Assessment and case management of children at risk

Improving the protection and wellbeing of children in Europe: enhancing the curriculum
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Assessment is a process:

• Systematic for collection of detailed information in relation to the child at risk or child in need;
• To identify strong sides of the child and family, social environment in which the child and family live, as well as the need of the child for care, support and alternative protection.
Principles directing the assessment process are:

- **Based on the development of the child** and to recognize the importance of the time factor in the life of the child.
- **Have the child on focus** and ensure that the child is always at the centre of the assessment process.
- **Ecological access** placing and considering the child within the family and wider community where he lives.
- **Includes the active work with the child and family.**
Principles directing the assessment process are:

• Based on facts or evidence.
• Knows well and considers the multidimensional approach and where it is worked in partnership with children and their families.
• Is a continuous process and not a specific moment in the help process.
• Provide equal quality and possibilities for all by being sensitive to the different needs and circumstances of children.
The assessment as a process goes through a number of stages which are summarized as follows:

- Preparation for assessment
- Collection of information
- Planning of actions based on this analysis
- Analyzing and understating the information collected
Aspects which are carefully assessed are:

• Child development (physical, emotional, cognitive and social development);
• Upbringing of a child (information on whether the child attends the kindergarten, playground, school, etc.);
• Health of child;
• Social child relationship within and out of the family;
• Relationship with parents and family;
Aspects which are carefully assessed are:

- Finances and family expenses;
- Living conditions of the family;
- Other specialists’ opinions;
- Child and family’s opinions on their situation;
- The existing sources in community;
- Strong and weak points of family
Bronfenbrenner (1979)

- Child
- Direct guardians
- Family
- Community
- Institutions
- Regional level
- National level (policies)
- National level (laws and rights)
- International level

Circles of influences - Bronfenbrenner
Factors that may impact the assessment process

- personal experience of social worker
- the knowledge of the social worker of the religious beliefs
- specific qualities of the child for family may impact the process
- the family does not want to cooperate or shows resistance
- professionals sometime don’t know how to keep children involved in the assessment process
Identification of risk

**Risk concept**
- Risk relates to the possibility that an abuse or negligence is shown or reshown in the future.

**Security concept**
- Security concept of the child refers to the situation when a child is not endangered within the family/home or when the protective capacities within the family may manage the risk for abuse or negligence. (Royal Society, 1992)
The abuse assessment with the child is affected by the aspects:

- Nature of abuse
- Gravity level
- Probability to occur again
Risk factors area broken down into four groups:

- Factors related to parents or guardians;
- Factors related to family;
- Factors related to the child; and
- Factors related to environment.
Factors related to parents or guardians

- Characteristics of personality and psychological welfare;
- History of abuse;
- Abuse with substances/mental health;
- Attitudes and knowledge;
- Age; and
- Others (that may be registered by participants)
Factors related to family

- Family structure;
- Mate conflicts and domestic violence;
- Stress and anxiety; and
- Parent-child interaction.
Factors related to the child

- Age;
- Disability; and
- Other child characteristics.
Factors related to environment

• Poverty and unemployment;
• Social isolation and social support; and
• Violent communities;
Levels of risk

Setting Priorities - Intervention Levels

- **ANY CHILD**
- **CHILD IN NEED**
  - **LOW RISK** - Child’s rights are not fully respected or met - PRIMARY
  - **MEDIUM RISK** – Child at risk of harm as needs not met - SECONDARY
  - **HIGH RISK** - Child is or at risk of severe harm - TERTIARY
- **CHILD AT RISK**
- **CP**
- **NO RISK** - PRIMARY
High risk—under this risk level, the child may be:

• a. harmed or seriously injured;
• b. exposed to sexual immediate and continuous abuse;
• c. permanently remains with disabilities;
• d. trafficked;
• e. die, if left under the current circumstances without any protection intervention.
Group work

• Work on Ali case story.
• The purpose of the exercise is to observe the application in practice of knowledge acquired in the previous exercise on risk factors, but by determining now the risk level in order to take decision for intervention.
  • 1. Determine risk level of the case,
  • 2. Analyse vulnerability factors of the case,
  • 2. What main factors did you rely upon to determine the risk level?
Analyzing information

• Some hypotheses may be confirmed
• The risk in this situation is that this information is not analyzed but is simply summarized
• At a certain moment the information should be systemized and analyzed in order to inform on necessary actions
Interpreting and understanding the information

- In order to answer this question, it is necessary what the researcher Hallows (2003) calls judgment of “issues”.

