

Children's Services User Guide to a Cumbria Children's Services Child and Family Assessment

How does an assessment start?

It starts when either you, or someone else, has asked for help with some difficulties you or your child are having which is having an affect on your child (or children). This is called a referral made via the Children Service Triage team. A referral can be made by anyone (e.g. you, a teacher, health visitor, a neighbour) in any form (e.g. a letter, telephone call, email). We will tell you about the reasons for this referral.

Before we can help you, we need to know more about you and your family. This will involve collecting information, talking through with you what the issues are for your child and family and agreeing what needs to be done. We call this an assessment. The assessment will help us to look at your situation and see what help and support you and your family need, and who could give that help.

What does an assessment involve?

An assessment is a way of exploring what life is like for your child and your family at home and in the community. We then understand what is happening for a child, what needs to change and why.

An assessment is a way of working together with you to decide how we can improve things for you and your family. Parents' roles in this is very important. A qualified social worker will talk with you and your child in order to find your views. If other people are already helping you and your family, it is likely that the social worker will talk to them too. We will always discuss this with you, examples of such are:

- How your child is doing in terms of education, health, learning about getting on with other people and their peers?
- How is your child developing and what are your hopes and fears for their future?
- What support you, as a parent, are able to give your child?
- What other things may be helping you with bring up your child, or may be making the role of being a parent more challenging?

The framework that has to be used by social workers is required nationally and locally. It is described fully in the Local Protocol for Assessment that can be found on Cumbria LSCB website <http://www.cumbrialscb.com/>. Your social worker can provide you with a copy if you ask them. Your social worker will explain what they are doing and the likely length of time it will take to complete the written assessment as some are brief and others are longer.

What happens during an assessment?

The assessment will be carried out by a qualified social worker. They will:

- Meet with your child and make sure their daily life and views are noted and we understand the extent of difficulties each child is experiencing;

- Meet with you and members of your family, maybe a number of times;
- Talk to other people who work with you and your family such as your child's teacher or your family doctor we will ask for your consent in to do this.
- Write down all the information they gather, and use it to help them work out what is helping the child and your family and is going well and what seems to be a concern and difficult for the family to change.

The only time we would do anything without your permission would be when we are worried about the child's safety.

The assessment is called a Child and Family Assessment and a copy will be shared with you on completion and you will be able to comment on it, as will your child if they are of an age where they can do so.

What happens after the assessment?

After the assessment one of two things might happen:

1. We may agree with you and your child that there is no need for our social work services. We will explain this to you and let you know this in writing. However we may recommend other organisations may be able to provide the support you need.
2. We may agree that support services can help you and your child. In this case we will draw up a plan that will describe your child's needs. We will work this out together with you, your child and other people actively involved in your child's life. The plan will identify the help required from Children's Services and other agencies to respond to these needs.

The plan will:

- Identify the strengths you and your family have that can be drawn on to make things better for your child e.g. a friend or family member, as well as the difficulties and areas that need support to make improvements;
- Be shared with you and written in plain English so it explains what will happen, your role and the role of support services in helping things change for the better.

Thereafter:

There will be regular meetings to look at progress being made. When your family and those playing a role in the plan can see most difficulties have been overcome, then the plan will end. Any continuing help from other local services for children will be in place when the plan ends.

The local manager of the social worker will authorise any plan of work; he/she can be contacted on the above number if the social worker is unable to answer your query.

NYAS is an independent agency for under 18s in Cumbria. If you need confidential help, information or advice, please contact :Freephone helpline: 0808 808 1001 or send an email to help@nyas.net

For complaints or compliments contact : 01228 221161 or e mail childrens.complaints@cumbria.gov.uk