

## 3.2 Single Assessment

### SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

Assessments must be based on good analysis, timeliness and transparency and proportionate to the needs of the child and their family.

Each child who has been referred into Hertfordshire children's social care should have an individual assessment to identify their needs and to understand the impact of any parental behaviour on them as an individual. Hertfordshire children's social care have to give due regard to a child's age and understanding when determining what (if any) services to provide under **Section 17 of the Children Act 1989**, and before making decisions about action to be taken to protect individual children under **Section 47 of the Children Act 1989**.

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#### Further Information

### 1. Focus on the Child

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Children should to be seen and listened to and included throughout the assessment process. Their ways of communicating should be understood in the context of their family and community as well as their behaviour and developmental stage. It is important that the impact of what is happening to a child is clearly identified and that information is gathered, recorded and checked systematically, and discussed with the child and their parents/carers where appropriate.

Any services provided following assessment should be based on a clear analysis of the child's needs, and the changes that are required to improve the outcomes for the child.

Children should be actively involved in all parts of the process based upon their age, developmental stage and identity. Direct work with the child and family should include observations of the interactions between the child and the parents/care-givers.

All agencies involved with the child, the parents and the wider family have a duty to collaborate and share information to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

See [Good Practice Supporting the Voice of the Child Procedure](#).

## **2.Planning**

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All assessments should be planned and coordinated by a social worker and the purpose of the assessment should be transparent, understood and agreed by all participants.

Referrals may include siblings or a single child within a sibling group. Where the initial focus for a referral is on one child, other children in the household or family should be equally considered, and the individual circumstances of each assessed and evaluated separately.

Planning should identify the different elements of the assessment including who should be involved.

Questions to be considered in planning assessments include:

- Who will undertake the assessment and what resources will be needed?
- Who in the family will be included and how will they be involved (including absent or wider family and others significant to the child)?
- In what grouping will the child and family members be seen and in what order and where?
- What services (if any) are to be provided during the assessment?
- 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? Are there any tools / questionnaires available?
- 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?
- What will be the timescales?
- How will the information be recorded?
- How will it be analysed and who will be involved?
- When will the outcomes be discussed and service planning take place.

The assessment process can be summarised as follows:

- Gathering relevant information;
- Analysing the information and reaching professional judgments;
- Making decisions and planning interventions in partnership with families;
- Intervening, service delivery and/or further assessment;
- Evaluating and reviewing progress.

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

### **3. Developing a Clear Analysis**

Research has demonstrated that taking a systematic approach to assessments using a conceptual model is the best way to deliver a comprehensive analysis. A good assessment is one which investigates the three domains; set out in the **Assessment Framework Triangle**.

#### **Environmental Factors**

Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and but increasingly also from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

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.

An assessment should establish:

- The nature of the concern and the impact this has had on the child;
- An analysis of their needs and/or the nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child;
- How and why the concerns have arisen;
- What the child's and the family's needs appear to be and whether the child is a Child in Need;
- Whether the concern involves abuse or Neglect and to what extent;
- The impact and influence of wider family and any other adults living in the household has on this, as well as community and environmental circumstances;
- Whether there is any need for any urgent action to protect the child, or any other children in the household or wider community;
- Whether there are any factors that may indicate that the child is being or has been criminally or sexually exploited or trafficked;
- Any factors that may indicate that the child is or has been trafficked, or is a victim of compulsory labour, servitude and slavery;
- Any factors that may indicate that the child has been exposed to some form of radicalisation or extremism.

Note: if there is a concern with regards to exploitation or trafficking, a referral into the [National Referral Mechanism](#) should be made.

The assessment will involve drawing together and analysing available information from a range of sources, including existing records, and involving and obtaining relevant information from professionals in relevant agencies and others in contact with the child and family. Where an Early Help Assessment has already been completed this information should be used to inform the assessment. The child and family's history should be understood.

Where a child is involved in other assessment processes, it is important that these are coordinated so that the child does not become lost between the different agencies involved and their different procedures. All plans for the child developed by the various agencies and individual professionals should be joined up so that the child and family experience a single assessment and planning process, which shares a focus on the outcomes for the child.

The social worker should analyse all the information gathered from the enquiry stage of the assessment to decide the nature and level of the child's needs and the level of risk, if any, they may be facing. Social workers should have access to high quality supervision from a Practice Supervisor who will help challenge the social worker's assumptions as part of this process. Critical reflection through supervision should strengthen the analysis in each assessment. An informed decision should be taken on the nature of any action required and which services should be provided. Social workers, their managers and other professionals should be mindful of the requirement to understand the level of need and risk in a family from the child's perspective and ensure action or commission services which will have maximum positive impact on the child's life. Where there is a conflict of interest, decisions should be made in the child's best interests, be rooted in child development, be age-appropriate, and be informed by evidence.

When new information comes to light or circumstances change the child's needs, any previous conclusions should be updated and critically reviewed to ensure that the child is not overlooked as noted in many lessons from Serious Case and Practice Reviews.

## **4. Contribution of the Child and Family**

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### **The Child**

The child should participate and contribute directly to the assessment process based upon their age, understanding and identity. They should be seen alone and if this is not possible or in their best interest, the reason should be recorded. The social worker should work directly with the child in order to understand their views and wishes, including the way in which they behave both with their care givers and in other settings. The agreed local assessment framework should make a range of age appropriate tools available to professionals to assist them in this work.

The pace of the assessment needs to acknowledge the pace at which the child can contribute. However, this should not be a reason for delay in taking protective action. It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child in their family and community context when planning appropriate services.

Every assessment should be child centred. Where there is a conflict between the needs of the child and their parents/carers, decisions should be made in the child's best interests. The parents should be involved at the earliest opportunity unless to do so would prejudice the safety of the child.

