

The Assessment Procedure

The assessor records basic information about the child, the agencies which are currently working with the child's family and the current family and home situation, including details about the child's principal carers. Other key information has to be recorded: Is there chronic illness or physical disability? significant medical history? mental health problems? relationships with peers? language and communication abilities and needs? self care and independence? self esteem? learning abilities, needs and aspirations?

Part of the assessment is designed to gauge the family's ability or capacity to meet the child's needs: ensuring basic care, health and safety; providing a warm, supportive and stable environment; and fostering learning and positive behaviour. There is a need for assessment of the extent that wider family and environmental factors impact upon the child's health needs: family history, cohesiveness and functioning; housing and employment; support for the family from the wider family and friends and the community. This is not a complete list but a guide to the sort of questions that must be asked.

Now the assessor has to record conclusions, solutions and actions. They should work with the child and/or a parent or carer, and take account of their ideas, solutions and goals. They have to make plain what needs to change. The assessment tool concludes with a summary of actions to be undertaken to address concerns or unmet needs. The child's and parents' views also have to be recorded faithfully.

A fundamental principle of the Common Assessment Framework is involvement and empowerment of the child and the parents in the needs assessment. It is important to share the form with these people and make sure that they understand what it entails. Moreover, the assessment has to be presented as a way of identifying where families need help rather than finding out in which ways they have failed. Filling out the form calls for partnership with parents and carers and, ideally, completion of the assessment in the child's home. The aim is to reach a shared understanding of what is happening and the impact on the child. The assessment tool also provides opportunities for the parents to express their views, including any dissent with the conclusions made by the assessor at the end of each assessment section.

When the assessment is completed, the assessor has five options for further action:

1. No further action required.
2. Identified needs to be met by the assessor's own agency.
3. Referral to Social Services.
4. Referral to agencies other than Social Services.
5. Consider organising a review meeting and inviting relevant professionals as well as the carers to formulate a multi-agency plan.

If an assessor forms a judgement at any point in the process that there is a child protection issue, they must immediately refer the case to the Social Services.

If there is no child protection issue but there are complex and sustained needs that require a coordinated multi-agency response, the assessor, or the assessor's agency, should arrange a review meeting. The parents must agree with this. The meeting should be minuted and should result in a plan of action detailing what is expected from each of the contributing agencies. Preparation for this meeting or action afterwards may call for additional specialist assessments but the services conducting these should not have to ask the questions already covered by the common assessment process because this information should be available to them.