

PROCEDURES AND GUIDANCE

Assessment Protocol

Date of original document	January 2015
Date document reviewed	August 2015
Date document reviewed	August 2017
Date for next review	December 2020



1. Introduction

Every child has the right to a full and productive life. It is up to all of us to ensure that the children in the East Riding of Yorkshire grow up in safe environments that build confidence, friendship, security and happiness. We want the best for each and every child and young person and will work in partnership to remove barriers to achievement and narrow the gap so that everyone can reach their potential.

To keep children safe from harm a vigilant and informed professional community, confident in making judgements and assertive in taking action is required. All practitioners working with children and young people need to understand their role in protecting children and have the confidence to respectfully challenge issues to ensure timely and proportionate intervention for children who are in need or who may be at risk of harm.

The aim of this protocol is to support a unified and consistent approach to assessment that defines roles and responsibilities and contributes to the protection and wellbeing of all children within the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The purpose of the protocol is to:

- Provide a clear framework for referral, assessment and ongoing work with families where it is identified that there is a vulnerable child
- Ensure that children's needs are prioritised and they are safeguarded from abuse and harm through robust assessment and planning
- Provide guidance in terms of good assessment practice

Assessment Vision

By working together partners across the East Riding of Yorkshire will contribute to and undertake assessment that is child focussed evidence based and analytical. Such assessment will inform plans and continue to develop flexible services which are responsive to children's and family's needs, providing the right level of support at the right time. Assessment will be undertaken by a competent and confident workforce with core knowledge and understanding of child development. The child will be at the heart of assessment and intervention and the focus will remain on achieving the best possible long term outcomes for the child.

2. Practice Principles underpinning the protocol

- Wherever possible all children and family needs will be met by universal services
- Effective early help improves long term outcomes for children.
- Assessment must be timely and proportionate
- The views of children and young people are crucial and acting in the best interests of the child is central to all activity
- Every assessment should reflect the unique characteristics of the child within the context of their family and community
- As soon as any professional or volunteer is aware that a child has any additional needs they should speak with that child and their family to offer advice and support to meet that need
- Keeping children safe relies on partnership and shared responsibility across all agencies. The starting premise of any assessment therefore must be that it should have a multi agency focus and include the involvement of all relevant professionals and volunteers.
- Developing an honest working relationship at the start will support the assessment process.
- Relationship based practice is central to achieving best outcomes for children
- Assessment is not the completion of a form
- Assessment is in itself an intervention not a neutral activity. Practitioners start gathering information and assessing at their first point of contact with a child or family.
- Maintaining a position of inquiry and conversation throughout interactions and assessments will support the gathering of information and the subsequent analysis of that information
- Every child has the right to achieve their full potential. Assessments should consider what unmet needs a child or young person has and what the impact on them will be if these needs are not met in the immediate, medium and long term
- Good assessments are rooted in an understanding of child development and a parent or carer's capacity to meet the child's needs; the impact of wider environmental factors on the ability of parent's and carers to meet these needs should be understood.
- All assessments should focus on outcomes and should inform the plan.
- The child's views and wishes should inform the plan.
- 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. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered.
- An open, honest and transparent approach where families are supported to identify their own needs, strengths and solutions is most effective in achieving and sustaining change
- Analysis of risk should also establish and build on family strengths to increase safety for children.
- A confident and competent workforce with strong professional judgement and expertise supports assessment, analysis and planning

3. Early Help

Early help may occur at any point in a child's life and includes both interventions early on in life as well as interventions early in the development of a problem; from the foundation years through to teenage years.

Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of support where a child has returned home to their family from care.

