

Understanding and managing your child's challenging behaviour



Behaviour is communication:

It's the way children let us know what's happening to them emotionally and psychologically. When a child's behaviour is challenging, it's usually serving a purpose for them.

It may be a way of letting you know they're anxious or scared, or a way of them managing the big emotions we all have:

- Rage
- Terror
- Delight
- Horror
- Despair
- Shame

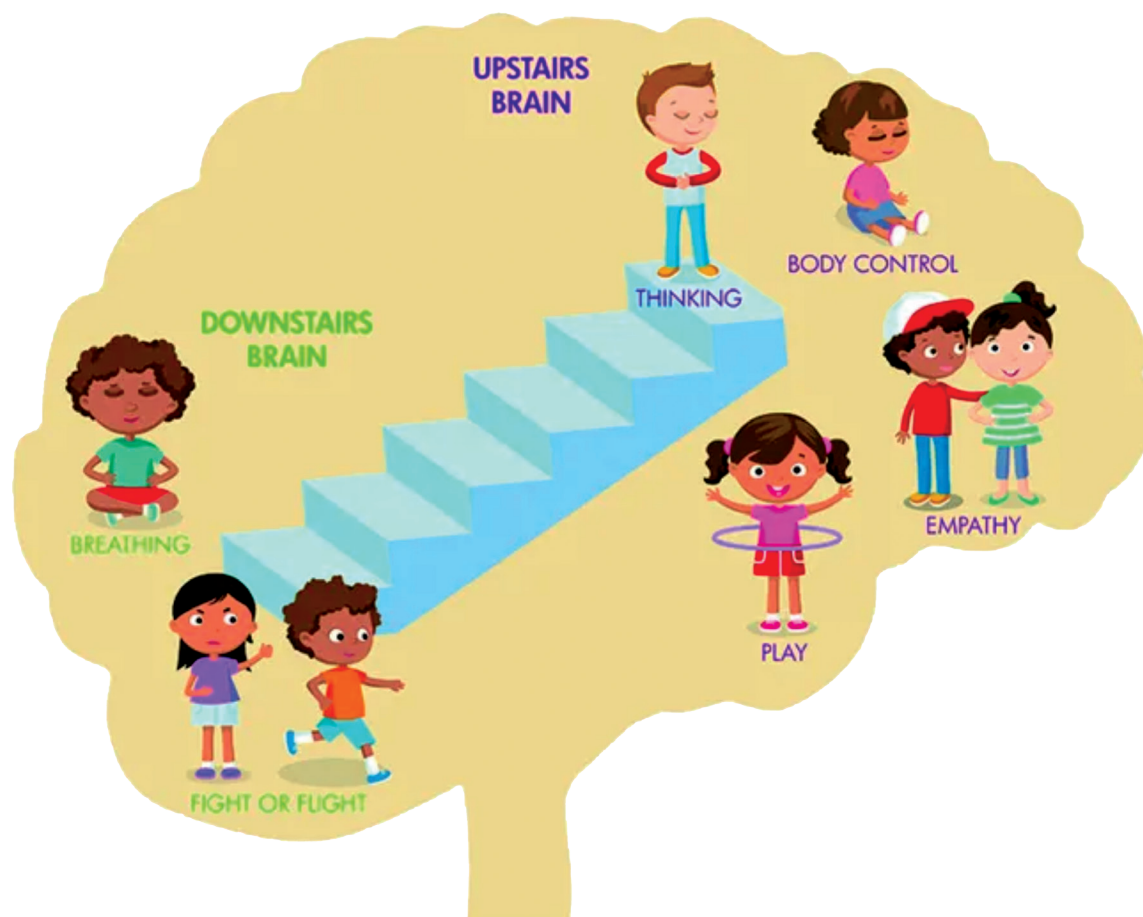
Challenging behaviour in children is very common and only a small proportion (1-4%) of them have a neurodevelopmental problem such as autism or ADHD. Thus, it's important that you understand your child's behaviour and learn how to manage it.

