

# Undertaking Parenting Assessments

## Guidance for staff working in Children and Families

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document is designed for social care workers and social workers in Children and Families and is intended to be a short guide to the areas which should be considered in any parenting assessment. The assessments produced in pre-proceedings should be prepared as if for court. It contains descriptions of methods of assessment and analysis, and specific areas which the report will need to cover. The primary aim of this guidance is to attempt to bridge the gap between social work knowledge and evidence before the court. It should be used alongside social worker's existing skills and knowledge.
- 1.2 This document should not be treated as a standalone guide for the assessment of parents and should be read in conjunction with the [Local Assessment Protocol](#).
- 1.3 As an appendix to this guidance there is a template for writing up completed assessments together with a parenting assessment and family support team referral form.

# 2. Parenting assessments and what are they?

- 2.1 A Warwickshire parenting assessment is undertaken in the community and should take place within the family home unless there is a clear rationale as to why this would not be appropriate. A parenting assessment is an evidence based assessment of parenting capacity and assessment of capacity to change.
- 2.2 The assessment may be undertaken as part of a child in need plan, a child protection plan and as a requirement of care proceedings.
- 2.3 The assessment should identify both the strengths and vulnerabilities of the parent being assessed. It should inform whether the parents can make and sustain the necessary changes for 'good enough' parenting, and whether they can meet their child's needs and protect the child/ren.
- 2.4 A parenting assessment needs to be robust, flexible and individual depending on the areas of concern being assessed. It is recommended that the parenting assessment should be no longer than 35–40 pages and should not repeat narratives held in other assessments or reports. The assessment should provide a comprehensive analysis of parenting capacity and capacity to change.

- 2.5 It is essential that the parenting assessment is based on an understanding of the family's history and functioning, that it is based on theory and evidence, direct observations and should most importantly conclude with the critical analysis of the assessment outcome. Whilst a narrative of what has been undertaken or observed within the assessment sessions is important, the key is to ensure that there is detailed analysis of the assessment outcome.
- 2.6 If concerning, risky or abusive behaviour is observed from a parent towards a child during the parenting assessment sessions, the social care worker/s should immediately address this with the parent, make a record of this and inform the family support team manager as appropriate.
- 2.7 This guidance document is to be used to support and underpin the established Warwickshire Parenting Assessment and Pre-Birth Assessment Tool.
- 2.8 Parenting assessments are mainly completed by social care workers within family support teams, but can be undertaken by social workers in children's teams, or as a partnership assessment between both.

## **3. Referral meetings**

### **3.1 What is a referral meeting and why are they important?**

- 3.1.1 The parenting assessment is an intervention which is completed in partnership with the parents and the referral meeting is the first step in the Warwickshire Parenting Assessment Model. It is crucial these meetings are recognised as an essential element of the assessment and **must** be held prior to the assessment being undertaken.

### **3.2 Who should organise the meeting?**

- 3.2.1 The child's social worker should organise these meetings.

### **3.3 Who should attend the meeting?**

- 3.3.1 It is vital that the people listed below attend these meetings:
- Referring social worker;
  - Family support team manager if appropriate;
  - Social care worker who will be leading the assessment and writing up the report;
  - Any other professional relevant to the parenting assessment, for example, Family Nurse Partnership;

- Parents/ carers who are to be assessed;
  - If this cannot happen/or they do not wish to attend, the recorded outcome of the meeting will be fed back to them prior to the beginning of the assessment. Who will do this and the date this will be undertaken is agreed and recorded in the meeting;
  - Inviting parents to attend is considered best practice and should be standard practice;
  - The social worker should invite the parents and will already have discussed the reason for the assessment with them;
  - The social worker should also be responsible for organising how the parents will get to this meeting and arrange child care if needed.

3.3.6 The Family Support Team Manager should chair these meetings and the agenda should include the information set out in sections 3.4 to 3.7 below.

### **3.4 Reason for referral/what needs to be assessed**

3.4.1 This is an opportunity for expansion and clarification of the information on the referral form. The single assessment or referring information would have already noted the area of concern which requires further assessment. It is not good enough to simply state on the referral form that a parenting assessment is required, without giving clarity to the specific issues. This may seem obvious, but without real clarity it is not possible for those undertaking the assessment to produce a clear and useful assessment.

