

## Communication – Context - Curiosity

### Why Thresholds Matter

Understanding thresholds is essential to making the right decision at the right time for children and families. Thresholds help practitioners decide what level of help and support is needed, who should be involved, and when a referral to Children's Social Care is appropriate.

Using thresholds well:

- Supports timely and proportionate responses to need
- Helps children and families receive the right help, at the right time
- Reduces inappropriate referrals and delays
- Strengthens multi-agency decision-making and shared responsibility

**Thresholds are not about gatekeeping services – they are about understanding need, risk and vulnerability, and responding in a way that is child-centred and effective.**

### What Do We Mean by 'Thresholds'?

Thresholds describe the levels of need that children and families may experience, and the type of support or intervention that is required in response.

In [Newcastle, thresholds are set out within the Multi-Agency Thresholds Guidance](#), which provides a shared framework for professionals across all agencies. The guidance is aligned to Working Together to Safeguard Children and promotes:

- Early help and prevention
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Proportionate responses that can step up or step down as needs change

### Using Professional Curiosity and Judgement

Thresholds do not replace professional judgement – they support it.

When considering thresholds, ask:

- What is the impact on the child right now?
- What are the protective factors and strengths?
- What is changing, escalating or not improving?
- What might happen if nothing changes?

Discussion with line managers, safeguarding leads, and multi-agency partners is encouraged – **no one safeguards alone.**

**Advice Line for concerns regarding a child on 0191 277 2500 (8:45am to 5pm)**

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#### **The Continuum of Help and Support**

The thresholds framework describes four levels of need:

- **Level 1 – Universal:** Children whose needs are met by universal services such as schools, health, and community support.
- **Level 2 – Additional:** Children with emerging needs who may benefit from targeted early help alongside universal services.
- **Level 3 – Integrated:** Children with more complex needs requiring coordinated multi-agency support and a clear plan.
- **Level 4 – Specialist:** Children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm, requiring statutory intervention from Children’s Social Care.

**Needs are not static. Children and families may move up or down the continuum over time, and professional judgement is essential.**

#### **Thresholds and Referrals to Children’s Social Care**

A referral to Children’s Social Care should be made when:

- A child may be suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm
- The child’s needs cannot be met through early help or multi-agency support alone

#### **Good referrals:**

- Are clear, evidence-informed and child-focused
- Describe what is happening, why it matters, and what has already been tried
- Reflect the voice and lived experience of the child

Understanding thresholds supports practitioners to be confident in when to refer and when to continue working collaboratively at an earlier level of support.

#### **Key Messages to Remember**

Thresholds help us respond proportionately and effectively

- Early help is everyone’s responsibility
- Risk and need can change – keep reviewing
- When in doubt, discuss and share concerns

**Safeguarding is not about choosing the right door – it is about ensuring children are seen, heard and protected.**