

## 7. Assessment and treatment planning



### 7.1. Ability to undertake a comprehensive (biopsychosocial) assessments

Effective assessment skills need to be integrated with other areas of this framework:



- background knowledge about working with children/young people, and engagement and communication skills
- other assessment and formulation skills (risk assessment, assessing functioning within multiple systems, formulation and discussing the results of assessment).

Assessments need to be comprehensive, identifying biological, psychological and societal factors that may be contributing to the child/young person's strengths and difficulties – usually referred to as a 'biopsychosocial' assessment. The aim is to develop an understanding of the whole person, placing them in the context of their community.



The decision of whether an inpatient admission is right for a child/young person usually rests on a comprehensive assessment (though if an emergency admission is being considered, it may initially need to be based on the information immediately available). The decision will balance the potential benefits against the potential harms, with the containment of risk and need being a primary reason for admission. This issue is considered in greater depth in the Supporting Document that accompanies this framework.



#### Knowledge of the assessment process

- An ability to draw on knowledge that an initial assessment should ascertain whether the level of risk and need identified by the referrer meets criteria for an inpatient admission, and so indicate whether an admission is in the best interest of the child/young person
- An ability to draw on knowledge that the focus of the assessment process is to create a formulation (including a possible diagnosis) that guides the choice of intervention and aims to improve the quality of life of the child/young person and their family/carers
- An ability to draw on knowledge that assessments generate working hypotheses that need to be updated or corrected in response to further information that emerges during the course of contact



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- An ability to draw on knowledge that different parties may have multiple perspectives, and that their aims for intervention can be significantly different
- An ability to draw on knowledge that the assessment process can, in itself, alter views towards a problem

### Knowledge of standardised assessment frameworks

- An ability to draw on knowledge of local and national assessment forms, including those that can be completed by several different agencies working together

### Ability to coordinate a multidimensional assessment

- An ability to coordinate the assessment process across the team in a way that ensures that different facets and sources of experience are sufficiently explored while not creating repetition, overlap or burden for children/young people and families/carers
- An ability to undertake a 'multidimensional' assessment of the child/young person that is:
  - multimethod: including information from interviews, observations and measures, and any other methods that seem appropriate
  - multisource: including information from the child/young person, family/carers and any other relevant sources
  - multilevel: including information about the child/young person's physical (including sexual), emotional, cognitive, social development, along with cultural and spiritual influences

### Ability to identify people and agencies who need to be included in the assessment

- An ability to identify and involve the people and agencies in the child/young person's network of carers, including:
  - identifying the primary carers (e.g. parents, foster parents, residential childcare staff)
  - identifying who has parental rights and responsibilities (e.g. parent, family member, social work department)
  - identifying the professionals and agencies already involved with the child/young person (e.g. CAMHS, social work, youth justice)

### Ability to focus assessment

- An ability to develop initial hypotheses based on information from the referral, and an ability to use these to plan the assessment, and:
  - where appropriate and possible, an ability to liaise with any agencies involved with the child/young person prior to the assessment, to determine their roles



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	■ An ability to adapt assessments in response to any significant information that emerges:
	■ an ability to draw on knowledge of theory and research around child and family development, mental health, and child protection in order to:
	■ focus on topics that appear to be problematic or significant for the child/young person and family (e.g. taking a more detailed developmental history if there are indicators of developmental delays)
	■ move away from areas that do not appear problematic for, or salient to, the child/young person and family

### Ability to engage the child/young person and their family/carers in the assessment process

■	An ability to identify who should attend the assessment sessions
■	An ability to discuss confidentiality and its limits (e.g. that child protection information will be shared with other agencies)
■	An ability to explain the structure of the assessment and the areas that it will cover
■	An ability to explain the relevance of particular areas of the assessment (e.g. the importance of gathering information about family history).
■	An ability to respond non-judgmentally to information that emerges during the assessment
■	An ability to balance problem-focused questioning with questions that elicit areas of strength and resilience, e.g.:
	■ considering the potential for language used in the assessment to convey a negative connotation, and making appropriate adjustments (e.g. describing a task as a challenge rather than difficult)
	■ helping the child/young person and their family/carers reach a balanced view of themselves rather than feeling defined by their problems
	■ recognising the potential impact on engagement of 'relentless' questioning of problems and difficulties

