



Every Child Matters
In Lancashire

Common Assessment Framework

**Lancashire Operational
Guidance**



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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This guidance establishes the operational framework in which the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) will operate in Lancashire.

It is aimed at all managers and practitioners in all agencies working with children, young people and their families who live and/or access services in Lancashire.

CAF is part of a set of interdependent elements of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme and should be considered in conjunction with guidance on:

- The Lead Professional
- Information Sharing

CAF has been designed for use with unborn babies, new babies, children and young people. In this document, the terms “child” and “children” have been used as shorthand to refer to babies; children and young people aged 0 to 18. CAF processes can be extended for young people beyond the age of 18 where it is appropriate to enable a young person to have a smooth transition to adult services. The term ‘parent’ has been used to represent mothers, fathers, carers and other adults with responsibility for caring for a child.

This document sets out the main features of the CAF, describes when

and how to undertake a common assessment, the operational process to be followed and provides recording forms and other supporting documentation.

This guidance and operational framework in which CAF will operate was agreed by the Lancashire Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership in 2007.

1.2 Background

The Green Paper, Every Child Matters, proposed the introduction of a national common assessment framework as an important part of a strategy for helping children, young people and their families to achieve the five priority outcomes to:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The Children Act 2004 gained royal assent in November 2004 and sets out the legislative framework to the green paper proposals.

The **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)** for children and young people is one of the contributing elements to the delivery of integrated frontline services, as outlined in the statutory guidance supporting section 10 (duty to cooperate and promote the well being) and section 11 (duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) of the **Children Act 2004**.

In Lancashire, the CAF Project has been established and is one of the activities being delivered under the Every Child Matters- Programme for Change, supporting the Vision of the Lancashire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership:

“Together, we will provide excellent services where people live and which are tailored to local priorities. We will stand up for Lancashire's children, young people and their families, listen to what they say is important, and take appropriate action. We will let everyone know what we are doing to improve outcomes for our children and young people.”

The CAF Project aims at supporting information sharing and multi-agency working and embedding the Common Assessment Framework and the role of the Lead Professional in the delivery of services for children and young people by all agencies across Lancashire.

1.3 What is the Common Assessment Framework?

CAF is a shared assessment tool for use across all children's services in England. It helps early identification of needs of children and young people and promotes a co-ordinated approach on how those needs should be met.

The Common Assessment Framework for children and young people is a process that has been designed

specifically to help practitioners assess needs at an early stage and then work with families, alongside other practitioners, to meet those needs.

The CAF is part of a wider programme to provide more integrated services and should:

- **Support earlier intervention**, by providing a method to help practitioners who come into day-to-day contact with children and families, such as those providing ante and post-natal services or those in early years settings and schools, to identify and meet identified needs at an earlier stage; leading to fewer children in need of specialist assessments and support.
- **Improve multi-agency working**, by enabling practitioners/professionals to maintain a single, overview record of the needs and progress of a child in contact with several agencies; embedding a common language of assessment, need and response; and improving communications and information sharing between practitioners;
- **Reduce bureaucracy for families**, by providing practitioners with a fuller overview of a child's needs and responses, thereby reducing the number of inappropriate and duplicate inter-agency requests of service, separate assessments and different agencies working with the child. This means for families that they do not have to tell and re-tell their story every time they come in contact with different agencies.

The CAF as a shared assessment tool consists of:

- **Pre assessment checklist** which practitioners may use to help decide who would benefit from a common assessment helping recognising the signs that a child has unmet needs.
- A **process for undertaking a common assessment**, to help practitioners gather and understand information about the needs and strengths of the child, based on discussions with the child, their family and other practitioners as appropriate, and to develop appropriate and timely support plans
- A **standard form** to help practitioners record and, where appropriate, share with others, the findings from the assessment, supporting those working with the family to find a response to unmet needs.

The CAF process has been designed so that common assessments are:

- An early assessment of a child's needs that can act as a basis for early intervention before problems reach a crisis point
- Holistic, looking at the range of child's needs and strengths across domains of child development, parent and carers capacity and family and environmental factors (see section 2.4)
- Undertaken by (and understandable by) practitioners of a range of agencies and specialisms
- High quality, undertaken according to good practice standards in

working with families and providing evidence based that is trusted by other services

- Co-ordinated and shared between relevant practitioners.

1.4 Which children is CAF aimed at?

CAF can be used for any **unborn baby, new baby, child or young person**.

