

Single Assessment Practice Guide

The guidance aims to assist social workers and their managers to undertake a Child and Family Assessment using the Bradford Single Assessment.

‘Every child who is open to Children Social Care should have an assessment which reflects their unique characteristics, assesses their individual needs including an analysis of the parental capacity to meet those needs whether they arise from issues within the family or the wider community’ (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018).

A key aim of the Single Assessment is to set out clearly the assessment plan and will:

- Aid relationship building with children and their families
- Strengthen reflective social work and supervision
- Foster increased use of research in our assessments
- Consider the balance between managing and reducing risks and promoting resilience
- Assist in explaining to children and families why social workers are involved in their lives

The assessment will also incorporate any S47 enquires and will form the report for both Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences. It will also form the report for all Children in Care Reviews.

The single assessment form will also be used for pre-birth assessments.

The single assessment should also be used to complete Parent Carers assessment; parents who are carers have the right to have an assessment of their own under Children and Families Act 2014; Section 97 of the Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to undertake a “parent carer needs assessment” when there is an identified need or where one has been requested by the parent (see fact sheet on Trix).

The intention of the single assessment is to allow Social Workers to use their professional judgement during the assessment process whilst focusing on the child.

Timeline for Single Assessment

It is the responsibility of the social worker to follow the assessment timelines as set out below. The Team Manager must ensure that assessments are reviewed at the intervals set, that management actions are recorded and that assessments are completed in the time frame that has been set.

In Bradford the expectation is that all Single Assessments (SA) will be completed within 10 working days and the LCS assessment form automatically defaults to 10 working days. If the assessment requires additional time, the manager is able to set a different target date for completion. Assessments must always be completed within 45 working days.

It is important that the timescale is always considered in line with the needs of the child. Some assessments may be required more quickly whereas others may be complex and require longer.

Where particular needs are identified at any stage of the assessment, social workers should not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before commissioning services to support the child and their family.

When a Section 47 (S47) Child Protection Enquiry has been undertaken, the single assessment will be commenced. The analysis of this enquiry will be recorded in the assessment and the team manager will place a case note on the child's file evidencing oversight, rationale for decision making and threshold met on the continuum of need.

When the Single Assessment is being undertaken to inform a child at Child Protection Conference it must be completed at least 3 days before an initial and review Child Protection Conference so that it can be shared with the family and Chair ahead of the conference. The social worker needs to confirm with the Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit that it is available and they have consent to share it with Child Protection Coordinator and partner agencies. If the family have refused consent, the assessment will need to be shared with consideration given to redacting any sensitive information that does not impact the assessment or recommendations.

When a Single Assessment is being undertaken to inform a Child in Care Review, it must be completed at least 2 days before the review so that it can be shared with the family and IRO. The social worker needs to confirm with the IRO that a final version is available when ready.

Assessment Timeframe

- Day 1 – Upon receipt of the referral from the IFD the AIT manager will read the referral and add an allocation plan within 24 hours. The Single Assessment form will be generated by the team manager who will add a brief summary of current concerns, the reason for the referral and the identified need / risk to the child in the context of any family history. This also needs to include the plan of work which will include when the child will be seen; this needs to be specific to the concerns with the child being seen no later than 3 working days of the receipt of referral.
- Day 10 - It is expected that the majority of single assessments will be completed, fully written up, shared with the family and authorised by the manager. If for any reason the assessment requires additional time, the team manager must set the new completion date with a clear rationale recorded and revised assessment plan,

stating frequency of visits. Assessments should be completed as soon as possible and not be allowed to drift.

- Day 45 - All assessments must be completed, signed off by the manager and with a plan in place where needed.

