

Guidance Note for Practitioners when completing Pre-Birth Assessment

Please refer to the Pre Birth Assessment Pathway

1. Introduction

There are a range of circumstances where social workers may undertake Pre-Birth Assessments.

Situations where a Pre-Birth Assessment may be required include where a previous child has been removed; where there has been previous care proceedings; where there is parental drug and alcohol misuse; where there is significant domestic violence between parents and adults in the household; where there is parental mental health and learning disability or where the parent is a Looked After Child and/or care leaver.

2. Planning

Multi-agency planning and liaison needs to commence as soon as possible after the pregnancy is confirmed to plan the assessment. The allocated Social Worker will lead on the Pre Birth Assessment with partner agencies contributing to the assessment. The assessment should take place as soon as possible to enable decisions to be made in good time, factoring in the potential for babies to be born early.

The impact of parental difficulties should be informed by professional advice and understanding from relevant agencies such as Drug and Alcohol Services, Learning Disability Services and Mental Health Services who should be involved in the planning of the assessment.

Where English is not the first language, or there are literacy or communication issues this must be taken into account in the planning stage. The use of an interpreter or advocate must be a consideration. Workers need to be aware of any risks to their own safety during the assessment and these may need to be addressed in supervision.

3. Purpose and Aims of the Assessment

The purpose and aims of the assessment are to undertake a thorough assessment of individual and family functioning and home circumstances. It is to identify the previous and current concerns in a family and the family's perception of these.

A further aim is to identify the strengths and positives within the family. The assessment will assess the potential and ability to maintain changes; identify support networks and identify risk to the child post birth and other children in the family.

The outcome of the assessment will identify the course of action, for example child in need plan, child protection plan or legal action.

A referral should be made for a Family Group Conference at the start of the assessment process. This is to identify the support network for the child post birth, and identify any alternative carers in the event that parent(s) cannot provide care.

4. Working Agreement/Assessment Plan

It is good practice to draw up a written agreement/assessment plan between the social work service and parents. The agreement/plan should outline the reason for the assessment, its purpose and aims and how the assessment will be carried out. The agreement will cover the following areas:

- Areas to be covered in the assessment
- Dates, times, venues of sessions and who will attend each session
- How the assessment will be shared and with whom
- Expectations of those participating in the assessment
- What parents can expect of the Assessor(s)

Parents should be seen alone and as a couple. Extended family members may need to be contacted. Assessment sessions will normally take place at the family home. One of the sessions in the family home should assess the home environment and preparations made for the baby's arrival.

It should be clearly stated that part of the process will be to liaise with other agencies.

5. Area to be covered in the Assessment:

The assessment should cover the areas within the Assessment Framework and the following areas should also be addressed:

- Individual history of parents, including any offending history;
- Assessment of strengths / safeguards
- Assessment of risks
- Parental understanding of concerns
- Practical arrangements for baby's care
- Capacity for and motivation to change

6. Practicalities in Undertaking the Assessment

The sessions should be recorded as fully as possible and typed as soon as possible following the session. Keep all rough notes for future reference as these may be required in Court.

The assessing Social Worker needs to meet with their Team Manager jointly to discuss progress with the assessment and any developments or difficulties. It is important to review the progress of the assessment mid-way through. The assessment must be completed no later than the second trimester.

7. Dealing with specific situations

Any difficulties which arise during the course of the assessment should be discussed as soon as possible with your manager. Any early indications of positive change should be clearly recorded, along with an analysis of the impact and meaning of this.

8. Going Forward

The assessment report should make a clear recommendation about identified risk to the expected baby, any protective factors and any service required, that would enable the parent(s) to provide care for the child.

A Multi-Agency Pre Birth Planning Meeting must be held chaired by the Team Manager to discuss the assessment and consider an appropriate plan. This meeting must take place no later than two weeks after the Pre Birth Assessment has concluded.

If the decision is that an Initial Child Protection Conference is to be convened, this must take place 6 weeks prior to the estimated due date of the child.

Where the identified risk is deemed to be high, the case needs to be presented to the Legal Gateway Panel. A Local Authority solicitor will be allocated if Panel agree that the Public Law Outline process is required or care proceedings should be initiated at birth.

It is the responsibility of the allocated workers to ensure the family, the hospital and all other professionals are fully aware of the plan for the child post birth, and it is clearly recorded on CareFirst should the birth happen outside office hours.