There are a lot of support systems in the community which need to be utilised before seeking a referral to paediatricians.

What lies behind children's behaviour?

Behaviour	What might be going on
Distant, disengaged, shut off	'Freeze' survival mode
Defiant, angry and aggressive	'Fight' survival mode, feeling threatened and afraid
Disruptive, silly, clingy	Trying to get noticed, seeking attention positive or negative
Withdrawn	Fearful, cautious
Rude	Self-protective, rejecting before getting rejected
Self-harm	Coping with emotional pain

'Upstairs' and 'downstairs' brain



The downstairs brain is where we process danger. This is linked to:

- Breathing
- Fight or flight reactions
- If you can't get away, you freeze. For babies this means sleep. For others, disassociation.

The upstairs brain is where higher thinking skills happen:

- Body control
- Play
- Empathy.

If a child is stuck in their 'downstairs brain' (shut down or screaming or running off), you'll need to use all your skills to help them feel safe enough to climb the stairs to their 'upstairs brain'. It's like literally holding their hand to climb the stairs. They will need all your patience, reassurance and consistency.

Managing your child's behaviour

A graduated approach with a focus on prevention and identifying your child's baseline behaviour, i.e. what happens on a good day, is key to developing proactive strategies to reduce challenging behaviour.

Prevention



Positive role modelling:

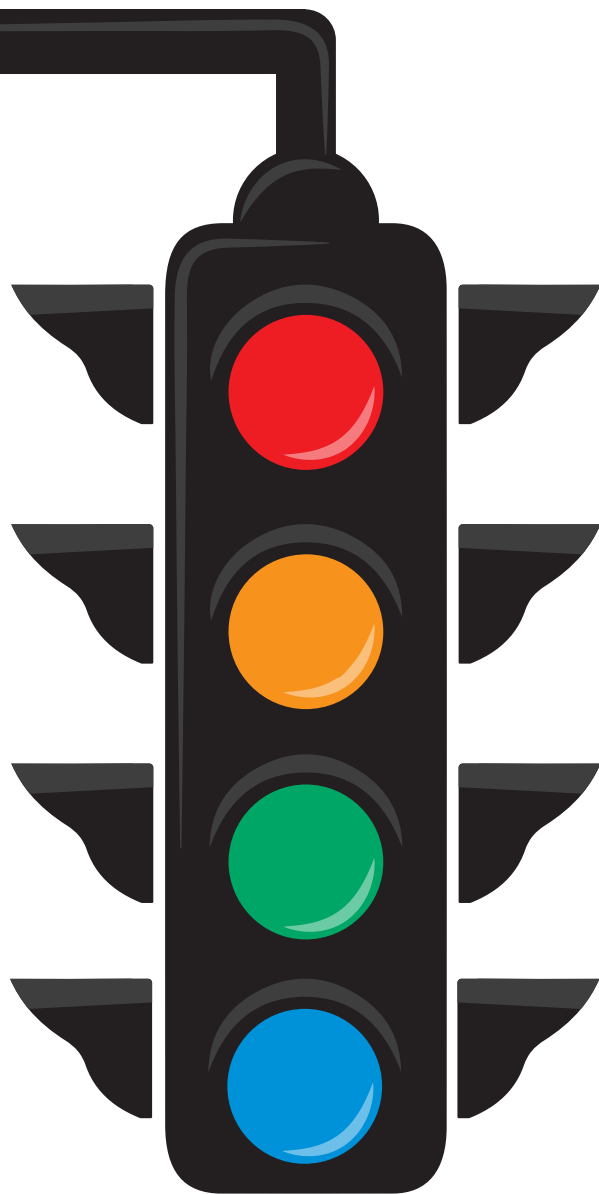
Babies and children listen to what you say and copy what you do from the moment they are born. By watching how you behave, your child will learn about how to react in similar situations. You are your child's role model. It's really important to notice the behaviours that you want to see in your children, so that they know to repeat them. Model the behaviour you want to see more of in your child.

