



Assessment of Risk and Need

Introduction

Assessment should be a dynamic process, which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by a child. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help and support 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's lived experience.

Working Together (HM Government 2015).

From a series of practice learning reviews conducted in Cheshire West and Chester some themes have emerged in relation to the risk assessments undertaken:

Our Findings:

- **Start again syndrome** can occur when referrals and/or interventions are seen as separate episodes; or when there is insufficient consideration of historical events and its potential impact on the current situation, e.g. historic drug use not being considered when the most recent concern was domestic abuse.
- **Assessment tools** such as the pre-birth assessment, home conditions and graded care profile could be better understood and used more consistently to elicit early help, record concerns and measure changes.
- **Over Optimism** resulted in a lack of rigour in undertaking assessment and focusing on the needs of the child, e.g. Mother's approach to agencies of "wanting to make a fresh start" and this being accepted uncritically.
- **Sources of Information** were not always given appropriate significance. Neighbours can have very pertinent information from observation of the unguarded care of children in their community. The Ofsted report of serious case reviews (2011) highlights the fact that "often agencies have to rely on members of the public as their 'eyes and ears'".
- **Information sharing** was not always consistent, leading to "mountains of information" being available to some agencies working with the family but not others.
- **Reviews of assessment** must be regularly undertaken to evidence that the desired impact of intervention is being realised for the child.

Themes in common with audits in Cheshire West and Chester

- All children in the household should be offered the same level of assessment.
- Neglect and CSE Screening tools could be better embedded in practice.
- Partner contributions to assessment could be improved.

Good Practice identified

- ✓ **Positive working relationships** support multi-agency working.
- ✓ When assessment tools supported referrals the response to need was timely and focused on addressing identified risk.

Key Messages for Managers

- Frequent changes in workers without adequate handovers can contribute to the Start Again Syndrome.
- Ensure that practitioners are trained and equipped to use all available risk assessment tools and that these inform referrals for early help and child protection services.
- If practitioners raise concern about the outcome of a referral, satisfy yourself that sufficient information has been provided to CART/ESAT. If you share their concern ensure you escalate the case.

Key Messages for Practitioners

- Take a forensic approach to assessment: at the outset consider all information regardless of the source.
- Ensure that all children are considered within an assessment regardless of how well they might appear to be doing.
- If you are concerned at the outcome of a referral for early help or protection act promptly to escalate these concerns to your Manager.

Key Messages for multi-agency practice

- Ensure that all partners working with the child and family have contributed to the risk assessment.
- Remember, if you are not satisfied with the outcome of an assessment it is in everyone's interest to challenge partner's to ensure the best outcomes for the child.

If you only do one thing, take the time to...

Remember and apply the basic principles of good risk assessments.

What do I know/ information do I have?

Who do I need to tell about the info I have?

What gaps do I have? Who do I need to ask for more info?

What possible hypothesis's are there?

Don't forget to use available resources:

The [Multi-Agency Assessment Toolkit](#) has been developed to support practitioners to undertake effective assessments that enable them to accurately identify appropriate cases in need of early help or onward referral to Children's Social Care. The tools included should also be used to review the effectiveness of the support plans that are in place and the outcomes for the child/ren.

The **Resolution and Escalation Policy** is there to help LSCB agencies and practitioners resolve differences of opinion about decision making in relation to vulnerable children. The Policy includes timescales for the stages of escalation, clarity about who to raise your concerns with at each stage, and forms for escalating cases.

Working Together (HM Government 2015) guidance lists some of the following as features of a high quality assessment:

- they are child-centred and informed by the views of the child
- decisions are made in the best interests of the child
- they are rooted in child development and informed by evidence
- they build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties
- they ensure equality of opportunity and a respect for diversity including family structures, culture, religion and ethnic origin