### **3.5 Structure of parenting assessment**

3.5.1 This section is about putting a structure around the discussion that has just happened from the previous section. The specific areas to be agreed should be detailed at the referral meeting. This also includes drawing upon, as far as possible, the timetable for the sessions, with dates and who will be carrying out each session.

3.5.2 If this cannot be completed in full at the meeting the completed version will be sent to all people who were invited to the meeting.

### **3.6 Risk assessment information**

3.6.1 The Family Support Team should undertake a risk assessment prior to each parenting assessment and as a consequence the Family Support Team Manager will ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that the assessment is completed safely.

### **3.7 Distributing the referral meeting information**

- 3.7.1 It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to send copies of completed referral meeting notes to all people who were invited to the meeting. This needs to be completed within three working days of the referral meeting. If the parents were unable to attend the meeting it is vital the notes from this meeting are fed back to them. The decision around who is going to do this will be made in the meeting.

## **4. Initial visit to parents**

### **4.1 Why is an initial visit to the parents needed?**

- 4.1.1 If the parents were unable to attend the referral meeting then this is a really important opportunity for the assessing worker to introduce themselves to the family and begin to build up a working relationship with them. It is an opportunity for the worker and the social worker to clearly explain why there is a need for an assessment to be completed and what will happen after this is carried out.
- 4.1.2 If the family did attend the referral meeting then this visit can be carried out by the assessing worker. This will be an opportunity to explain the assessment process in more detail and confirm arrangements.
- 4.1.3 Parents have a right to understand what will happen during the assessment, why it's happening and what the purpose of the assessment is. This can feel like a really intrusive process for them, so it's crucial that the worker is open and honest about what is going to happen, as this allows the parents to prepare themselves and understand the reasons why this is happening.
- 4.1.4 This visit should happen after the referral meeting and within the agreed timeframe specified in this meeting. It needs to happen at a convenient time for the parents.
- 4.1.5 It is important that the parents are reminded about the agreed actions at the referral meeting:
- Reasons why the assessment is needed, what will happen after the assessment has finished;
  - Do the parents understand the reason for the assessment?
  - What the process will be – the family will be continually observed, how many staff, family will be given feedback, what staff need to observe etc.;
  - What aspect of their parenting will be assessed;

- Timetable for the assessment;
- Where the assessment will be undertaken. It should be assumed that the assessments will be undertaken in the child's home with the parents, unless there is a clear reason why this should not be the case, for example where a child is in foster care;
- Written agreement form – to be discussed, agreed and signed by parents and the worker, including contact details for the assessing worker and their manager. This is to be given to the parent/s;
- How the feedback to the families will be given.

## **5. Feedback to parents**

- 5.1 It's vital that workers are open and honest with the parents about what they have assessed. This ensures that families have a fair and open assessment. Parents appreciate honesty and although some of the feedback may be difficult for them to hear, it is essential for them to receive this feedback, so they can move forward and make the necessary changes if they are needed.
- 5.2 This is an opportunity to give the family areas to work on and also positives about what you are observing. By recording the information gathered in each session, feedback can be provided and the social worker can evidence the advice and guidance given to the family. The worker can then clearly see if this was acted upon or not and therefore assists with the overall analysis of parenting capacity and capacity to change.

## **6. Review meetings**

- 6.1 These meetings allow an opportunity for everyone involved in the assessment, including the parents, to come together and discuss the assessment, its outcomes and what actions will now be undertaken.

## **7. Feedback report to parents**

- 7.1 It is essential that the parents have the report fed back to them.
- 7.2 The assessing worker and social worker needs to feed back the report to the parents, unless there is a clear reason as to why this should not happen, and if so, this needs to be clearly recorded on the child's file.
- 7.3 The parents have the right to see and be provided with the whole report to read and explained to them.