Professionals should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- Is disabled and has specific additional needs
- Has special educational needs
- Is a young carer
- Is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance misuse, adult mental health problems and domestic violence
- Is showing early signs of neglect and/or abuse

4. The Early Help and Safeguarding Hub (EHaSH)

The Early Help and Safeguarding Hub (01482) 395500 supports activity at all levels. Information, advice and guidance will be available to advise practitioners on services available and offer opportunity to discuss the best course of action or signpost available help. EHaSH will apply the Signs of Safety methodology to consider all contacts and this in reference to the ERSCP threshold document, will decide the most appropriate response or service.

5. Levels of need and types of assessment

Universal level - open access for all children and families living within the geographic area who have no additional needs and their core needs such as health and education will be met by universal provision alone.

Additional level - includes children and families with additional needs who would benefit from or who require extra help and support. This often includes more than one agency (e.g. education, health, and housing) working together to meet a child and family's needs and being co-ordinated by the service who knows that family best or who the child and family feel are best placed to lead. Needs here are often assessed through an inter agency early help assessment and such assessments should identify what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating to a point where intervention would be needed via a statutory assessment under the Children Act 1989. Early help assessments will be completed in partnership with parents and children and undertaken with their consent. If parents and/or the child do not consent to an early help assessment, then the lead professional will need to make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate. If so a referral into the EHaSH team should be made.

Targeted -Vulnerable children and their families with multiple or complex needs where the children are not reaching their expected outcomes and will require targeted support for a time limited period. The assessment process to establish needs and assess the circumstances surrounding the child will be either using an early help assessment or by statutory services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 using the single assessment framework.

Complex - Statutory/Specialist - these children require statutory or specialist support which can include intervention under section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Children who have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect, children with significant impairment of function/learning and or life limiting illness, children whose parents and wider family members are unable to care for them, families involved in crime/misuse of drugs at a significant level may all fall in to this category. In these circumstances a single assessment will be undertaken by Children's Social Care.

6. Access to targeted and complex services

Prior to making a contact to request a service or assessment for targeted or complex support, practitioners are expected to have worked together to meet the additional needs of the child and their family.

Where practitioners have already involved the child and family in assessment and undertaken an early help assessment and identify that a more intensive response than they can provide is needed they should discuss this with the family prior to making contact with EHaSH.

An early help assessment should not delay the process if a professional is concerned that a child is suffering or may suffer significant harm. In such circumstances a contact should be made to EHaSH in a timely manner.

Where there is doubt about which service pathway to take, anyone worried about the welfare and protection of a child should in the first instance consult with their own manager or designated member of staff which may then result in a contact to EHaSH.

Please remember this must be timely and not cause delay and further potential exposure to harm for the child concerned

7. What happens to a Children's Contact once received?

Once EHaSH have received a contact they will determine whether it is appropriate to progress to early help and/or targeted support through the Children Centres, Youth and Family Support Services or Children's Social Care. In determining the course of action practitioners within EHaSH will have consideration of the ERSCP threshold document.

Practitioners within Children, Young People's Support and Safeguarding Services will apply the principles of the Signs of Safety approach from the point of contact / referral to case closure. All aspects of work will focus on increasing safety for the child or young person and practitioners will utilise their experience and professional judgement based on evidence based research and theory to undertake their assessments.

If it is determined by EHaSH that a contact should progress to the Children's Social Care Safeguarding Team it will be forwarded via the Children's Case Management (CCM) system task list to the responsible team manager.

A team manager will consider the contact information and decision make within 24 hours as to the next steps. This decision will be clearly recorded on the contact record that sits within the child's CCM record.