- **Show appreciation and love through words and affection.** Your child will learn to talk and act based on how you talk to them and how you treat them.
- **Be polite and respectful when you talk to your child.** This will help show your child how to talk and interact with others. Saying please and thank you will set a good example.
- **Give your child lots of praise when you feel proud of them or when you see a desirable behaviour.** This helps your child learn what positive behaviour looks like. Reward the behaviour with lots of attention, praise, cuddles and favourite activities. Don't worry about praising your child too much. Make it clear to your child what you are praising.

- 
- **Create family rules that apply to everyone.** Keep rules clear and simple, suitable for your child's age and ability. Reward and praise your child for following agreed routines and rules. Use positive language to reinforce these expectations e.g., "*We use gentle hands*" instead of "*No hitting*". Tell and show your child what you want them to do instead of what you don't want them to do. For example, say "*Please put your toys in the box*" and show them what to do, rather than "*Don't leave your toys out*".
 - **Let your child see you express and deal with difficult emotions.** When you express your anger without shouting or hurting others, you will teach your child how to deal with angry feelings.
 - **Nobody is perfect.** Everyone loses their cool occasionally and says things they are sorry for. It's okay to say sorry to your child if you have been cross. Apologising to them or giving them a cuddle after using harsh words helps them to see what they can do to make it right when they lose control of their emotions. You are showing your child what to do and it will make them feel valued.
 - **Using the acronym HALT** (is your child **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, **T**ired) can be a helpful reminder to stop and think about the possible feelings and needs underneath the behaviour, before responding.
 - **Spend quality time with your child.** Examples include playing a game, reading a book, or eating together as a family. Your child will love this special time with you. It is a great opportunity to chat and spend time together as a family and will also help their development.

Stages of behaviour

A format which has been found to be particularly useful in helping carers to understand the different stages of behaviour is based on a 'traffic light' system:



Red: Challenging behaviour incident (crisis)

Amber: Anxious, aroused or distressed

Green: Calm and relaxed

Blue: Calming down - but still need to be careful

Think of ways to help the child, young person or adult stay happy and calm.

What makes a good day for them? Can you make their favourite activities available? How can you help them to communicate with you or understand you / what is happening? Discuss these ideas with family or other carers, then try them out.

These are called 'proactive' or 'Green' strategies

Some examples are:



Teach simple communication,
e.g. a sign for 'finished'



Teach skills, e.g. waiting for an activity



Talk to the child, young person or adult in a way they respond to e.g. firm, funny or calm



Adjust the environment e.g. low lighting, free of clutter.



Rewards
Can be praise e.g. "well done", 'that's great'; a thumbs up sign, pat on the back or something more tangible e.g. stickers on a board. It is important the reward is given immediately so there is an association between praise and positive behaviour.



Routine and structure
Make a visual plan of the day for the child or adult to follow so they know what will happen next. Be consistent with the routine(s) - predictability is important and will help your family member feel safe. If you need to change the routine, try to make gradual changes only and inform the child or adult about what will happen next. This will help to reduce any feelings of anxiety, keep them involved in their day, and is less anxiety provoking.



Boundaries
Setting rules is important so that the child or adult knows what better behaviour is expected of them. Use a variety of communication methods to help them understand what to do, e.g. pictures, signs and speech.



Proactive strategies aim to keep your family member in their 'baseline' behaviour i.e. their usual, 'good day' behaviour. The skill here is to identify what keeps them here and plan around these. Sometimes your family member will go off their baseline and their behaviour will begin to change - this may be quite subtle.

What can you do when behaviour becomes challenging?

Recognise the early warning signs of the behaviour (child, young person or adult becomes anxious) and think about how to respond when you see these.

Knowing what helps them maintain their baseline or keep them calm / content means you can offer those things they like.

These are called 'active' or 'Amber' strategies

Some examples are:



Divert or distract



Giving the child or adult what they need



Use body gestures / signs



Withdraw from the situation.



