

# 8 Multi-agency practice standards

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Supporting all workers to undertake effective assessments when working with children and their families



**Bolton  
Council**

# Foreword

Bolton can be proud of a long history of effective multi-agency working to safeguard children and young people. The development of the nationally acclaimed Child Concern Model, the more recently effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Bolton's 'Framework for Action', builds on strong multi-agency working to make sure that any child who needs a coordinated response from more than one agency receives a consistent and meaningful intervention.

Bolton has responded positively to recent changes in legislation, all of which require us to work across services in an integrated way to meet the needs of the whole family across all the levels of vulnerability. It is essential to build on practice to ensure that agencies work together with families to undertake meaningful assessments, deliver on action plans and share information appropriately, to make lasting change with families even though their problems can be complex and challenging.

This guide has been developed by practitioners and managers from across the entire children's workforce in Bolton. It should not be used as a methodical checklist but to support best practice.

The guide identifies and provides advice for all stages of interventions from preparation, assessment and analysis to delivery and review. The guide also outlines what support practitioners should be receiving and outlines best practice for supervisors. Suggestions regarding a broad range of advice and support materials are included - these tools can be found on the Bolton Safeguarding Children Board website [www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk](http://www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk)

We are proud of our multi-agency commitment to support children, young people and their families in Bolton and hope that this guide supports us to continue our effective working relationships and to develop our work with families.

Best wishes

**M. Tarver**

Chair – Bolton Safeguarding Children's Board.

# Acknowledgement

Bolton Safeguarding Children Board would like to acknowledge and extend our thanks to Bolton Children's Services Staying Safe Department who developed the original piece of work upon which we have based this tool. Particular thanks are given to the social workers and managers who committed their time to develop their model of eight assessment standards.

We would also like to thank members of the Guidelines Working Group, the Integrated Working Champions Group and all those who critically reviewed the document for their time and energy in developing and adapting the original model to create this multi-agency tool.

Finally we would like to take this opportunity to thank the extensive contribution made by the late Tony Morrison MBE to the original work, and subsequently his influence on this tool. Tony was a great advocate of strong and positive multi-agency work and we hope that through this tool his legacy will continue in Bolton.

# Using the standards

These standards have been developed as a guide to support workers at Level 1, 2 and 3 of Bolton's Framework for Action. They aim to help workers consider what their strengths are when working with children, young people and their families, and what they can do to develop these further.

The standards can be used flexibly in a number of situations and although they are presented in a sequence, in reality you will use them in the order that best meets your needs and the needs of the assessment you are working on. You are encouraged to reflect on each of the standards and gauge where your practice is at.

## It may be helpful for you to consider within each standard whether:

- You feel challenged by this standard or the particular elements within it e.g. you are not confident about this (C).
- Your assessment practice is patchy around this standard or particular elements within it e.g. you can do it in some cases, but not in others (P).
- You feel strong around the standard or elements within it and are confident you do this, unless it is a very difficult situation (S).

## You can then consider:

- How you can be proactive in meeting your learning needs?
- What your supervisor can do?
- How might your colleagues/co-workers help?
- The training/development opportunities you could make use of?

## Don't forget:

You may want to use different tools to help you work through this practice guide; here are a few suggestions:

- The Graded Care Profile
- Signs of Well Being
- A Day in the Life of a Child
- The HOME Inventory
- Information Sharing Guidance for Practitioners and Managers
- Genogram
- Chronology – Life Cycles
- Domestic Abuse Guidance

All of this learning can be used as evidence of your Continual Professional Development.



# 1

## **You need to be clear about your role in the assessment, don't be unprepared.**

- You consider that the child is safe from harm at every stage of your involvement and take action if you need to.
- Your assessment will focus on the child and parents circumstances and needs; your assessment will cover health, education, housing etc – all aspects of the child's life.
- You are clear about what you are going to do, when you are going to do it and what outcomes need to be achieved from the assessment.
- You follow policies and procedures including any legal requirements, for example Framework for Action, Integrated Working Processes and inter-agency guidance.
- You understand the elements of the assessment tools you use, e.g. Common Assessment Framework, and will consider the needs of the whole family.
- You are clear what information you need to collect for the assessment.
- You have thought about where you feel confident in this assessment, where you may need support and how you can access this.

## 2

# You need to work together with your family.

- You agree with family members why there needs to be an assessment and how you will do this together.
- You have discussed confidentiality with the child and parents, stating how and with whom you will share information and describing situations where confidentiality and consent will be broken.
- You make sure you involve and gather the views of all the relevant people in the assessment; including non-resident parents, parent's partners, wider family members or other significant adults.
- You share information appropriately and sensitively with family members.
- You check out any possible barriers to the child or family taking part in the assessment, e.g. learning disability, culture, language, mental illness. Identify ways of making the assessment process accessible for family members.
- You spend time with the child alone in a suitable place (with parental consent) and take the child's story, needs, views and feelings seriously.
- You develop a real sense of what a day in the life of this child is like within their family; the significant adults in the child's life and the child's relationship with these adults.
- You listen and accurately record how and what family members tell you.
- You keep families involved with what's happening and the reasons for any changes or delay; you consider any contingencies together.
- You present and act professionally and use plain english that is free of jargon.
- You are honest with the family and check what's happening and why; you involve them in developing the action plan and in identifying outcomes.

