

*Giving children the best start in life...*

# Family Start

## Referral Guide

### What is Family Start?

Family Start is an intensive home visiting programme that focuses on improving children's growth and health, learning and relationships, family circumstances, environment and safety. It helps families who are struggling with challenges or problems that may make it harder for them to care for their baby or young child. Family Start will begin to support babies and their parents/ caregivers early—before the baby's birth or in their first year. We encourage referrals from the second trimester of pregnancy.

There is a focus on strengthening and improving the parents' skills for the benefit of the child, and the achievement of the family's own goals.

The three main aims of Family Start are to help:

- improve health, education and social outcomes for children
- improve parents' parenting capability and practice
- improve children's and parents' personal and family circumstances.

Family Start promotes and acts on the child's safety at all times.

A Family Start whānau worker will visit the family regularly (weekly at first). They will:

- assess the family's situation
- help them make an individual plan focussed on goals for the child's wellbeing and safety
- offer the family advice and guidance about achieving their goals
- encourage parents to ensure the child gets appropriate health care
- connect the family with other services, agencies or resources they might need
- facilitate regular parenting discussions with the family to help them understand their child's needs at different stages as they grow.

## Referral age

Referrals can be made from when the mother is pregnant up to when the baby is 12 months old. In exceptional circumstances, a child may be accepted into the program up to two years old.

Families can stay in the programme until they have achieved their goals, the child's wellbeing is enhanced, parents' confidence is increased, and living circumstances are improved.

Families cannot stay in the program beyond the child's fifth birthday.

## Referral steps and timing

Send the completed referral form and supporting documents to your local Family Start provider.

The Family Start provider will contact the family within five days to arrange an initial visit. This visit will determine whether the programme is the right service for the family.

The Family Start provider will let the referrer know the outcome of the initial visit.

## Referral Criteria

Research and practice experience show that the situations listed in the criteria below are likely to put children at risk of health, development and social problems. These are the situations Family Start is targeting to help.

List A sets out the main criteria for Family Start. Families need to experience challenges in one of these areas to be referred.

List B sets out additional issues that in themselves would not meet the criteria for Family Start. If you feel that a parent has high needs but does not 'fit' into the Family Start criteria use List B to explain why an exception should be made for this family.

Family Start providers are happy to talk through any potential referral if you or the family are unsure if the programme is right for them.

Please provide details on the referral form for any of the criteria that apply to the parents/caregivers. With the family's permission, you can also include supporting documents, and your agency's assessment report.

### **When referring a family to Family Start, please ensure that:**

- the family is aware of your worries and why you think a referral might help them. We encourage referrers to complete the referral form with the family
- the strengths and aspirations of the family are acknowledged
- the family consents to being referred.

### **Please note**

- Family Start is not an alternative to emergency or crisis help from other organisations such as Child, Youth and Family, the Police or Women's Refuge.
- Family Start is often used alongside other services such as ante-natal care, Well Child, mental health services or counselling.

## FAMILY START Referral Criteria

List A sets out the main criteria for Family Start. Families need to experience challenges in one of these areas to be referred.

List B sets out other areas where families may have challenges. If you feel that a parent has high needs but does not 'fit' into the Family Start criteria then explain, using indicators in List B, why an exception should be made for this family.

LIST A. Family Start criteria	DESCRIPTION
Mental health issues	<p>Either parent/carer has a mental health problem, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post-natal depression</li><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Depression</li><li>• Self-harm or suicidal tendencies</li><li>• Other (specify)</li></ul> <p>Is this current or historic?</p> <p>Are they receiving any assistance or professional services for this?</p>
Difficulties with drugs, alcohol or gambling	<p>Either parent/carer has a problem with one of the following which affects parenting ability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alcohol use</li><li>• Illicit drug use</li><li>• Gambling</li></ul> <p>Are they are receiving any assistance from other professional services for this?</p>
Childhood history of abuse	Either parent/carer experienced abuse as a child or young person.

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Care and protection history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Oranga Tamariki are, or have been, working with this family/whānau</li><li>• One or more children in this family/whānau have been removed from the family by Oranga Tamariki or some other legal means (ie: through the Family Court)</li><li>• Family/ whānau have arranged for an informal placement of a child due to concerns for their wellbeing</li></ul> <p><b>NOTE:</b> Any live child protection concerns must always be referred to Oranga tamariki. Where there has been a previous child/children removed as above, Oranga Tamariki must complete a safety assessment before Family Start proceeds. This will determine if Family Start is the right service.</p> <p>Family Start may on occasion work alongside Oranga Tamariki, but not instead of them, if there are active current care and protection issues that require a statutory level of intervention. Family Start is not an alternative to Oranga Tamariki.</p>
Relationship problems	Evidence of significant relationship problems including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family violence</li><li>• Conflict</li><li>• Multiple partner changes or significant instability within the family/whānau</li></ul>
Child health and development issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bonding and attachment issues – parents struggling to build rapport, connection and interest with baby/child</li><li>• Parents struggling to establish successful feeding and care routines</li><li>• Child with disabilities or special needs</li><li>• Recurring health issues – parents struggling with recognising child’s needs</li><li>• Foetal abnormalities</li><li>• Little or no ante-natal or post-natal care</li></ul>
Young parent with additional challenges or needs	Parent under 18 experiencing additional challenges which increase their need for intensive support. Please consider indicators in List B below.

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The following are additional issues that in themselves would not meet the criteria for Family Start. Where there is a combination of these, we may be able to make an exception.

## For more information

For information about the Family Start programme, or to discuss whether a referral is appropriate, contact your local Family Start provider.

Contact information and referral forms are available at [www.mvcot.govt.nz/](http://www.mvcot.govt.nz/)

List B. Indicators of potential need	DESCRIPTION
Lacks positive support networks	Parent or caregiver lacks family / whānau / community support for positive parenting or they have limited connections to their local community.
Financial and material resources	One or more of the following applies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties managing day-to-day expenses resulting in debt issues</li> <li>• Family housing situation is unstable or unsuitable for their needs</li> <li>• Lacks access to transport</li> <li>• Lacks basic amenities – no phone, power</li> <li>• Living conditions are chaotic or unsanitary</li> </ul>
Frequent change of address	Parents and/or child have changed address more than twice in the last six months
Low parent education	One or more of the following applies to the parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks qualifications – no School Certificate or National Certificate of Educational Achievement</li> <li>• Left school early – under 16 or had a significant non-attendance history</li> <li>• Literacy and numeracy difficulties</li> <li>• Has recognised learning disability</li> </ul>
SUDI factors	One or more of the following applies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother smoked while pregnant</li> <li>• Baby has not been breast fed, or has only been breast fed for a short period</li> <li>• Baby was of low birth weight – less than 2500 grams</li> <li>• Baby was premature – less than 33 weeks gestation</li> <li>• Baby was, or is, exposed to second hand smoke</li> <li>• History of premature birth</li> <li>• Safe sleeping issues</li> </ul>
Criminal justice involvement (adults in the family/whānau)	One or more of the following applies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous convictions or charges pending</li> <li>• Protection orders</li> <li>• Youth justice involvement</li> <li>• History of imprisonment</li> </ul>