

Engaging with parents/carers

It is best to engage the parent without the child present since this will allow for more open discussion and enable the worker to decide whether the child needs to be seen on their own. There are situations where it is helpful to have a parent and child, or even the whole family, together e.g. when exploring family interactions and dynamics.

Where it is alleged that domestic violence between adults has occurred, caution should be taken about not placing the alleged victim at renewed risk by alerting the perpetrator before the risks posed have been assessed.

Avoid sending appointment letters or leaflets that specifically mention domestic violence without prior arrangement. It may be helpful to arrange for the parent to be met discreetly at the child's school or nursery, before approaching the home address.

Individual Profile of each parent to include:

History from birth, including education, own experiences of being parented, previous relationships, current relationships, parental attributes that may impact upon parenting capacity – see below: Complete an ecomap for each parent to identify significant relationships and sources of support, sources of stress.

Aspects of Parent / Carer capacities which affect their ability to respond appropriately to the child / young person's needs

The assessment should address if there are *attributes of the parent's capacity which affect their ability to respond appropriately to meet the child's needs.*

Research shows that the following are most likely to affect parenting capacity:

- Physical illness
- Mental illness
- Learning disability
- Substance/alcohol misuse
- Domestic violence
- Childhood abuse
- History of abusing children

Gaining personal information from parents can be a delicate and difficult process.

The practitioner should be prepared to explain to the parents the relevance of questions to the assessment of their child. Questions should be phrased sensitively.

The practitioner should ask the parent whether they have (or had):

- any significant health issues....
- life experiences from childhood to the present day....

....which the parent believes may have an impact on their parenting capacity or the child's health and welfare.

It is important to record when an issue or significant event is identified:

- who it involves or concerns
- Its effect on parenting

It is important to be aware of parent(s)/carer(s) strengths, skills and resources, as well as difficulties they are experiencing.

The practitioner should discuss the parent's views about their child being assessed. For instance: are they broadly supportive of offers of assistance or resistant to engaging positively with Children's Care? Are they seeking help; welcoming and accepting; or hostile, aggressive or uncooperative? Do they share the practitioner's assessment of the child and situation?

Checklist of questions to engage a Parent in sharing information about factors which may be affecting parenting capacity:

Physical Illness

- What contact do they have with the family doctor?
- Do they have medical treatment, attend clinics?
- How does the parent feel today?
- How do they feel generally?
- Has the illness improved or worsened recently?
- Do they eat and sleep well?
- How does the illness impact on their parenting?
- What does the parent think the child's attitude is, to their illness?
- Does their child act as a carer for them?
- What support do they receive from family and friends?

Mental Illness

- Is the mental illness a current or historical condition
- Is the illness ongoing or episodic?
- What contact do (did) they have with the family doctor?
- What contact do (did) they have with the mental health services?
- Do they have medical treatment, attend clinics? How effective are they?
- How does the parent feel today?
- How do they feel generally?
- Has the illness improved or worsened recently?
- Do they eat and sleep well?
- When did the mental illness start?
- Was the illness triggered by a particular event?
- How does the illness impact on their parenting?
- What does the parent think the child's attitude is, to their illness?
- Does their child act as a carer for them?
- What support do they receive from family and friends?

Learning disability

- In what ways do they think the learning disability impacts on their parenting?
- Do they require support from family and friends to care for their child?
- Does their child act as a carer for them?
- What does the parent think the child's attitude is, to their learning disability?

Substance or alcohol misuse

- When did the substance or alcohol misuse become problematic, or beyond their control?
- Is the misuse a constant or episodic?
- Has the misuse decreased or increased recently?

- How much a week does the parent spend on drugs or alcohol, what does this represent as a proportion of the family weekly income?
- Has the drug or alcohol misuse caused the parent to become involved in criminality?
- Has the drug or alcohol misuse caused the parent to become incapable of providing appropriate and safe care of their child?
- Have they sought medical assistance or attend clinics/ groups?
- Do they eat and sleep well?
- How do they think alcohol or drug misuse impacts on their parenting?
- What does the parent think the child's attitude is, to their illness?
- Does their child act as a carer for them? What impact do they think this has on the child?
- What support do they receive from family and friends?
- What steps, if any, is the parent currently undertaking to control or cease their drugs or alcohol misuse?
- What steps, if any, is the parent prepared to consider or take to control or cease their drugs or alcohol misuse?

Domestic violence

- When did the violence begin?
- What degree of violence took place e.g. verbal or racial abuse alleged common assault, alleged attempted murder?
- Has a report been made to the police?
- Has the police Domestic Violence Unit been involved?
- Has the victim been injured?
- Has the victim taken legal steps with a solicitor or court?
- Has the child ever witnessed, been involved, injured in an incident?
- Is the child safe to remain living at the address?
- What steps does the parent think are necessary to prevent further incidents?
- What steps is the parent prepared to consider or actually take, to prevent further incidents e.g. refuge, rehousing, court injunction, criminal complaint and proceedings, victim support, Next Link, change locks, police alerts?

Childhood abuse or maltreatment

- What kind of abuse or maltreatment took place e.g. physical, emotional, sexual, neglect?
- At what age was the parent when the abuse or maltreatment took place?
- Was the abuse or maltreatment reported or investigated?
- What outcome was there to the intervention?
- Was the parent subsequently protected or did the abuse or maltreatment continue?
- Has this experience made the parent more likely to cause harm, be abusive or be protective towards their own children?

History of abusing/maltreating children

- What attitude does the parent have towards the history of abuse or maltreatment?
- Has the parent changed their approach to parenting since the last incident of abuse or maltreatment?
- What is the *attitude* of the parent to the concerns of professionals about harm or danger to the child/
- Does the parent *understand* the concerns of professionals about harm or danger to the child?
- Is the parent prepared to cooperate with all reasonable requests made by social work staff?

- What concerns does the parent have about the implications or possible outcomes of cooperating with social work staff? What would help to ease those concerns?
- How are the parent's relationships with other professionals e.g. health and school?