If safe, not responding to, or 'ignoring' the behaviour



Stay as calm as possible



Always have a stack of prepared activities, distractions or diversions and use these to help calm the situation.

Check if the child, young person or adult is in pain or unwell. Contact your GP or 111 if your child is unwell.

What can you do if the behaviour is happening or about to happen??

When behaviour occurs, these are strategies to make sure your child, young person, you and others nearby are safe.

These are called 'reactive' or 'Red' strategies

Some examples are:



Divert or distract to a preferred activity



Give your family member what they need - you will need to understand how they communicate their need or want and use this option at the start of any escalation



Introduce a 'new face'



Withdraw from the situation - an increase in space between you and your family member may help to defuse the situation



Use body gestures / signs but never point your finger



Stay as calm as possible, think about your breathing and try exclude other people if you think they might make matters worse



If safe, try not responding to, or ignoring the behaviour - but not ignoring, the child or adult

In a crisis, people are often very anxious. Most of our communication is non-verbal, so we must be aware of what our body and face are communicating. If you appear anxious or panicky, you may increase the level of anxiety in your family member.

Use a low-arousal approach:



Appear calm (even if you are not) - lowering your voice and smiling to encourage mirroring, which helps to decrease the child's or adult's anxiety.



Observe and be prepared to respond if required



Give personal space



Consider eye contact, touch and noise - your family member may be very sensitive to being "watched" which could increase their level of anxiety, so observe the child or adult from a distance.



Listen, don't bombard child or adult with questions.

Do not attempt to teach your family member new skills or ask them to think about what they are doing right now; this may lead to further escalation and when in a crisis, no one learns new skills no matter how hard you might try to teach them. **Recognise the signs that the child or adult is recovering and calming down.**

For more information and support for families and careers please visit the challenging behaviour foundation website [For family carers - Challenging Behaviour Foundation](https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/)

Where to get advice and support

As a first point of call, we would encourage you to access the **universal services** by self-referring to them.

0-19 team for support with sleeping, anxiety, healthy eating.

Telephone the SPoA 0-19 Hub:
01902 441057



The 0-19 services and schools can refer for Early Support Plans - this is a way of getting extra support when your family needs it i.e. maybe your child is affected by domestic abuse, drugs or alcohol.

ChatHealth is an NHS text messaging service for young people across Wolverhampton.



11–19-year-olds can text a School Nurse on **07507 332 631** to get confidential advice and support for a range of health and wellbeing issues, including:

- Anxiety, emotions and anger
- Bullying
- Family issues and friendships
- Sexual health and contraception
- Smoking, alcohol and drugs
- Sleep
- Staying healthy

Your school can refer to Reflexions.

This is a Mental Health Support Team who work with children and young people who may need support with low mood, exam stress, problems sleeping, low self-esteem and anxiety. Telephone **01902 444021** for more information.



CAMHS provide support for managing anger, anxiety and other conditions.

Telephone SPA CAMHS Hub on **01902 44402**.



Where Young Minds Matter

MindEd is a free educational resource on children, young people, adults and older people's mental health.

Email: mindenquiries@hee.nhs.uk



WIASS

WIASS offers impartial information, advice and support on matters relating to a child or young person's special educational needs or disability from birth to 25 years. Telephone **01902 556945**.





Local strengthening family hubs - these are places where children, young people and their families can go to access services from different agencies in the local area.



1. Eastfield Family Hub, Colliery Road, WV1 2QY
2. Rocket Pool Family Hub, Rocket Pool Drive, WV14 8BH
3. Graiseley Family Hub, Pool Street, WV2 4NE
4. Bingley Family Hub, Norfolk Road, WV3 0JE
5. Whitmore Reans Family Hub, Lansdowne Road, WV1 4AL
6. Dove Family Hub, Grangefield Close, WV8 1XF
7. Low Hill Family Hub, 26-28 Fourth Avenue, WV10 9LZ
8. Children's Village Family Hub, Graiseley Lane, WV11 1PE



The [Wolverhampton Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) local offer](#) provides a single place for children, young people, their parents and carers. You can find information on what services children, young people and their families can expect from a range of local agencies. The local authority is responsible for the local offer. Tel no: **01902 551155**

Websites



[CAMHS](#) one stop website has pooled together lots of helpful resources for carers, young people and professionals on matters relating to mental health and well being.



