

Single Assessment Framework for Early Help

Example Questions for Practitioners

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide practitioners with **example questions**. The questions featured here have been developed as a result of consultations with a wide range of practitioners, and reflect what they have found to work well with children, young people and families, enabling the necessary information and evidence to be collected.

The example questions presented here are **NOT** intended to be seen as a **'script' for assessment** (and not all questions will need to be asked), but should aid thinking in respect of the type and style of questions that a practitioner might use in each domain. The questions may be of particular use to new or less experienced colleagues approaching assessment for the first time. It is also not intended that all answers are recorded in the assessment, as the questions only assist in gathering information, so that significant issues can be selected for inclusion. For example, we do not need to know that a child attends a dentist or doctor regularly, but it **may be significant** to record that a child has dental issues and is not registered with a dentist, or that a parent maintains a child's good health well, as it might help to identify a strength if there are other needs. This selection of relevant information will require professional judgement.

Assessment should not be a mechanical process, and it is not intended, appropriate or desirable to use stock questions and a rigid, overly formal style of presentation. Practitioners will need to **use their experience and professional judgement**, guided by these examples and local assessment training, to determine how best to select questions in order to explore and evidence areas of strength and need with children, young people and their families. The Single Assessment Framework early help (SAFeh) is not intended to impinge on professional practice in this respect, but to offer a context for greater

consistency and clarity between professionals and agencies working with children, young people and families.

The example questions presented here can be used by practitioners as a **starting point** for discussion in assessment awareness raising, with the aim of ensuring that local guidance reflects local circumstances and the approach of local practitioners. The style of questioning and methods of communication will need to be adapted to suit children and young people of different ages, those unable to answer questions directly, and in respect of children unborn at the point of assessment. Many of these questions can also be applied to parents/carers and, where this is appropriate, should be phrased accordingly.

A number of **toolkits, resources and training materials are available** to help children and young people contribute to assessments, reviews and planning meetings, e.g. the *'I'll go first'* toolkit produced by the Children's Society or *The Neglect Toolkit* within South Gloucestershire.

The context of SAFeh assessment

In order for assessment to be a useful and positive experience for everyone involved, it is important that careful thought is given to the context as well as content of the assessment discussion. **Where assessment takes place** in families' own homes, for example, practitioners may be able to better contextualise what is said, and conversely families may feel more secure and in control of events than might be the case in a more sterile office setting. Clearly care must be taken to ensure the privacy of assessments, as these will almost inevitably raise personal, sensitive and confidential matters. Where it is necessary to ask adults to represent the views of children, for example, if the child is unborn, or is too young or unable to speak for themselves, it is vital to establish that the adult you talk to is the person who can best do this, and not just the person who happens to be available on the day.

It is likely that assessors will need to be **flexible with the ordering and level of the questions** they ask, and how they address each of the assessment domains, using their experience and professional judgement to respond creatively to what they find.

Importantly, whilst the focus of the SAFeh rests on the child or young person in the context of their family and community, practitioners will need to remain sensitive to the impact that other, possibly **undisclosed issues** such as domestic violence, may have in relation to how easy it will be for children, young people or their parents/carers to respond to questions. It is important to acknowledge that in some families there may be issues (such as the undisclosed ill health of a parent or financial difficulties) where parents may not wish to comment in front of their children or vice versa. In many cases children or young people and parents/carers will both be present at an assessment meeting, but it should be made clear that both have the right if they choose to see the assessor separately. If **"private time"** is

requested, this should be presented positively. It is also possible that parents request that some sensitive information is left out of the SAFeh because they do not wish others (other parent, partner, child/YP or another practitioner) to read it. As the SAFeh requires consent these wishes have to be observed, although practitioners should be honest about any possible consequences. In addition it will be useful for you to record this sensitive information internally, for future information in case it should be important to evaluate any future circumstances.

Finally, in addition to using professional judgement and experience to determine what questions to ask, and in what order, practitioners will need to reflect on how best to include their observations and professional opinions as part of assessment. This may pose challenges, for example, where practitioner observation, or knowledge, contradicts what they are told. **Observations and professional opinion** are likely to be a vital part of assessment, but must be **recorded in a way that clearly differentiates between opinion and what has been seen**, said, or is otherwise implied by the child, young person or family. Professional opinion should also be backed up by evidence. Although the focus is on the child, practitioners should take care to note factors affecting the parents or carers, or wider family, which may have an effect on the child or young person.

Example questions for practitioners

The number of example questions in respect of **each of the assessment domains** reflects what professionals have told us. Consequently, where a greater number of example questions are listed for one domain, this should NOT be taken to imply that domain is worthy of greater questioning, or somehow more important than the others.

