



Brothers and Sisters 'Together or Apart' Assessment Timeframes and Approaches

1. Family Assessment (45 working days)
2. 'Together or Apart' Assessment during Pre-Proceedings (4-6 weeks)
3. 'Together or Apart' Assessment during Care Proceedings (6-8 weeks)

*Care Proceedings may require up to 12 weeks for large or complex sibling groups. Any extended timeframes should be planned for from the onset and discussed within pre-proceedings)

FAMILY ASSESSMENT (45 Working DAYS)	
Brother and Sister Assessment Approach within the Family Assessment	The Family Assessment format could be completed where an immediate decision is required for an emergency placement plan or within 2 to 4 weeks as part of the Family Assessment where the child(ren) are living at home. This Family Assessment stage is usually the first point of contact that a family has with children's services. The Child Development Domain should gather information on the attachment of each child with their primary care giver before the brother and sister relationship is considered. The quality of the attachment each brother and sister has with their primary care giver will affect a child's relationship with their brother and sisters. This would enable a social worker to gain further insight into the day to day functioning within the home.
Suggested Social Work tasks and activities to consider as part of the assessment	• Read referral and case notes / chronology / history / reports etc. • Carry out a home visit to discuss day to day parenting needs of the children, individually and together. • Have discussions with school / nursery. • Have discussions with health professionals. • Undertake a minimum of two observations of the children together. • Undertake an observation of contact (if applicable).
Examples of tools that can be used	• Discuss day to day parenting needs, this could include: • Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home – parent or carer. • Coram BAAF forms for parents – 2 separate forms to gather information. • Description of each child by parent (e.g. ask the parent for 3 words to describe a child) • SDQ questionnaire to be completed by parent / carer and the school. • Observation of children's interaction – this to be undertaken in the home or placement. This could include games to observe brother and sisters taking

	turns, sharing and observation of conflict resolution. • Observe child in nursery / school to see free play in a different environment. • Eco Maps, Social atoms, trauma / nurture timeline (chronology). • Brother and Sister Relationship Checklist. • Direct Work with the children.
Things to consider during each stage of the assessment	• Family networks can be complex and fragmented with step-brother or sisters, half brother or sister and full brother or sisters growing up together or living separately. Identify and gather as much information as possible on the different brother or sisters. If children are to be removed then this will assist planning on placements together with non-resident brother or sisters as well as considerations around contact. • Read background information e.g. case recordings, chronologies, photographs, reports, developmental history etc. Consider key events and timing in relation to the developmental stage of the child at that time and the impact this may have had in respect of current functioning and future development. • Gain a good insight into the lived experience of the child. What did it mean to be a child growing up in that birth family environment? Too often words like abuse, neglect etc. are used. The assessor needs to try to capture the actual lived experience. • Likes and dislikes, behaviour, social, emotional and academic development of each child. Do they seek comfort appropriately and allow themselves to be parented? Consider eating and sleeping patterns, self-care skills. Can they play independently, need support and have imaginative play? • Can the children share? Does one brother or sister nurture or try to parent/dominate the others? Is there a child often on the periphery of the group? The amount of conflict and rivalry shown? Degree of warmth and affection between brother or sisters? Is one child excluded or scapegoated? Is there a favoured child? Consider gender differences and roles within this. • What work is needed as part of a family support package on the relationships between the brother or sisters as well as between parents and the children? Do all the children need to be removed? If not, have clear rationale between different care plans and decisions? • Can the brother or sisters' combined needs be met by one family in the short-term? What impact will temporary separation have on each child and their relationship? What future work is needed?

BROTHER AND SISTER ASSESSMENT (4-6 weeks, during Pre-Proceedings)

