

**DRAFT**

**Thurrock Early Offer of Help  
Strategy**

**2012-15**

**Supporting, Challenging and  
Changing Parenting**

# Thurrock's Early Offer of Help to Secure the Best Possible Outcomes for Children

## INTRODUCTION

“Thurrock’s character and personality has formed and evolved over centuries as agriculture, industry and the river have shaped the landscape, the make-up of its people and the quality of life.

The enduring characteristics of those who live or have lived and worked in the borough – enterprise, resilience, opportunism, adaptability – represent strength of spirit. It is this spirit that will drive a new tone and a fresh relationship between the Council and everyone it does business with and is captured in the Council’s vision and priorities:

**“We want Thurrock to be the dynamic heart of the Thames Gateway, a place of ambition, enterprise and opportunity, where communities and businesses flourish**

1. **Improve the education and skills of local people**
2. **Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity**
3. **Ensure a safe, clean and green environment**
4. **Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs**
5. **Build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock’s communities and its residents.”**

This strategy sets out the plans and priorities to support and where necessary, challenge parents to secure ‘good enough parenting’ for all children in Thurrock and supports the following Council priorities in particular:

- Improve the education and skills of local people
- Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet wherever possible, individual needs

It also supports delivery of the aims of the Children and Young Peoples Plan:

- Excellent childcare, schools, colleges and services
- Everyone succeeding
- Protection when needed
- Lean and fit for the future

No single agency or service can respond to the complexity of families we have outlined in the strategy. **In Thurrock the early offer of help is multi-agency and integrated** at planning, middle management and operational delivery levels.

There are very significant opportunities to re-profile public sector spend in Thurrock. The early offer of help and accompanying system redesign will

reduce the risk of harm to children by

- reducing overlaps and gaps between professional services and agencies;
- preventing multiple interventions in families and multiple professional exchanges; and
- reducing complicated and extended information exchange chains

Thurrock Council and the Primary Care Trust on behalf of the Children's Partnership Board proposes to review its early offer of help to provide a seamless range of integrated services and activities to help families address problems before they become too serious, reducing the need for intensive, high cost interventions at a later date.

## **NATIONAL CONTEXT**

The proposed changes follow and build on recent government sponsored reviews, in particular the 'Munro Review of Child Protection', the Early Offer of Help Strategy also reflects the changes to Thurrock Children's Centres agreed by Cabinet in November 2011 following the public consultation.

The Government's response to Munro's final report, A Child Centred System, in July 2011 addresses the fundamental arguments made by Munro that current child protection systems should be less centrally prescribed and there should be less central interference giving us the scope to develop a local solution.

## **THE CHALLENGE IN THURROCK**

This strategy to provide an early offer of help aims to improve the way children's centres, schools, social work professionals, health, police, education and partners in the third sector work together to support children, young people and families across the Borough.

The initial focus of the strategy is children aged 0-19 years (25 years where there are additional needs), however we acknowledge the benefits of intergenerational early intervention and the need to combine this work with a wider range of adult and other support services and agencies.

## **NEEDS ANALYSIS**

A needs assessment was undertaken between October and December 2011 to inform the development of this strategy. The assessment involved an analysis of referrals to Multi Agency Groups (MAGs), referrals to Social Care and to services commissioned as a part of the Thinking Families Project. The needs assessment was also informed by the Child Poverty Needs Assessment and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011.

# The Early Offer of Help Strategy

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

In life the parents you are born to, is probably the most important factor in the outcomes you are likely to achieve. Parenting is innate and the majority of parents successfully bring up their children without the need for additional help.

Bringing up children in adverse circumstances, for example in poverty or trauma, demands increased levels of resilience and resourcefulness and, for some parents, this can mean that the ability to support their children is damaged or inhibited and this can have very profound consequences for children.

That innate capacity in all humans can, however, be damaged or inhibited, enhanced or refreshed with very profound consequences for children. There is no doubt that bringing up children in adverse circumstances, for example in poverty, or war, or trauma; demands levels of extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness.

