



# Other forms of harmful parenting: a structured guide

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Some of the links contained in the Pathway are not live. This is because they relate to internal Cafcass guidance. Please contact us at [Privatelawprojects@cafcass.gov.uk](mailto:Privatelawprojects@cafcass.gov.uk) should you wish to access this internal guidance or have any other questions about the Pathway.

# Introduction

This guidance and the accompanying tools are designed to support the Family Court Adviser's (FCA) structured professional analysis of cases where children may have been harmed under the following circumstances:

- when their parents' or carers' behaviour is affected by issues such as alcohol or drug abuse or mental health difficulties
- when they have been neglected
- or where there is concern they may have been sexually exploited or abused.

It forms part of the Child Impact Assessment Framework, which together with the Underlying Principles of Private Law Assessment, applies from the outset to case closure. Other parts of the Child Impact Assessment Framework and all relevant factors for the child will need to be considered as the assessment progresses.

As with all assessments, the case analysis should begin with and follow what is happening for each child, considering risk posed to them, the impact of parental behaviour, and their wider experiences.

Key practice points	
<b>Consider child impact and risk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What has been happening for this child? - <b>Past</b></li><li>• What is happening now? - <b>Present</b></li><li>• What might happen? - <b>Future</b></li><li>• How likely is it to be repeated? - <b>Risk</b></li><li>• How serious would it be? - <b>Impact on the child</b></li></ul>

## Context

Information regarding abuse and harm to children, arising in the ways set out below, may become apparent at any stage of the assessment.

- Alcohol misuse which is harmful to the child
- Drug misuse which is harmful to the child
- The impact of mental health difficulties, including personality disorders, that are harmful to the child
- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional and/or psychological abuse (including radicalisation)

## Assessing other forms of harmful parenting

- If this is the case the Evidence Informed Practice tools referred to in this guidance can be used to develop your analysis and to assess the risks and impact on the child.
- It is frequently the case that forms of harm for children do not exist in isolation. For example, the toxic trio of domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health difficulties are often found in the same case. This combination should alert you to explore the cumulative effect of these risks on the child.
- It is important to note that serious case reviews (now known as child safeguarding practice reviews) have highlighted learning regarding risks posed by the parent the child lives with, which have not been fully assessed because of the focus being on the application before the court. This may, for example, be limited to the arrangements for spending time with a child.
- As always, the focus of the assessment should be on the experiences of the child. As such, assessment should not necessarily be confined to the issues before the court if risks in other aspects of their lives are apparent.
- Be clear about the static risks (those which cannot be changed) and dynamic factors (those more amenable to change).
- **Use your case plan** for planning your interviews with the child and parents and/or carers to enable you to gather relevant information about other forms of harm to children.

Form of harmful parenting	Resource	Guidance on use (relating to key issues identified in the case plan)	Source
Drug misuse	<a href="#">SCODA - risk assessment with parental drug misuse</a>	To be used in an interview to establish an evidence base for analysis.	SCODA
	<a href="#">Tool for drug abuse</a>	To be used in an interview to establish an evidence base for analysis.	Cafcass – adapted from Fowler, 2003
Alcohol misuse	<a href="#">Alcohol use tool</a>	To be used in an interview to establish an evidence base for analysis.	Adapted from Department of Health (DoH), 2000
Mental health difficulties	<a href="#">Mental health thinking tool</a>	This is a tool to help organise FCAs' thinking and support them to critically review evidence in cases where parents have mental health difficulties. It is not designed to be a prescriptive or definitive measure of risk and should be used in the context of the overall structured professional judgement, in conjunction with the broader evidence in the case.	Dr Sheena Webb, Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust for Cafcass, 2017.
	<a href="#">Helping young people affected by parental mental illness</a>	General resources for professionals to be used when working with young people affected by parental mental illness.	Our Time, 2018
	<a href="#">Adult wellbeing scale</a>	To be used in an interview to establish an evidence base for analysis.	Department of Health, 2000
Child exploitation	<a href="#">Child sexual exploitation (CSE) screening tool</a>	This tool can be applied to all children (male and female) under the age of 18. Its purpose is to enable practitioners to assess a child's level of risk of CSE in a concise and consistent manner.	Cafcass
Sexual abuse	<a href="#">Sexual behaviours traffic light tool</a>	This tool lists examples of presenting sexual behaviours within four age categories. All green, amber and red behaviours require some form of attention and response, but the type of intervention will vary according to the behaviour. This tool must be used within the context of the guidance provided and should not be used in isolation.	Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool adapted with permission from True Relationships & Reproductive Health. (2012).
Neglect	<a href="#">Tool for parenting knowledge and style</a>	To be used to explore parents' understanding of their child's needs according to age and stage of development.	Cafcass – adapted from Fowler, 2003
	<a href="#">Parenting daily hassles scale</a>	An assessment tool which can be used with the parents/carers to consider their view of the children's needs and how they are coping with these needs.	Department of Health, 2000
	<a href="#">Neglect Appraisal Tool</a>	The tool methodology was derived from the Graded Care Profile which helps to ascribe levels of risk and was intended for public law practitioners to use when doing their gap analysis in order to help them independently assess levels of risk and so inform and evidence their position regarding interim removal, where neglect is a key issue.	NSPCC (date unknown)

## Reflect on your analysis and make recommendations in the child's best interests

- As in all assessments direct work with the child should be a fundamental task and children's wishes and feelings will help to form the analysis of their best interests.
- Use the information gathered from using the tools to inform your analysis and your planning with and for the child.
- We know that "it is what is done with information, rather than its simple accumulation, that leads to more analytic assessments and safer practice" (Brandon et al 2008). When using evidence informed tools, be clear about what the results mean for the individual child you are working with.
- Does there need to be any intervention or support to manage/ minimise the risk identified? How will the child know when the risk has been reduced, what will be different for him or her?
- Where you believe the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, consider the need to refer the case to the local authority under child protection procedures and/ or to recommend the court order a report under section 37 Children Act 1989 from the local authority.

## Reference list

If you would like to see any of the items listed, send the 5 or 6-digit item numbers (in **bold**) to [library@cafccass.gov.uk](mailto:library@cafccass.gov.uk) and [click here](#) to view a **further reading list (for internal use only)**

**164089.** Brandon, M., Belderson, Pippa., & Warren, C. (2008). *Analysing child deaths and serious injury through abuse and neglect*. Nottingham: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

**135655.** Fowler, J. (2003). *A practitioner's tool for child protection and the assessment of parents*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

**171674.** Great Britain, Department of Health. (2000). *Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families*. London: The Stationery Office.