

GUIDANCE FOR COMPLETION OF A
COMPREHENSIVE PARENTING ASSESSMENT WITHIN
THE CHILD ASSESSEMENT AND PLAN

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Policy and Practice Team

Parenting Assessment Tool and Framework – Workers Guidance

Parenting Capacity is defined as “the ability of parents or care givers to ensure that the child’s developmental needs are being appropriately and adequately responded to and to be able to adapt to the child’s needs overtime (DOH 2000). This includes providing for the child’s basic physical needs, ensuring their safety, supporting the child’s emotional needs and development of self, through encouragement and nurture. The challenge for social workers will be in assessing whether, in light of what they know about a parent, they consider that a parent is likely to achieve and sustain change within the child’s timeframe.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that parenting behaviour is one of the most important factors in a child’s development and wellbeing. Each child will have a different experience of being parented and workers need to consider the parents ability to meet each individual child’s needs. Consideration of parenting is already a central factor in our present assessment process.

For the purpose of this guidance we refer to the significant care giver as the ‘parent’ however we recognise that extended family members such as grandparents may also be the subject of assessment.

Comprehensive Parenting Assessment

When a Comprehensive Parenting Assessment is requested, the aim is to provide an enhanced assessment of a parent’s ability to meet, and understand their child’s specific needs. This is a dynamic process in which strengths and pressures are identified, analysed and progress monitored over a specific time frame. (Between 4 – 16 weeks)

This document is to be used alongside the existing Child Assessment and Plan Guidance. It is not exhaustive and the different tools are not mandatory but suggested avenues to enhance your assessment.

Parenting ability is considered fully within the My World Triangle section of the Child Assessment and Plan. In relation to every assessment undertaken, workers are advised to **utilise the current guidance notes incorporating the My World Triangle to their full potential** to maximise the assessment.

Guidance

This guidance provides a tool to enable practitioners to frame a Comprehensive Parenting Assessment within the Child Assessment and Plan.

When there is more than one parent being assessed this should be done individually, with a joint analysis reflecting on their relationship dynamics and the impact of such on one another and the child.

Parenting assessment focuses on identifying strengths and weakness in relation to the following dimensions of parenting:

- Basic physical care – ability to understand and meet.
- Safety and Protection needs of the child - ability to understand and meet.

- Emotional care needs of the child – ability to understand and meet.
- Stimulation – play encouragement and fun.
- Guidance routine and boundaries.
- Stability
- Capacity to sustain change and to do so within the time frame of the child.

The assessment should also take into account the impact of wider factors on parenting and the child's development. These include:

- Family history and functioning
- Extended family
- Housing
- Employment
- Income
- Social integration and community resources

In many cases in which there is concern about a child's welfare, parents will be facing at least one of the following issues:

- Domestic abuse
- Substance misuse
- Parental Mental Health Issues
- Learning Difficulties.

Workers need to be mindful of the fact that parents often struggle with more than one of these problems and should factor this into their assessment. Furthermore the risk to the child increases significantly if the parents themselves were parented by carers experiencing any of these issues. (Clever, Unell and Aldgate, 2011).

Child Assessment and Plan Completion

Within Section 2 – Reasons for a Childs Plan and Intervention now

- Confirm in this section if the Child Assessment and Plan includes a Comprehensive Parenting Assessment and analysis. Include the date requested and from which forum. E.g. LAC Review.
- Name who is being assessed
- Have they given consent and contributed to the assessment.
- Proposed timescale for completion

Within Section 6 – Child and Family Circumstances

You should use the following tools to complete this section, alongside the information you have gathered from your individual meetings with the parents, observations of contact and information from other agencies. It is expected that workers supervising contact will be using the new Contact Feedback Sheets.

Chronology and Eco map

The Chronology of Parenting/Family Functioning and Eco Map will be standalone documents which should be appended to the CAP.

Building a Chronology

A chronology is a significant tool in framing understanding of parental history and functioning.

A family's past history, patterns of behaviour and agency interventions need to be recorded as a chronology. This will guard against 'start again' syndrome which involves a succession of assessments at crisis points which do not take into account the findings of previous assessments (Brandon et al, 2009) patterns of behaviour and social work involvement.

The chronology is drawn up using information and knowledge already held by agencies involved with the family. Its aim is to provide early indications of emerging patterns of concern. It includes the following elements:

- key dates and milestones
- life changes and transitions
- a brief note of interventions and actions taken by professionals

The parents own history should be part of any chronology. This includes any experiences of child abuse and neglect which may impact on their parenting capacity (Jones, 2010).

Building an Eco Map

An Eco Map is a graphical representation that shows all of the systems at play in an individual's life. It allows you to identify the risk and protective elements within the parents support network.

