

Information for Families

Guide to the Social Work Assessment and Plan



This guide explains how we work with children, young people and their families in Redcar & Cleveland.

So that you know what to expect throughout the assessment process and understand how we will support you, your family and your support network to create a plan that shows everyone that your child or children are safe.



Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.

During all of our conversations and visits with your family and network you can expect the following from the Children's Services Social Work Teams at Redcar & Cleveland Council:

- **We will be honest and respectful** in all the discussions we have with you about any worries and concerns.
- **We will ask you lots of questions** to find out about what's working well in your family's life and explore what you, or others, are worried about and what everyone thinks needs to happen to help get the worries sorted out.
- **We will spend time with your child or children** (if they are old enough) to understand their wishes and feelings and make sure this is at the centre of all the work we do.
- **We will work with you and the important people in your life to develop a plan that keeps your child safe**, we want you to be central to this process.
- **We will use clear, everyday language when we speak or write to you** so you understand exactly why we are worried and what we need to see achieved for us not to have a worry, even if you don't agree with us.

For example, we shouldn't use a term like 'neglect' without describing exactly what has happened to have worries that a child is being neglected. If we use any words that you don't understand, if you don't think we have explained something very well or aren't 100% clear what we mean, please tell us.



About the Assessment Process

Why have I been contacted by a social worker?

There are a number of reasons why a social worker from Redcar & Cleveland Council's Children's Services might be involved with your family. You might have requested help or someone else might have requested help on your behalf.

Sometimes Children's Services get involved because we have received a 'referral.' This means that someone has contacted us to say they are worried about a child. If we receive a referral, it is considered by a social worker - they have a legal duty to look into this further, even if the worries aren't confirmed.

What is a children and family assessment?

The children and family assessment is the process that social workers use to gather information about you and your family, so that we can establish if we need to help and support you to create a plan that keeps your child safe and well cared for.

The assessment will consider what you or other people are worried about, what is working well to address these worries and what needs to happen next.

To do this we will work closely with you, your child and other important people in your lives.

We will also speak to people who work for other organisations who might know your family, like someone from your child's school or your health visitor. We will do this to get their perspective on how well you are doing and their view on whether you are having any struggles.

There are two reasons why we might carry out an assessment:

- To consider if a child is a 'Child in Need' meaning that some help and support from a social worker is required for the child to achieve and maintain a reasonable level of health and development or to prevent their health and development from being impaired (this is set out in Section 17 of the Children Act 1989).
- Where children's services have received information that suggests a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, and involvement from a social worker is required to keep them safe. (this is set out in Section 47 of the Children Act 1989)

Your social worker will explain to you the reasons for the assessment.

Do I have to give my consent to the Assessment?

If we are undertaking a 'Child in Need' assessment we will ask you for your consent, which you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If we are concerned that your child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, your consent is not needed as we are legally required to undertake an assessment to safeguard the welfare of your child.

What happens at the end of the assessment?

At the end of the assessment your social worker will compile a report, this will set out recommendations for what happens next and it will be considered by their Team Manager. The manager will consider all of the information in the assessment and authorise the assessment outcome if they agree with the social worker's recommendations.

Your social worker will explain the outcome of the assessment to you and what will happen next, they will also give you a copy of the assessment.

The assessment usually takes about 45 working days.



The outcome of the assessment will be one of the following:

No further action - The social worker has assessed the child as safe and well and doesn't feel any further action is required, their involvement will end at this point.

Refer to Early Help – Social worker involvement will end but with your agreement, if we feel you still need some help to prevent the worries getting any bigger, a referral will be made to our Early Help service who will provide a lower level of support to try and prevent any social worker involvement in the future.

Child in Need – The social worker has assessed your child as a Child in Need, the next steps will be to develop a Child in Need Plan with you and your network.

Child Protection – If, during the course of the assessment, there are any worries about significant harm to a child, we will still work with you to agree a plan that keeps your child safe, and we may hold an Initial Child Protection Conference. This will involve other agencies so that all the professionals involved with your family have a shared understanding of the worries and are all monitoring the plan to make sure your child is safe.

What will you do with my records?

Throughout the assessment we will collect and record information about you and your family. We will store and process this information in line with the requirements set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

Children's Services are allowed to share this information with other agencies but ONLY for very specific reasons, for example, to protect a child from the risk of significant harm or to prevent a crime. For more information about how we process your data please see the Children's Social Work Privacy Notice.

At the end of the assessment process, you will receive a paper copy of your assessment. You can also request to see the information that we hold on you and your children at any time.

How can I share my feedback

We value your feedback about your involvement with Children's Services and will invite you to complete a survey at the end of the assessment process.

Should you wish to make a compliment, comment or complaint about the service you received you can do so at any time by emailing PeopleServicesComplaints@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk.



What happens during the Children and Families Assessment?

During the assessment we will collect information to help answer the following key questions:

- What are we worried about?
- What's working well?
- What needs to happen to address the worries?

This part of the guide explains what is involved in the assessment process and explains all the things that we will consider.

Involving you, your child and your network

At the beginning of the assessment process we will ask you to tell us about the important people in your family's life such as:

- The people who are most important in your child's life and
- the people that help and support you.

With your consent, we will work with you to identify a network of all the important people to support you and your family. We will call this a support or safety network.

Your network can include your extended family, friends and neighbours. It's really important that you have a network, they will be involved in the plan that we all work together to create to make sure your child or children are safe.

At the beginning of the assessment process we will arrange a meeting with you and your family network. Network meetings will need to take place regularly throughout the assessment process.