### Ability to adapt the assessment to match the abilities and capacities of the child/young person and their family/carers

■	An ability to tailor language to match the abilities and capacities of the child/young person and their family/carers
■	An ability to engage children/young people with physical and sensory impairment (e.g. by altering the pace and content, and the modes of discussion)
■	An ability to make effective use of interpreters when working with child/young people and families/carers who do not speak the same language as the interviewer



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## Ability to assess risk of harm<sup>f</sup>

- Ability to assess risk of harm to self and others
- Ability to identify child protection concerns

## Ability to take a history

- An ability to make appropriate use of basic interview techniques (e.g. appropriate range of questioning formats, facilitation, empathy, clarification and summary statements)
- An ability to elicit specific detailed and concrete examples of behaviour when assessing and exploring areas of concern

## History of presenting problem(s)

- An ability to identify and explore the behaviours/symptoms/risks that are causing concern to the child/young person and their family/carers, including:
  - emotional symptoms (including their somatic expressions and any self-harming behaviours)
  - conduct problems (including harm to others)
  - developmental delays
  - relationship difficulties
- An ability to help the child/young person and family/carers elaborate the details of problems that concern them, including the frequency, duration and intensity
- An ability to analyse the function of specific problematic behaviours, by identifying:
  - the settings in which the problematic behaviours or symptoms manifest (including the people who are present, and details of places and times)
  - the situations or events that occur immediately before the behaviour, and that appear to trigger it
  - the consequences that immediately follow the behaviour (e.g. the reactions of others)
- An ability to assess the broader impact of symptoms or problems including:
  - the degree of social impairment
  - the degree of distress for the child/young person
  - the degree of disruption to others
- An ability to assess the child/young person's current functioning
- An ability to assess the child/young person's use of drugs and alcohol
- An ability to identify the child/young person's current and past contact with legal services
- An ability to identify previous attempts to solve the problems or manage symptoms (including any previous contacts with services)
- An ability to identify the child/young person and their family/carer's explanations of how behaviours/symptoms have developed

<sup>f</sup> Described in detail under 'Ability to recognise and respond to concerns about child protection' (3.5.) and 'Ability to undertake a collaborative assessment of risk and needs related to suicide and self harm' (7.2.).



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### **Developmental history**

- An ability to obtain information on the child/young person's development, including strengths and interests as well as any delayed or unexpected developmental processes
- An ability to undertake a detailed developmental assessment across biological, cognitive, communicative, emotional and social domains, including e.g.:
  - the pregnancy and birth
  - developmental milestones
  - reactions to past separations from caregivers
  - temperament, concentration and activity levels
  - sleep, eating and toileting history
  - communication and social skills

### **Medical history**

- An ability to elicit details of the child/young person's physical health history, including:
  - immunisations, infections, allergies, illnesses and operations
  - prescribed and non-prescribed medication
  - fits/faints, loss of consciousness, head injury
  - hearing and vision problems
  - contact with hospitals and specialist child health services

### **Relationship history**

- An ability to ask about the child/young person's friendships, e.g.:
  - first/early friendships (and how long they have lasted)
  - how many friends in primary school and beyond
  - what they did with their friends
- An ability to assess the child/young person's interpersonal functioning (e.g. in their family, close friendships, friendship networks)
- An ability to ask about the child/young person's intimate relationships, e.g.:
  - the history of any partnerships
  - the quality of their relationship with any current partners (and any other significant others who they are in regular contact with)
- An ability to ask about the influence of sexuality and gender diversity on the child/young person's identity and their experience of relationships, and:
  - an ability to discuss any adverse experiences associated with the child/young person's sexuality or experience of gender diversity (e.g. difficulties accepting their sexuality, homophobic and/or transphobic bullying)



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### ***Abuse and neglect***

- An ability to identify whether the child/young person has been exposed to traumatic experiences, abuse and neglect, e.g.:

- physical abuse
- exposure to domestic violence
- psychological abuse
- financial or material abuse or exploitation
- sexual abuse or exploitation
- neglect
- abuse in an organisational context