3

## Make sure you gather assessment information in a clear and sensitive way.

- You explain the reasons for, and gain consent for the information you obtain and share.
- You decide when you need to over-ride consent to share information, informing relevant people when this is going to happen and recording your reasons, for example where there may be child protection issues, prevention of a crime etc.
- You make use of local tools and guidance to gather information in a structured way, for example Neglect and the Graded Care Profile, Signs of Well-being, A Day in the Life of a Child, Safeguarding Children and Families Affected by Substance Misuse etc.
- You evaluate the accuracy of the information to distinguish between facts, feelings, opinions, assumptions and identify what information is missing.
- You undertake objective, professional observations and discuss any differences or inconsistencies in the information you have gathered or observed with the child or parents where appropriate.
- You establish who is living in the home, other significant adults or children and know when to inform other workers.
- Where appropriate, you observe and assess the home environment, including upstairs rooms, cupboards, sleeping arrangements.
- You develop an understanding of how the family works; its culture, tradition and identity and what this means for the child. This includes religious practices, ethnicity, work patterns, parenting practice.
- You understand and discuss the impact and influence of cultural norms as part of the assessment.
- You are aware of how your role and style may influence the willingness of others to share information, particularly when it concerns sensitive or disputed information.

# 4

## You should be working with other agencies.

- You develop good working relationships with other agencies and workers. You are clear on the role and tasks of other workers involved in the assessment, including agreement on the Lead Professional role.
- You agree with other workers what actions and support they will contribute and when.
- You communicate with other workers during the assessment process to share, clarify and evaluate information.
- You make use of other workers expertise and knowledge to inform your assessment.
- You avoid professional jargon and use plain English.
- You value the contribution of other workers and use multi-agency meetings to share their information and consider the implications for your assessment.
- You can challenge the views of other workers in an appropriate manner and have confidence in your professional judgement.
- You aim to resolve professional differences by listening and offering constructive feedback; you may wish to refer to Bolton Safeguarding Children Board's policy on resolving professional differences.



# 5

## The information you gather needs to be analysed and an informed action plan put in place.

- You can show how the child's safety and needs have remained central throughout the assessment by demonstrating an understanding of the impact on the child of living in their environment.
- Your analysis has a clear and logical structure; you understand what the information you have gathered means for the child and can identify what action needs to be taken to make things better or to maintain the strengths.
- You understand the difference between description and analysis; analysis is focused, evidence-based, balanced and seeks to explain:
  - What key issues have been identified by you, the child, parents, workers and any other significant adults?
  - Why did each issue start?
  - What keeps it going?
  - What is the impact of each issue on the child?
  - What are the strengths from the assessment?
  - What would help to make things better or maintain the strengths?
  - What will let everyone know when things are better?
- You carefully evaluate the balance of strengths and needs in the light of further information, even if it means revising your original assessment and plans.
- Your analysis includes the child and parent's understanding of the situation, including where they feel they need support.
- Your action plan is linked to the analysis and identifies what can change as a result.

# 6

## Your action planning and outcomes.

- You have identified clear outcomes from the assessment with the child, parents and other workers.
- You agree the action plan with the child, family and other workers, including who will be responsible for each action or task, which tasks are prioritised and the timing of when things will happen.
- You are clear about when, how and with whom the progress of the plan will be reviewed and evaluated.
- You are clear that the review identifies whether tasks have been completed, whether the child's needs are being met and whether outcomes have been achieved.
- You re-evaluate the balance of strengths and needs in light of further information and re-assessing if necessary.
- You evaluate the process with family members and use this to develop your skills and practice, for example Common Assessment Framework evaluation tools.
- You have discussed and agreed a contingency plan and when this will be used.
- You have identified what needs to happen to make a difference for the child.
- You share the assessment and action plan at transition points.



## Your assessment is 'fit for purpose.'

- You complete the assessment and action plan in a timely manner to prevent delay.
- Your contacts with other workers and visits to the child and family members during the assessment are recorded in a timely fashion and include purpose of any contact, who was present, what happened and any outcomes.
- You have used the information provided by other workers to create a holistic assessment.
- You have used local guidance and tools to inform the assessment.

### Your assessment covers:

- the reason for the assessment
- how and from whom you have gathered information to inform the assessment
- the child's experience and understanding
- the strengths and needs for the child and parents and analyses the impact of these
- how the analysis leads to the decisions and actions
- how the child's situation will be kept under review
- the child / young person and their families wishes and feelings

# 8

## Good assessment practice is supported by supervision.

For readers who are supervisors, the following statements describe what you need to provide for workers undertaking assessment work.

For practitioners, these statements indicate how supervisors can and should be supporting and quality assuring your assessment practice, and how you can work with them on this.

- You are clear about the nature, scope, timescales and focus of assessment activity.
- You record clearly how supervision has influenced the direction, key decisions, outcomes of the assessment and actions.
- Your supervision includes reflection, analysis and where appropriate, challenge on assessment practice, as a way of building your awareness and confidence about your professional judgements.
- Your supervision considers how well you have communicated and worked with the child, parents and other workers; including your consideration of communication needs.
- You check whether tasks have been completed, asked and answered all the questions you intended to and engaged the child, parents and significant adults you need to see.
- You check at each stage of assessment that the child is safe from abuse.
- You observe assessment practice and provide constructive feedback.
- You have opportunities to explore family dynamics and their impact on the child.
- You explore feelings generated by the work and how this might affect assessment and interaction with family members.
- You set an open and constructive climate for discussion.
- You provide feedback on the quality of written assessments and the information contained within them; you have opportunities to debrief and learn from difficult situations to reflect on any learning from assessment activity.
- You monitor and review assessment skills and knowledge, and jointly identify training, co-working and other resources, to help develop skills and practice.
- You discuss any real or perceived barriers and any appropriate escalation of issues for resolution.

For further information please visit [www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk](http://www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk)

Large print, translations, text-only and audio formats of this guide can be produced on request.

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e-mail: [boltonsafeguardingchildren.gov.uk](mailto:boltonsafeguardingchildren.gov.uk)

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