The CAF can be used generally up to the age of 18, but extended beyond 18 where it is appropriate to enable a young person to have a smooth transition to adult services. If there are concerns about more than one child in the same family a common assessment should be undertaken for each child - CAF is an individual assessment.

CAF is aimed at children with additional unmet needs.

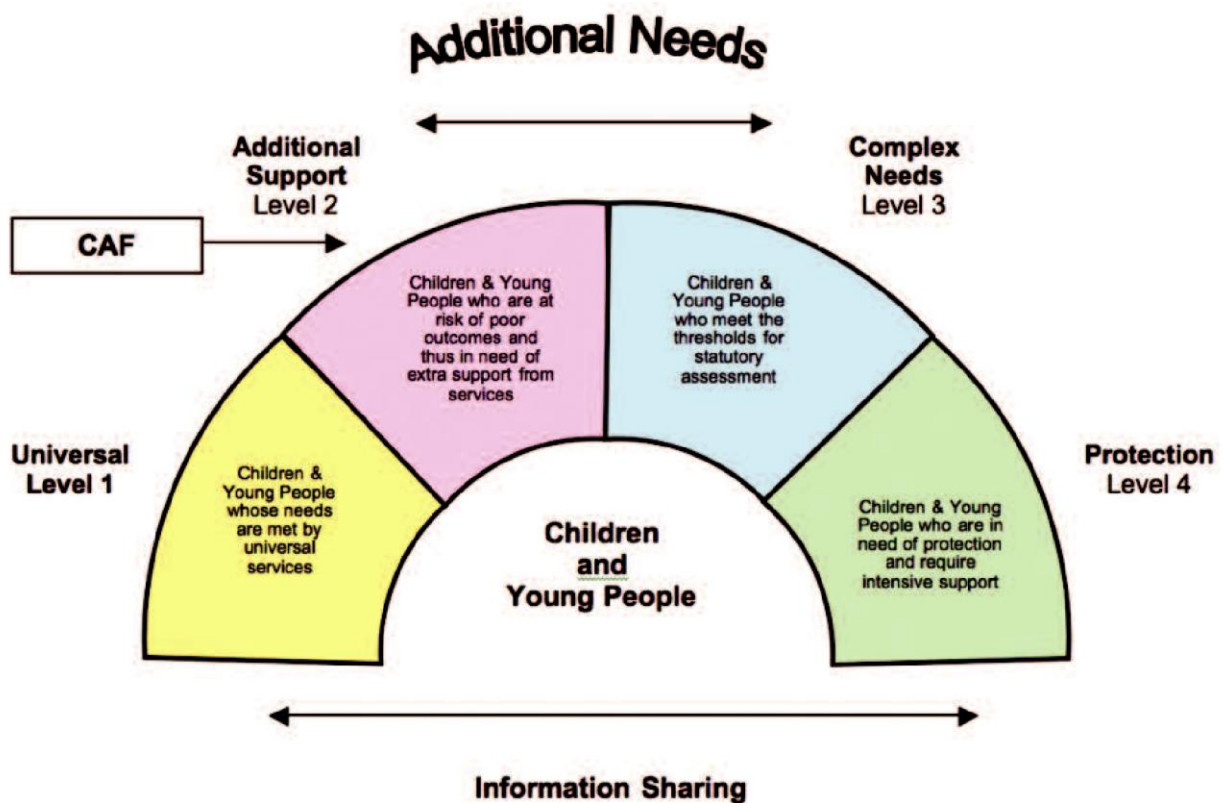
Children and families may experience a range of needs at different times in their lives. All children require access and should have access to high quality universal services. However, some children are at risk of poor outcomes. These are **children with additional needs** and they will require targeted support from education, health, social care or other services. The CAF is aimed at this group of children to ensure needs are identified at an early stage and that appropriate and coordinated support plans are developed to address those needs.

1.4.1 CAF and the Lancashire Continuum of Need

Additional needs are defined in Lancashire according to the Lancashire Continuum of Need. CAF is aimed at children at level 2 of the continuum. The Lancashire Continuum of Need has been developed to provide help and guidance to practitioners at all levels, working in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors, who work with children and their families. It allows practitioners to identify levels of need through indicators related to the 5 outcomes. The Continuum of Need also supports practitioners in determining how their

service can best support children, young people and their families by providing guidance as to what assessment and planning procedures to follow at each level to meet or prevent the escalation of need.

Please refer to Lancashire Continuum of Need and Multi-agency Procedures.



1.5 When to undertake a CAF?

A common assessment process can be undertaken at any time a practitioner believes a child will not progress towards the five Every Child Matters priority outcomes without additional services/support.

