

Tameside Children's Social Work - Local Assessment Framework



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Preface

This local assessment framework sets out how, in Tameside, we will assess, plan and manage cases when there are concerns about a child, where it is recognised that there is a need for social work assessment and intervention. Social Workers in the four Children's Social Work locality teams and the Children with Disability Team will also use this framework when assessing the needs of children and families in Tameside.

Assessment should be a continuous process, which has the needs of the child at the centre. The assessment completed by a Social Worker will therefore build on information already known as a result of early help to the child and their family.

A consistent message from cases involving harm to children is the importance of identifying problems early and taking rapid action to address them before they get worse. We also know that no single professional can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances.

If children and families are to receive the right help, everyone who comes into contact with them – midwives, health visitors, GPs, early years' professionals, teachers, youth workers, police, voluntary and social workers – has to play a role by identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

Concerns about a child's welfare may arise in many different contexts and the nature of these concerns will vary greatly from child to child. What is important is that support is provided quickly so that a problem does not escalate.

Understanding families and the experiences of children within them can be complex and signs of low level abuse and neglect may be misleading. Professionals working in universal services – health, education, police and early years – have a responsibility to identify the early signs of abuse and neglect, to share that information and work together to provide children with the help they need.



The 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.

The 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 judgment 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.



Statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989

A good assessment will analyse not only the developmental needs of the child but also the nature and level of both the risks and protective factors in the child's life. An assessment must be proportionate to the needs and the nature of any harm faced by the child. The assessment will inform decisions about whether a child is a child in need or is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as defined in section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

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.

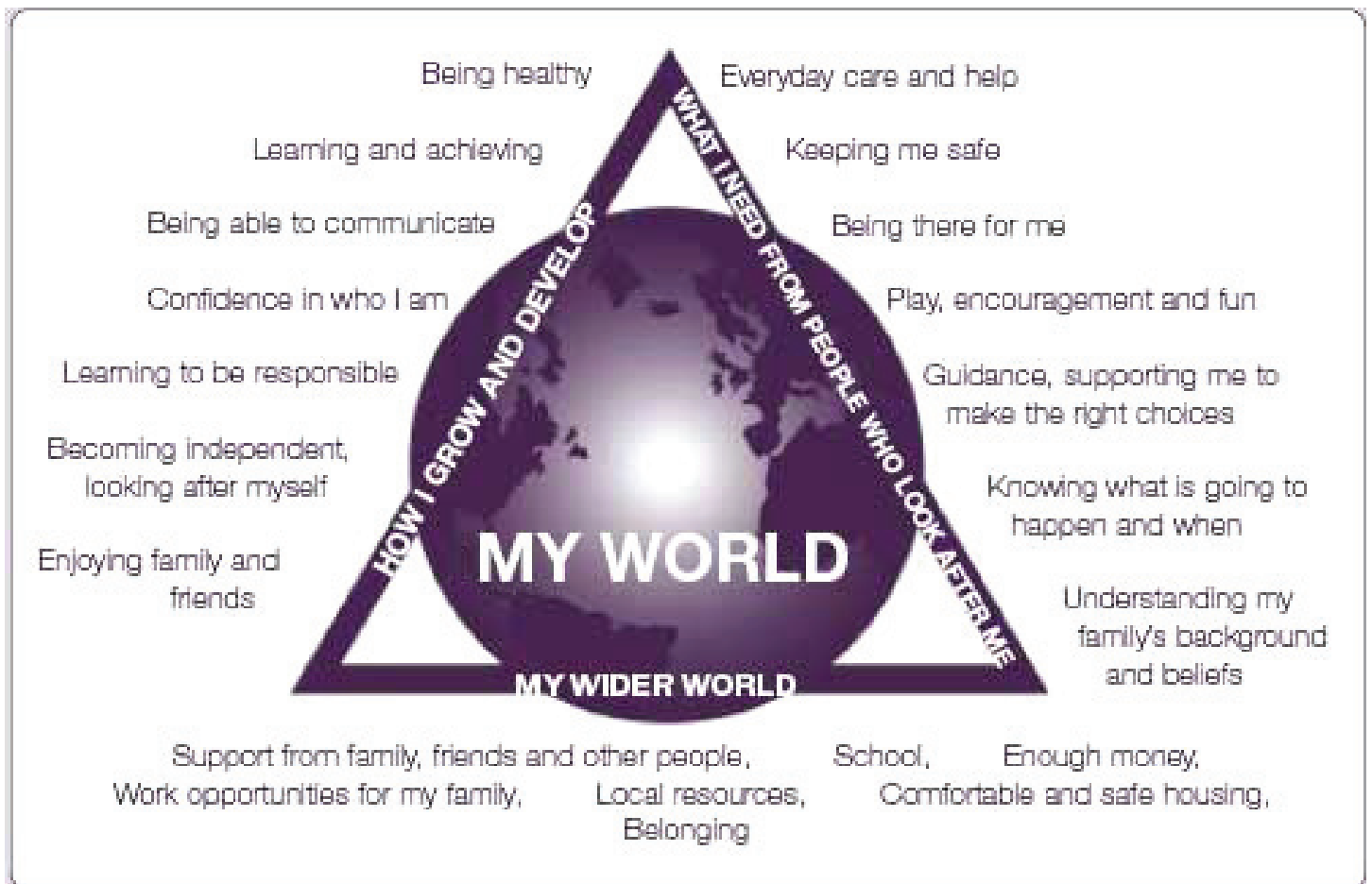
Where a child is accommodated under section 20, the local authority has a statutory responsibility to assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services to be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

