
Social Work Single Assessment in Halton

Halton Children's Services use a single assessment as a way of recording the needs of the child. The framework ensures a common method is used to understand the needs that are presenting and the impact. This page sets out the single assessment process.

Introduction

Introduced in September 2013, the single assessment replaced initial and core assessments. The single assessment provides an opportunity for social workers to:

- Focus on the specific needs of the child / young person and their parents / carers; and
- Build appropriate time within the assessment for reflection and direct work with the child/young person to ensure a robust and analytical assessment.

Assessment is not a stand alone piece of work, rather it is a continuous process, which places the child's needs, welfare and wishes at its centre. An assessment is therefore based on what is known from the past and what is going on currently and should include the views of the child, their carers and anyone who comes into contact with the child including immediate and extended family members, as well as known professionals such as midwives, health visitors, GPs, early support workers, teachers, Police, housing officers, probation officers and voluntary workers i.e. NSPCC/Barnardos.

Understanding families and the experiences of children, how they live, where they sleep, the care they receive can be very complex as signs of low level abuse and neglect may be misleading. Care givers may purposefully/intentionally mislead professionals in an attempt to hide abuse (disguised compliance).

Purpose of social work assessments

The purpose of an assessment is to gather information and evidence about a child and their family and to identify whether a child has unmet needs. An assessment is not an end in itself but the means of informing the delivery of effective services for children and families.

An assessment must be based on a sound knowledge of child development and be seen in the context of the child's family and their environment. The social worker leads the assessment which must be informed by the child and their family members and by other professionals who know them, including teachers, health visitors and the police.

No system can fully eliminate risk. Understanding risk, involves judgement and balance. To manage risks, social workers and other professionals must make decisions with the best interests of the child in mind and within a timescale which has the child's safety as its paramount concern.

A good assessment will analyse not only the developmental needs of the child but also the nature and protective factors in the child's life. The assessment will inform decision making.

When statutory assessments are required

A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health and development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services, or children who are disabled. In these cases, assessments by a social worker are carried out under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The purpose of these assessments is to gather evidence about a child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to meet these needs within the context of their wider family and community. This information must be used to inform decisions about the help needed by the child.

If the social worker believes that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, then the local authority under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is required to make enquires to decide what action must be taken, with partners, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.

Following an application under section 31A, where a child is the subject of a care order, the local authority, as a corporate parent, must assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services which will be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

Where a child is accommodated under section 20, the local authority has a statutory responsibility to assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services to be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

Whatever legislation the child is assessed under, the purpose of the assessment is always to understand the needs, nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child; and to provide help and support to address those needs and make the child safe.

Where a child becomes looked after, the assessment will be the baseline for work with the family while the child is looked after. Any needs which have been identified must be addressed before decisions are made about the child's return home. An assessment by a social worker is required before the child returns home under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review England Regulations 2010. This will provide evidence of whether the necessary changes and improvements have been made to ensure the child's safety when they return home.

The framework for social work assessment

Social work assessments must:

- Always involve speaking to children alone, taking into account age and ability and with the consent of parents or care giver;
 - Take into account the child's wishes and feelings;
 - Analyse the impact and influence of wider family, community and environmental circumstances; take a systematic approach, drawing on the most up to date research, to support professionals to assess whether a child is in need and if the child is suffering harm. This evidence will also
-

-
- inform decisions on what types of help should be offered to the child and family;
- Provide clarity on the contributions of all agencies and professionals that will be undertaking assessments and providing services;
 - Be informed by other specialist assessments such as the assessment for children with special educational needs and disabled children;
 - Ensure that any specialist assessments are coordinated so that the child and family experience a single assessment and planning process;
 - Regard the assessment as an on-going process which should be built upon in order to inform future plans such as the care plan for a child who is looked after and, where appropriate, a care plan prepared for the purposes of family court proceedings;
 - Seek to ensure that each child and family understand the type of help offered and their own responsibilities for being involved in the assessment and the help being provided – so as to improve the child’s outcomes;
 - Be evidence based and clearly recorded within the child’s social care record. Recording should include information on the child’s development so that progress can be monitored against baseline information to ensure their outcomes are improving. This will reduce the need for repeat assessments during care proceedings, which can be a major source of delay;
 - Be borne of the principle that assessment should be followed by a plan>do>review approach to our intervention, and social workers must continually review the impact of the resulting plan in terms of improving the child’s outcomes;
 - Analyse the information gathered systematically and understand the child’s development needs including whether they are suffering or likely to suffer harm;
 - Take into account the risk and protective factors;
 - Take into account the capacity of parent/caregivers to respond to the needs of children in their care including the ability to protect them from harm.

Timely, transparent and proportionate to need

How quickly an assessment is carried out after a child has been referred into a social work team from the Contact and Referral Team will be determined by the needs of the child and the level of harm being suffered or by the likelihood of harm. This will require a decision by a Principal/Practice Manager on every case recorded on the Single Assessment Template. In Halton the following timescales have been set as “check points” in the children’s social work single assessment:

The child must be seen by a qualified social worker as soon as possible following a referral. This will be determined by a principle/practice manager, and will be recorded in the allocation instructions given to the social worker, this decision will also be recorded on the child’s social care record

Section 47 cases

In all section 47 cases children should be seen **within 24 hours**

Other cases

For all other cases children should be seen within **5 working days**

No social work assessment will take more than 45 days to complete.

For cases where child protection concerns arise, an initial strategy discussion involving social care, the police and health may need to happen, in such scenarios, other partners may also need to be involved.