[Get self help](#) provides information and strategies for different problems and difficulties.



[Kooth](#) offers free, safe and anonymous online counselling support for young people with qualified counsellors.



[Alumina | Self-harm](#): an interactive self-harm support website. Alumina offers a free, online 7-week course for young people struggling with self-harm. Each course includes up to 14 young people who join the sessions from their own devices across the UK. The sessions are run by friendly, trained counsellors and volunteer youth workers. You can sign up without an adult referral, and participation is entirely through a chatbox – no one will see or hear you.



[The Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#) offers information about challenging behaviour to anyone who provides support to a child, young person or adult with a severe learning disability.



[Youngminds](#) offer help and advice for young people, parents and professionals on mental health conditions, feelings, coping with life and supporting others



[Positive Parenting NSPCC – understanding your child's needs](#) – offers support with babies and toddlers, school age and teenagers. Positive parenting uses techniques that work well for every child.



[Yo!Wolves](#) provides access to events and services within Wolverhampton that offer opportunities to children, young people and their parents. These opportunities are split into two types – events and services.

Helplines

- ChildLine: immediate access to trained counsellors via phone, chat functions on their website, or by email. The number is **0800 1111**, and you can visit them on their website.

Mobile Apps

Headspace. A meditation and mindfulness app to promote relaxation and encourage staying in the present moment. It can help to prevent becoming overwhelmed by thoughts and emotions.

Calm Harm. A free app designed to help young people manage or resist the urge to self-harm. It provides tasks and activities categorised by different strategies, such as Distract, Comfort, Express, Release and Breathe.

DistrACT: the distrACT app offers easy and quick access to information and advice about self-harm and suicidal thoughts. It also includes a self-help section with techniques and coping strategies to help manage.



Wysa: an online emotional support app that uses conversational AI. It provides an anonymous, safe space to work through worries and stressors for young people aged 12-18 years, helping to prevent them from escalating.



The Healthy Child Wolves App gives parents quick and easy access to health advice and practical tips for their 0–5-year-old.

You'll find lots of tips, advice and signposting to support families, from pregnancy to getting your child ready for school, and everything in between.

There are dedicated sections for:

- My pregnancy
- My new baby
- My toddler
- Getting my child ready for school

Each section includes a wide range of information and advice, including:

- Common illnesses, first aid and keeping your baby safe
- Breastfeeding, bottle feeding and introducing solids
- Sleep and safer sleeping
- Teething and dental health
- Looking after your emotional health and wellbeing

You can also find out more about your Health Visiting team and other local NHS children's services, plus advice on what to do if your child is unwell.



Positive Parenting

Being a parent for a child can be both difficult and rewarding. Parenting workshops aren't just for young or inexperienced parents; they're for everyone who wants to be a better parent. They offer a variety of strategies that you can utilise as needed to handle the daily challenges of parenting.

There are different parenting groups depending on your child's age and needs.

Children/young people respond more positively towards loving, predictable behaviour i.e. praise, encouragement, distraction, time out and rewarding good behaviour.

Parenting programmes: There are various parenting programmes available. Most of them can be accessed by self-referral. Some require the child and family to be referred by a healthcare professional such as a health visitor or school nurse.

Parenting programmes you can self-refer to:

Henry 0-5 years:

The programme is for parents or carers of children aged 0 to 5 years old. It is a structured 8-week program with a duration of 2 hours per session. It is an early intervention programme supporting families to adopt a healthier lifestyle.



It is free to join, and you can self-refer via an expression of interest form (Appendix 1).

For any further enquiries, contact HENRY Coordinator Julie Baker on henry@wolverhampton.gov.uk or 01902 441057.