A common assessment is likely to be of most help when:

- a practitioner is concerned about how well a child is progressing. This may be concerns about their health, welfare, behaviour, progress in learning or any other aspect of their well-being. It may be that the child/parents may have raised a concern themselves;
- the needs are unclear, or broader than a particular service can address;
- a common assessment would help identify the needs, and/or get other services to help meet them because it is likely the child will require support from another agency.

It is not necessary to undertake a common assessment on every child. If a child is progressing satisfactorily, or already having their needs met, a CAF is not needed. A common assessment is also unlikely to be needed if the child's needs are clear and can be met by the child or their parent/carer or by the assessing agency (although we would encourage practitioners to look beyond the presenting problem).

To support practitioners in deciding when to initiate a CAF, the Lancashire Continuum of Need and this CAF

operational guidance have been developed to provide a framework to which all services in Lancashire should work. **The CAF process should be undertaken, with the consent of the child, young person, parent/carer, when it is identified that a child has additional unmet needs.**

However, quite often the decision to undertake an assessment is a matter for professional judgement and the CAF pre-assessment checklist supports practitioners in this decision. You should also discuss your concerns with the child and/or their parent and others involved and check whether a CAF already exists before deciding on a common assessment. If you are still unsure discuss the case with your line manager, CAF key contact within your agency.

If at any stage (including when a child, young person, parent/carer refuses consent to undertake a CAF process) you think the child is in need of protection (level 4 Lancashire Continuum of Need), you should follow established Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LCSB) procedures without delay. Please make contact with Children's Social Care (CSC) and follow up the referral with written evidence on a CAF form within 48 hours. If you are unsure what to do, contact CSC.

It is important to stress that completing a common assessment cannot guarantee provision or automatic entitlement to particular services. It is important that practitioners do not promise that services will be delivered, especially those involving another agency.

Lancashire Children's Trust and District Trusts will be working to determine where to focus their resources in line with local and county priorities so as to maximise the outcomes for children and minimise the risk that identified needs will not receive an adequate response. Gaps between needs and responses should be identified through monitoring of the CAF process and feed into local planning and strategy discussions.

Practitioners need to know about how other agencies operate in relation to CAF, understand local priorities and the availability of services. The Lancashire Children's Service Directory can support practitioners in accessing information about provision of services available in Lancashire.

www3.lancashire.gov.uk/cyp/csd/

1.6 Who should use the CAF?

The CAF will help practitioners undertake assessments in a more consistent way. In many cases, it will just formalise current practice. With the right attributes and/or training, we expect that practitioners in any agency will be capable of undertaking a common assessment.

Where the assessment indicates that the child has urgent or complex needs, requiring specialist assessment and intervention, the common assessment information will feed into the specialist assessment process e.g. Special Education Needs (SEN) statutory assessment, Onset/Asset (Youth Offending Team) and Initial and Core Assessment (Children's Social Care).

In Lancashire we expect that that every practitioner working with children, young people and families will:

- understand the outcomes we want for children, e.g. identify children who need a common assessment to identify their additional needs and arrange appropriate support;
- Have awareness of the CAF process, when and how to complete a CAF, and where to go within their own agency for support or for a CAF process to be initiated.

It is up to individual services to determine which practitioners should undertake common assessments. Every agency offering services to children and young people and their families (whether from statutory, community or voluntary sectors) will train at least some of its staff to undertake common assessments. The relevant services include health, schools, education, integrated youth support, childcare, early years, social care, police and youth justice. Practitioners in specialist services who are more likely to be receiving CAFs will need to have knowledge and support to use and build upon them. It is not expected that every practitioner working with children will be trained in detail on common assessment but it is expected that:

- relevant agencies will embed CAF process as appropriate within their workforce development plans, business processes, performance management and quality assurance systems, and ICT developments;
- there will be an awareness of the CAF among those who provide relevant services to adults, such as adult health and social care services, housing, the probation service and the immigration service.

The Lancashire CAF training programme has been agreed. For further information please check http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/education/childrenstrusts/whats_involved/caf/index.asp

1.7 The CAF and other Assessments

CAF is a generic assessment. It provides an initial assessment of a child's needs. In Lancashire CAF is to be adopted by all agencies working with children and families. As a generic assessment, the CAF is distinct from specialist assessments and there are two broad types of specialist assessments, each of which interacts with CAF in a different way:

- universal checks or assessments, such as the developmental checks undertaken by health professionals as part of the Child Health Promotion Programme or progress checks against the national curriculum conducted in

schools, for example the foundation stage profile.