Principles of a Good Assessment

Key principles for a good assessment are:

- The welfare and safety of the child is paramount.
- Families are unique and know their own story.
- Children are best maintained within their own family unit wherever this is safe to do so.
- Gives a clear picture of what life is like for that child – what does it feel like to be this child living in this family?
- The child's voice is captured throughout the assessment.
- There is a duty to assist families to identify support either within their own family or the community in order to meet their child's needs and keep them safe.
- When working with families' social workers will be clear about what we are doing and why, and the legislative framework for practice.
- Consent for an assessment will always be sought, even where there are concerns about significant harm, unless to do so will put any person at immediate risk of harm. Where families are reluctant to engage, social workers should explain to families the benefits of working in partnership with Social Care as well as the actions that may be taken if concerns persist.
- Children and family members will be treated with respect, openness, and honesty; staff will talk to them, listen carefully and record and take into account their views
- Assessments will be undertaken in a timely manner.
- Assessment are evidence based – information gathered is checked and discussed with the child / parents / adults and where appropriate, triangulated with the evidence of partner agencies demonstrating professional curiosity to understand what the information really means.
- The assessment will balance risk and resilience factors and evidence where the family is doing well.
- The child will remain central to the focus of the assessment, whilst involving immediate family members and any other significant people in family or community. This should include all parents / carers, including parents who do not live in the child's household.
- Considers the history of the child and family and the impact of that on the here and now.
- The assessment will lead to an agreed plan of intervention incorporating the wishes and feelings of the child, their family and professional agencies involved
- Each plan will be outcome focused and lead to action, where needed

Process of Assessment

The purpose of an assessment is always:

- To gather and report important and relevant information about a child and their family
- To analyse their needs and/or nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child to reach professional judgements
- To decide where the child is a child in need (section 17) or is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm (section 47)
- Making decisions and planning interventions to keep children safe
- Identify a plan that will meet the needs of the child and family to make a positive impact
- Evaluating and reviewing progress

On allocation of the case or the start of the assessment, it is important to read the referral, contact the referrer and review the enquiries made by MASH – this is the starting point for understanding what you will need to do.

The information gathered during the assessment process should be obtained from various sources. These sources include but are not exclusive to:

- Individual assessment sessions with the adults in the family
- Direct work with the children
- Multi-agency information sharing (Police, NCA, Health, Education etc.)
- Review of electronic and paper files
- Observations of contact between the children and their parent(s)
- Observations of the home environment
- Family network meetings

If it is determined that the child should *not* be seen as part of the assessment, this should be recorded by the manager with reasons.

All assessments should be planned and coordinated by the social worker to ensure that the process is transparent and the reason for the assessment is understood by all.

Planning should identify who will be involved and what information is required; plans should be clearly set on the file. Questions to be considered in planning assessments include –

- Who in the family will be included and how will they be involved (including absent or wider family and others significant to the child)?
- When will the child and family members be seen and in what order and where?
- What services are to be provided during the assessment? For example, one to one work with domestic abuse agencies, drugs services or counselling.
- Are there communication needs? If so, what are the specific needs and how they will be met?

- How will the assessment take into account the particular issues faced by black and minority ethnic children and their families, and disabled children and their families?
- What method of collecting information will be used?
- What direct work tools will be used with the family?
- What information is already available?
- What other sources of knowledge about the child and family are available and how will other agencies and professionals who know the family be informed and involved?
- How will the consent of family members be obtained?
- How and when will the outcome of the assessment be shared with the child and family?

