

HOME-START BRACKNELL FOREST

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Managing Referrals and Waiting List Policy and Procedures

Policy statement

Home-Start Bracknell Forest is committed to providing a safe, efficient and responsive service to local families with at least one child under five. Referrals are accepted with the consent of the family. The range of referrals or self-referrals accepted is not limited, except where the resources available are not adequate to meet the number or complexity of cases. Waiting times are carefully managed and referrers and families are kept informed.

Home-Start Bracknell Forest has devised the following procedures for managing referrals using guidance issued by Home-Start UK, but reflecting the close partnerships and excellent working relationship it has with local referring agencies.

When accepting new referrals the major considerations will be that we should be able to:

- manage the expectations that the referred family have of the support they hope to receive
- ensure that potentially vulnerable families are not left without the proactive support of any agency while they are awaiting Home-Start support and that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults remains our priority
- keep the referrer informed about the status of their referral at all points

Home-Start's unique service involving the careful matching of a volunteer with a family means that there is almost always a 'wait' between referral and introducing the volunteer.

We aim to ensure that families are referred to Home-Start Bracknell Forest appropriately, that referrers are well-informed about the process and support the family might expect to receive, and that they receive regular feedback about the family's support status.

1. All partner agencies are offered induction visits to Home-Start for new staff, during which they will receive both written and verbal information about the support offered and the referral process.
2. All referral information and forms are available from the Home-Start Bracknell Forest website
3. All referrers are encouraged to call and speak to the Family Co-ordinator or Scheme Manager about potential referrals prior to completing a referral form. This will enable referrers to receive realistic feedback on the appropriateness of the referral and likely timescales for the family to receive support.
4. All referrals must be made with the full knowledge and consent of the family.
5. All referrals are acknowledged in writing and contact attempted with the family within 5 working days. If the co-ordinator is unable to make contact with the family within this timescale, the referrer is informed accordingly.
6. Once contact is made the co-ordinator will arrange a visit within 10 working days, or as soon as possible if the family (or scheme) is unable to arrange a visit within this timescale.
7. At Home-Start Bracknell Forest we believe that when support is offered, it should be put in place as soon as possible. Although Home-Start's unique service involves careful matching of a of volunteer with a family, we endeavour to keep our 'wait time' to less than 15 working days after the initial assessment but occasionally, where a family's needs are quite specific, wait times may exceed this and both the family and referrer will be informed accordingly.
8. Referrers are informed in writing of the outcome of the initial assessment i.e. whether support has been declined, is inappropriate, a volunteer linked or attendance at our weekly Family Group has commenced.
9. If the wait time exceeds 2 months, the family will *either* be reviewed by the co-ordinator again to assess whether their support needs have altered and whether they should be referred on; *or* the referral is brought back to the original referrer for discussion and next steps are agreed with him/her. A proactive approach is taken with all waiting families at this point, involving a review of the referral and a clearly identified course of action. As a result, the scheme, the family and the referrer are all aware whether
 - the referral is 'returned' to the original referrer, so that s/he might refer the family elsewhere for support
 - the family's needs have changed and the referral is withdrawn
 - the referrer agrees to re-refer the family at a later date, when a volunteer is more likely to be available
 - the referrer and the co-ordinator agree to maintain the family on the waiting list for a further specified period of time no more than a further 4 weeks.

10. The family's expectations are managed, so that from initial visit onwards they have a good understanding of how the referral is likely to progress and when they will be contacted by the scheme.
11. Referrers are informed in writing after each review visit whether support is continuing or support has ended.
12. Referrers are always informed in writing when support for a family comes to an end

Self-referrals

Where a request for support has been made by the family themselves the procedure works in a similar way.

1. The co-ordinator would try to arrange an initial visit within 10 working days of the family's first contact.
2. At the initial assessment the scheme would seek the signed consent of the family to inform their Health Visitor and local Children's Centre of their request for support and the support offered.

Waiting list closure

Should the trustees of Home-Start Bracknell Forest consider it necessary, e.g. in the event of long term sickness or vacancy, they may decide to 'close' to new referrals if they deem it necessary. Although this is undesirable, it is sometimes the pragmatic course of action.