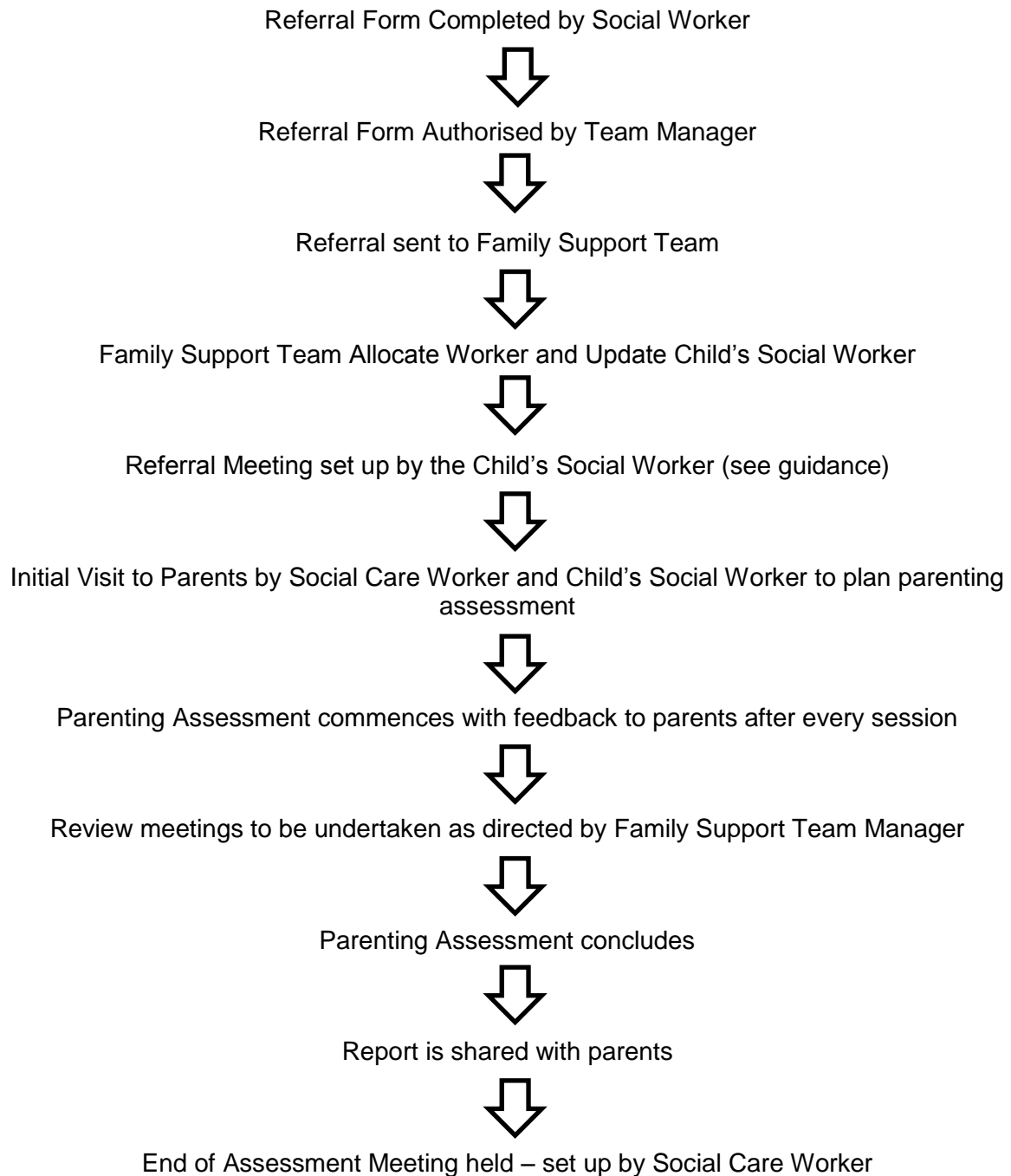
- 7.4 They need to be given the opportunity to hear this in full. However, if they do not wish to have the whole report read to them, the conclusions should be explained as a minimum requirement Parents are to be provided with a written copy of the report, unless there is clear reason why this should not happen, which needs to be recorded on the child's file.

## **8. Further information**

[Children's Social Care Guidance and Procedures](#)

[Reference: Fowler, J \(2003\) \*A Practitioner's Tool for Child Protection and the Assessment of Parents\*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003, London](#)

# APPENDIX 1 - Parenting Assessment Flow Chart



## **APPENDIX 2 – Parenting Assessment and Family Support Team Referral Form**

## **APPENDIX 3 – Parenting Assessment Report Template**