There is a template for completing the family tree and Eco Map within your toolbox.

Framework for Engagement with Parents

The following are suggestions of themes based on the Fowler Model, which you may consider to help frame your focus of work with parents. This will help inform the overall analysis of the parent's ability to meet the individual child's needs. This will also complement the My World Triangle section in the CAP – ***What I need from the people who look after me'***.

Perception of the child –

- Detailed time looking at how the parent describes the child
- Strengths and challenges the child brings
- What makes them happy
- When was the last time they were happy
- When were they happiest
- How often and how do they show this
- How long does this happiness last
- How do they exhibit other emotions

Parenting

- What do they most enjoy about being a parent
- What do they least enjoy
- What creates stress for you as a parent and how do you deal with it
- What does your child need in respect of their care, safety and emotionally
- How does/do the child(ren) respond
- What games and fun activities do you do
- What do you think you are good at as a parent
- What do you think your child enjoys about your time together
- What would you like to improve upon
- How will your child's needs change overtime and what kind of things will affect this

Perceptions of self

- How would you want to describe your ideal self and what would you like to change
- Have you ever tried to effect change? How did you find this and what worked well and what did not.
- Have you experienced any issues with alcohol misuse, anger/violence either by you or to you; is there any criminal history
- Have you undertaken work in respect of these issues
- What do you feel your strengths are; what areas of weakness do you have
- What are your skills and abilities

Health and Finances

- Parental Health history to be explored. Contributing factors and the parents perspective of how these impact on the child.
- Types of support the parent found helpful and any understanding of supports they now require to manage health needs.
- Parental finances – How these are managed; any difficulties they may have and what are contributing factors to this and how this could be managed to meet the needs of the child. It is important to differentiate between structural inequalities and poor capacity to manage.
- Involvement of agencies such as Addictions, Mental Health and Counselling. Discuss their engagement with these services.

Attitude to the task of Parenting

- Parenting relationship and style (capacity for empathy and understanding from child's perspective should also be commented upon as well as actual style of parenting. Whether the parents work together or oppositionally. Protective and risk factors in style of parenting should be commented upon drawing on feedback from contact sessions etc.)
- Engagement (attendance and contribution at sessions; capacity to engage in feedback and insight as to impact of self on the child)
- Potential for change (e.g. Ability to accept responsibility; previous patterns; engagement with supports; impact of negative/ positive factors)

Parenting Assessment Summary, Analysis and Conclusion

The analysis of your parenting assessment should be gathered and captured on the standalone document entitled "*Parenting Assessment Summary, Analysis and Conclusion*" this should be appended to the completed Child Assessment and Plan and can be found in the toolbox.

An essential part of the assessment process is evaluating parent's ability and motivation to change. This is characterised by parents accepting responsibility for their own actions; sustaining changes over time; and taking up offers of support and resources from services. Workers should note evidence of changes and improvements made as a result from previous interventions. They should also assess the ability of parents' ability to translate information into action (Department of Education 2010b)

Workers need to be alert to cases of 'disguised compliance' (Reder, Duncan and Gray, 1983). This is when parents/ carers appear to co-operate with child care agencies but have little or no intention of changing their behaviour permanently. It often features as a theme in serious case reviews. Brandon et al (2008) noted "Apparent or disguised co-operation from parents often prevented or delayed understanding of the severity of harm to the child and cases drifted".

Workers should draw together and analyse the information/evidence they have gathered. The level of detail required should be proportionate to the level of complexities identified.

In some cases, parents will be unable to make sufficient and timely change to ensure they meet their children's needs and can protect them from harm .In such cases professionals must decide what care and protection measures should be taken to protect the child from significant harm.

A clear recommendation needs to be made to inform the future plans for the child. This should be ratified by the Team Manager.

Reference/ Further Reading and Information

- Brandon M, et Al (2008) **Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury through Abuse and Neglect: What can we learn? A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case reviews 2003-2005** London: Department of Education and Skills (DfES)
- Brandon M, et Al (2009) **Understanding Serious Case Reviews and their Impact: A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case reviews 2005-2007** London: Department for Children, Schools and Families(DCSF)
- Cleaver H, Unell L and Aldagte J (2011) **Children's needs – Parenting Capacity: child abuse, parental mental illness, learning disability, substance misuse and domestic violence.** (2nd ed) London: The Stationary Office
- Conley C, (2003) **A Review of Parenting Capacity Assessment Reports.** Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) Journal – 47(3): 16-22.
- Fowler J (2002) **A Practitioners Tool for Child Protection and the Assessment of Parents.** Jessica Kingsley Press.
- NSPCC **Parenting Assessment Guidance 2014**
- Reder P, Duncan S and Gray M,(1993) **Beyond Blame : Child Abuse Tragedies revisited.** London : Routledge