



Practitioner Guide for Undertaking Child and Family Assessments

Children's Social Care

Revised: 01.08.2024

Policy Governance

Title	Undertaking Child and Family Assessments
Purpose/scope	The purpose of updating a C & F Assessment is to consider changing needs or circumstances for a specific child/young person
Subject key words	When to update a C&F Assessment
Council Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and support our vulnerable children and Adults • Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and address health inequalities
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Date Established	01 August 2024
Date of Next Review	01 August 2025
Service Improvement & Efficiency Validation	Laura Moore, Service Delivery Manager – Service Improvement and Efficiency
Legal Sign Off	Not Applicable
Finance Sign Off	Not Applicable
Approver	Louise Spragg Principal Social Worker

Introduction

Child and Family Assessments are key to understanding the needs of children and families. The maximum timescale for an assessment to conclude is **45 working days**. Where information is absent or lacking that prevents this from taking place, the Manager and the Social Worker should clearly state the reasons for exceeding the timescale.

Wherever possible, a C&F assessment should be completed within this timeframe. The Manager should review the progress of the assessment at 25 days, and add a management decision providing a rationale for any extension beyond the timescale.

C&F assessments gather information from professionals, children, parents and members of the relational network to triangulate a wide range of information. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of the child/children's needs and family circumstances including history and impact on family dynamics and strengths and areas of need. The Social Worker these uses this to analyse the impact on the child/children, to capture their lived experience and devise a plan alongside their parent or carer.

Good quality assessments will evidence that they:

- Address the presenting need whilst linking back to the past/historical history if relevant.
- Are child-centred and capture the lived experience of the child - including triangulation of information from observations.
- Are rooted in child development.
- Are ecological in their approach to understanding the context of the child in terms of their community, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, ability and any other individual needs they may have.
- Consider the strengths of the young person and their parent/carers as well as identifying areas of vulnerability and need.
- Take account of the parent/carers own lived experience and the impact this may have on them as an individual and on their capacity to meet and understand the child/children's needs.
- Separate fact from opinion.
- Focus on analysis and impact of the current circumstances on the child/children.
- Evidence how conclusions were reached, the options considered and discounted, and reasons why.
- Evidence a critical analysis of the child/children's circumstances which incorporates facts, evidence, observations and child/children/parent/carers voice and their perspectives.
- Provide clear recommendations including creating plans, identifying services and how impact will be measured.

(The assessment framework DOH 2000) All Social Work Assessments should cover the three domains as highlighted in the Assessment Framework



Social Workers need to evidence in the assessment that they have:

- Sought informed consent for the assessment by the parent/carer.
- Understood the purpose of the assessment and what it will cover.
- Considered the needs of each child.
- Seen the child alone and observed their interaction with their care givers.
- Ensured observations include the presentation of the child and body language.
- Considered whether the child is of an age or stage to contribute evidence of their wishes, feelings and influence.
- Explored the relational network and who is important to the child/children - who visits the home and who cares for the child/children?
- Spoken to people who are significant to the child/children and those who are involved in their life/care arrangements wherever it is possible and safe to do so.
- Recorded the perspective of the parent/carer.
- Understood areas of need and the impact/likely impact on the child.
- Any areas of strength.
- Any support that can be provided to mitigate identified needs.
- Identified any themes and patterns within the family.
- Liaised with other professionals working alongside the family and included their information.
- Provided clear recommendations including clear plans, identification of services and outlined how impact will be measured.
- Ensured that the parent with parental responsibility has a copy of the assessment if appropriate - if there are any safety concerns or reasons why this cannot be provided, should be documented on the child/children's record.
- Completed the assessment within timescales.

Working alongside male care givers/partners

It is important that all assessments fully consider the significant role of male care givers, partners and wider family members - even if the parents are not residing together. Where possible, they should be involved in the assessment. If there are any safety concerns regarding involving the male care giver/partner, this needs to be documented on the child/children's record.

Management oversight

The manager needs to evidence their oversight of the assessment and include an analysis and judgement of whether they endorse the assessment.

Updating Assessments

The purpose of updating a C&F Assessment is to consider changing need related to a specific child or young person. The updated assessment will consider whether there are changes that have a negative or positive impact in respect of the needs of the child/children. The allocated social worker and their Line Manager must review where changes are apparent. IRO's should offer guidance/challenge as appropriate, when changes merit a review of the assessment.

C&F Assessments should be updated at the following points: -

1. A S47 enquiry is initiated as outlined in Working Together - this process should always run in parallel.
2. For Children in Need or subject to Supervision Orders, assessment should be reviewed:
 - a. Every 12 months, or;
 - b. When there are clear indications of significant change;
 - c. For children being supported by support plans in the children with disabilities team, consideration should be given to updating the C&F when reviewing the support plan or where there is significant change to the child/children's circumstances;
 - d. If child/children are being supported via the Family Safeguarding model and has an open workbook, the parenting programme will be completed in place of a C&F.
3. In situations where a decision is made for a child to continue a Child Protection Plan post second review conference, a C&F should be undertaken before the next review conference. If a child/children are being supported via the Family Safeguarding Model and has an open Workbook, the parenting programme can be completed in place of a C&F Assessment (both are not required):-
4. For Children in Care, assessments should be reviewed where there are significant changes e.g. a child exiting care, a child moving placement or changes to the care plan e.g. changes in the adults in the household, transition times of starting school, moving to secondary school or college.

- It should include a review of their relationship/family time with their relational network and or a review of their parent/relational networks circumstances and whether a return to their care can take place.
- If none of these, then every 12 months prior to the subsequent LAC Review. For young people 16 and over where a pathway plan part 1 has been triggered, please see below.
- A child/young person accommodated under S31, where the plan is to revoke the Care Order.
- A child/young person accommodated under s20 for a short period and then returned home within the period of the active C&F assessment, this assessment would reflect this.
- To inform private law proceedings - section 7/37

C & F Assessments are **not required only** in the following circumstance: -

- Where the core group is recommending de-plan at a review child protection conference. A comprehensive social worker report should be made available prior to the conference, providing clear rationale as to why threshold is no longer met.
- Where case management responsibility has been transferred to the Children in Care Service following recent court proceedings where there will be a comprehensive assessment of the child's needs at that point. If this is the situation, a C&F should be undertaken within the following 12 months or earlier if there is a significant event or change in the Care Plan.
- When a Pathway Plan is triggered, the Pathway Plan Part 1, will form the assessment for the young person and a C&F need not be undertaken. The Pathway Plan Part 1 should be updated six monthly to reflect any changes and should have a focus on independence skills going forward.
- When a young person reaches 18 (Care Leaver).