You will notice that wherever possible, the example questions are **phrased as if asked directly to a child or young person**. Practitioners nationally advise us not to under-estimate the contribution that children and young people can usually make for themselves, even where others suggest that the child is unable to do so. The voice of the child should always be heard through assessments.

Additionally, at the bottom of each section there are some **questions in italics**. These are intended specifically for parents of unborn children and parents or carers of babies, toddlers and young children.

Example questions for children able to express their own views and their parents/carers

1. CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLES DEVELOPMENT

A Health including general health, physical development and speech, language and communications development

i) General Health

The baby, child or young person's current health condition, for example, conditions of relevance to a baby, child or young person, including growth, development, physical and mental wellbeing.

How far the baby, child or young person appears healthy and well, is growing and developing normally and is accessing health services (such as GP, dentist or optician) appropriate to their age.

- Who is your family doctor? When did you last see them?
- Who is your family dentist? When did you last see them?
- Have you had all the immunisations and health checks you should have had?
- What food do you like to eat? What have you eaten today?
- Are you feeling well today? Do you usually feel well?
- Are you taking any medication at the moment? Do you regularly take medication?
- Would you describe yourself as having a disability or special need?
- Do you feel you are the right weight for your height?
- Are you presently receiving or waiting for specialist medical services like a hospital consultation or operation?
- Do you see any other doctors, therapists or nurses on a regular basis?
- Do you feel you are getting all the health services you need? If not, what do you think you are missing and why do you think you are not getting them?
- What things do you do to keep healthy?
- *Are you seeing your midwife/health visitor regularly?*
- *Does anything concern you about the general health of your baby?*

ii) Physical development

The baby, child or young person's means of mobility, level of physical maturity / delayed development.

How far the baby, child or young person's physical skills seem to be developing normally for their age, for example whether they are crawling, walking and running as

expected and whether their vision and hearing seems normal.

- Do you do any physical activities like walking, swimming, running or playing [wheelchair] sport?
- What activities do you like doing best?
- Do you need to wear glasses/hearing aids etc? If so do you have them?
- Do you think you are a similar weight and height to others of your age?
- *Does your baby, toddler, child have access to a play group or play facilities, for example a mother and toddler group or play area?*
- *What types of physical skills has your baby acquired?*
- *If your child has any form of developmental delay have any referrals been made so far?*

iii) **Speech, language and communications development**

The ability to communicate effectively, confidently and appropriately with others.

How far for their age the baby, child or young person seems able and willing to speak, communicate, read and write, and express their feelings.

- What is your address?
- How is your writing and reading?
- How are you at filling in forms?
- Do you sometimes worry that your spoken English lets you down?
- Do you sometimes find it hard to talk to people?
- Do you have enough support with speech, language and communication? If not, what would help you?
- *How does the child communicate? Do they cry when unhappy? Are they making noises or words yet?*
- *How do you communicate with your child?*
- *If your child has a visual or hearing impairment or possible developmental delay difficulties have any referrals been made so far?*

B Emotional and social development

The emotional and social response the baby, child or young person gives to parents and carers and others outside the family.

How well the baby, child or young person copes with everyday life, e.g. their disposition, attitudes and temperament, any phobias or psychological difficulties.

- What makes you happy or sad? If you were unhappy about something who would you ask to help you?
- When you are frustrated, angry or upset, how would people around you know that something was wrong?
- Do you ever do things because they are exciting without thinking about what might happen or that it might get you into trouble?
- Do you find it easy to talk to people about how you feel? How do you feel?
- Have you ever been bullied?
- Who do you spend most of your time with?
- What sort of things do you do with other people?
- What do you like doing best?
- How much time do you spend on your own?
- Whom do you feel close to?
- *What types of sounds and facial expressions does your baby make in response to your attention?*
- *In what ways does your baby express their feelings?*

C Behavioural development

The behaviour of the child or young person.

How well behaved the baby, child or young person is and, for example, any anti-social or aggressive behaviour.

- How would you describe your behaviour today/usually?
- How do you think other people would describe your behaviour today/usually?
- If you sometimes get into trouble because of your behaviour, tell me what happened last time.
- Can you tell me about a time when you helped somebody?
- *How do you know what your baby likes and dislikes?*
- *Are you worried about any aspect of your baby or child's behaviour?*

D Identity, including Self-esteem, Self-Image and Social Presentation

The growing sense of self as a separate and valued person.

