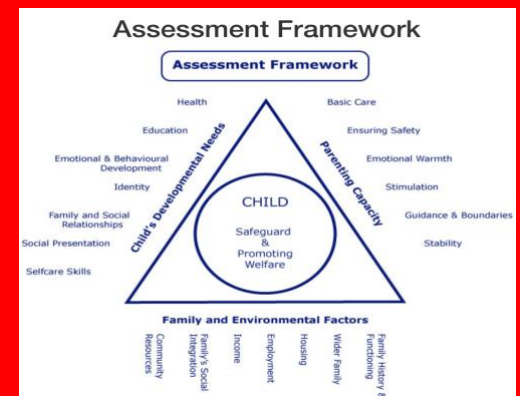


Child and Family Assessments (CAF) Explained.

WHAT IS A CHILD AND FAMILY ASSESSMENT (CAF) ?

A child and family assessments is carried out by a local authority social worker, who will collate information about your child/children to establish what services are needed and who should provide them. The plans should always be child focused to ensure the child is being able to reach their full potential, with services working together to ensure a child needs are fully met.

According to Maslow hierarchy of need for a child to develop positively there are 5 basic needs that must be met. It is at this point you need to start documenting any failures from the services, for example they fail to turn up at the CAF meeting, things are not happening in the time scale agreed, etc. keep a diary of interactions and always communicate with the social workers via email. All of this then becomes your paper trail and evidence should they fail to provide services that your legally entitles to leading to them having concerns for your child and progressing to a CIN, CP or PLO. This would be failing to follow due process, by failing to provide the services your legally entitled to. This situation seems to happen a lot and I have experienced it my self.



The Local Authorities must have regard for for a child's understanding and age when deciding what (if any) services to provide under Section 17 of the Children Act (1989) and before making decision regarding action to be taken to protect individual children under Section 47 of the Children Act (1989)

According to research using systematic assessment using the assessment framework triangle as shown above, this also include an assessment of risk. The main goal is for the social worker is to judge the levels and nature of needs and/or risks that the child may be placed under within your family setting.

Ref: procedures online.com

All CAF's should be planned and organised by the social worker in consultation with the family and relevant professionals. If these relevant professional fail to attend you must ensure you want it recorded that they failed to attend and ask the social worker to provide you with a email confirming it was recorded, as you want what's best for your child and they have a duty to provide these services to your child. The purpose of the CAF should be agreed, transparent and understood by all participants. You should be asked to discuss and explore your perception of the assessment and be provided with an agreed statement setting out the aims of the assessment process. Professional and families roles and time scales, along with services to be provided whilst the assessment is on going should be clarified. Especially if a number of family members and services likely to be partaking in the process. I know there are people that will advise you not to engage with social workers in my experience this will only lead to them having further reason for concern. You don't have to be afraid of social workers but just protect your self should one of them make a mistake and try and cover it up at your expense. This is why you keep a load or diary of everything and communicate via email, I would also ask can you record the meetings, in my experience they don't mind if you tell them and assure them you only want it for your own personal use and to document what is happening for the best interest for you child.

The things social workers are advised to consider

- The lived experience of the child. What life is like for the child? What are their routines? What kind of care do they receive? What opportunities are they able to access? What are they proud of? What do they keep to themselves?
- What the child thinks about their situation and their views about what has to or could be different;
- The nature of the relationships within the family as experienced by the child

The assessment process can be summarised as follows:

- Gathering relevant information;
- Analysing the information and reaching professional judgments;
- Making decisions and planning interventions;
- Intervening, service delivery and/or further assessment;
- Evaluating and reviewing progress.

Assessment should be a dynamic process, which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child from within and outside their family. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered. Whilst services may be delivered to a parent or carer, the assessment should be focused on the needs of the child and on the impact any services are having on the child.

Pre-birth 'Good Practice Steps'

According to proceduresonline.com it was in a High Court judgement (Nottingham City Council v LW & Ors (2016) EWHC 11(fam)(19 February 2016) Keenan) set out 5 points of fundamental and basic good practice steps with respect to public law proceeding regarding pre-birth and newly born children and particularly where children's social care services are aware at a early stage of pregnancy.

These are the 5 points of good practice:

- A risk assessment of the parent(s) should 'commence immediately upon the social workers being made aware of the mother's pregnancy';
- Any assessment should be completed at least 4 weeks before the mother's expected delivery date;
- The assessment should be updated to take into account relevant events pre - and post delivery where these events could affect an initial conclusion in respect of risk and care planning of the child;
- The assessment should be disclosed upon initial completion to the parents and, if instructed, to their solicitor to give them the opportunity to challenge the Care Plan and risk assessment.