## **The Parents/Carers**

The parents' involvement in the assessment will be central to its success. At the outset they need to understand how they can contribute to the process, what needs to change in order to improve the outcomes for the child and how they (with support) can achieve this. The assessment process must be open and transparent with the parents. However, the process should also challenge parents' statements and behaviour where it is evidenced that there are inconsistencies, questions or obstacles to progress. All parents or care givers should be involved equally in the assessment and should be supported to participate whilst the welfare of the child must not be overshadowed by parental needs. There may be exceptions to the involvement of parents or care givers in cases of Sexual Abuse or domestic violence and abuse for example, where the plan for the assessment must consider the safety of an adult as well as that of the child.

## **5. Contribution of Agencies Involved with the Child and Family**

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All agencies and professionals involved with the child, and the family, have a responsibility to contribute to the assessment process. This might take the form of providing information in a timely manner and direct or joint work. Differences of opinion between professionals should be resolved speedily but where this is not possible, the local arrangements for resolving professional disagreements should be implemented. See [Escalation of Concerns and Professional Disagreements about Decisions, including Convening an ICPC](#)

It is possible that professionals have different experiences of the child and family and understanding these differences will actively contribute to the understanding of the child / family.

The professionals should be involved from the outset and through the agreed, regular process of review.

The social worker's supervisor will have a key role in supporting the practitioner to ensure all relevant agencies are involved.

Agencies providing services to adults, who are parents, carers or who have regular contact with children must consider the impact on the child of the particular needs of the adult in question.

## 6.Actions and Outcomes

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Every assessment should be focused on outcomes, deciding which services and support to provide in partnership with the family to deliver improved welfare for the child and reflect the child's best interests. In the course of the assessment the social worker and their line manager 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 on by the social worker and their line 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.

The outcomes may be as follows:

- No further action;
- Additional support which can be provided through universal services and single service provision or the early help process;
- 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;
- Specialist assessment for a more in-depth understanding of the child's needs and circumstances;
- Undertaking a Strategy Discussion/Meeting, a Section 47 child protection enquiry;
- Emergency action to protect a child.

The outcome 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 or Police investigation;
- 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.

The maximum time frame for the assessment to conclude, such that it is possible to reach a decision on next steps, should be no longer than 5 working days from the point of referral. If, in discussion with a child and their family and other professionals, an assessment exceeds 5 working days the social worker and professionals involved should record the reasons for exceeding the time limit.

## **7. Regular Review**

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The assessment case direction must set out timescales for the actions to be met and stages of the assessment to progress, which should include regular points to review the assessment in supervision. Where delays or obstacles occur these must be acted on and the case direction must be reviewed if any circumstances change for the child.

The social worker's line manager must review the assessment progress regularly with the social worker and ensure that actions such as those below have been met:

- There has been direct communication with the child alone and their views and wishes have been recorded and taken into account when providing services;
- All the children in the household have been seen and their needs considered;
- The child's home address has been visited and the child's bedroom has been seen;
- The parents have been seen and their views and wishes have been recorded and taken into account;
- The analysis and evaluation has been completed;
- The assessment provides clear evidence for decisions on what types of services are needed to provide good outcomes for the child and family.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children' reminds all professionals of the importance of reviewing progress and that:

*“a high quality assessment is one in which evidence is built and revised throughout the process and takes account of family history and the child's experience of cumulative abuse. A social worker may arrive at a judgement early in the case but this may need to be revised as the case progresses and further information comes to light. It is a characteristic of skilled practice that social workers revisit their assumptions in the light of new evidence and take action to revise their decisions in the best interests of the individual child.”*

## **8. Recording**

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Recording by all professionals should include information on the child's development so that progress can be monitored to ensure their outcomes are improving. This is particularly significant in circumstances where neglect is an issue.

Records should be kept of the progress of the assessment on the individual child's record and in their Chronology to monitor any patterns of concerns.

Assessment progress and action points arising from plans and meetings should be circulated to the participants including the child, if appropriate, and the parents.

The recording should be such that a child, requesting to access their records, could easily understand the process taking place and the reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Supervision records should reflect the reasoning for decisions and actions taken.

## **9. Principles for a Good Assessment**

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The assessment triangle in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 provides a model, which should be used to examine how the different aspects of the child's life and context interact and impact on the child. It notes that it is important that:

- Information is gathered and recorded systematically;
- Information is checked and discussed with the child and their parents/carers where appropriate;
- Differences in views about information are recorded; and
- The impact of what is happening to the child is clearly identified.

## Assessment Framework Triangle



### 10. Assessment of Risk Outside the Home

As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online.

These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; teenage relationship abuse (including controlling or coercive behaviour); sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

Assessments of children in such cases should consider whether wider environmental factors are undermining effective intervention being undertaken to reduce risk with the child and family. Parents and carers have little influence over the contexts in which the abuse takes place and the young person's experiences of this extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Interventions should focus on addressing the wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority Children's Social Care. Effective information sharing and intelligence gathering is crucial in developing effective coordinated multi-agency responses.

## **Further Information**

**The International Child Abduction and Contact Unit** - includes the form for local authority staff to ask the authorities in another country for information or assistance in a child protection case.

**Modern Slavery (GOV.UK)** - details about the government's work to end modern slavery, including details about how to refer victims into the national referral mechanism (NRM).

**Working with foreign authorities: child protection cases and care orders**  
**Departmental advice for local authorities, social workers, service managers and children's services lawyers (GOV.UK)** - guidance on child protection cases and care orders where the child has links to a foreign country.

**Cross-border child protection cases: the 1996 Hague Convention (GOV.UK)** - guidance for local authorities dealing with international child protection cases.