In general CAF is not a suitable vehicle for undertaking the universal assessments referred to above, which require the measurement of progress towards specific developmental milestones. However, these assessments are an opportunity to identify need for additional support. If this is the case, then CAF process should be undertaken, and relevant information from these specialist assessments should feed into the CAF process.

- Assessments of children with known issues or where there are specific or acute concerns.
 - the Initial Assessment of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (the Assessment Framework) used by social care
 - the Young Offender Assessment Profile (ASSET) operated by Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and the ONSET assessment and referral framework operated by Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs) and Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIPs)
 - the SEN Code of Practice/SEN statutory assessment
 - Drug screening and assessment tools.

CAF is for use at an earlier stage than some specialist assessments for children with known issues or where there are specific or acute concerns,

ideally enabling most issues to be resolved before a child requires a specialist assessment. Interfaces between CAF and these specialist assessments are being determined nationally with some local agreements also being made between agencies to determine and ensure we reduce the number of duplicate assessments.

The CAF cannot replace specialist frameworks, but the information recorded on a CAF will inform specialist assessments.

CAF will be the means whereby services and further assessment from Children's Social Care (CSC) is requested.

A CAF should be undertaken by any agency/service that comes in contact with a child with additional unmet needs (level 2). Any information gathered should be recorded on the CAF form. A CAF will also have to be initiated to request further assessments for children with additional need for support or further services that cannot be provided within the assessing organisation/service.

By using CAF as an information gathering tool and means whereby we request support from other services, and using CAF to inform specialist assessment, practitioners will be better informed, time will be saved for practitioners as they do not have to start the process of gathering information and save the child/parent repeating themselves unnecessarily. However, it is always important to check that the information is accurate and up to date.

2 The CAF Model

The CAF model is an overarching framework for:

- recognising the signs that a child may have unmet needs/identifying children with additional needs
- developing a child/young person centred and holistic approach to assessment of needs
- recording information using the CAF form and, with consent, sharing information
- developing appropriate and timely support plans
- Monitoring and review of plans

2.1 The Principles Underpinning Common Assessment

The principles underlying the approach to common assessment are that it:

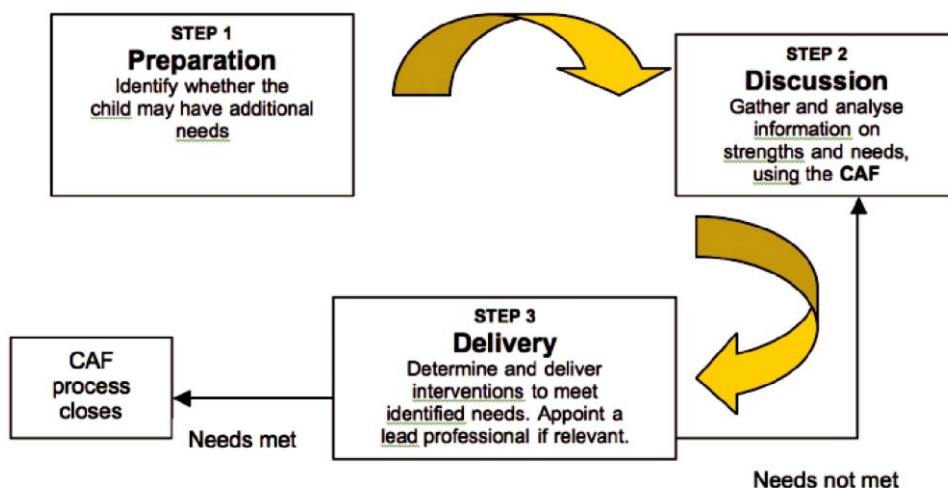
- looks at the whole child, not just the policy focus and statutory obligations of a particular service;
- takes account of strengths as well as needs and understands the role

of parents/carers and a wide range of family and environmental factors on child development;

- is simple to use and geared towards the practical delivery of support to children, young people and their family members;
- is empowering for families, completed in partnership with children and families at all stages, where possible enabling them to take the lead, and ensuring they have a copy of all the relevant documentation;
- enables and encourages information held by agencies to follow the child, e.g. as they get older, change schools or move house, subject to controls to protect confidentiality;
- is a tool to support practice; is not used mechanistically or when it adds little value; and supports and enhances ongoing and effective communication within and between agencies. Communication should not end with the completion and forwarding of the common assessment.

2.2 The 3 staged process

The CAF process is illustrated in the figure below.