Circle of Security is for 4 months to 6 years

An easy to follow visual map of attachment, illustrating that babies and young children's behaviour is motivated by their attachment needs. This includes eight two-hour sessions where parents learn how they can respond sensitively to their child's distress.



You can self-refer to these sessions by completing an expression of interest form (Appendix 2).

For more information contact Amanda.stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk



Wolverhampton's Fathers Group invites all fathers and male carers to join regular coffee mornings to share and talk about being a father in a safe environment. For more information, contact Dave on 07771836558 or Ian on 07779974955.



Proud Parents Stay and Play for the LGBTQ+ Community – for parents with children between 2 months – 4 years. For more information contact David Clinton on 07771836558 or Sunita Banga on 07775547896.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

SOLIHULL APPROACH

Solihull Approach Digital Programme – free 13 parenting programmes for parents who have a Wolverhampton postcode.

Parenting programmes for children and young people on a plan:

Journey of Change is for all ages, helping to build stronger relationships, secure attachments, understanding your child and communication.

Your young person must be on a plan to be referred (Appendix 3).

Journey of Change is for all ages, helping to build stronger relationships, secure attachments, understanding your child and improved communication.

Your young person must be on a plan to be referred (Appendix 3).

Appendix 1



Henry Expression of Interest Form

Henry (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) is an early intervention program supporting families to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Henry is a structured 8-week program with a duration of 2 hours per session.

The program is aimed at families with children from birth to 5 years.

Henry applies a solution-focused and strengths-based approach to build parents' skills and confidence in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Child/parent or carer details			
Child/ren's Name:		Children's DOB's:	
Parent/main carer's name who will be attending.		Contact No:	
Attendee's Eclipse PER No (If applicable)		Email address	
Attendees date of birth:		Family Hub:	
Address including postcode:		Ethnicity:	
Does the child have any SEND or Disability? If so, please give details and include any other professionals / services involved.			

Further Details

Any Social Care involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, who is the Lead Professional?	
		Contact No:	
Any Early Help involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, who is the Lead Professional?	
		Contact No:	
Has the parent/s expressed an interest in attending the Henry programme?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Have you gained the parents/carers consent to be contacted for Henry	Yes ☐ No ☐
Would the parent/ carer require a crèche place if one could be offered?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, for how many children?	Ages of children who will be attending the crèche:
Does the parent/ carer have any special requirements?			Is English their first language? Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Known ☐
Why do you think the family would benefit from attending the HENRY Program? Please give as much detail as you can.			

Referrer Details

Name of Referrer:	
Organisation:	
Contact Details:	
Date of Referral:	

On receipt of this form, the Henry facilitators will contact the parents/carers. Please state any factors that need to be considered before the family are contacted:

--

Office use only

Entered on System MACRO/Secure File Transfer: Yes ☐	Date:
---	-------

Appendix 2



Circle of Security Parenting Expression of Interest Form

Child/parent or carer details			
Children's Name:		Children's DOB's:	
Parent/main carer's name who will be attending		Contact No:	
Email address of attendee		Attendees Eclipse PER No (where applicable)	
Attendees date of birth:		Ethnicity:	
Address including postcode:		Employed Yes/No	

Referral details			
Any Social Care or Early Help involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, who is the Lead Professional?	
		Contact No:	
Is there a live EHA open on this family?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Who is the lead professional and from which organisation?	
		Contact No:	
Does the child or parent have a known disability or special need?	Yes ☐ No ☐	What Services or support are involved?	

