

North West Region

Social Work Planning and Assessment Model

May 2013

(Ref. Working Together to Safeguard Children, March 2013)

The purpose of assessment

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 carried out by a qualified social worker. 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.

The role of planning

Local frameworks for assessment must ensure the child and family experience a single assessment and planning process. Active planning at the earliest opportunity should identify and put in place services or interventions which will deliver the right help to children and families at the right time. A combined assessment and planning process should develop a robust understanding of the child's journey to date and evidence the impact of existing plans in place at the point of referral. The use of chronologies should inform planning, interventions and the approach to assessment. Early planning will complement and inform a process of robust assessment, but changes in circumstances should prompt a proportionate review of current interventions and not lead to 'open-ended' assessment. Professional judgement and management oversight should identify when reassessment or a change in plan should be triggered. Planning and assessment should deliver an agreed plan, with clear outcomes which can be measured as part of formal review and performance management arrangements.

Assessment - timely, transparent and proportionate to need

How quickly an assessment is carried out after a child's case has been referred into children's social care, 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. Local authorities should set out shared internal review points in their frameworks, such as how soon a child should be visited after a referral. Urgent cases must be prioritised but delay must not be a feature in any case that requires a statutory assessment under the Children Act 1989. 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 years 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.

Risk Assessment and Analysis

It is incumbent on practitioners to analyse the information collected during assessment to identify the factors that may place a child at risk of significant harm. Undertaking this analysis to determine risk is complex. Not all decisions taken in the context of risk can be guaranteed to prevent a hazard from occurring. However planned and informed risk assessment and risk management based on research will better predict outcomes than unevaluated information collection.

Principles & Values

Work with children and families should:

- be child centred - where there is a conflict of interest, decisions must be made in the child's best interests;
- be rooted in child development;
- be focused on outcomes for children;
- be holistic in approach – addressing the child's needs within their family and wider community;
- ensure equality of opportunity;
- build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties;
- be integrated in approach;
- be a continuing process not an event;
- provide and review services;
- be informed by evidence; and
- be transparent and open to challenge.

The Social Work Planning and Assessment Model - Flowchart