Assessment is simply the process of gathering and interpreting the information needed to decide what action to take to help meet the child's (or their parent or carer) needs. In many cases, it is simply a conversation with the child or young person and/or their parent and carer. The common assessment provides a structure to help practitioners undertake and record this process and decide, with the child and family as appropriate, what to do next. The assessment is not an end in itself but a key part of providing support through case-working. The stages will be further explored in section 3 – Lancashire CAF process

assessments and plans/ recommendations for support. The structure of the form covers 3 domains of assessment described in 2.4.

TAC Plan- (locally developed)

As a result of a CAF process a Team Around the Child plan may be developed when the needs require the input of different disciplines and/or agencies. These plans should be reviewed. All the plans and review documentation will form part of the CAF process and will be recorded in the child/young person's CAF record.

Please see supporting documentation

2.3 The CAF documentation

The pre-assessment checklist (national standardised document)

The pre-assessment checklist can be used as an aid in deciding whether a common assessment is appropriate. The checklist guides the practitioner through consideration of the five Every Child Matters outcomes in relation to the child. If the practitioner has a doubt that the child will achieve positive outcomes, they need to consider whether to undertake a common assessment themselves or talk to someone else who would be better placed to do so.

CAF form (national standardised document)

The CAF form is designed to help practitioners record and, where appropriate, share with others, their

2.4 CAF assessment domains

In undertaking a common assessment, practitioners should consider each of three themes or domains:

- How well a child is developing, including in their health and progress in learning; how well parents or carers are able to support their child's development and respond appropriately to any needs;
- The impact of wider family and environmental elements on the child's development and
- The capacity of their parents and carers.

Within each of these domains practitioners should consider the elements set out below.

Development of the child

- Health
- Emotional and social development
- Behavioural development
- Identity, including self-esteem, self-image and
- Social presentation
- Family and social relationships
- Self-care skills and independence
- Learning

Parents and Carers

- Basic care, ensuring safety and protection
- Emotional warmth and stability
- Guidance, boundaries and stimulation

Family and environmental

- Family history, functioning and well-being
- Wider family
- Housing, employment and financial considerations
- Social and community elements and resources, including education

2.5 How CAF should be operated

A) Co-ordinating common assessments

All local areas will need to consider how to co-ordinate their common assessments, so that information is shared and not duplicated.

In the longer term, we expect this co-ordination role to be achieved through ContactPoint. ContactPoint will hold basic information about whether, when and by whom a common assessment has been undertaken. They will also provide details of the agencies

working with a child and, if appropriate, their lead professional. An eCAF National solution is also being developed by Department of Children School and Families (DCSF) and will help coordinating existing CAFs. In Lancashire for an interim period a district CAF Support Officer will take this role but the role of the district support officers is also to support and advise agencies and to monitor local met and unmet needs.

B) Creating and storing common assessment records

The results of all common assessments should be recorded in the standard CAF form. A paper copy should be given to the child their parent or carer (unless to do so could put the child at risk of harm), who should be encouraged to take it with them when they are in contact with services. Initially the common assessment records in Lancashire will be stored in a secure electronic system to support the CAF process until deployment to the national eCAF system. Any CAF initiated in Lancashire needs to be notified to the relevant district CAF support officer. When a CAF closes because needs are met, a notification needs to be made to the district CAF support officer. A closed CAF will be stored for a period of 1 year and will then be archived for a period of 6 years. CAFs held by agencies will be expected to adhere to their own organisations' record & retention procedures.

C) Sharing assessment information with other practitioners

Subject to the views of the child, or

parent or carer, and it being in the best interests of the child, common assessment information should be shared between practitioners and services where it is necessary to enable joint working or in support of request for services. Practitioners will need to be aware of and, where appropriate, check with families for specific individuals with whom sharing this information would place the child at risk of harm.

All information sharing must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 (see I). In most cases the decision about whether and how information is shared will be taken by the lead professional in consultation with the child or their parent/carer. For guidance on sharing information follow DCSF Information Sharing-Practitioners Guidance.

D) Receiving and updating common assessment records

Practitioners considering initiating a common assessment should check whether a CAF is already in place by asking the child or their parent/carer and/or the CAF District Support Officer. In the longer term they can check ContactPoint. Consent to access a copy should be sought from the child or their parent. Depending on the results, the practitioner may wish to review and, as appropriate, update the assessment.

Agencies to whom children are referred following a common assessment should discuss the assessment with the referring practitioner. Where it is sensible and appropriate to do so, they should use the common assessment as a starting point for their own assessment or work with the child.