Brother or Sister Assessment (4 to 6 weeks)	If a family is subject to a 12 week pre-proceeding process then the 6 week mid review stage should discuss the parent/carers progress with the plan. If significant concerns continue with the likelihood being that care proceedings will be issued, then a decision needs to be made whether a 4 to 6 week Brother and Sister assessment needs to be completed within the home environment during the remainder of the pre-proceedings process. This will inform the initial care plan and placement request. It may also be appropriate to take this approach where a brother and sister group is already in care with emerging concerns around the brother and sister relationship and the stability of the placement requires a swift response.
Suggested Social Work tasks and activities to consider as part of the assessment	Social Worker should: • Read referral and case notes / chronology / history reports etc. • Carry out a minimum of three / four observations of children together. • If possible to observe as a brother and sister group and in different parings. • Visit foster carer to discuss day to day parenting needs of children. • Hold discussions / seek views from school / nursery school. • Hold discussions / seek views from health professionals. • Undertake observation of contact. • Meet with: • previous carers (if applicable) • birth parents to ascertain their views
Examples of tools that can be used	• Discuss day to day parenting needs, with parents / carers: • Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home – to be completed with parent or close relative. • coramBAAF forms for parents – 2 separate forms to gather information. • coramBAAF forms for Foster Carers – 4 separate forms to gather information. These could be completed with the foster carer by the Supervising Social Worker. The Social Worker may need to provide a covering letter for external foster carers explaining the importance for completing the forms. • Observation of children's interaction – this to be undertaken in placement and nursery / school. Include games to observe taking turns, sharing, observation of conflict resolution, free play / non directive play. • Meeting with birth parent – explore how the birth parent sees the children; ask them to describe personality and behaviour traits. How they perceive their children's relationship and how the children respond to one another, individual parenting needs of child when in their care. • coramBAAF forms for Health, Education and Contact Workers. • Eco Maps, Social atoms, trauma / nurture timeline (chronology) can be used. • Brother and Sister Relationship Checklist.

	• SDQ questionnaire. • Direct Work with the children. • Family Future resources focussing on attachment and brother and sister relationships.
Things to consider during each stage of the assessment	• Family networks can be complex and fragmented with step-brother and sisters, half brother and sister and full brother and sisters growing up together or living separately. Identify and gather as much information as possible on the different brother and sisters. If children are to be removed then this will assist planning on placements together with non-resident brother and sisters as well as considerations around contact. • Read background information e.g. case recordings, chronologies, photographs, reports etc. Consider key events and timing in relation to the developmental stage of the child at that time and the impact this may have had in respect of current functioning and future development. • Gain a good insight into the lived experience of the child. What did it mean to be a child growing up in that birth family environment? Too often words like abuse, neglect etc. are used. The assessor needs to try to capture the actual lived experience. • Multiple sources of information is needed. Meet with key people who may have information about the family due to previous and current involvement, e.g. Education, Nurseries, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Family Support Workers. What experiences have the family had and what is life like now? • Meet with current carers and also ask them to complete a 'Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home' for each child, as well as the coram BAAF foster carers forms to help gather information. • Meet with previous carers where possible. Ascertain what it is like to parent the children. Likes and dislikes, behaviour, social, emotional and academic development. Do they seek comfort appropriately and allow themselves to be parented? Consider eating and sleeping patterns, self-care skills. Can they play independently, need support and have imaginative play? • Observe the Brother and Sister group together, as well as individually and in different combinations. Structured activities that all children can participate in – board games, decorating gingerbread men, craft activity, listening to a story. • Opportunities for free play, dough, dolls house, puppets, trip to the park etc. sharing lunch. Can they share? Does one brother or sister nurture or try to parent/dominate the others? Is there a child often on the periphery of the group? The amount of conflict and rivalry shown. Degree of warmth and affection between brother and sisters. Are they seeking the attention of the adults/splitting adults? Is one child excluded or scapegoated? Is there a favoured child? Consider gender differences and the roles within this. • Road map to elicit discussion about their moves and to observe how the children manage this discussion together.

	• Observation of contacts, preferably more than one. Do the children seek comfort appropriately and allow themselves to be parented? Does one brother or sister try to dominate the parent(s) attention? Is there a child often on the periphery of the group? Are the children eager to please or uninterested in the parent(s)? • Identify the themes that emerge from the tools used and all the information that has been gathered during the assessment process, consider research and seek advice when making recommendations about the placement of brothers and sisters together or separate. • Can the brothers and sisters' combined needs be met within one family now and in the future? What future time limited work is needed to enable a sustainable placement together? What impact will permanent separation have on each child and how can future contact address/mitigate for this? • Do all the children need to be removed? If not, have clear rationale between different care plans and decisions? • It is very important that the reasons for separating or placing together are clearly recorded and evidenced, and if children's wishes were over-ridden then the reasons for this. • Ensure that you provide yourself with adequate time to discuss your observations with your colleagues. This can be difficult, however, is imperative if observing a larger brother and sister group. Recommendations are needed on all assessments, even if this is time limited. Request additional time if further observation / exploration needs to be undertaken.
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BROTHER AND SISTER ASSESSMENT (6-8 WEEKS during Care Proceedings) * May require up to 12 weeks for large or complex sibling groups. Any extended timeframes should be planned for from the onset and discussed within pre-proceedings *	
Comprehensive Brother or Sister Assessment (8 to 12 weeks)	It is likely this assessment will be required during care proceedings to inform the final care plan. Also, children subject to an adoption referral should have a comprehensive assessment which considers their brother or sister relationship. If being undertaken as part of proceedings, a Letter of Instruction (LOI) will be helpful in order to clearly set out the areas which you feel need to be addressed.
Suggested Social Work tasks and activities to consider as part of the	• Read referral and case notes / history. • Undertake up observations in different pairings and brother or sisters together and also within different settings, for example during 'family time' (contact), home visits, school and social settings. This could be up to a minimum of 6-8 observations depending on the size of the brother or sister