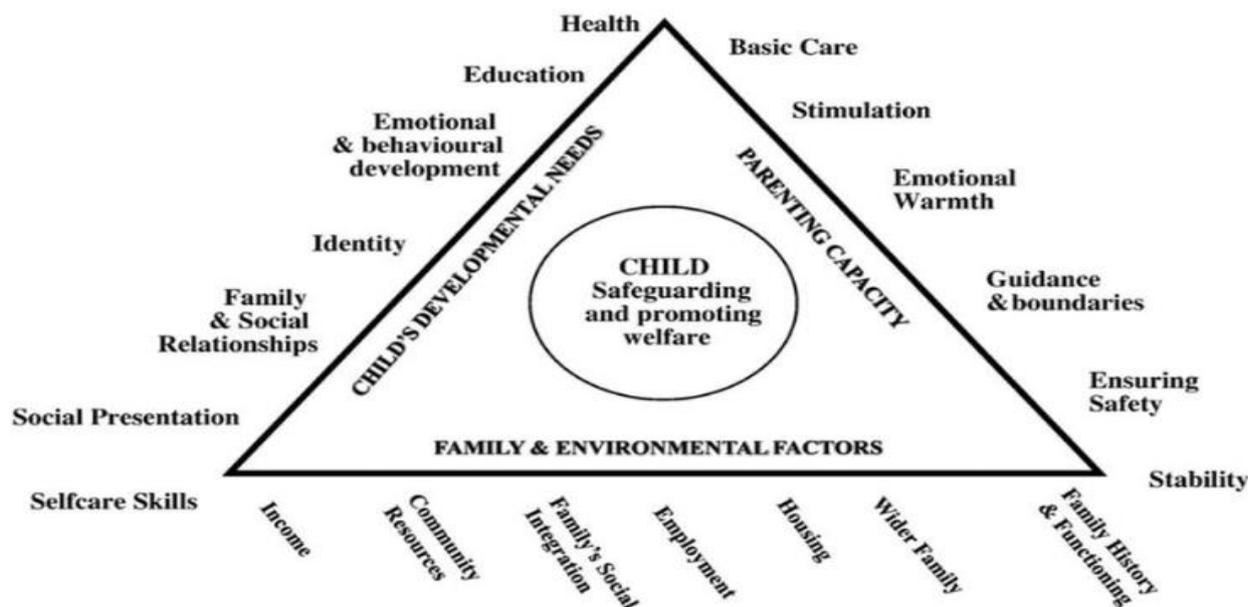
Assessment should be a dynamic process, which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child from within and outside their family. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered. Whilst services may be delivered to a parent or carer, the assessment should be focused on the needs of the child and on the impact any services are having on the child.

As part of the assessment, social workers should evidence professional curiosity, questioning and triangulating the information that has been provided with regards to what it means for the child.

Completing the Assessment

The Assessment Framework Triangle for children and young people is a shared assessment tool that helps social workers to develop a shared understanding of the child's needs so that they can be met more effectively. The assessment triangle should be used to examine how the different aspects of the child's life and context interact and impact on the child.

The interaction of these domains requires careful investigation during the assessment. The aim is to reach a judgement about the nature and level of needs and/or risks that the child may be facing within their family and/or community. Importantly the assessment, in looking at the domains, should also consider where the strengths are in a child's circumstances and in what way they may assist in reducing the risk.



Child Development

Assessments should be informed by a clear understanding of the child's educational, emotional and health needs, alongside an awareness of the factors that impact on the child's developmental outcomes (including the identification of specific behavioural problems that contribute to poor placement outcomes) and those that promote resilience.

Observations of relationships and key adults is a key art of understanding the child's world – how do they relate to adults? What are their reactions with different adults? How does the child relate to other children including any brothers and sister. a

Being able to understand the impact of the situation on the child is central to formulating a plan of work.

Consider the child's diversity needs; what makes this child unique. Refer to the diversity wheel on Trix.

For a Child in Care Review, refer to the following:

- Health assessment, highlighting any identified issues including any dental information, opticians, any CAMHs involvement, and disabilities
- Capture important information regarding any impact of parental behaviours such as foetal alcohol syndrome, the child using drugs or alcohol and their sexual health
- PEP and EHCP information referencing what is in place to ensure that the right support is in place, the use of pupil premium, planning for GCSE's or post 16 education
- Capture any issues identified with transport, friendships groups and family time
- Brother and sister assessments
- Life story work and identity

Assessing Parenting Capacity

Assessment of parental capacity must be done on a 'child by child' basis as a parent / adult or parents / adults may be able to care for one child but not another within the family. Where parenting difficulties or likelihood of impairment to the child's health and development are identified, there should be a clear assessment of the parents' capacity to change. Capacity to change must be understood and assessed within a timeframe that is compatible with the developmental needs of the child.

Assessing parents' capacity to change presents challenges for social workers, and a multi-faceted approach including interviews, observation, use of previous reports about the child and family members, and gaining information from multiple informants is needed. Being able to ascertain the parents / adults understanding regarding their child's needs and how they meet their child's need is central to this. It is also important to understand whether there are any issues that are impacting on the parent / adults' ability to meet their child's need such as substance misuse, mental health, domestic violence and learning needs. It is also necessary to explore the parents' own history in terms of their childhood experiences, their own parenting experience, previous relationships and their parenting values. As a social worker, it is critical that we build a relationship and listen to individual experiences so that we are able to understand past experiences and how they affect individuals to meet the needs of their child.