E) IT and database issues

The CAF will work most effectively when the information can be generated, stored and transmitted electronically within and across the IT systems in agencies providing services to children. The DCSF have announced that a National eCAF solution will be available aiming at embedding the CAF form as a template within agencies' systems, and ensure interoperability between eCAF and other case-working systems such as the Integrated Children's System. Lancashire will operate a secure e-mail solution for CAF in the interim period and CAFs will be stored locally until national eCAF is available.

H) Managing and Monitoring CAF operation

All agencies operating the CAF will need to embed it within their existing systems and processes, and train their staff appropriately. All practitioners should know how to complete an assessment or how to get one completed. Agencies should ensure that enough staff are trained in common assessment to enable those who need one to access it. Lancashire will set up and undertake quality assurance and operational monitoring, audit and review of CAF systems and practice. Integrated working panels will also be developed for the overall monitoring of CAF and Lead Professional processes (see 3.5). Managing and monitoring the CAF process is a requirement for implementation of children's services integrated processes. As well as looking at outcomes generally, monitoring should pick up any situations where

identified needs are not being met. Such situations should be fed back into the planning and commissioning of services, e.g. through Children's Trusts arrangements. The views of children and parents/carers must be sought for the measurement of outcomes and better service experience.

I) Data Protection Act

All agencies and practitioners operating the CAF must comply with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998. The Act applies irrespective of whether common assessments are held on IT or paper systems. It applies to all processing of assessment information, including collection, use, disclosure and destruction.

To meet the requirements of the DPA, agencies who are processing assessment information ("data controllers") must:

- notify the Information Commissioner of the purposes for which they are processing personal data. Their notification will appear on the Commissioner's website; and
- comply with the data protection principles. The key principles for the purposes of this guidance are that the data must be:
 - fairly and lawfully processed
 - processed only for specified, lawful and compatible purposes
 - adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - accurate and where necessary kept up to date
 - kept for no longer than necessary
 - shown to the individual when they request it ("subject access")
 - kept secure

In undertaking these responsibilities, agencies should bear in mind the likelihood that:

- they will be processing information about parents and carers as well as children or young people; and
- some of the information is likely to be sensitive and therefore subject to more stringent control.

To meet DPA requirements, the practitioner undertaking the assessment should always explain to the child or family what the information held on the CAF form means and how it may be used.

3 Lancashire CAF process

3.1 Preparing to do a CAF

Preparation

In Lancashire CAF process should be undertaken for any child who has additional/unmet needs and it is likely that will require multi-disciplinary and/or multi-agency support. Practitioners should use the Lancashire Continuum of Need to support the decision in identifying additional needs and of initiating a CAF process

Any child and young person who has additional need for support (level 2) should have access to a CAF process so needs can be identified and met at an early stage.

The use of the CAF pre-assessment checklist is optional but can also support practitioners in identifying additional needs/additional support in relation to the 5 outcomes.

There will be situations when the need is clear and a request for a single service is made without a whole CAF process being initiated e.g. request for speech and language for a child where speech is the only need identified or request for audiology exam.

Also there may be situations when the need identified is clear and can be met by the child or their parent/carer or by the assessing agency. Although there may not be a requirement to initiate the CAF process, we would

recommend and encourage practitioners to look beyond the presenting problem.

Initiate the process:

- If you are concerned about a child talk to the child/parent and to others involved
- Contact caf@lancashire.gov.uk to check whether a common assessment already exists and/or to get the contact details of others involved.
- If there is one already in place, obtain consent to join existing team around the child and review existing CAF if appropriate.
- If a CAF does not exist, decide with the child/parent whether the CAF will be useful and get consent to proceed.
- Whether to do the assessment is a decision you should make jointly with the child and/or their parent. A young person aged 16 or over, or a child under 16 who has the capacity to understand and make their own decisions, may give (or refuse) consent for the assessment to take place. You should always encourage children under 16 to involve their parent as appropriate.
- A common assessment should not be completed if the child and/or their parent/carer do not want one. This should not be a significant barrier if the practitioner is working in partnership with the child or their family. In these circumstances and assuming there are no concerns for the child's safety, case working

systems should simply record the fact that a common assessment has been refused.

- However, if at any time you feel worried that a baby, child or young person is in need of protection you must follow your Lancashire Safeguarding Procedures as established by the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board. Similarly, children or young people putting themselves or others at risk of harm, for example, by their threatening behaviour, should be dealt with immediately using established procedures operated locally. In these situations even if there is a refusal of consent the CAF form should be completed and submitted to Children's Social Care direct.

