



**NOTES FOR PROFESSIONALS ON THE FDAC
'CHILDREN'S NEEDS MEETING'**

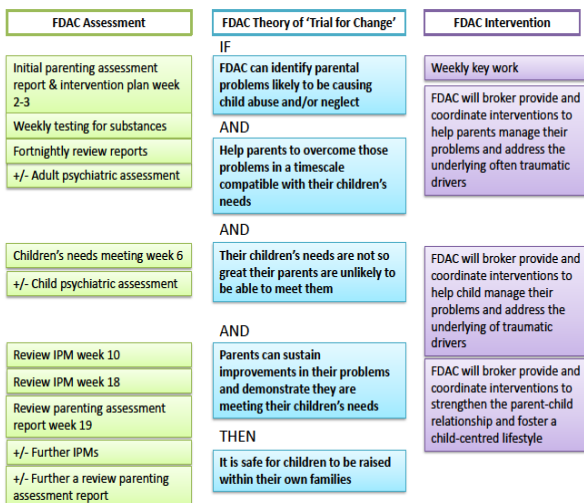
Introduction

Central to the FDAC model is a ‘trial for change’, which tests whether parents can solve their problems and meet their children’s needs in a timescale compatible with their children’s needs. The ‘Children’s Needs Meeting’ is an opportunity to assess the children’s needs and think about their timescales.

A ‘Children’s Need Meeting’ is held for nursery/school age children only:

- The meeting usually takes place sometime during weeks 4 -8 of the proceedings.
- The children’s social worker is asked to set up the meeting, which is often held in the children’s nursery or school.
- Everyone who knows the child is invited including parents, other relatives, foster carers, teachers, therapists, the children’s social worker and the children’s guardian etc
- A child and adolescent psychiatrist/psychologist from FDAC chair the meeting and the meeting will also be attended by the FDAC keyworker, or keyworkers if there are two parents in FDAC.
- It is not a decision-making meeting but a chance to build up a picture of how children are getting on and what their individual needs are if they are part of a sibling group.
- Minutes are taken by the FDAC keyworker (or FDAC administrator) and shared with the parties in a short report.
- There will also be a recommendation as to whether or not the children need to be seen by the child and adolescent psychiatrist/psychologist and a further report prepared.

Figure: How the assessment and treatment process fits FDAC’s ‘theory of change’



All children have 'needs'

Basic needs

- To be kept safe and feeling safe
- To be adequately fed, washed and clothed and to have somewhere comfortable to sleep.
- To have developmentally appropriate routines for eating, hygiene, sleeping, play and education.

Emotional needs

- To give and receive love.
- To receive affection and comfort from a trustworthy adult
- To know what response, they will get from a parent if they are hurt or upset or if they do well.
- To feel understood, lovable and that the world is a reasonably okay place.
- To be able to communicate painful feelings, thoughts and memories in a safe way and to feel listened to by a respected and trustworthy adult.
- To be able to rework and give meaning to previously overwhelming experiences.

Complex needs involving decision-making

- To have developmentally appropriate levels of adult supervision
- To have clear expectations about socially appropriate behaviour, and a calm but firm and consistent approach to discipline
- To have developmentally appropriate levels of control over one's own body, actions and conscience
- To be encouraged to observe, learn and solve problems
- To be encouraged to pursue interests and talents through play, education and other cultural and leisure activities
- To be encouraged to make developmentally appropriate choices about identity, health and education and have access to adequate opportunities and services

Where parents are able to meet their children's needs, children are more likely to grow up healthy and reach their full potential. Where parents are unable to meet their children's needs the children's health and wellbeing may be damaged if they remain in their parents' care.

Damage to children's health and wellbeing means children may develop additional needs. For example children exposed to parental violence can feel helpless, frightened and angry and as a consequence have a greater than usual need to be safe and feel safe, to be supported with expressing painful thoughts and feelings in a safe way, and to be able to process these experiences and understand they are not to blame and to support them with managing the feelings they have and the behaviour which may be seen as a symptom to their experiences.

The Children's Needs Meeting is opportunity to identify whether children have any additional needs and what support they may need to overcome these.

Linking timescales to developmental crossroads

Children come into care proceedings because their parents are failing (or likely to fail) to meet their needs. So the question becomes, how long can these particular children afford to wait for the situation to improve? The answer depends on a combination of the presences of additional needs and where children are in relation to certain developmental crossroads. The developmental crossroads that are particularly important include: early attachment, late attachment, late integration into a substitute family and transition to secondary school.

FDAC aims to have new-born babies permanently placed by their first birthday. This is because of the advantages of 'early attachment' to long-term health and life chances. The sensitive period when children naturally form an attachment is between 6 and 18 months, and 12 months is safely inside that sensitive period. While FDAC will always attempt to keep children with or return children to their parents, where that is not possible, we regard an early attachment with a member of the extended family or with an adoptive parent as the next best option.

Where children pass through the sensitive period (6-18 months) without forming a healthy attachment, they can still form an attachment if they are placed with a good enough carer, but the quality of that attachment is likely to be impaired. If the child reaches the age of 3-4 years without forming a healthy attachment the risk of developing an 'attachment disorder' rises rapidly ('attachment disorders' are characterised by either emotional withdrawal and failing to seek comfort or indiscriminate friendliness with adult strangers). It follows that time is running out for children aged 2-3 years with attachment difficulties or an attachment disorder, and they urgently need to be placed with long-term carers and can't wait for their parents to change to give these children the best opportunity.

While older children can manage short spells in foster care, after a certain age, children find it difficult to put down roots in an unfamiliar substitute family and such placements are much more likely to breakdown. Older children feel a conflict of loyalty and a need to protect their vulnerable parents. This means unless children are strongly motivated to live elsewhere, permanently removing children beyond a certain age is problematic. It is difficult to say when this age is, but it is somewhere around 8-10 years. This means that once children approach 8-10 years the opportunity to successfully integrate into a substitute family begins to fade and so children are less able to wait for their parents to change.

Finally transition to secondary school is a challenging point in children's lives and where possible we would want children to make that move from a secure position with their parent or secure in an alternative family placement. While older children can wait longer for their parents to change than younger children, there is a limit to how long any child can live with the uncertainty of not knowing whether or not she will be returning home. In FDAC we think that limit is 12 months.

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