Most children grow up in loving homes, with resourceful and resilient parents who secure the support they inevitably need from time to time to meet the challenges of life. Thurrock's early offer of help is not for them; they will find the help they need themselves from within their own resources or by tapping into resources in the community. Not everything we do in Thurrock is part of the early offer of help; for example our work to ensure young people are in work or education/or training is not focussed on parenting and therefore is not included, but it will continue.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

Thurrock's early offer of help is for

- Parents who are struggling, whose children are suffering harm as a result, who know they need to do some things differently and who will accept the support and challenge they need to change
- Parents who don't appreciate the harmful impact their lifestyle and/or parenting is having on their children and need challenge as well as support if they are to make the changes they need to make and thereby prevent chronic damage and/or significant harm to their children. Parenting is about skills that can be learned and applied but more importantly it is about relationship which must be reflected upon if sustainable change is to be secured.

**The early offer of help is designed to secure 'good enough' parenting for all children in Thurrock, through support challenge and change.**

Some children will experience significant harm through abuse (physical/sexual/emotional) or neglect. Research has shown that the worst outcomes for children are associated with parenting that features serious abuse and neglect, specialist services under a legal mandate are required in these kinds of cases. The specialist services will be locality based and fully

aligned with the early offer of help.

Figures one and two (attached) show the segments of the population for which the early offer of help has been designed. Our detailed needs analysis shows that approximately 15% of the child population in Thurrock may need the early offer of help, with a further 5% needing specialist services. This will equate to approximately 3000 families and whilst these will live across the Borough our analysis shows that the greatest concentration of need is in the following areas:

- Belhus
- Ockendon
- Chadwell St Mary
- Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
- Tilbury St Chads
- West Thurrock and South Stifford
- Parts of Grays

In developing our locality based offer of services we will focus on these areas with the capacity to provide outreach in other areas of the Borough where this is required.

Families are dynamic, growing/shrinking, learning/resisting, struggling/thriving, succeeding /failing; in any event changing all the time. Common sense as well as national and local analysis shows that they move in and out of categories of need and services must be sufficiently aligned and /or integrated to respond to the changing needs over time.

The adult behaviours that are having harmful impacts on children (either numbers of children affected or degree of harm) are:

- Domestic abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Alcohol and Substance misuse
- Unresolved or chronic parental conflict
- Poor attachment
- Parenting characterised by low warmth and high criticism

In addition some families have features that increase the risk that children will be adversely impacted, these are:

- Enduring and/or serious parental mental ill health
- Parental learning difficulties
- Enduring and/or serious parental physical ill health
- Loss and separation
- Children who are parents

There are also environmental factors that require parents to have higher than average levels of resourcefulness and resilience if children are not to be adversely affected such as:

- Poor housing
- Worklessness
- Poverty
- Racism and other forms of discrimination

The behaviours, features and environmental factors identified above are not exhaustive, they rarely occur singly and combinations can act to intensify or ameliorate the risk of harm to the child.

In Thurrock we have identified a small group of very troubled families for whom the offer of help will be intensive and highly personalised. These are families who, without intervention, would prove extremely costly to the public purse. Within the People Directorate in the council we have an unprecedented opportunity to fully integrate services, systems and processes across children's adults and public protection. In health, the scale or the change is equally unprecedented and gives an opportunity to re-configure equally radically locally. Alongside is the opportunity that Integrated Offender Management provides to uniquely align at a local level the policy direction of education, health and the home office. Thurrock is small and nimble, it is much easier here to work across organisational and service boundaries than in most other areas in the country.

### **HOW WILL IT WORK?**

No single agency or service can respond to the complexity of families we have sketched out here. **In Thurrock the early offer of help is multi-agency and integrated** at planning, middle management and operational delivery levels.

There are very significant opportunities to re-profile public sector spend in Thurrock. The early offer of help and accompanying system redesign will reduce the risk of harm to children by:

- reducing overlaps and gaps between professional services and agencies;
- preventing multiple interventions in families and multiple professional exchanges; and
- reducing complicated and extended information exchange chains.

However this depends upon very effective management of access to resources, this is critical to ensure the right families get the right services at the right time under the right mandate. **The early offer of help in Thurrock will have a single point of entry to service, and will seek to develop this into a multi-agency screening or triage response.** Initially the single point of entry will involve a reorganisation of the referral into Local Authority children's services with a view to further developing this into a multi agency response. This will rely on other agencies aligning their services in a way that works for Thurrock families and we accept that, whilst we will continue to strive for this, it is an aspect that is not yet secured. The aim is to develop a Thurrock Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) that brings together a variety of agencies into an integrated multi-agency team, where they share information appropriately and securely on children, families and adults around the child or young person, in order to take timely and appropriate actions. Based on the information gathered Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub staff would decide on what appropriate action needs to take place.