Has the parent/s expressed an interest in attending the Circle of Security Parenting group.	Yes ☐ No ☐	Are there any other agencies involved, please state?	
Has the parent/carer completed a previous Parenting Group?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, when and where did they attend the group?	
		Name of the type of Parenting Programme	
		Was the parenting group completed?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Does the parent/carer have any special requirements?			Is English their first language? Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Known ☐
What is the reason for this referral?			
Please provide a brief overview of the family history and current circumstances/parenting concerns			
Have you gained the parents/carers consent for this referral?	Yes ☐ No ☐		
Referrer details			
Name of Referrer:			
Organisation:			
Contact Details:			
Date of Referral:			
On receipt of this referral Family Learning Team will contact the parents/carers. Please state any factors that need to be considered before contacting the family:			

Office use only

Entered on Tracker: Yes ☐

Date:

Appendix 3

Journey of Change Parenting Programme Referral Form



Referral sent to:.....Strengthening Families Hub

Parenting mountain

Child/parent or carer details

Children's Name:		Children's DOB's:	
Parent/main carer's name who will be attending		Contact No:	
Email address of attendee (Required for Virtual training)		Attendees Eclipse PER No	
Attendees date of birth:		Ethnicity:	
Address including postcode:		Employed	Yes ☐ No ☐

Referral details

Any Social Care or Family Help or Early Support involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, who is the Lead Professional?	
		Contact No:	
Is there a live FH or ES open on this family?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Who is the lead professional and from which organisation?	
		Contact No:	
Has the parent/s expressed an interest in attending the Parenting Programme?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Are there any other agencies involved, please state?	

Has the parent/ carer completed a previous Parenting Group?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, when and where did they attend the group?	
		Name of the type of Parenting Programme	
		Was the parenting group completed?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Does the parent/ carer have any special requirements?			Is English their first language? Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Known ☐
What is the reason for this referral?			
Please provide a brief overview of the family history and current circumstances/ parenting concerns			
Have you gained the parents/carers consent for this referral?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Will the attendee travel to an alternative Hub if required?	Yes ☐ No ☐

Referrer details

Name of Referrer:			
Organisation:			
Contact Details:			
Date of Referral:			
How will you continue to be involved?			
Will the child/children continue to be supported after completion of the group?	Yes ☐ CP Plan ☐ CIN Plan ☐	FHT Plan ☐ ES Plan ☐ No ☐	If no, any other support in place?
On receipt of this referral Early Help services will contact the parents/carers. Please state any factors that need to be considered before contacting the family:			

Office use only

Entered on Tracker: Yes ☐	Date:
--	-------

Appendix 4



Parents Plus Adolescents Programme

Child/parent or carer details			
Children's Name:		Children's DOB's:	
Parent/main carer's name who will be attending		Contact No:	
Email address of attendee (Required for Virtual training)		Attendees Eclipse PER No	
Attendees date of birth:		Ethnicity:	
Address including postcode:		Employed	Yes ☐ No ☐

Referral details			
Any Social Care or Early Help involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, who is the Lead Professional?	
		Contact No:	
Is there a live EHA open on this family?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Who is the lead professional and from which organisation?	
		Contact No:	
Does the child have a known disability or special need?	Yes ☐ No ☐	What Services or support are involved?	
Has the parent/s expressed an interest in attending the Parents Plus Adolescents Programme group.	Yes ☐ No ☐	Are there any other agencies involved, please state?	

Has the parent/ carer completed a previous Parenting Group?	Yes ☐ No ☐	If yes, when and where did they attend the group?	
		Name of the type of Parenting Programme	
		Was the parenting group completed?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Does the parent/ carer have any special requirements?			Is English their first language? Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Known ☐
What is the reason for this referral?			
Please provide a brief overview of the family history and current circumstances/ parenting concerns			
Have you gained the parents/carers consent for this referral?	Yes ☐ No ☐		

Referrer details

Name of Referrer:			
Organisation:			
Contact Details:			
Date of Referral:			
How will you continue to be involved?			
Will the child/children continue to be supported after completion of the group?	Yes ☐ CP Plan ☐ CIN Plan ☐	EH Plan ☐ Universal ☐ No ☐	If no, any other support in place?
On receipt of this referral Family Learning Team will contact the parents/carers. Please state any factors that need to be considered before contacting the family:			

Office use only

Entered on Tracker: Yes ☐	Date:
--	-------