8. Assessments under the Children Act 1989

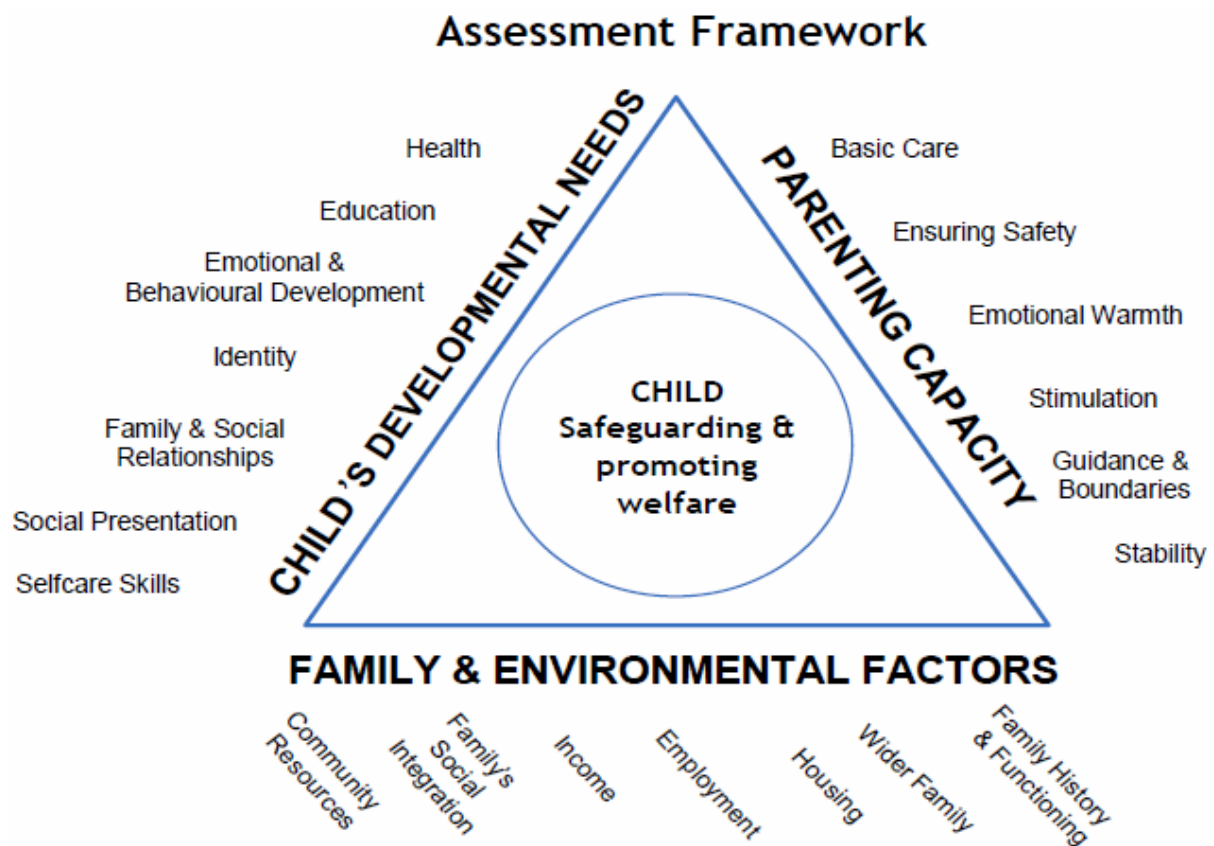
Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Local authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children to determine which services to provide and what action to take.

A full list of statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989 is in the appendix to this protocol.

9. Consultation with others

Once a referral has been accepted by the Local Authority Children's Social Care team, the lead professional role falls to the social worker.

When the decision is that CSC will progress to assessment and where required relevant consents have been obtained (please note this consent will be overridden in cases where child protection concerns exist), partner agencies will be consulted with. They will be asked to share any information that will contribute to the single assessment, including any assessments they themselves have undertaken. Best practice would involve a multi agency meeting at this stage to share and validate the information each agency holds. Additionally the social worker will check historical CSC records to consider any relevant previous involvement or specialist assessments undertaken and consider this within a single assessment. This assessment will be undertaken with consideration of the Assessment Framework Domains as outlined below.