To ensure excellent alignment of services between levels of seriousness from

universal to specialist, **services currently locality based will be enhanced by co-location and/or closer integration with other council services** for example libraries, adult services, housing. In addition **specialist services for children in need of protection will be de-centralised** to strengthen alignment with the early offer of help and to **deliver specialist consultation and support in risk management to lead professionals** who are not qualified social workers.

### **WHAT SERVICES WILL BE ON OFFER?**

The early offer of help in Thurrock will be underpinned by a shared theoretical framework. No single theory of human behaviour is sufficient. Thurrock's strategy will be shaped by:

- Attachment theory
- Systems theory
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Solution focused models of intervention
- Multi-systemic therapy
- Family group conferencing

The accompanying **workforce development framework** will ensure all staff involved in the early offer retain their professional integrity and insights but share a common language, an understanding of evidence based practices and a shared approach that is shaped by this shared theoretical underpinning.

The core offer in each locality will include:

- Parental and Infant Mental Health Services
- Family Nurse Partnerships
- Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home visiting (MECSH)
- Family Intervention Programme
- Domestic abuse and sexual violence services
- Alcohol and substance misuse services
- Family Group Conferencing
- Targeted parenting support and challenge programmes

This offer will be delivered through a range of front line delivery through Council staff, commissioned Children's Centres, partner agency staff and through the commissioning of some specialist services.

The services commissioned will include:

- Family Intervention Programme
- Domestic abuse and sexual violence services
- Alcohol and substance misuse services
- Targeted parenting support and challenge programmes
- Management of four children's centres

### **HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THE EARLY OFFER OF HELP IS WORKING ?**

Parents will tell us!

We will develop a **performance management framework** that includes quantitative as well as qualitative measures of success. Examples might include:

- shorter care proceedings, as courts will be satisfied that families have had appropriate opportunities to access high quality and effective help to effect the necessary changes in their parenting. This presents a potentially significant saving in public spend
- help plans that specify in 'SMART' terms exactly what aspects of parenting need to be supported challenged or changed
- lead professionals with increased capacity to confidently and effectively manage appropriate levels of risk.

We may hope to see fewer children in care, fewer young people in trouble with the law and fewer children subject to protection plans as a consequence of the early offer. However we need to be cautious, we are already seeing changes in the demography of the borough, with a steady increase in vulnerable families moving in to the borough. The proposed welfare reforms are likely to have a significant impact on the volume and nature of the demand for early offer services.

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In summary, the key priorities for the early offer of help are as follows:

- Strengthening entry into services through the development of a **single point of referral** and seek to secure multi agency agreement to develop a local safeguarding hub.
- Developing an **integrated multi agency response that targets resources** to supporting parents and reducing the number of cases escalating to statutory intervention.
- Enhancing locality delivery by **decentralising and aligning specialist services to targeted locality delivery**.
- Developing a **core offer of services delivered locally** to support, challenge and change parenting where needed
- Developing the **Troubled Families\* offer as a core part of the Early Offer of Help**
- Implementing a **clear workforce development programme** to support the delivery of the early offer of help.
- Implementing a **performance management framework** that monitors and evaluates the success of the support offered.

\*Troubled Families is the national programme to support families that are experiencing serious, multiple and complex problems - including parents not working, mental health problems, and children not in school and who are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.



Figure One:

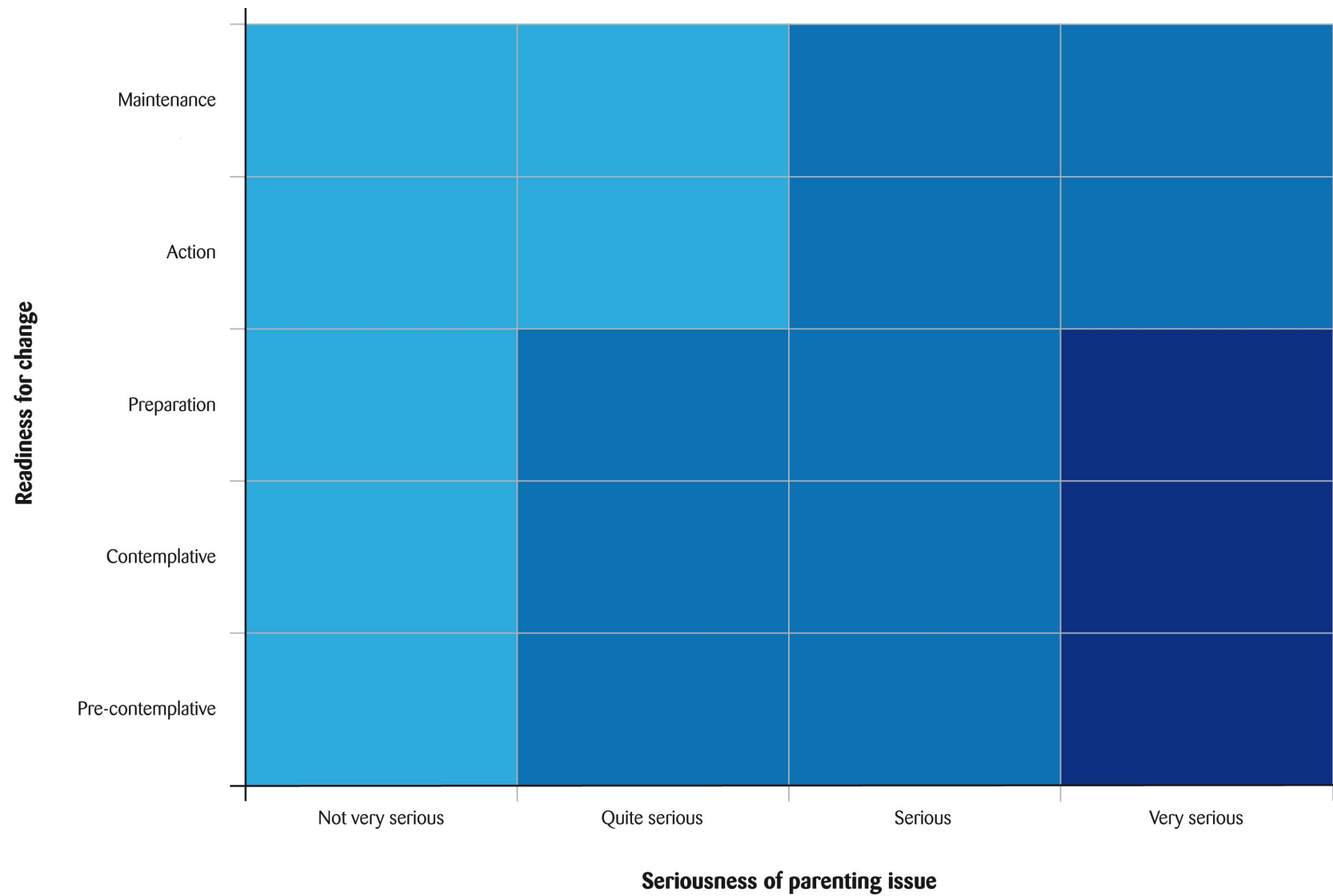
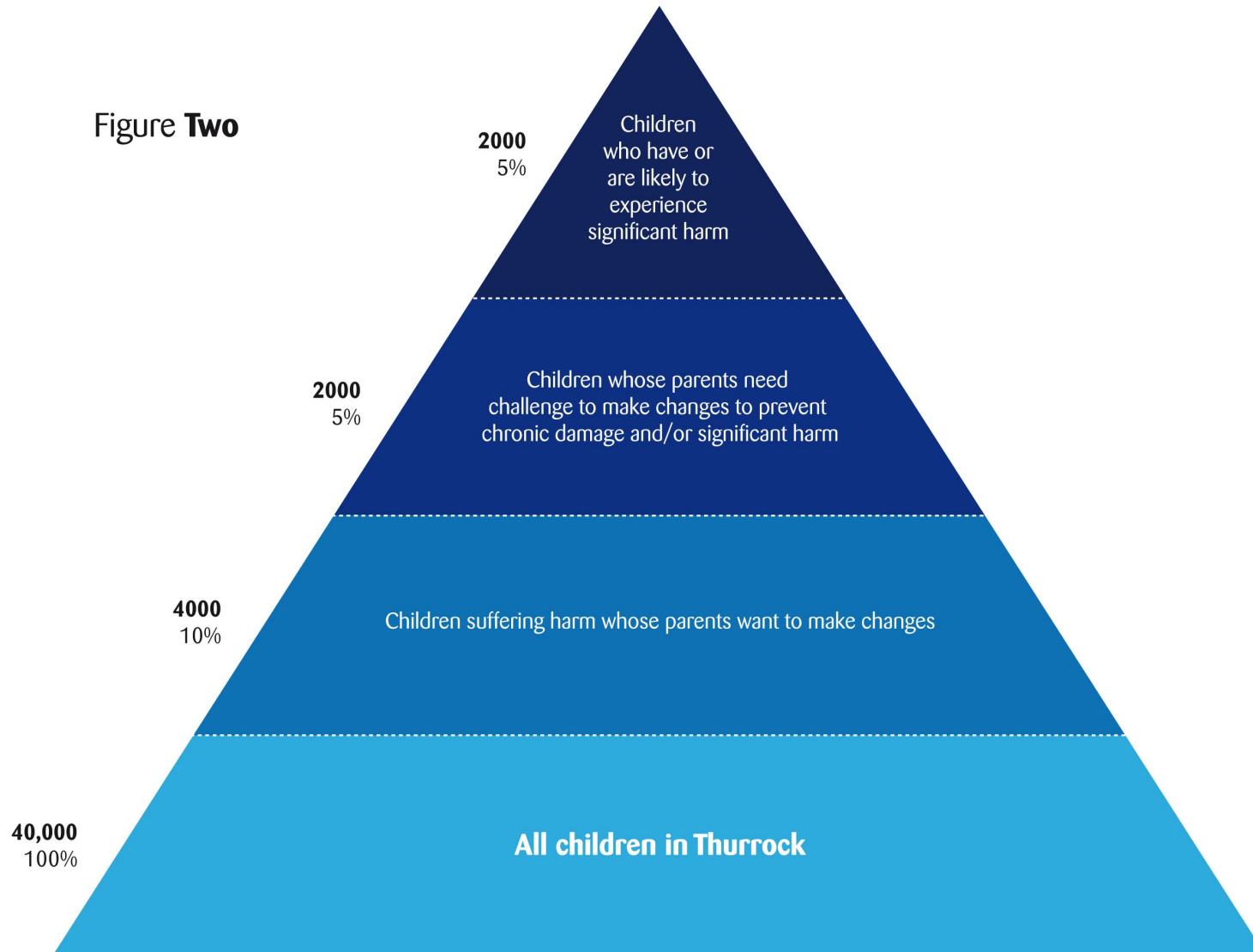


