

No Wrong Door 2014

Children's Advice Team

20 tools and tips for more effective assessments

1. Welcome and introduction. We're calling this "Tools and Tips for more effective early help assessments". The quality assurance auditing that we carry out shows particular difficulties in 2 areas: analysis and voice of the child. We hope to offer some practical suggestions today to help you strengthen these areas of your practice, but also some tips on making it easier for you. Because of time constraints, we don't intend to take questions as we go along. However, if you have a burning issue, make a note of it, and we'll try to deal with it at the end, or failing that, email it to us & we'll get back to you.
2. The most important thing about making effective use of any assessment is to understand what you are doing. (*= a Tool/tip*) An assessment is a way of guiding you through a complex problem. It starts with a question, brings together information from all around the problem, analyses the information to work out what needs to be done and what will help, then makes a plan for solving the problem. Don't forget that early help processes are for non-urgent situations (*= a Tool/tip*) Unlike our colleagues in social care, you have time to get it right, to gather sufficient information, to engage with your clients and partners, to reflect on what the information is telling you.
3. The FEHA or similar is your main tool but is only as good as the way it is utilised so, always use the associated guidance information. (*= a Tool/tip*) Throughout this workshop, we'll use the FEHA too, based on a fictional family that we use in our training. We don't claim it's a perfect assessment, but we offer it as an illustration of the ideas we're discussing today. If you want to use other assessment tools, we have developed a statement of the key features of an effective assessment (*= a Tool/tip*) that can be used

to help you decide which assessment tools/systems will be useful for complex situations. Email us to request a copy.

4. At the outset frame in your mind question(s) such as “*why am I doing this assessment?*”. “*What has prompted the need?*” or “*what am I trying to achieve for the young person and family through this process*” (= a *Tool/tip*) By writing this down, you keep it in your own mind and help keep the family and others focused on what you are trying to find out.
5. Get clear in your own mind and record who is in the family and how they are related. The genogram shouldn't be dismissed lightly: it can be vital for helping you and other practitioners understand complex family relationships and events. (= a *Tool/tip*) You don't need fancy software for this. One drawn in pencil on scrap paper can still be scanned and pasted into the document (= a *Tool/tip*) – and it's a great way of engaging kids in telling you about their lives! (= a *Tool/tip*)
6. Find out who else is involved. Record their names and contact details on the assessment document. It'll help, I promise, if you only need to look in one place for everyone's phone number! (= a *Tool/tip*) You should always check with the advice team to see if any other practitioners are known to be involved or have been historically. (= a *Tool/tip*) Approach them for any information they can share that may be relevant to your assessment. It's best to request the information in writing, but please be clear about what information you need, why and how it will be used. (Go back to your “question” at the head of the assessment – this'll tell you're informant what you're hoping to work out. (= a *Tool/tip*)) They may well need support in providing the right information in the right way for it to be useful, so be ready to ask some questions when you get the information in. (= a *Tool/tip*) Use the “assessment triangle” diagram at the top of the FEHA to remind you what kinds of information you need (= a *tool/tip*). Ask for the information in electronic format – email, a Word document or spreadsheet. The last thing you need it to make extensive notes during a detailed phone call, then have to type it all up again into the assessment tool, so cut and paste, cut and paste! (= a *Tool/tip*)