- Social workers should use research, theory, and practice experiences to build up these judgments

- There are two main areas, which are in particular difficult to give meaning to the entire information:
  - a) in relation to the assessment of probability that harming or injury of the child occurs, and
  - b) assessment of potential of guardians to change.
Decision-taking

- These decisions are related to the addressing the needs of the child and parents or family
- Another challenge with which professionals are facing is the time available to ensure sufficient information
Professionals should have developed more understanding for some case aspects when come to the decision-taking stage:

- **Main issues affecting the protection and welfare of the child;**
- **Strong points of family, sources of protection and what can be further build-up;**
- **Reactions to previous interventions;**
- **Motivation and reflections of parents/guardians related to necessary changes for meeting the child’s needs;**
- **Wishes and feeling of the child for those that he / she thinks should change.**
- **Guardians’ opinions about their needs to undertake steps for change.**
- **Culture influence, language, religious belief, and practices pursued by the family**
- **How did guardians/parents of the child start to respond to the child’ needs while they continue with the assessment process**
First decision – verification if the abuse case is abused

• This decision depends on the answers of questions:
  • “Is the child harmed as to be called abuse or negligence?”
  • “Are there sufficient facts to make this case, a case of abuse?”
  • “Is the child at risk?”
  • “Should there be taken immediate measures?”
Second decision – risk assessment

Risk assessment includes the assessment of situation of the child and family to identify:

- risk factors,
- strong family points,
- sources and potential services of the system of protection of the child
- and community.
Steps needed to assess the risk

• Organize information according to categories (e.g., level of educations, stressors, etc.).
• Determine if information is sufficient and reliable to confirm risk factors, strong points, sources and interactions among them.
• Use risk assessment to address every risk factor and to consider every strong point.
Third decision – determining child’s security

• A child is considered insecure when he is at immediate risk to be heavily harmed
• Social worker should decide that in the first contact with the child and family, if the child is going to be secure during the stage of investigation and elements to be assessed are:
  • the family’s situation,
  • behaviour and conditions of parents or guardians,
  • emotional aspect,
  • physical circumstances and
  • the social ones.
Fourth decision – determining urgent needs

- In the assessment process, professionals establish contact with children and assess whether the child or family may have immediate needs of the:
  - medical nature,
  - food,
  - footwear,
  - shelter,
  - needs for mental health services and
counseling with the psychologist in case of crisis.
Fifth decision – Provision of services

• The decision whether the child and family are involved in services for protection or other community services is a decision which is taken at the end of the assessment process.

• Decision taking is taken based on legislation applicable and procedures adopted.
CASE MANAGEMENT
Discussion in small groups

• What do you understand with case management and why is it used?
• What are some principles to keep in mind throughout the process in child protection work?
• Why case management process is important?
Case management

• Case management is first and foremost a structured approach to child protection issues, but also a method of providing secondary prevention (preventing further harm to a child and any other children in a family who may be at risk).

• Case management is a methodology which ensures continuous and effective provision of support step by step to individuals in need (child, adult or family) and aims at promoting and encouraging further for protection of the rights and welfare of a person.
Case Management must be seen as a dynamic process, with some dimensions:

- Process
- Relationship
- Approach
- Outputs
- System
Base Principles of Case Management

• Basic principles to have in consideration during case management (Bowles, 2009)
  • Respect for person – obligation to respect opinions, wishes, concerns and thoughts of the person.
  • Provision of services which improve the welfare and minimize the risk.
  • Justice and Equality - obligation to be fair in distribution of benefits and risk evaluation;
  • Avoiding or minimizing damage - obligation to avoid hurting others involved in the process.
Core steps in the case management process

- Identification
- Assessment
- Case planning
- Implementing the case plan
- Follow up and review
- Case closure
Comprehensive assessments typically assess:

• Child’s development needs
• Parenting/caregiving capacity
• Social & cultural context
• Community & wider family influences
• Socio-Economic factors
INTERVENTION

• Early interventions:
  • Usually target identified vulnerable populations
  • Usually are focused on families with children 0-8 years old, especially on parenting issues and child development.
Family support:

- Includes a series of interventions – from practical help to counselling and advice
- Family support shouldn’t be confused with economic aid.
- *Multidisciplinary and network meetings are not family support, although they may help in the implementation and monitoring of the services offered to the family, in order to support it.*
Direct work with children includes:

- Intervening in the child’s life through giving support, in order for the child:
  - to get help in understanding,
  - coping with/acknowledging its experiences, and
  - to be able to articulate its needs and feelings.
Social Welfare Systems for Children and Families

The diagram has been adapted from “Child Protection Program Strategy Toolkit”, UNICEF EAPRO, Chapter 5, pg. 328-366
Levels of service

• Primary – Universal for all children and families
• Secondary – Targeting specific groups of children and families
• Tertiary – Targeting the individual child and family
• Specialized services