On occasion, social workers over-estimate the ability of some parents to understand, and respond to, professional concerns. Using an evidence based approach and supervision will help keep a check on this.

For a child in care review, ensure that the following has been captured:

- Where the child is living – identify whether this is with family, friends or foster and how the placement is meeting the needs of the child (activities, routines, emotional wellbeing, family time, is the child happy?)
- How are risks being managed within the placement?
- Any outstanding assessment for family and friends, rehabilitation home, discharge of care order as well as expert assessments
- Be clear regarding whether this is the long term placement and any outstanding tasks with regards to achieving permanence
- Where children are placed with their parents, the parenting capacity section should be completed in detail and reviewed against the Placement with Parent Agreement

Family and environmental factors

It is necessary to understand the effects of family and environmental factors on children and on parenting capacity. Research and serious case reviews consistently highlight the impact of parental drug and/or alcohol use, domestic violence, parental mental health difficulties and learning disabilities on parents' capacity to meet their child's needs. Understanding the degree to which these impact a child's life enables

for a holistic assessment to be completed and with the parents' consent, advice should be sought from the adult care professionals working with them.

Recognising the wider community and family is core to supporting good outcomes for children whilst enabling any identified risk to be explored and managed.

For children in care reviews, the following should be given consideration:

- Family time with parents, brothers and sisters, extended family as well as important individuals such as friends, previous carers, and community members.
- Identity issues such as enabling the child to feel part of their faith/community/culture.

Any current involvement of social care and other professionals / services

This section should refer to any historical information or significant events as well as what work is being undertaken by social care and other agencies working with the child and family such as direct work, CAMHs, voluntary sector.

When completing for a Child in Care review, include the previous recommendations with an update of any progress.

Conclusion and Analysis

Having gathered all your information, reflect on what you know and what this means for the child – think about the child's experiences and how it impacts them. What does the information you have gathered tell you about the following:

- What / who has caused the harm?
- What is the severity of the harm?
- How has it impacted the child?
- What are patterns of behaviour for this family in light of what we know from being involved what does this mean for the child now and in the future?
- Timeliness of intervention?
- Who is available to support the family?
- Have the parents / adults engaged honestly and co-operatively in the assessment? Consider evidence of disguised compliance. Has there been reflection? Are they able and motivated to change?
- Are the risks linked to contextualised safeguarding such as County Lines / CE – are specialist assessments needed?

For Child in Care Reviews:

- Initial Review – clear analysis of why we have got to where we are and what needs to be done to formulate a final decision for care planning (twin and triple tracking), including court timetabling and types of and dates for assessments with overview of the assessment plan including exploration of extended family options.
- Decision making Review – details about assessments completed with outcomes, rationale for the proposed plan and how this meets the needs of the child.

Information should also include details of any support plans proposed and what legal order will be sought and why.

- All other reviews should capture analysis on how the care plan / permanence plan has progressed, what's changed, what needs to be done and why.

What is going well and what are we worried about?

Use the Signs of Safety framework to set out what you have identified as the strengths and the concerns for the child, including any vulnerabilities.

Analysis of need, harm and risk

A good assessment involves more than just the information gathering; the social worker needs to analyse and make sense of all the information relating it to what it means for the child. The analysis of risk and needs should explore the level of risk / need present and if not a risk / need now what might be a potential risk in the future if the right support / change has not been achieved. This section should also address the following –

- What safeguarding and support measures are already in place and how are these working or not.
- Outstanding work to be done
- What is the safety plan for each risk identified?
- Who does the child trust?
- How is the plan managing these risks and needs?
- If the assessment is being prepared for a Child Protection Review, there needs to be a clear analysis regarding whether or not the threshold for significant harm remain and how each risk identified at the onset of the child protection process has now been reduced and / or managed. If the risks are not reducing / increasing, then a plan is required regarding stepping up from the child protection process.

