

Understanding Assessments

Information for families

What is an assessment?

If you, or someone else on your behalf, has asked Children's Services to help your family with a difficulty that affects your child or children, we need to know more about your circumstances in order to know if we can help you.

This will involve collecting information, talking it through with you and agreeing what might be done. We call this **an assessment**.

Why is an assessment necessary?

The aim of the assessment is to work with you to find out what help and support you and your family may need and who could best give that help. What we find out will be written down and recorded electronically in what is called **a plan**.

The assessment will normally be carried out by social workers and other professionals. It should be done in a way which helps you to have your say and encourages you to take part. The social worker will meet with you and members of your family a number of times to carry out the assessment.

Anything you tell us will be held in confidence within Children's Services. If there is a need to discuss this information with anyone else, we will normally ask your permission. The only exception to this is if the information may, in the social workers view, indicate a serious threat to the welfare of your child. If this is the case you will be told what your rights are in this new situation.

What will happen in the assessment?

- The social worker will meet with the children involved and talk to them. The social worker will help the child/children to join in and make sure they have their say in the assessment wherever possible.
- The assessment will take into consideration your ethnic and cultural background and any special requirements you may have.
- If we need help to make sure we understand clearly what you or your child wants to tell us, we will find someone who can help us talk to each other, for example an interpreter or signer.
- If other people are already involved in helping you and your family, the social worker will probably want to talk to them too. We will discuss this with you.
- If you do not agree with what the social worker says in the assessment, there will be an opportunity for you to record your point of view on the assessment record.
- During the assessment the social worker will use the information gained from working with you to draw up a plan to show how we can help your child or children. You will be given a copy of the plan.

What will be expected of you?

We know that most parents want the best for their children, and completing the assessment will help the social worker to recognise the strengths you and your family have, as well as your difficulties.

We can help you best if you tell us about what your family does well and your difficulties. Some people find it useful to write down the help that they want and the reasons why. You can give this to the social worker and encourage him/her to use it as a basis for the assessment.

We will keep you informed about what we are doing and thinking.

An assessment is an important part of our work with you. In a small number of cases, there are serious concerns about a child's safety. Making sure the child is safe will be our chief concern.

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.

What can you expect of us?

We will listen carefully to what you have to say, offer advice and, if necessary, support you to be an effective parent and resolve your difficulties.

We know that with a little help most families can sort out their own problems, and our aim is to help you to do that.

We will aim to offer you any services you need as soon as possible.

At times there are more people needing services than there are services to give. This means that sometimes, although everyone agrees that you need a service, it might not be available at the time. If this happens we will try to find an alternative, but we cannot guarantee to provide a particular service.

How long does an assessment take?

We aim to complete the assessment as soon as possible but sometimes, if things are complicated or we need advice from people in other services, we will need to spend more time doing an assessment. For example, we may need to ask the paediatrician for their advice on health issues. If help is needed we will try to provide it.

A full Child and Families assessment should be done within 35 working days.

Tell us what you think

Your comments help us to improve the quality of our services, so please tell us what you think. It helps if you tell us when we do things well and also when we get it wrong.

If you are not happy with the service you receive, it is best to try to sort it out with the person you are dealing with first. If you are still unhappy, Children's Services has a formal complaints system. A factsheet giving further information is available from our local offices or from your social worker.

Sharing information

When carrying out an assessment there may be a need to ask other agencies, such as schools or health, for information they may have on your child. There may also be a need to share information we have with such agencies.

Children's Services will comply with the Data Protection Act at all times. We will normally ask your consent but the welfare of children is our main priority and on occasion we may have to make enquiries without prior permission. Children's Services will only request and share information on a 'need to know' basis. We will also ensure all information we receive is treated as 'confidential'.

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