolkit? If a language delay was identified, is an intervention in place? Do you feel equipped to support this at home? • Is there a difference for the child in school compared to home in relation to being understood / understanding others and expressing their needs? • Are physical needs being met in school and at home?

Can we talk about wider family and support?
Your experience of growing up
• How did you experience being parented? What would you have changed?
Your experience of family / friends / local community
• How are your relationships with wider family/friends? Stable / warm / respectful? Inc. stepparents / grandparents etc. • Is there anything that causes difficulty for the family, such as neighbour disputes? • What support networks are around your family? E.g., family, friends, comunity • Are your family socially integrated if part of a minority or new to the country / area? • Are you socially isolated or feel isolated? • Are any adults in the family carrying out caring roles for grandparents that is putting strain on the family? • How does your child experience your relationships with others?

Your financial / employment situation
• Are you / older children employed? If not, what help do you need? • Are finances stable and sufficient? • Are the family's basic needs met? Does anything need to change? • What aspirations do you and your child(ren) have?
The situation with housing
• What is your current housing situation? e.g., private rental. Are there any arrears? Is the housing stable? N.B. If there is risk of homelessness professional must refer to the local housing authority (Duty to refer) • Does your child have a safe space at home? Describe what it looks like • Home environment – what's good and bad about it? Is it safe and hygienic?
How is your and your family's health (physical / emotional)?
• Do you / or another member of the household live with any physical health issues? • If so, does your child/ren support you with these? Do you feel this impacts your child/ren? • Who supports you with your physical health? • Do you or another member of your household/family live with mental ill health? Or experience mental health problems? • What support is in place for you/ your family? Does it help? • What does home life look like when your/family members mental ill health deteriorates? • How long have you experienced physical/emotional ill health? • What might help tackle the problems you are experiencing? • How are you feeling now?

Can we talk about your relationships with your child(ren)?
Do you have a good relationship with them?
• Do you feel your usual response to your child has emotional warmth? • Do you feel attached to your child? • Would you describe your relationship with your child/ren as positive? • Do you struggle with parenting e.g., lots of shouting / feeling disconnected / struggle to meet physical / emotional care needs? Struggle with positive routines? • What do you think could help?
Day to day care of your child(ren)
• What do weekdays look like? Mornings/Evenings? Describe a typical day • What do weekends look like? Describe a typical day

- Are the care arrangements for the child amicable if you and your partner have separated?
- Do you feel you have a predictable routine in place at home that your child responds well to? What does this look like/ describe a routine?

Boundaries / routine / stability

- Warmth? Routines? Consistency? Boundaries? Please describe typical mornings and bedtime routines? E.g., Time for 'to and fro' conversations, daily time to share books and rhymes together?

Do you and your child(ren) feel safe in your home and community?

- Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? Does your child(ren) feel safe in your neighbourhood?
- Does anti-social behaviour, bullying or crime impact on the family?
- Has there been any historical or any ongoing domestic abuse / emotional abuse?
- Have there been previous concerns about not meeting the basic care needs of your child/ren yet?

The child's experience of growing up in your family home?

- Are there family member(s) who struggle with mental health, alcohol, or drug use?
- Does your child experience any conflict between you and your partner / another adult? e.g., lots of arguments / disagreements about parenting / contact etc?
- How would your child describe their living experience?

Section: Child / young persons' view

Alternatively use the tools here: Early Help and the Locality Community Support Service (LCSS) - Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (oscb.org.uk)

- Tell me about yourself – what are your hobbies or interests? What do you like to do?
- When are you most happy?
- Who is in your family? Tell me about your parents, carers, siblings?
- Describe your usual morning routine during a weekday?
- Describe your usual bedtime routine during a weekday?
- How do you spend your free time / weekends?
- What do you enjoy doing most?
- Who do you like talking to? Who listens to you most?
- How often do you talk about how you feel?
- What makes you worried? Who would you talk to if you had a worry?
- What do you do to change how you feel or your mood?
- Have you ever been bullied?
- Do your family members support you with difficulties? Who are they?

- Do you think some family members understand your concerns? Who are they?
- Tell me about home, is there someone you like to cuddle most, who do you play with?
- Is home a calm place? Or do you listen to adults shouting/arguing/being angry a lot?
- Who visits your family?
- Do you have anyone who you feel connected to? Who really knows who you are, and you talk openly to?
- Do you like where you live? Do you have your own space? What is your space like?
- Tell me about school? What are the best and worst bits?
- Who controls your behaviour? How do you know how well you are behaving?
- What could you do to change your behaviour? Do you need help to do this?
- How do you feel about reading and writing?
- How easily do you make friends? Tell me about your friends - Who is kindest to you? How do you make friends? Do you have any difficulties keeping friends?
- Do you feel safe at school and at home and at the other places and houses you visit?
- Who are your safe people / places? What makes you feel safe?
- Are there any worries you haven't shared with anyone?
- What do you like about yourself? What would you like to change about yourself?
- Is there anything you would like help with regarding your behaviour, thoughts or feelings?
- Do you have any illnesses, health problems or disability? Who helps you stay healthy?
- Do you ever feel angry / sad? Who do you talk to at that time?
- What are your hopes for the future?

Health and wellbeing (for children under five)

- Are they meeting developmental milestones? (physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social)
- Do they have additional health needs? Or suspected additional needs?
- Are they in nursery / pre-school/Childminder setting?
- What opportunities are there for social and emotional development?
- Are there difficulties ensuring consistent childcare when needed, what are these?
- Does the parent feel connected emotionally or are they struggling and needing support?

Health and wellbeing (for disabled children)

- What is the disabled child's diagnosis / condition?
- Do they have a severe learning disability? e.g., they are functioning at a much lower developmental age in comparison to their chronological age.
- What does this mean for daily life for the child, siblings and parents in terms of:
- What are the personal care needs?
- Relationships within the family
- Friendships/ leisure activities
- Can the child keep themselves safe?

- Do they have a degree of independence?
- What is the child good at? Do they have aspirations for the future?
- Does the child have an EHCP?
- Who (which agency) is currently involved?
- What support is the family seeking? What does it look like?

Documents which could be useful

- Copy of EHCP
- Copy of last paediatric assessment/ review
- Ages and stages questionnaire
- CAMHS reports
- Any information from partner agencies who might be supporting the adult carers