Child's Voice and Participation

The child's experience and voice should be central to all assessments. All children should be able to contribute to the assessment process based upon their age, understanding and identity. Babies and young children, including those who are non-verbal should be observed in detail. Arrangements should be made to see children alone for direct work where possible. The Signs of Safety tools should be used when appropriate or an alternative tool to best ascertain the child's understanding of what is happening, what they are worried about and what they think needs to happen next. Attach any direct work completed with the child to the assessment.

To understand the child's world, it is essential that their views are captured regarding where they live, how they feel about issues such as their health, education and any family time arrangements.

If the child is non-verbal, observations should be completed to capture how they presented and communicated with others around them, noting any changes in behaviour or presentation.

Parent / Carer's View

Developing a positive relationship with parents / adults can be challenging. To promote good engagement, it is important that social workers are clear about their roles, listen and challenge when necessary in a way that is not threatening. It is recognised that it is challenge to establish a good working relationship with parents at the same as maintaining a central focus on the child.

The assessment needs to capture what the parents / adults think about what is happening and why everyone is worried alongside what they think is working well. Engaging parents / adults to think about what needs to happen next and who can help them enables them to be part of the solution and involved in what will happen next.

Include the parent / adults views on the proposed plan and any identified issues. For parents / adults who have not engaged, include what has been done to capture their views and include them in the assessment process.

Wider Family View and Community

Identifying and working with significant others will help to identify who can support the child and family and understand what this will look like. Include their views about what is happening and what they think needs to change – how can they contribute to supporting the family to keep everyone safe.

People Working with the Family

Different professional groups including health, education and other specialist services have a substantial contribution to make to the assessment process to ensure that we get a holistic overview of the child's life. Gathering what information they have about the family will enrich your assessment but also help to understand what support can be provided to the family. Include all professionals and their views about what is working well, what they are worried about and what they think needs to happen to keep everyone safe.

Recommendations and Plan of Work

Every assessment should end with a clear set of outcomes and a plan for how these will be achieved. Deciding if services are required and if so, which services and support is needed to improve the child's safety and welfare. The assessment should determine:

- Is this a Child in Need? (Section 17 Children Act 1989);
- Is there reasonable cause to suspect that this child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm? (Section 47 Children Act 1989);
- Is this a child in need of accommodation? (Section 20 or Section 31A Children Act 1989).

The possible outcomes of the assessment should be decided by the social worker and their manager, who should agree a plan of action setting out the services to be delivered how and by whom in discussion with the child and family and the

professionals involved. All plans should be SMART and reviewed when the assessment is next updated. The plan needs to be explicit about what actions are needed and who will complete the identified tasks.

The outcomes may be as follows:

- No further action (this should only be used when the child requires no additional support beyond what is normally provided by universal services)
- Additional support but which can be provided through universal services and single service provision
- Early help services
- Specialist assessment
- The development of a multi-agency child in need plan for the provision of child in need services to promote the child's health and development
- Undertaking a Strategy Discussion/Meeting, to consider whether a Section 47 child protection enquiry is required
- Emergency action to protect a child.

The conclusions of the assessment should be:

- Discussed with the child and family and provided to them in written form; exceptions to this are where this might place a child at risk of harm or jeopardise an enquiry; some sections may require redaction to ensure that information about adults is not shared inappropriately
- Taking account of confidentiality, provided to professional referrers
- Given in writing to agencies involved in providing services to the child with the action points, review dates and intended outcomes for the child stated

For Child Protection Conferences, it should be clear whether a further period of review is required and why. A recommendation to continue child protection planning should take into account the length of time already on a plan and the impact for each child in the family remaining subject to a plan for a further period of time, making it clear what need to happen the process to end safely.

For a Child in Care Review, it should be clear what the proposed care plan is and how permanence will be achieved.

Management Oversight

A good assessment will evidence management oversight and should reflect best practice as highlighted in Management practice guide which is available on Trix.

Supervision should be agreed with the social worker at the point of allocation to reflect on the plan of work agreed; this should include overseeing the completion of the case summary, chronology and genogram.