It should be remembered that the purpose of assessment is always:

- To gather important information about a child and family;
- To analyse their needs and/or the nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child;
- To decide whether the child is a child in need (section 170 and/or is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (section 47)); and
- To provide support to address those needs and too improve the child's outcomes to make them safe

CSC social workers have up to date contact lists for partner agencies and are aware of the need to gather information from all relevant parties. They know to be mindful of the different teams within services who may all be working with a child and hold a piece of the child's picture, for example, the differentiation between school nurses employed within schools, who can provide day to day insight of the child and the statutory school nurses from health who can access relevant information from health data bases.

On the first or subsequent visit to the child and their family the social worker will encourage the child and family to complete a genogram as this provides crucial detail

about the network surrounding a child and will assist in creating safe plans. Social work assessment practice is based on the principles of strengths based practice and social workers in the East Riding of Yorkshire will deploy a range of tools and evidence based research and theories to support them in the process of assessment. The assessment will take account of historical as well as current information.

The social worker should analyse all the information gathered from the enquiry stage of the assessment, including from a young carer's, parent carer's or non parent carer's assessment, to decide the nature and level of the child's needs and the level of risk, if any, they may be facing. In addition social care assessments should be informed by and used to inform, other specialist assessments for example, an education and health plan or assessment by adult services. The joining up and co-ordination of assessments is crucial in gaining the full picture of the child's circumstances and ensuring that the child and family experience a joined up process with a single planning process focussed on outcomes. This 'joining up' will be supported by the social worker ensuring that multi agency meetings are co-ordinated.

Assessment is a continuing process responsive to changing and emerging needs, strengths and worries. It will be the responsibility of the social worker to make clear to children and families how the assessment will be carried out, when they can expect decisions in terms of next steps and sharing on completion the assessment document with the family and relevant agencies.

In undertaking assessments workers will be mindful of research, knowledge and local protocols in respect of emerging issues, behaviours and practices that place some children at risk, for example, female genital mutilation, self harm and child sexual exploitation. This learning and understanding will assist in analysing the impact of such circumstances upon the individual child.

10. Supervision

Effective professional supervision plays a critical role in ensuring a clear focus on a child's welfare. Supervision is a crucial element of practice and should support professionals to reflect on the impact of their decisions whilst giving opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in improving life for the child. It allows for managers to challenge assumptions made by workers and the impact of these on their analysis. Local authority managers are responsible for ensuring that case supervision takes place in line with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council Staff Children's Services Supervision policy in order to maintain effective management oversight and avoidance of case drift.

11. Children in Need Plans - Section 17 The Children Act 1989

When an assessment concludes that a child will be subject of a child in need plan, the social worker will be responsible for organising regular Child in Need meetings. These are opportunities for all family members and relevant professionals to contribute to the work and share relevant information pertinent to the child. Professional judgement will be deployed in terms of the frequency of the meetings as they must be timely and proportionate to the needs of the child. The meetings will also provide means by which plans can be reviewed and interventions evaluated in terms of improving outcomes for the child. Minutes of such meetings will be retained by the social worker on the child's electronic case record.

12. Section 47 of the Children Act 1989

Whenever there are child protection concerns a 'section 47 enquiry' is undertaken. This will involve liaison with police and other agencies and will include a strategy discussion, often through a meeting to decide and plan next actions.

This may lead to a decision that there are no concerns, to a voluntary child in need plan or to some form of statutory intervention often through an initial child protection conference. If a child protection conference is required this will take place within 15 days of the strategy discussion/meeting. An assessment of the child's circumstances will be undertaken by CSC to inform actions and intervention.

13. Child Protection Plans

If the decision is made that a child's situation needs to be considered through an initial case conference (ICPC) that decision will be discussed with the child and family by the social worker. The social worker should share their assessment and ensure that the family fully understand the reason for this decision and the subsequent process which will take place.

Assessments and the plan will be shared with conference members and updated to reflect any new information from conference. All decisions made at conference are recorded on the child's CCM record and actions distributed to family and professionals accordingly.