assessment	group. • Different combinations of brother or sisters to be observed. • Carry out direct work with children to explore their understanding of brother or sister relationships. • Take children out of placement. • Visit foster carer to discuss day to day parenting needs of children. • Hold discussion / seek views from school / nursery school. • Hold discussions / seek views from health professionals • Undertake observation of contact with parent(s) • Meet with: • Previous carers (if applicable) • Birth parents (or other significant family members) to ascertain their views; this may need to be supported by an advocate if appropriate.
Examples of tools that can be used	• Eco Maps • Road Map • Structured and unstructured play • Social Atoms • Sand Tray play • Trauma / nurture timelines • Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home • Family Future resources focussing on attachment and brother or sister relationships • Fahlberg's (1994) Child development chart • Questionnaires devised by Beckett (2018) • Brother and Sister Assessment Checklist • Consultation with the Clinical Psychologist within the Adoption Service if this is appropriate for the child(ren). • Consultation with the Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS). • Consultation with the Family Finding Service.
Things to consider during each stage of the assessment	• Read background information e.g. case recordings, chronologies, photographs, reports, developmental history etc. Consider key events and timing in relation to the developmental stage of the child at that time and the impact this may have had in respect of future development. • Gain a good insight into the lived experience of the child. What did it mean to be a child growing up in that birth family environment? Too often words like abuse, neglect etc. are used. The assessor needs to try to capture the actual lived experience. • Multiple sources of information is needed. Meet with key people who may have information about the family due to previous and current involvement, eg. Education, Nurseries, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Family Support Workers. What experiences have they had and what is life like now. • Meet with current carers and also ask them to complete a 'Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home' for each child.

	• Meet with previous carers where possible. Ascertain what it is like to parent the children. Likes and dislikes, behaviour, social, emotional and academic development. Do they seek comfort appropriately and allow themselves to be parented? Consider eating and sleeping patterns, self-care skills. Can they play independently, need support and have imaginative play? • Observe the brother and sister group together, as well as individually and in different combinations. Structured activities that all children can participate in – board games, decorating gingerbread men, craft activity, listening to a story. • Opportunities for free play, dough, dolls house, puppets, trip to the park etc. sharing lunch. Can they share? Does one brother or sister nurture or try to parent/dominate the others? Is there a child often on the periphery of the group? The amount of conflict and rivalry shown. Degree of warmth and affection between brothers and sisters. Are they seeking the attention of the adults/splitting adults? Is one child excluded or scapegoated? Is there a favoured child? Consider gender differences and any impact on their role? • Road map to elicit discussion about their moves and to observe how the children manage this discussion together. • Observation of contacts, preferably more than one. Do the children seek comfort appropriately and allow themselves to be parented? Does one brother or sister try to dominate the parent(s) attention? Is there a child often on the periphery of the group? Are the children eager to please or uninterested in the parent(s)? • Identify the themes that emerge from the tools used and all the information that has been gathered during the assessment process, consider research and seek advice when making recommendations about the placement of brothers and sisters together or separate. • Can the brothers and sisters' combined needs be met within one family now and in the future? What future time-limited work is needed? What impact will permanent separation have on each child and how can future contact address/mitigate for this? • Have clear rationale between different care plans and decisions. • It is very important that the reasons for separating or placing together are clearly recorded and evidenced, and if children's wishes were over-ridden then the reasons for this. • Provide yourself with adequate time to discuss your observations with your colleagues. This can be difficult, however is imperative if observing a larger brother and sister group. Recommendations are needed on all assessments, even if this is time limited. Request additional time if further observation / exploration needs to be undertaken.
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Note: When Using the Brother and Sister Assessment template you will need to delete the blue prompts after you have typed the assessment.