A CAF will be considered to be in progress once a practitioner checks to see if a CAF is in place and gains a Unique Reference Number from caf@lancashire.gov.uk. In the future, when the national eCAF system is operational, the CAF will be considered in progress when records are made onto the system.

possible to do a common assessment without seeing or involving the child.

Make sure you explain the purpose of the assessment. Explain why you are recording information and what will happen to it. Make sure the child/family understands who else will see their information. Make sure they understand that the CAF is a resource to help them access services. Check they fully understand and consent to what is proposed. You should always encourage children under 16 to involve their parent as appropriate.

Before you start completing the CAF form please consider that the common assessment is a way of recording the conversation that a practitioner has with a child and/or their parent/carer, together with any knowledge they may have. In having such a conversation with the child or family, practitioners should:

- seek to build a working partnership with the child and/or family- you are working with the family to understand the issues and find solutions

3.2 Undertaking a CAF

Discussion

This step involves working with the child and, as appropriate, their family, and completing the assessment with them. Remember the discussion does not have to be highly formal or presented as a 'big event'. You will want to use a method and style that suits you, the child/parent and the situation. Apart from a pre-natal assessment, it is not normally

- be clear about the nature and goals of the assessment and issues of consent and confidentiality
- be aware that families (including those members who have parental responsibility) may not agree between themselves about the child's needs and solutions
- make use of information you have already gathered from the child, parent or other practitioners so they don't have to repeat themselves
- conduct the interview in a child-centred way, e.g.: in an appropriate environment within which the child and parent/carer are likely to feel more secure and confident and where assessors have a more direct opportunity to observe behaviour in context, listening to and taking into account the range of views from the child and/or parent or carer, observing responses, and focussing on areas of strength as well as need.
- seek advice if they are worried about a child's welfare or their own safety.

Working with unborn babies

If you are undertaking a common assessment for an unborn baby you will find some of the fields on the CAF form are not relevant. In these fields either enter 'not known' or 'not applicable'. In the name field state 'unborn baby' and the mother's name, e.g. 'unborn baby of Ann Smith'. All pregnant women should have a named midwife to co-ordinate their pregnancy care. When completing a common assessment for an unborn baby you should contact the associated midwife.

Working with infants and very young children

You should try to involve and work directly with infants and very young children, 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 undertaking a common assessment for an infant, and the parent agrees, you should contact these practitioners.

Working with young people

For older teenagers, you should consider possible current and future needs for adult services, and transitional arrangements. For example, you may need to consider whether adult services are more appropriate to a young person in their late teens or, if a young person is already accessing children's services, you may need to help manage their progression into adult services. The possibility that a teenage boy is a father is a question that should not be overlooked when assessing teenage boys, as their needs can be as complex as those of a teenage mother.

Working with children missing education

If you discover that a child is not receiving any form of educational provision, you should notify the Children Missing Education Officer. You should also try to identify why the child is missing education to assess whether there are needs to be addressed.

Working with privately fostered children

If you discover that a child is, or may be, privately fostered (though it is not always easy to tell), you should notify Children's Integrated Services.

Working with Disabled Children

The CAF is suitable for assessing disabled children, as their basic needs are no different to those of any other child. Practitioners need to consider access and communications requirements. Check the child's preferred means of communication (e.g. symbols, BSL, voice synthesiser, aide/interpreter) and ensure this is used.

Working with children with English as an additional language

Where the child's or their parent's first language is not English, you should consider whether an interpreter is needed.

Please see supporting documentation- CAF Form: How to complete it?

CAFs should be completed as soon as possible, and within 20 working days of initiation, and submitted to the District CAF Support Officer. This will help avoid drift and a resulting delay in meeting needs. While there will be occasions when it is not possible to achieve this, every effort should be made to do so, and in cases where the timescale is not met practitioners should record the reason for the delay.

All CAFs should have clear outcomes, ie. an initial plan to meet the child/

young person's needs. If multi-agency involvement is required the date of the Team Around the Child meeting (TAC). If needs have been met during the process, a clear statement of no further action, with reason for this should be recorded.

A CAF will be considered complete once it has been agreed and signed by the child/ young person (where appropriate), their parent/carer (as appropriate) and the practitioner completing the assessment.

Once a CAF is completed and signed, the form should only be amended or fresh information added during a Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting or a review. If there are significant changes in the child/young person's needs or circumstances, then the CAF should be updated and re-named as 'version 2' or a fresh CAF episode initiated on eCAF system. This should be only undertaken with consent from the family/young person. This version will replace the original CAF, and the manual / eCAF system should ensure that only one version of the CAF is available at a time.