The wishes and feelings of your child or children

We want the wishes and feelings of your child or children to be central to the assessment. It's really important that your social worker sees and speaks with your child, and they will need to spend time with them alone. The social worker will do this in a caring and friendly way and will communicate with your child in a way which is appropriate to their age and needs.

To help your child explain anything they are worried about, who and what makes them feel safe and well cared for and what they want their future to look like for them not to have a worry (if they have any). The social worker will use different approaches and activities to help them open up and talk about how they feel. This might include encouraging them to draw pictures and write things down.

The worries, good things and wishes that your child shares will form part of the assessment; so their thoughts and feelings can inform what happens next.



What are we worried about?

Your social worker will ask lots of questions to understand what has happened to make children's services worried and, most importantly, the impact this has had on your child or children.

They will ask questions to understand when the worries started, the worst thing that has happened, how often this has happened and the last time this happened.

To understand the extent of the worries the social worker will ask, you, your child and people in your network about this. They will also speak to other professionals to find out if they have any worries.

When we talk to people about their worries, we will always make a distinction between what people have seen and heard to make them worried and their opinion.

We will also consider anything which is happening in you or your child's life which isn't a worry in itself but is making the worries more difficult to deal with. This is known as a **'complicating factor'**, for example, if someone in the household has a long term illness.

When your social worker has collected the information that they need about the worries, they will develop a Danger Statement and share this with you and your network.

Danger Statement

The Danger Statement is part of the assessment, it summarises the information collected by the social worker to explain who is worried, what has happened to make them have a worry, what is likely to happen if nothing changes and the potential impact this will have on your child.

If there are lots of things happening that the social worker is worried about there might be up to four separate danger statements. The danger statement(s) will be shared with you, your network and any other professionals so that everyone understands what we are worried about.

What's working well?

Your social worker will ask you, your child, your network and other professionals lots of questions to understand the best ways everyone has been trying to get the worries sorted out. They will be particularly interested in:

Existing Strengths – Who has been doing what to try and get the worries sorted out?

Existing Safety – Who has done what to keep the child safe, particularly at times when the things we are worried about have been happening.

All of the what's working well information will help you, your network and your social worker to agree 'what needs to happen' we can use the existing strengths and safety as the basis for this.



What needs to happen?

When your social worker has considered the worries and what's working well they will write a safety goal and agree this with you and your network.

Safety Goal

The Safety Goal explains what the day to day life of the child would need to look like for everyone, including your child, not to have a worry and feel confident that your child is safe. The safety goals must be met in order for the case to be closed.

There will be a safety goal linked to every danger statement, there could be up to four safety goals that you are working towards.

There needs to be a safety plan in place for each Danger Statement and Safety Goal which shows us how you and your network are keeping the child safe from the dangers and reaching the goals set. The plan is explained further on the next page of this guide.

Safety Scale Questions

Throughout the assessment lots of meetings will take place, involving you, your child and your network, as well as your social worker and professionals from other agencies. Safety scale questions are used at meetings to help everyone involved explain how well they feel the safety plan is working to keep your child safe and to explain what they would need to see happening in order to increase their rating. Everyone at the meeting will be asked to answer the scaling question, including you and your child if they are old enough to contribute to this process.

The safety scale question will be adapted to reflect your family's individual circumstances but will look something like this:

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is 'the child is safe and the social worker no longer needs to be involved' and 0 is 'the child is not safe and is certain to get harmed' how worried are you about the child?

Scaling questions help generate conversations about what needs to happen, it also helps everyone to see if things are getting better.



What is a Plan?

At the end of the Children and Families Assessment a decision will be made as to whether your child requires support from a social worker, in most cases it will be necessary to develop a plan to achieve the Safety Goals identified during the assessment.

The social worker will work with you, your child(ren) and your family network to develop a plan that works for you and your family.

There are a number of different parts to the plan:

Bottom Lines

If there are any bottom lines your social worker will explain this to you at an early stage. These are the most important things that must happen for the social worker and other professionals to be satisfied that your child is safe and protected from harm in their current situation.

If you don't stick to the bottom lines, the social worker will need to review the situation, this could result in a Child in Need case being escalated to Child Protection, requiring a higher level of social worker intervention. For Child Protection cases this could result in matters being put before the court.

Timeline

The timeline sets out how and when we will work with you towards the safety goal. Most of the tasks in the timeline will be for you and your network but there will also be tasks for the professionals who are involved with your family, including the social worker. Every timeline will include the following stages:

- **Preparation Phase** – The work the social worker will do to prepare for safety planning work to start.
- **Safety Planning Phase** – Helping you to build a network and create a safety plan that keeps you and your child safe.
- **Monitoring Phase** – Explains how everyone, including your network, will check that the plan is working, and for how long, so that we can be sure that this will continue to work when children's services are no longer involved with your family.

Who is involved in the plan

This part of the plan sets out all the regular tasks that members of the support network will do to help support the children. For example, it might specify that Mum's sister will visit three times a week to check things are okay or that Granny will phone everyday.



Rules of the plan

It's really important that you help to create the safety plan because we know that this is far more likely to work for you when we are no longer around.

The rules of the plan will show everyone who will do what to keep your child safe if ever the problems happen again.

In some cases this will mean that the rules of the plan need to stay in place until the child is 18.

How will my plan be reviewed?

Lots of meetings will take place with you, your child, network, social worker and other professionals to develop your plan and check on progress. Your social worker will explain how often these meetings will need to take place.

If you have any questions about your plan, or how it will be reviewed, please contact your social worker.