In situations where a child is made subject to a child protection plan this will be reviewed through regular multi agency core groups and monitored by an independent Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing officer (CISRO).

14. Children Looked After

When a child becomes looked after by the Local Authority there is an expectation that their situation remains open to assessment and as a minimum this assessment should be updated prior to any Looked After review or as a result of a significant change in circumstances.

As a result of assessment when it is agreed that a child no longer needs to be cared for by the Local Authority and the child returns to the care of their parents or other family members, planning remains crucial. One of the most emotionally challenging times for children and their families can be when they have ceased to be looked after and returned to family care. It is vital therefore that they continue to receive planned and co-ordinated support at the right level to ensure that any needs and risks are appropriately managed.

Professional judgement will be used in respect of assessing how long children and families will require support following ceasing to be looked after and in nearly all situations there will be a period where a case is managed on a child in need basis.

In all situations it is crucial that records and assessments reflect the changing picture for the child capturing the child's development in order to establish progress made in terms of improving outcomes. Plans are an essential component of this and the scaling used within plans assists in measuring change. In addition where there is a decision that CSC support and intervention is no longer required a multi agency meeting, including the family, must be held to ensure that all are clear about the next actions and who will be there to support the child and the family in the future.

15. Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The social workers within the 0 to 25 SEND Team use the single assessment framework. This is built on the Department of Health Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families and adopts a holistic approach to considering a child's needs and the circumstances in which they live. All assessments undertaken are quality assured by team managers before being authorised. Additionally the audit process ensures that assessments are scrutinised as part of the continuing improvement and quality process.

16. Young Carers

Where a child is believed to be a young carer whether this is by any type assessment identifying this need or whether by the young person themselves making a referral, the Children's Participation and Rights Team will support them. Following Allocation the team complete a Young Carers or Sibling Support Assessment and then agree the actions e.g. one to one sessions or attending a group or both. They will also refer to other agencies and work with Carers Support whilst maintaining that the support is child centred.

17. Children involved with the Youth Justice system

In situations where the Youth Offending Team is the lead worker they use the ASSET-Plus assessment tool in line with national expectations.

The principles of good assessment practice apply in all circumstances.

Appendix 1

Statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989

- A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. Children in need may be assessed under **section 17** of the Children Act 1989, in relation to their special educational needs, disabilities, as a carer, or because they have committed a crime. Where an assessment takes place, it will be carried out by a social worker. The process for assessment should also be used for children whose parents are in prison and for asylum seeking children. When assessing children in need and providing services, specialist assessments may be required and, where possible, should be coordinated so that the child and family experience a coherent process and a single plan of action.
- When undertaking an assessment of a disabled child, the local authority must also consider whether it is necessary to provide support under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (CSDPA) 1970. Where a local authority is satisfied that the identified services and assistance can be provided under section 2 of the CSDPA, and it is necessary in order to meet a disabled child's needs, it must arrange to provide that support.
- Concerns about maltreatment may be the reason for a referral to local authority children's social care or concerns may arise during the course of providing services to the child and family. In these circumstances, local authority children's social care must initiate enquiries to find out what is happening to the child and whether protective action is required. Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, also have a duty to make enquiries under **section 47** of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.
- Some children in need may require accommodation because there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, because they are lost or abandoned or because the person who has been caring for them is prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Under **section 20** of the Children Act 1989, the local authority has a duty to accommodate such children in need in their area.
- Following an application under **section 31A**, where a child is the subject of a care order, the local authority, as a corporate parent, must assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services which will be provided to meet the child's identified needs.
- If a local authority considers that a young carer (see glossary) may have support needs, they must carry out an assessment under **section 17ZA**. The local authority must also carry out such an assessment if a young carer, or the parent of a young carer, requests one. Such an assessment must consider whether it is appropriate or excessive for the young carer to provide care for the person in question, in light of the young carer's needs and wishes.