

A brief guide to key working

What is the aim of key working?

The overall aim of key working is to ensure the provision of holistic care and support to meet the individual needs of the child or young person and their family. EVERY child, young person and family who would benefit from key working support should get access to it.

‘Parents with disabled children are likely to face higher levels of stress and they value the practical and emotional support of key working’.
Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability (DfE 2011)

What is key working?

Key working is:

- A way of enabling effective support, underpinned by the Early Support principles, that helps build strong and resilient children, young people and families
- Defined by a set of functions
- Based on person centred thinking and partnership approaches to working
- Family focused as well as child or young person focused
- Underpinned by an approach that enables open, equality promoting and supportive relationships
- A way to facilitate the coordination of an integrated package of support for children, young people and families

Who is key working for?

Key working is for children and young people who have additional needs, from birth to adulthood and their families.

What are the key working functions?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing emotional and practical support as a part of a trusting relationship • Enabling and empowering for decision making and the use of personal budgets • Coordinating practitioners and services around the child, young person and family • Being a single point of regular and consistent contact • Facilitating multiagency meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting and facilitating a single planning and joint assessment process • Identifying strengths and needs of family members • Providing information and signposting • Advocating on a child’s, young person’s and/or family’s behalf • Facilitating clinical and social care seamlessly, integrated with specialist and universal services in an equality promoting approach
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Who can undertake key working?

The person providing key working support:

- May come from health, social care, education or the voluntary, community or private and independent sector (or it may be provided by the parent carers or young people themselves)
- Should be selected according to the specific needs of the child or young person and their families

- Is likely to be someone from the team working with the family, who is identified in discussion with the family, who has the skills, training, time and support to ensure that key working is effective and that the family are the pivotal part of all discussions and decision making
- May undertake all of the functions required by a family themselves; OR they may facilitate some of the required functions to be fulfilled by other members of the team working in partnership with the family.

Does every family need every function all of the time?

No! The level, intensity, frequency and number of the key working functions that children, young people and their family may require is determined by a number of things, including the complexity of the package of support and the family's resilience and support networks. This is likely to vary over time.

- **For families requiring a moderate level of support:** the person providing key working support may only deliver a few of the functions (for example, single point of contact; coordinating; empowering decision making). Key working is likely to be light touch, short term and just part of the way that a practitioner works.
- **For families requiring a high level of support, who require services from a number of agencies:** the person providing key working support is likely to ensure that more of the functions are undertaken at a higher level of intensity. In the early stages ensuring frequent and regular proactive contact may be essential, but the intensity should quickly reduce. The key working practitioner could be any member of the team around the family and should be the one who is 'best placed' in terms of the needs of the family and the individual's skills, capacity and relationships. After discussion with the family, the key working practitioner may undertake all of the required functions or facilitate another person from the team around the family to fulfill some of the functions (for example, someone else undertakes advocacy).
- **For families requiring an intensive level of support, who require services from a number of agencies, including extensive specialist input, and complex packages of support:** these families will probably have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan and access to a personal budget. The person providing key working is likely to need to ensure that most (possibly all) of the functions are undertaken, at a high level of intensity and possibly over an extended period of time. It is likely that the key working practitioner will come from a specialist service and could dedicate a significant amount of their time, at least in the early days or at times of crisis. After discussion with the family, the key working practitioner may undertake all of the required functions themselves or facilitate another person from the team around the family to fulfill some of the functions (for example, someone else facilitates clinical care).

What local structures need to be in place?

To enable and support a key working approach, each area will need to consider:

- Accountability structures
- Joint commissioning
- Information sharing agreements
- Supervision and management
- Professional development
- Awareness raising

For more detail on each of these areas, as well as more on the evidence that supports key working, please consider our online key working training offer.