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 local framework for social work assessment



Social work assessments must always;

- use the above conceptual framework to gather information;
- analyse the information systematically and understand the child's developmental needs, including whether they are suffering harm;
- analyse parents' or carers' capacity to respond to these needs;
- 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 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.

Assessment - timely, transparent and proportionate to need

How quickly an assessment is carried out after a child's case has been referred into the Children's Multi Agency Referral and Assessment HUB will be determined by the needs of the child and the level of any harm being suffered. This will require judgments to be made by the social worker in discussion with their manager on every case. Some complex cases will need longer to complete but social workers must not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before putting in services to support the child and their family.

In Tameside the following timescales have been set as 'check points' in the children's social work assessment process;

- Within one working day of a referral being received, a local authority social worker and their manager must make a decision about the type of response that is required.
- The child must be seen by a qualified social worker as soon as possible following a referral. Urgent cases will be prioritised without delay with an immediate visit to assess the child's welfare, in all urgent cases this will occur within 24 hours. In other cases professionals involved with the child and family must make a decision on the timing of this meeting, based on their assessment of the child's needs. In all cases this will not exceed more than 10 working days, and for preschool or non-school attenders (including school holiday periods) this will not exceed 4 working days.
- The social work team manager will set a timescale at the outset of the assessment process for its completion. This date will be shared by the social worker with the child/family and relevant partners.
- No social work assessment will take more than 45 working days to complete.
- For cases where child protection concerns arise and assessments are being completed in accordance with S47 of the Children Act 1989 the assessment will always be completed within 10 days to enable the assessment report to be available to an Initial Child Protection Conference which must be held within 15 days of the statutory discussion.
- For Child in Need cases, where it is identified that assessments will take longer than working 10 days to complete, the assessment and understanding of the child's needs will be discussed with the social worker by the manager prior to the 15th working day. There will be a review as part of that discussion of the timescale for completion.
- For Child in Need cases a planning meeting will always be held between the 15th and 45th day.
- Feedback must be given to the referrer on decisions made and action being taken. The child and family must be informed of the action to be taken.
- The child's wishes and feelings must be taken into account when deciding what services to provide.
- Where a case is referred that may constitute a criminal offence, the local authority must discuss it with the police at the earliest opportunity.
- Where there are also allegations of a crime, the police have a duty to carry out a criminal investigation.
- Delay in providing services, or initiating care proceedings when this is required, has a detrimental impact on a child's development. It is vitally important for their development that children have their needs met at the right time throughout their lives.
- The social worker must discuss the child's case with other professionals – teachers, health and early year's staff, police - and agree how quickly meetings should be convened so that children are kept safe and help is provided which meets the needs of them and their family.
- It is the responsibility of the social worker to make clear to children and families how the assessment will be carried out and when they can expect a decision to be made on next steps. The conclusions of any assessment must be shared with the child and their family and parents must always be given a copy of the assessment documentation.

The Social Work Planning and Assessment Model Flowchart

