**PSW Brief October 2019- Assessment**

Child and Family Assessments are the bread and butter of social work so you will already have a range of skills, drawing on a variety of tools and methods in your practice. As always though it can be helpful to revisit the basics to reflect on your practice wisdom.

**The knowledge and skills statement (KSS) requires practitioners to**:

*Carry out in-depth and ongoing family assessment of social need and risk to children, with particular emphasis on parental conflict and capability to change. Use professional curiosity and authority while maintaining a position of partnership, involving all ley family members, including fathers. Acknowledge any conflict between parental and children’s interests, prioritising the protection of children as set out in legislation.*

**Working Together 2018 describes the purpose of an assessment as:**

* To gather information about a child and family.
* To analyse their needs and/or the nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child.
* To describe whether the child is a child in need (section 17) or is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm (section 47)
* To provide support to address those needs to improve the child’s outcomes and welfare and where necessary make them safe.

An assessment is a dynamic and continuous process, which should build upon the history of the individual child and the child’s family, with the need for the Social Worker to read and take into account previous Social Work records, responding to the impact of any previous services and intervention and analysing what further action may be needed based upon the new referral or change of circumstances.

* Our Local Assessment Protocol states - Assessment is continuous and ongoing and an updated assessment should be completed at a minimum of **every 6 months** for children open to Children’s Services aged under 1 years and **no more than 12 months** for children over 1 year. The timeliness of an assessment is a critical element of the quality of that

Assessment and in turn the outcome for the needs of the child. The speed in which an assessment is carried out will be determined by the needs of the child and the nature and level of any risk of harm being faced. This will require judgements being made by the allocated Social Worker and their Manager on each individual child.

<https://www.proceduresonline.com/buckinghamshire/chservices/files/ass_protocol.pdf>

**What makes a good assessment -?**

* The child is always at the centre of the assessment, their names need to be spelt correctly and their relationships clearly explained. Identify the family support networks, including extended family, friends and community resources.
* The importance of not just what happened or was said, but what this means for the child. Use child observation skills, genograms, ecomaps, chronologies and other evidence based tools ensuring active child and family participation in the process.
* The Assessment should clearly reflect the child’s experiences and the impact on them of any failure to properly meet their needs. Avoid social work jargon and ensure the assessment is bespoke to each child.
* Hold and empathetic position about difficult social circumstances experienced by children and families, taking account of the relationship between poverty and social deprivation, and the effect of stress on family functioning. Take into account the individual child and family history and how this might affect the ability of adults and children to engage with services.
* Parental views on the child’s experiences need to be obtained and recorded, including their level of engagement and motivation to change. Recognise and address behaviour that may indicate resistance to change, ambivalent or selective cooperation with services, and recognise when there is a need for immediate action, and what other steps can be made to protect children. It is important to ensure that things do not go round and round for a child.
* The child’s wishes and feelings and their understanding of what is happening in their life needs to be explicitly recorded, and how they were obtained. Ensure you have recorded your observations, particularly for young or non-verbal children. Ask yourself would someone reading the assessment get a sense of the child’s personality, opinions?
* Incorporate the contributions that other professional disciplines provide for the assessment, clearly indicate who provided the information and their level of involvement with the child and family.
* Good social work practice connects the evidence drawn from each corner of the triangle and the analysis, then considers the interconnectivity. For example, what is observed may contradict feedback of the evidence. Digging deeper and exploring each corner of the triangle really helps with this analysis.
* Decision making needs to be clear about why the decision has been made, who made the decision and what the outcome for the child and family will be. Assessments and Plans need to be updated to reflect the decisions made and the next steps.

Sandra Carnall, Principal Social Worker. October 2019.