How far the baby, child or young person seems to be developing the right measure of confidence and self-assurance, and how far they have a sense of belonging.

- Who is the most important person in your life?
- If you had to name one special thing about yourself, what would that be?
- Is there anything about yourself that you don't like?
- What do you think other people most like about you?
- How do you feel you are different from other people?
- How do you feel you get on with your family and friends?
- *Can the child point to family on a picture or respond to their own name?*
- *Does the child respond differently to different family members or siblings?*
- *How does your baby demonstrate individual preferences?*

E Family and social relationships

The ability to empathise and build stable and affectionate relationships with others, including family, peers and the wider community.

How far the baby, child or young person is building stable and affectionate relationships with others, including family, peers and the wider community.

- Who do you call family? How often you see them?
- What do you enjoy doing with your family?
- How important are your friends to you?
- Do you have a 'best friend'? If yes, who is that and why are they so special for you?
- Do you have to help to look after anyone? If yes who is it and what do you do to help them?
- *Does the child respond to their name?*
- *Can the child identify its mother's and/or father's voice?*

F Self-care skills and independence

The acquisition of practical and emotional competences to increase independence.

How independent the baby, child or young person is for their age – how far they can do routine tasks for themselves and make their own decisions.

- How independent are you? What can you do for yourself?
- Do you need any help with day to day living? How do you feel about the help

you receive?

- Who will help you learn to be more independent as you grow up?
- Do you get to do what you like to do?
- How do you cope with big changes in your life?
- *How does your baby express their feelings or preferences?*

G Learning, including Understanding, Reasoning and Problem Solving, Participation, Progress and Aspirations

i) Understanding, reasoning and problem solving

The ability to understand and organise information, reason and solve problems.

How well for their age the baby, child or young person is able to understand and organise information, reason and solve problems.

- Tell me what you did yesterday?
- Are your friends mostly the same age as you, or are they mostly younger or older than you?
- Imagine someone treated you unfairly, what would you do?
- Do you like reading, if so what do you like to read?
- How are you at sorting out day to day problems?
- *What types of resources/toys are provided for your baby?*
- *How does your baby respond to the environment around them?*

ii) Participation in learning, education and employment

The degree to which a child or young person has access to and is engaged in education and/or work based training and, if he/she is not participating, the reason for this.

How far the baby, child or young person is engaged in and attending learning appropriate to their age, whether through play, early years settings, school or college/employment.

- What school or college do you go to? How regularly do you attend?
- How do you get on at school/college/training?
- What might stop you going to school/college?
- If you don't go to school/college at all, why is that, and how long have you been out of school/college?
- What are you studying?

- What do you think you are good at doing?
- Who can you ask for help and advice about education and learning?
- If you are working, what is your job? Do you enjoy your job?
- What do you want to do long term?
- *Does the child attend a nursery or play group?*
- *How does your baby interact with others of a similar age?*

iii) **Progress and achievement in learning**

The child or young person's educational achievements and progress, including in relation to their peers.

The baby, child or young person's educational achievements and progress, including ability to read and write, compared with what would normally be expected from someone of their age.

- How well do you think you are doing at school/college/with your learning?
- What is your favourite subject and why?
- What is your first language?
- What qualifications do you have?
- If you lack qualifications or confidence with reading, writing or maths, How do you feel this affects you?
- If you think you need additional help, how would you like to get this?
- *What learning opportunities does the child have?*
- *Do they have a favourite game or book?*
- *Does anyone read books to the baby/child?*

iv) **Aspirations**

The ambition of the child or young person, whether their aspirations are realistic and they are able to plan how to meet them. Note there may be barriers to a child or young person's achievement of their aspirations, for example the child or young person's other responsibilities in the home.

- What do you hope that learning will help you do?
- What help do you need with learning to make sure you do your best?
- What do you do if you find something difficult or challenging?
- What are your goals for the future?
- *What do you want for your baby/child?*

2. PARENTING STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

A Basic care, ensuring safety and protection

The extent to which a baby, child or young person's physical needs are met and they are protected from harm or danger, including self-harm.

How far the baby, child or young person is safe from harm or sexual exploitation, well-fed and cared for, and living in a safe, warm and clean home.

- Is the place where you live warm enough for you not to need to wear outdoor clothes (like coats and hats) when you are inside?
- What do you have to eat and drink where you live?
- How do you keep yourself and your clothes clean?
- Do you have a least one other set of clothes, which are the right size for you, and suitable for this time of year?
- How do you feel about where you live?
- If you share the place you live with others, can you be in private when you need to be?
- In an emergency how would you call the services you need?
- *Do you feel able to look after your baby, toddler, child and make sure it's safe?*
- *Do you feel your home is in good repair and a safe place to bring up children? If not, what would make your home a better place to live?*

B Emotional warmth and stability

Provision of emotional warmth in a stable environment, giving the baby, child or young person a sense of being valued.