3.3 Delivering Support and Follow-up Action

The purpose of the assessment is simply to lead to the next stage of intervention. As part of your conclusion and actions there is a need to determine and obtain consent.

Outcomes:

- a) no further action – the practitioner’s concerns have been resolved and no further needs have been identified
- b) (internal) single agency support – the needs identified require action by the child and/or their parent or carer, or by the assessing practitioner

c) (external) single agency support- Where there is nothing further the practitioner can do, and part of action was to request support from external single agency, they should request this support from another agency or practitioner via CAF . Requests should be made by sending the CAF via a secure e-mail system. Discuss the assessment and the request with the receiving agency, and if appropriate, develop a TAC Plan (Team Around the Child) and agree a lead professional (if the requesting agency is still involved in delivering actions). Make sure consent to share CAF with that agency has been given and recorded on the CAF documentation.

d) multi-disciplinary support delivered within assessing agency/ practitioners within the same management structure- ensure a Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting/discussion takes place and agree a TAC Plan. A Team Around the Child and a Lead Professional are identified.

e) multi-agency support – the needs identified require multi-agency intervention. If it was agreed that support will be requested from other agencies, the CAF is sent to those agencies via a secure e-mail system. The CAF author should at this stage convene Team around the Child (TAC) meeting. At the meeting a TAC Plan is agreed and a Lead Professional is nominated.

The TAC Plan needs to be agreed by the Team around the Child and with the family and submitted to the District CAF Support Officer.

For the TAC Plan please see supporting documentation.

3.4 Monitoring and Review

Assessment is not an end in itself but a means to more effective intervention. It is important, therefore, that the child’s progress is monitored and the effectiveness of interventions reviewed. Review timescales should be determined by the needs assessment and outcomes, services and plan, and the timescales attached to these. They should be consistent with the current statutory review frameworks and agreed in writing with the child or young person and their parent or carer as appropriate.

All agencies should put in place mechanisms for such reviews, or embed them within their existing arrangements. This may require a

re-assessment against the CAF elements or may simply entail a quick progress check on agreed actions. For those children with TAC plans, the Lead Professional needs to ensure there is a co-ordination of **the delivery of the actions agreed by the practitioners involved at the Team Around the Child discussion/ meeting**, to ensure that children and families receive an effective service which is regularly reviewed, ensuring review dates are set.

Review meetings should take place and outcomes recorded into CAF documentation (TAC Plan template).

It may mean:

- support will have to continue-set new review dates
- needs escalate and request for statutory assessment is required (do this via CAF - relevant agencies need to maintain their involvement). CAF progresses to Children with Complex Needs multi-agency procedures. Lead Professional functions may need to be transferred at this stage.
- needs are met and CAF is closed. The Lead Professional needs to notify the District CAF Support Officer.

3.5 Role of CAF District Support Officers and escalation procedures

In cases where support is not being effective, agencies are not able to deliver what was agreed, and/or a lead professional can not be agreed, the CAF author/lead professional should discuss this with their line manager. In the first instance these situations should be solved by having open lines of communications between managers. Where issues cannot be resolved this should be raised with the District CAF support officer. The District CAF Support Officer will raise these situations to Integrated Working Panels that will operate in all districts as escalation mechanisms for issues related to CAF and Lead Professional:

- Determine course of action for children whose needs are not being met through CAF processes.
- Escalation process for LP/determine LP where these are not identified
- Progress cases to meet statutory requirements
- Overall monitoring on CAF process

It is the role of the District CAF Support Officer to:

- Attend district Integrated Working Panel meetings

- Establish contacts with other Local authorities CAF coordinators when support is required for cross border CAF processes
- Identify good practice and promote it across the county
- Follow up on previously agreed actions
- Produce reports to appropriate structures

processes standards so we work consistently across the northwest. These standards have been incorporated into this CAF Operational Guidance.

3.6 Cross Border work

If support is required for a child, and/or agencies involved operate in different local authorities, you should contact the District CAF Support Officers, who will make contact with other Local Authorities CAF coordinators and promote joint working and support required for cross border CAF processes.

In situations where there is a need to escalate situations where support is not being effective, practitioners should follow the escalation processes and procedures of the Local Authority where the child lives.

The NW CAF Group has been established and is fully operational. The group is composed of all people with responsibility for CAF in the NW Local Authorities and aims at supporting cross border work and addressing any issues that may arise from that nature of the work. The group has also established CAF

