



## **Social Care Single Assessments**

### **Information for Parents and Carers**

**If you need this information in another format or  
language please contact 01454 868009**

**November 2016**

## Introduction

South Gloucestershire Council's Social Care Department works with children, young people and their families who are experiencing difficulties and are in most need. This work could be with a child who is at risk of significant harm, a child who is experiencing the effects of family breakdown or a child who is in need of services to promote their health and welfare. Where it is identified that a child is at risk or is likely to be at risk of significant harm, a Single Assessment will always be undertaken given Children's Social Care have a statutory duty to safeguard children under the Children Act 1989.

This leaflet explains how Social Care staff working with children and young people will make an assessment of children at risk and in need. It also outlines what a family should expect from the department when an assessment is undertaken.

Government guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015', gives all Councils clear instruction about the way in which they should assess the needs of children coming into contact with them. This leaflet explains what this means for parents and children.

## How does the Department decide which children to assess and help?

Parents, the general public and professionals will make contact with the Access and Response Team (ART) on 01454 866000, if they are concerned about a child. If the department is informed that a child is in need, they must make a decision about how the department will respond within 24 hours of receiving that notification or sooner if there is a child protection concern. A worker from ART will generally inform the referrer and the parent or carer what action will be taken and this could include an assessment of the child's needs. ART can provide information and advice, the referrer may be signposted to other services or an assessment may be undertaken. If a Single assessment is required, a referral is made to one of the locality social work teams or the 0-25 team to undertake this assessment.

## When is an assessment carried out?

An assessment is carried out whenever Children's Social Care consider that a child is in need under section 17, or a child is at risk under section 47 of The Children Act 1989. For example, where:

- There are allegations or concerns about child abuse and risk of significant harm to a child.
- Children are placing themselves at risk of harm, perhaps by running away.
- Children are experiencing severe rejection.
- There are parental mental health problems or learning disabilities which affect the care given to the child.
- There are drug or alcohol related difficulties for parents which affect the care given to the child
- The child is displaying severe violent or aggressive tendencies.
- Parents are not coping with day to day parenting tasks or behaviour – to the extent that the child is suffering neglect.
- There is a need for significant additional care because of a child's disability.
- A child is having to care a lot for others.

The purpose of an assessment is:

- 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 17) and/or is likely to suffer significant harm (section 47)

- To identify support to address those needs to improve the child's outcomes to make them safe.
- To inform the action plan of how to provide this support

In circumstances where Children's Social Care are concerned that a child[ren] is at risk or is likely to be at risk of abuse and significant harm, A Child Protection Conference may be held where it is suspected that child(ren) is suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm (section 47). The conference is held within 15 days of when the decision was made that the child(ren) is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm (section 47) which is the same day the single assessment is started. The Conference will consider the risks to the child[ren] and decide whether the child[ren] needs a Child Protection Plan.

## What does the Assessment involve?

Timescales for the completion of an assessment will vary according to the level of need and risk. The assessment timescale is set by a social care manager and can be between 15 and 40 days.

The content of any assessment will vary according to the child's circumstances, but will usually include looking at the child[ren]'s:

- Health and development
- Feelings about themselves, their identity and relationships
- Physical and emotional presentation
- Education.

During the assessment the social worker will also assess parenting capacity and other family members, and the things that help or get in the way of parents providing:

- Safe care.
- Food, drink, warmth, clothing, shelter and hygiene.
- Protection from harm or danger.
- Love, praise, encouragement.
- Play, learning, mixing and talking with other people.
- Standards and guidance about what it is okay for children and young people to do and not to do.
- Reliable adults who are there for children - in giving them a secure basis for growing up.

The social worker will also want to know about the family history and the practical things like income, housing and work issues.

The assessment involves gathering detailed information about a child and family and coming to a view about future needs and whether services are needed to meet those needs.

The social worker will ask for permission to speak to other Agencies. It is normally essential for the social worker to talk to other agencies and professionals who are involved with a family and the social worker will ask for a parent's written permission to do this. This is to find out as much as possible about a child's needs, and the best way to meet these. These Agencies may include the child's G.P. or health visitor, the child's school or any other agencies who have been involved.

