

## What is it?

**C**ommon: processes, across England, to all services and agencies within Universal Services, (agencies/services that are generally available to all children and young people. e.g. schools, Connexions, Health, Children's Centres, Youth Centres etc.)

**A**ssessment: a holistic assessment to ensure that important factors are not overlooked, to identify needs and generate actions to reduce the negative impact of those needs.

**F**ramework: a complete process to identify needs early, assess those needs, create a plan of action delivered through Integrated Services, review progress, evaluate outcomes and close action/delivery plan; In order to improve the lives of children and young people so that they can all achieve the following five Every Child Matters outcomes:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being



The Common Assessment Framework is a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services and all local areas in England. It aims to help the early identification of children and young people's additional needs and promote coordinated service provision to meet them. The holistic approach adopted by the common assessment focuses on three assessment areas:

- development of the child or young person: how the child or young person is developing, including their health, emotional and social development, and progress in learning
- parents and carers: how parents and carers are able to support their child or young person's development and respond appropriately to their needs
- family and environment: the impact of wider family and environmental elements on the child or young person's development and on the capacity of their parents/carers



# Who is the Common Assessment Framework for?

The Common Assessment Framework is aimed at children and young people with additional needs that are not being met by their current service provision

Potentially all children and young people from pre-born to under 19 years of age, this can be extended to 24 years where a young person has an identified learning difficulty or disability.

Children, young people and families may experience a range of challenges at different times in their lives. However, while all children and young people require access to high-quality universal services, some of them also may be at risk of not achieving good outcomes. Some of these might be associated with:

- Parental issues that have a negative impact on children's outcomes
- disruptive or anti-social behaviour
- 'poor classroom behaviour'
- overt parental conflict or lack of parental support/boundaries
- involvement in, or risk of, offending
- poor attendance or exclusion from school
- experiencing bullying
- special educational needs
- disabilities
- not in education, employment or training (NEET) post-16
- poor nutrition or inadequate clothing
- ill health
- substance misuse
- anxiety or depression
- experiencing domestic violence
- housing issues
- teenage pregnancy and parenthood (including the risk of pregnancy and early parenthood, as well as actual pregnancies and parenthood among young people)
- Young carers who exhibit additional needs which are as a direct result of their caring responsibilities, e.g. truancy/lateness, ill health, housing issues.

In addressing the needs of children and young people with additional and complex needs, the Common Assessment provides a generic and holistic assessment of a child or young person's strengths and needs. This enables decisions to be made about how best to meet those needs, in terms of both what the family or community can do and also what services could be provided.

**It will also help you get other services to assist, because they will recognise that your concern is based on evidence.**

Within the group of children and young people with additional needs, a small proportion has more significant or complex needs which meet the threshold for the statutory involvement of Children's Social Care. These are:

- children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan
- looked-after children and young people care leavers
- children and young people for whom adoption is the plan
- children and young people with severe and complex special educational needs
- children and young people with complex disabilities or complex health needs
- children and young people diagnosed with significant mental health problems
- young offenders involved with youth justice services (community and custodial)



## Using the Common Assessment to involve additional services

The Common Assessment should be used to decide whether to involve additional services. For this reason many agencies are now asking for a service request to be supported by the holistic Common Assessment to evidence need, limit the numbers of inappropriate requests and target their services more effectively. This enables the new agency to have the information they need, and avoids the child/young person, parent/carer having to re-tell their story again. It is important to understand the Common Assessment is **NOT A REFERRAL FORM**. It is a holistic assessment to identify additional needs and create an Action/Delivery Plan to tackle the negative impact of those needs, by planning and co-ordinating additional services.

**If you treat the Common Assessment as a referral form, you will inevitably focus on your pre-conceived solution and miss important and relevant information that a holistic assessment will disclose.**

Before you do a Common Assessment, you should also check whether a Common Assessment already exists by phoning the CAF Coordinator. If an assessment exists and/or other practitioners are working with the child or young person, with the consent of the child or young person and family, you should work with these practitioners to ensure that information from existing assessments is taken into consideration. If there is already a Lead Professional you should contact them to discuss your concerns and if appropriate join the team of professionals working with the child or young person

## Working with unborn babies:

If you are completing a Common Assessment for an unborn baby, you will find some of the fields on the assessment form are not relevant. In these fields, enter either 'not known' or 'not applicable.'

In the name field, state 'unborn baby' and the mother's name, e.g. 'unborn baby of Ann Smith' (and the father's name if appropriate).

All pregnant women should have a midwife they know and trust to co-ordinate her pregnancy care. If you are not that person, this will be a key person to consult if undertaking a Common Assessment with a pregnant woman.

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## Working with infants and very young children:

You should try to involve and work directly with infants and very young children in a way that is most appropriate for them; for example, through observation, play and thoughtful conversations. Most infants and their parents will have at least some contact with the midwife, health visitor and/or GP. If you are completing a Common Assessment for an infant, and the parent agrees, you should contact these practitioners.

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## Working with young people:

Common Assessment is generally used with children and young people under the age of 19, but its use can be extended beyond 19 where appropriate, to enable the young person to have a smooth transition to adult services, (and up to the age of 24 where a young person has a learning difficulty or disability.)

The possibility that a teenage boy is a father is a question that should be considered when assessing teenage boys, as their needs can be as complex as those of a teenage mother and are often not addressed.

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## Engaging with fathers & father figures:

Fathers or father figures sometimes find it difficult to engage with services. It is important to make it clear that you welcome their involvement as much as that of mothers.

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## Working with children and young people not receiving a suitable education:

If you discover that a child or young person is not receiving any form of educational provision, but is of compulsory school age, you should notify the Education Welfare Service within the local authority who is responsible for identifying children and young people not in education. You should also try to identify why the child or young person is missing education to assess whether there are needs that should be addressed.

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## Working with privately fostered children:

If you discover that a child or young person is, or may be, privately fostered, (Children are privately fostered when they are cared for on a full-time basis by adults who are not their parents or a close relative, for a period of 28 days or more,) you should notify Children's Social Care.

## Working with children/young people and parents/carers who do not speak English as their first language:

For children/young people and parents/carers who do not speak English as their first language, appropriate support must be put in place to enable them to engage in the Common Assessment Framework process. You can contact the Diversity Team Leader for additional support.

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