Pre-birth planning in advance should include:

- Ensuring parents have had the opportunity for legal advice prior to birth;
- The offer of a Family Group Conference;
- That where possible there is an agreement developed as to both what will happen to the baby upon birth prior to issue and timescales for issue;
- And that notification to Cafcass is made of the likelihood of proceedings.

In planned proceedings, except in extremis where it is unsafe to do so, parents should be made aware of the proposed care plan for the baby prior to the birth, so that this can be the subject of clarification and negotiation outside of the court process, and so that there is an early opportunity to consider family alternatives to care, or family support, which might avert the need for emergency or short-notice proceedings.

Parents / Carers

parents' involvement in the assessment will be central to its success. At the outset they need to understand how they can contribute to the process and what needs to change in order to improve the outcomes for the child. The assessment process must be open and transparent for the parents. However, the process should also challenge parents' statements and behaviour where it is evidenced that there are inconsistencies, questions or obstacles to progress.

All parents or care givers should be involved equally in the assessment and should be supported to participate whilst the welfare of the child must not be overshadowed by parental needs.

There may be exceptions to parent or carer involvement in cases of Sexual Abuse or forced marriage, or in situations where there may be domestic abuse or violence where the plan for the assessment must consider the safety of an adult as well as that of the child. See also Safeguarding Children Board Procedures: Domestic Violence for further information.

Actions and Outcomes

Every assessment should be focused on outcomes, deciding which services and support to provide to deliver improved welfare for the child and reflect the child's best interests. In the course of the assessment the social worker and the Consultant Social Worker should determine:

- Is this a Child in Need? (Section 17 Children Act 1989);
- Is there reasonable cause to suspect that this child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm? (Section 47 Children Act 1989);
- Is this a child in need of accommodation? (Section 20 or Section 31A Children Act 1989).

The possible outcomes of the assessment should be decided on by the social worker and the supervisor / Team Manager who should agree a plan of action setting out what services are to be delivered, how and by whom in discussion with the child and family and the professionals involved.

There are a range of possible outcomes which may include:

- No Children's Social Care support required but other action may be necessary including:
 - Referral into Early Help provision;
 - Referral into single agency / specialist provision.
- The development of a multi-agency Child in Need Plan, led by Children's Social Care for the provision of Child in Need services to promote the child's health and development;
- Specialist assessment for a more in-depth understanding of the child's needs and circumstances;
- Undertaking a Strategy Discussion/Meeting, a Section 47 child protection enquiry;
- Emergency action to protect a child.

Following the assessment the social worker should:

- Discuss outcomes with the child and family and provide them with the assessment in written form. Exceptions to this are where this might place a child at risk of harm or jeopardise an enquiry or Police investigation;
- Inform in writing, all the relevant agencies of their decisions and if the child is a child in need, of the plan for providing support;
- Inform the referrer of what action has been or will be taken.

The social worker's supervisor / Team Manager must review the assessment plan regularly with the social worker and ensure that actions such as those below have been met:

- There has been direct communication with the child alone and their views and wishes have been recorded and taken into account when providing services;
- There has been observation of the interaction between the child and parent / carer;
- All the children in the household have been seen and their needs considered;
- The child's home address has been visited and the child's bedroom has been seen;
- The parents have been seen and their views and wishes have been recorded and taken into account;
- There is clear analysis and evaluation of the information gathered throughout the assessment process and this has been recorded;
- The assessment provides clear evidence for decisions on what types of services are needed to provide good outcomes for the child and family.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children' reminds all professionals of the importance of reviewing progress and that a *high quality assessment is one in which evidence is built and revised throughout the process and takes account of family history and the child's experience of cumulative abuse. A social worker may arrive at a judgement early in the case but this may need to be revised as the case progresses and further information comes to light. It is a characteristic of skilled practice that social workers revisit their assumptions in the light of new evidence and take action to revise their decisions in the best interests of the individual child.* Decision points and review points involving the child and family and relevant practitioners should be used to keep the assessment on track. This is to ensure that help is given in a timely and appropriate way and that the impact of this help is analysed and evaluated in terms of the improved outcomes and welfare of the child.

Contribution of Agencies Involved with the Child and Family

All agencies and professionals involved with the child, and / or family, have a duty to collaborate and share information to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. All agencies and professionals involved with the child also have a responsibility to contribute to the assessment process. This might take the form of providing written or verbal information in a timely manner and direct or joint work. Differences of opinion between professionals should be resolved speedily but where this is not possible, the Safeguarding Children Board Escalation Procedure should be implemented.

It is possible that professionals have different experiences of the child and family and an understanding these differences will actively contribute to the understanding of the child / family's situation. The professionals should be involved from the outset and through the agreed, planned regular review process. The social worker's supervisor / Team Manager will have a key role in supporting the practitioner to ensure all relevant agencies are involved.