### ***Family history***

- An ability to identify areas of resilience within the family, as well as any stresses that may contribute to the problem presentation or to difficulties in the relationships between parent/carer and child/young person or within the family
- An ability to draw a family tree and obtain demographic details about each family member
- An ability to ask about family relationships, extended family, social networks and social support
- An ability to ask about both recent and past transitions experienced by the family (e.g. marriage, divorce, loss of family members, new additions to the family)
- An ability to ask parents about their own history, including:

- their own experience of being parented
- school and employment
- stressful life events, loss, trauma, neglect or abandonment
- mental ill health, learning difficulties, drugs and alcohol

### ***Educational history***

- An ability to obtain details of the strengths and interests and achievements shown by the child/young person within the education system as well as any difficulties
- An ability to obtain a comprehensive educational history from the child/young person, parent, including:
  - pattern of attendance including information on absences from school
  - pattern of contacts with school professionals (e.g. teachers, educational psychologists, special educational needs assistants)
  - academic ability and achievement
  - pattern of social relationships, play, and any experiences of bullying
  - emotional/behavioural, concentration or social difficulties



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### ***Routine screening for neurodevelopmental disorders (ASD and learning disability)***

- An ability to draw on knowledge of diagnostic criteria for learning disabilities and for autism spectrum disorder, and use this to:
  - routinely screen for neurodevelopmental disorders
  - identify whether and how a neurodevelopmental disorder may contribute to the child/young person's presentation, resources and needs
  - identify the implications for the child/young person's care

### **Ability to assess the child/young person and family/carer's cultural and social context**

#### ***Social***

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the incidence and prevalence of mental health concerns across different cultures/ethnicities/social classes
- An ability to ask about potential protective factors in the child/young person's social environment (e.g. social support, proximity to extended family or access to community resources)
- An ability to ask about any potential stresses in the child/young person's physical or social environment (e.g. overcrowding, poor housing, neighbourhood harassment, problems with gangs)
- An ability to ask about the child/young person's membership of peer groups (e.g. friendship groups, clubs)
- An ability to ask about the child/young person's experience and membership of gangs

#### ***Cultural***

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the child/young person and family/carers cultural, racial and religious background when carrying out an assessment of their behaviours, beliefs, and the potential impact of this perspective on their views of problems
- An ability to understand cultural influences on gender roles and gender identity, parenting practices, and family values
- An ability to identify the limits of one's own cultural understanding, and:
  - an ability to seek out further information about the child/young person and family/carer's religious, racial and cultural background from them and other sources

### **Ability to make use of observation of the child/young person, and of interactions between them and their family/carers during assessment**

#### ***Knowledge***

- An ability to draw on relevant knowledge to help structure observations, including:
  - the usual trajectories of child development
  - common neurodevelopmental conditions and mental health difficulties
  - theories relevant to understanding the child's interactions with caregivers (e.g. attachment theory)



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### ***Observation of the child/young person***

- An ability to observe the child/young person in relation to domains including:
  - physical appearance
  - levels of activity and attention
  - quality of social interactions and communication
  - emotional state
  - complexity and use of language
- An ability to observe and consider the impact of the assessment situation on the child/young person's presentation and behaviour when evaluating the validity and generalisability of any observations

### ***Observation of the interactions between child/young person, carer, and family***

- An ability to observe the interactions between the child/young person and caregiver(s)
- An ability to observe how family members interact with each other, e.g.:
  - how much sensitivity and warmth is shown by family members to each other
  - how much criticism is shown by family members
  - the ways that the parents/carers monitor the child/young person and set limits, and how the child/young person reacts to limit setting
  - whether the child/young person's behaviours appear to be reinforced by other family members
  - whether there are particular alignments between family members or hierarchies within the family
  - the language family members use to describe one another (i.e. as an indicator of their attitudes and feelings towards each other)
- An ability to include knowledge of the family's social and cultural background in any consideration of family interaction patterns

### ***Ability to draw on information obtained from other agencies***

- An ability to identify any agencies and/or key professionals currently or previously involved with the child/young person and the family/carers
- An ability to obtain consent prior to seeking information from an agency
  - an ability to draw on knowledge of local policies on confidentiality and information sharing when obtaining (and sharing) information about the child/young person and their family/carers
- An ability to obtain relevant records from agencies and identify and draw on information likely to be relevant