Please see the information on our website about sharing information:

<http://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children/i-am-a-professional/information-sharing-2/>

## **What if I don't want to give my permission to speak to other agencies?**

Agencies cannot share information about you or your child without your permission, unless they have serious concerns about the welfare or safety of your child or children. This Department will therefore respect your wishes not to contact other Agencies, unless there are child protection concerns.

In child protection cases Children's Social Care will seek legal advice, and will advise you to seek your own legal advice. In cases where there are child protection concerns, your consent to share information can be overridden. In all other circumstances they will contact only those Agencies or individuals whom you have agreed to involve, and will discuss with you any limitations that this places on the assessment and its outcome.

## **Who will do the assessment?**

The main assessor will be the allocated Social Worker from Children's Social Care. They will consult with other professional people, as agreed, who know your child[ren] and family such as your health visitor, school nurse, general practitioner, child[ren]'s teacher or a probation officer.

## **Will my views and my children's views about the assessment be taken into account?**

Yes. It is very important that we work together with you in completing this assessment and that you understand what it involves. Your Social Worker and the other professionals will want to talk to you and your child[ren] about your views, wishes and feelings. Your Social Worker will consult with you, your child[ren] and other professionals about how you will all be involved and explain what will be expected from you. It is generally expected that all children will be seen alone by the social worker. Your views, as well as your child's views, will be incorporated into the assessment and you will have the opportunity to comment on the assessment.

## **What will be expected of me?**

The main expectations are that you will be committed to keeping any appointments, that you will be open and honest and that you will co-operate with the assessment being undertaken. The Social Worker will probably want to see each member of the family separately as well as together. This will certainly include talking to your child[ren], as it is very important to listen to their views. In this way the best possible decisions and plans can be made in respect of your child[ren] and family.

## **What can I expect from the Department?**

The child's Social Worker and other professionals will discuss with you what is happening during the assessment and will be committed to keeping appointments. They will act professionally at all times and will always act in the best interests of your child. Whatever the timescale for the assessment, where particular needs are identified at any stage of the assessment, social workers should not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before commissioning services to support the child and their family.

An assessment is a dynamic process which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child/ren.

Assessments should be undertaken alongside parents/carers and children/young people where appropriate to their age and understanding. All relevant agencies should contribute to the assessment. When completing an assessment as a shared process, it can become a therapeutic tool which is seen as being of value to parents/carers and children/young people.

It is really important to consider the child's culture, ethnicity, disability or additional needs and any other issues of diversity, as this relates to needs, risks, strengths and protective factors within the child, family and wider environment. This should be specifically addressed in the analysis section of the assessment.

The assessment should include information regarding the child's stage of development. This is a helpful baseline against which to monitor progress and to consider whether and how their outcomes are improving. This is important as it should reduce the need for repeat assessments.

## **How will I know the outcome of the assessment?**

The assessment will be carried out with you. When it is finished, the assessment will be written, and you will be given a copy, together with the recommendations of the social worker and their manager. You will have the opportunity to make comments of your own, including rectifying any factual inaccuracies, which will be recorded alongside the assessment on file.

## **Does the assessment mean that I will get a service?**

Not necessarily. The Department can help only those children who are most in need and there are more requests for help than there are services available. This means that the assessment can have a number of possible outcomes.

## **What if I need some more information?**

We hope that we can work together with you to carry out this assessment. If there is anything that you do not understand, or if you have any questions, please ask your child's Social Worker.

## **What happens if I have a complaint?**

All of the agencies involved have their own complaints' procedures and will provide you with a copy of these on request. If you consider that your complaint is about the way in which Children's Social Care have acted, you should initially approach the social worker or Team manager who will attempt to resolve your complaint. If your complaint remains unresolved you can write to the Complaints' Manager at the address below, who will ensure that your complaint is properly dealt with.

### **FREEPOST RTCT-JXLE-EETT**

South Gloucestershire Council  
Department for Children, Adults and Health – Complaints & FOI Team  
Civic Centre  
High Street  
Kingswood  
Bristol  
BS15 9TR

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