7. The advice team can also tell you whether any flags of concern have been applied to the record and share the details of who to speak to for more information (*= a Tool/tip*) Ring 55 1900 and choose option 2!
8. The information gathered from other professionals is only part of the process. Gather information from all family members, associated individuals and extended family. For God's sake don't forget Dad, even if doesn't live with the family (*= a Tool/tip*) If there's a good reason not to involve him (high risk, deceased or not in contact, that's an important piece of information that might help you and others understand the family. (*= a Tool/tip*))
9. Always make sure the voice of the child is sought, strongly presented and contextualised. Opinions are fine as long as they are linked to evidence of what has been seen, heard or experienced by or with the child. (*= a Tool/tip*) We all remember the case of Victoria Climbié. One of the things that has struck me about that case recently is the image of her joy when hospital staff gave her a white dress and pink wellies – staff had spotted she had nothing but, by not asking Victoria about it, away from her Aunt and in her own language, they failed to understand the significance of what they had seen. Kerry Gregory, a member of our team, has prepared some really useful helps, prompts, etc., to help you in gathering the views, thoughts, feelings of children. (*= a Tool/tip*) We can email you a pdf of this on request.
10. Analysis is the very core of the assessment process. You test the reliability of the information from all parties and examine how it ties in together. Once you have confidence that the gathered information is reliable and accurate see how it reflects the child's situation and circumstances against a "norm" Think of the weight/height charts that health professionals use. Anything significantly above or below the band needs to be looked at: if their situation deviates from an accepted norm for their gender/age etc what does this mean? Is it a positive factor that gives them resilience or is it a negative factor? If negative, how so and what are the likely poor outcomes if this goes unaddressed? Education people: look at information from SATS and other progress

monitoring, but compare the individual's information to expected results and apply the same analysis. Anything above expected progress could indicate an important protective factor; below it, a risk. This is starting to write your intervention plan for you. (= a *Tool/tip*) When you're gathering the information from outside your own area of expertise, ask the professional providing the information to tell you if anything is significantly different from what is expected for the child's age/development. You can't be expert in everything! (= a *Tool/tip*) Use the CYC Threshold Guidance (on the Yor-OK website) to help you compare the information to "norms" and identify what areas need most urgent attention. (= a *Tool/tip*)

11. The conclusion, effectively, is the answer to your original question. Look closely and creatively at the information you've gathered to spot the strengths. Even in the most complex problems, there's something you can build on. Look especially at how the wider family might help or support. It's often in the information about the bottom side of the 'triangle' that you'll find these strengths (= a *Tool/tip*)
12. At this point, use a second pair of eyes. Ideally, organisations should have senior practice staff who have oversight of assessments. If not, or even as a third pair of eyes if you want, we *actively encourage* practitioners to ring the advice team and book a telephone slot (immediate or at better time) to discuss the draft assessment. Send us a copy by email and we will walk through every section with you to test/challenge and offer advice. (= a *Tool/tip*)
13. Identify who else can be involved in the process. Delivering early help is a mixture of challenge and support. Consult the advice team for help and advice in this area as they can signpost to services such as parenting support, mentors etc (= a *Tool/tip*) Use the Family Information Service to find services, voluntary agencies and supports for parents. (= a *Tool/tip*)
14. Once the FEHA is completed, log it with the advice team and forward us a copy for our records. If any new enquiry is made of that record by another practitioner we will advise them of your

involvement and ask them to make contact with you to avoid duplication or overlap. Your involvement can also be seen by Children's Social care who will contact you if they have a need to be involved at a statutory level. (= a *Tool/tip*) Ask for feedback from the Advice Team to further your professional development. Effective assessment gets easier with practice. (= a *Tool/tip*)

15. We will also advise you if any other practitioner applies a flag to this record and put the two of you in touch to discuss. (= a *Tool/tip*)

16. Others sources of help:

- Your CAT link worker can talk you through processes and systems in your own agency and give you pointers about what else is happening locally (= a *Tool/tip*)
- YorOk website – for guidance, documents/tools and information
- Bespoke training – we can offer training to groups of staff on any of the elements and processes for early help to families – including: how to cope with challenging conversations with families; how to contribute purposefully to other people's assessments; developing confidence in information-sharing... (= a *Tool/tip*)
- Core (EH) training – 2 more occasions this year (19 Nov & 9th Dec) and 4 days booked for next year. It's now called "Early Help: principles, tools and assessments" because this more accurately reflects what we're trying to achieve. If it's some time since you took part in this training – say 3 years or more – you will find it useful to refresh yourself (= a *Tool/tip*)
- The Advice Team bulletin, which comes out bi-monthly, contains helps, tips and key messages from our team. Email us if you'd like to be included in the distribution list.

Delivered by Paul Fogarty & Vicky Bruce

Children's Advice Team

01904 551900: option 2, then option 2 again