Figure Two



supporting, challenging and changing parenting for struggling families

Determining priorities and alignment of resources  
Gateway and Triage  
Case load monitoring and review

Single Point of Referral

Multiagency Intelligence gathering and analysis

Risk of harmful parenting  
Parental change readiness

Segments

'Aware' Families

'Unaware' Families

'Resistant' Families

Children in care

Characteristics

Families who are experiencing isolated problems related to specific events (e.g. unemployment, bereavement, depression, separation) and are not resilient enough to cope and children are suffering harm as a result. Aware of harm to children and accepting of support and help

Don't appreciate harmful impact their lifestyle has on children or neighbourhood. Experiencing multiple issues, such as; domestic abuse, sexual violence, alcohol and substance abuse, parental conflict Unable to make changes without intensive help.

Very troubled and highly resistant to change. Long standing complex and acute issues. Notorious, often large and extended, families with intergenerational unacceptable behaviour. Aspects of learning difficulties, border line personality disorders, persistent offenders, well known to CJS. Professional fatigue may be setting in

Nature of response and service offer

Targeted short-term interventions on selected issues, counselling, mentoring, role models, creating support networks to support family to resolve the problem,

Dynamic challenge and support. Pro-longed evidence based programmes to embed awareness, willingness to change and capability of sustaining improvements. Parenting plans, offer of incentives and threat of sanctions

Social Care / Statutory / Protect Child Crossed the line / Last chance Benefits/Housing /Children in care sanctions Authoritative approaches Multi-agency single agenda Holding the line and follow through

Families for the Trouble Families Programme

The Early Offer of Help