

Assessments in Children's Services

– a guide for parents,
carers and families



London Borough of Waltham Forest
Children and Families' Service



Introduction

As you are aware, a referral was made to Children's Services by someone who thought you may be experiencing difficulties within your family. This leaflet explains what happens when a referral is made, what the social worker must do and how you can be part of the process.

What is a referral?

You or someone you know may have contacted Children's Services about a family who may be experiencing difficulties which is affecting a child or young person. This is called a 'referral'.

What does the social worker do?

First of all a social worker will decide if anything further is to be done. This could be:

- To take no further action
- To refer to another agency to provide support and advice
- To make an assessment and gather information to help understand the difficulties you are having with your child or children
- To determine what sort of help you may need or to implement child protection proceedings.

The decision about what to do must be taken within 24 hours of the referral being made.

Will my child be taken away from me?

Children's Services do everything they can to help families to stay together unless the child or children in that family needs to be protected or is in danger of significant harm. In extreme circumstances legal action will be taken to ensure that a child is safe. Generally the social worker will do

everything they can, including offering you the help of other services or agencies who may be able to help you to prevent the need to remove a child.

Child and family assessments

If the social worker feels they need a bit more information to help them make a decision, they will do what is called a child and family assessment. It is not a test of your ability to look after your child, but it helps them to gather basic information about the issues affecting the family to help them decide if there is any support you may need. The assessment can take up to 45 days from the date of the referral.

What information are they looking for?

The information that the social worker asks for is outlined below and should be proportionate to the presenting needs and background history.

They will talk to other professionals who may work with you and your child or children such as your GP, teacher/s or health visitor.

They will look at:

- Your child's developmental needs
- Your parenting capacity – your strengths in managing the difficulties you may be experiencing
- Your friends and family – any support you may have in your networks.

They will then look at any action which needs to take place immediately. For example, this could be to refer you to a service which can help develop your parenting skills or day-care for your child or children.

Child's developmental needs

- Health – are there any health needs such as a disability or medication?
- Education – does your child need extra support at school or with learning?
- Emotional and behavioural development – does your child have behaviour which you find difficult to manage?
- Identity – does your child lack self-confidence?
- Family and social relationships – how does your child relate to others and how do the others respond?
- Social presentation – how do others respond to your child?
- Self-care skills – does your child have the early practical skills such as dressing and feeding?

Parental capacity – looking at your strengths

- Basic care – providing for your child's needs
- Ensuring safety – making sure your child is protected from harm
- Emotional Warmth – giving your child a sense of being valued
- Stimulation – playing and learning with your child
- Guidance and Boundaries – helping the child to know the difference between right and wrong
- Stability – providing a stable environment.

Family and environment

- Family history and functioning – who lives with you and how they are related to the child?
- Wider family – who are the wider members of the family?
- Housing – does the house have basic amenities such as water, heating, cooking facilities, sleeping arrangements etc?
- Employment – what impact does this have on your child?

- Income – do you have a regular income or might you be entitled to any benefits?
- Family’s social integration – how does the family mix with other people in the local neighbourhood?
- Community resources – what services are available locally such as health, schools, transport, shops, place of worship and leisure activities?

In a small number of cases, it may be necessary for the social worker to meet urgently with other professionals because they feel that a child or children may be harmed. In this case, legal action may be taken by the local authority, by the police or by one of the parents (for example, an injunction) to protect the child.

Once the assessment has been completed, the information in it will be shared with you by the social worker. They will also tell you if they need to gather more information to help them decide which services you should be offered.

This assessment should be completed within 45 working days. The social worker will summarise why they think some of the problems are happening and what can be done to improve the situation including the services that may be offered.

You will be asked to help to create and agree an action plan which will be signed by all of the agencies who may be involved in helping you and your child or children. You will receive a copy of the core assessment and will be involved in completing some of the actions. Your family may receive on-going support from a social worker and will be invited to attend review meetings until the need for support comes to an end.

What if I don't agree with the assessment?

Hopefully you will have been actively involved in the assessment, however, if you have not or you are unhappy with and explain why. The social worker should record your view and amend inaccuracies. The social worker cannot change any factual information received from another agency and will not always change their assessment of the situation. We will always record your views.

The Family Rights Group is an organisation which helps families involved with Children's Social Care, who may be able to offer assistance:

The Family Rights Group
The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, E8 3DL

Tel: 0808 801 0366

www.frg.org.uk

Complaints

We always try to provide good quality services for children but we know that sometimes we get things wrong, and we try to resolve any problems as soon as they arrive. If you are unhappy with the service that you have received, you can write to:

Complaints Team
Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3000

complaints@walthamforest.gov.uk

www.walthamforest.gov.uk/complain