How far the baby, child or young person is loved, in a stable environment, and in contact with those who are important to him/her.

- Who lives with you at home? How long have they lived there?
- Who cares for you and takes responsibility for you?

- If you were upset or frightened who would look after you, and make sure you were all right?
- If you do something well, who would be proud, and praise you?
- How long have you lived where you do now, and how many times have you moved home in the last year or so?
- *How often do you give your baby, toddler a cuddle?*
- *How are you coping/managing at the moment?*
- *How are you coping with looking after your baby/toddler?*

C Guidance, boundaries and stimulation

Enabling the baby, child or young person to regulate their own emotions and behaviour while promoting the baby's, child's or young person's learning and intellectual development through encouragement and stimulation and promoting social opportunities.

How far the baby, child or young person is subject to and provided with appropriate guidance and discipline at home and elsewhere, and helped to learn.

- What do your parents do to show you that they are interested in you and involved in what you do?
- What do your parents do to encourage you with your learning?
- Do you have a quiet place where you can do your college or school work?
- How do your parents treat you?
- Do you think your parents/carers sometimes overprotect you, and treat you as younger and as less able than you are?
- If you do something wrong, what happens, and how do the people around you respond?
- How do you react when people ask you to do the things that you don't want to do?
- *Does the child respond to NO?*
- *What rules or boundaries do you think are important for young children?*
- *Who plays with the child?*
- *Do you enjoy playing with the child? If so what do you play?*
- *What do you do to communicate with your unborn baby?*
- *Does your unborn baby respond to different music or noises or voices?*

3 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

A Family history, functioning and well-being

The impact of family situations and experiences.

Who lives in the household and how they relate to the baby, child, including any changes since the child's birth; family routines; and anything about the family history, such as family breakdown, illnesses (physical or mental) or problems with alcohol or other substances that are having an impact on the child's development.

- When you want to know something about your family, whom might you ask?
- Describe the routine in your house?
- Tell me what you did for your last birthday?
- Think about a really good time you enjoyed with your family. What was it, and what made it so special for you?
- Who do you turn to if you need advice?
- Who do your parents turn to if they need help?
- *How does your baby indicate what he/she needs?*
- *How does your baby respond to different family members?*

B Wider family

The family's relationships with relatives and non-relatives.

Whether there is an appropriate level of help for the baby, child, young person or parents/carers from relatives and others.

- Other than your family, who is important to you in your life?
- Are there people in your neighbourhood or community that you know and trust that you could turn to for help if you needed to?
- Are there people in your neighbourhood or community that your carers know and trust that they could turn to for help if they needed to?
- Can someone who is not really a member of your family, feel like family and be just as important, and do you have anyone like that in your family?
- *Are there other adults regularly in the home with you and your children?*
- *What support do they give you in looking after the children? What do they do?*

C Housing, employment and financial considerations

What are the living arrangements? Does the accommodation have appropriate amenities and facilities? Who is working in the household, the pattern of their work and any changes? Income over a sustained period of time.

Whether the accommodation has everything needed for living safely and healthily, and the effect on the baby, child or young person of the work and financial situation of the family or household.

- What is it like to live in the area you do?
- At home, who is working and what do they do?
- Does anyone in your family work away from home or at night, such that you don't see them very often?
- How does their work affect you? How do you feel about them working away?
- Is there enough money, from work and any benefits, to meet your family's needs?

D Social and community elements and resources, including education

Explores the wider context of a baby, child or young person's neighbourhood and its impact on them, including local services and facilities available.

Impact on the baby, child or young person of the local area, including crime levels, availability and quality of shops, schools/colleges etc. This includes how well the child or young person fits in with neighbours, friends and others.

- Tell me what local facilities you use (for example schools, day nurseries, sports, play and leisure centres, nurseries, libraries etc)
- Are there any local facilities that you would like to use but can't for some reason?
- If so, why can't you use these facilities? (for example cost, transport, inaccessible to disabled people)
- When you are out and about locally with friends or family, what sort of things do you do?
- What is the best thing about living where you do?
- What is the worst thing about living where you do?

- Are you aware if drugs are bought and sold in your area?
- Tell me about crime in your area.
- *What local facilities like pre-natal clinics, child care services such as day nurseries or play schemes, support groups or Sure Start programmes are available? Do you use them?*