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/frontline



# assessing parents' capacity to change

A structured approach

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Dartington

[www.rip.org.uk/frontline](http://www.rip.org.uk/frontline)

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# assessing parents' capacity to change

## Issues to consider

The four stage assessment process outlined at [www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange](http://www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange) recommends the use of standardised measures such as those described here to 'take a baseline' on particular issues for the child and family.

Following evidence-informed work with the family to address their issues, use the measure again to inform an objective assessment of change in parenting capacity.

This table provides examples of well-validated tools to support assessment in key domains of child, parent and family functioning.

For a full list of references visit [www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange](http://www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange)

**'... it is important to keep assessing whether [work with parents] is leading to sufficient improvement in the capacity of the parents to respond to each of their children's needs. This, at times, requires difficult judgements about whether the parents can change quickly enough to meet the child's developmental needs.'**

Munro, 2011

domain of assessment	description	brief description of selected measures
Child developmental outcome	Assess whether a child is meeting or failing to meet developmental milestones or has other identifiable problems.	<p>Use of developmental charts is strongly recommended, particularly for babies and infants. Readily available on the internet, these provide a starting point for checking on developmental outcome.</p> <p><b>Screening measures of infant/child well-being</b>  <b>Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA):</b> A screen for social-emotional development and competencies for children from 12 to 36 months (purchasable copyright instrument).</p> <p><b>Screening measures of child behaviour</b>  <b>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ):</b> A 25 item measure of child behaviour problems ranging from three to sixteen years of age (Goodman, 1999). Available at <a href="http://www.sdqinfo.com">www.sdqinfo.com</a></p>
Quality of the parent-child relationship	Assess how psychologically and emotionally connected the parent is with their child and the child is with their parent.	<p>The <b>Emotional Availability Scales (EAS)</b> (Biringen, 2004): Contains four dimensions to describe parents' behaviour – the ability to respond sensitively to the child (sensitivity), provide structure to help the child manage their emotions and behaviours (structuring), promote autonomy (non-intrusiveness) and minimize angry and hostile interactions (non-hostility). Two child scales measure child responsiveness and child involvement – <a href="http://www.emotionalavailability.com">www.emotionalavailability.com</a></p> <p>The <b>Care-INDEX</b> (Crittenden, 1986): Well validated and widely used 15-20 minute coding system. Assesses mothers on three scales: sensitivity, control and unresponsiveness. There are four scales for infants: cooperativeness, compulsivity, difficultness and passivity.  <b>Graded Care Profile:</b> enables practitioners to produce a measure of the quality of care given to a child by looking at four key areas: physical, safety, love and self-esteem. The grades indicate quality of care and are recorded using the same 1-5 scale in all areas.</p>
Parenting values, structure and skills	Assess the parents' ability to provide routines; effectively manage child's behaviour and monitor the child (know where they are and who they are with).	<p><b>Parenting skills</b>  The <b>Parenting Scale</b> (Arnold and O'Leary): Designed to assess parental discipline strategies in response to child misbehaviours. Available at <a href="http://www.incredibleyears.com/Measures/forms_GL.asp">www.incredibleyears.com/Measures/forms_GL.asp</a>  The <b>Management of Children's Behaviour Scale (MCBS)</b> (Kazdin and Rogers, 1985): Designed to measure parenting practices that have been associated with the development of child conduct problems, including: coercive communication, dysfunctional disciplining practices, inconsistent parental control, physical punishment, harsh punishment, negative reinforcement of misbehaviour, lack of positive reinforcement of good behaviour and negative parental attitude.</p>
Parents' state of mind	This can cover many aspects of parents' well-being. We focus on mood difficulties and emotional regulation, although this domain can also include use of substances.	<p><b>General mood</b>  Assessing parental mood, including depression and anxiety, is strongly recommended.</p> <p>The <b>Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale</b> (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995): A 21 item measure that reliably assesses each of the constructs (<a href="http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/groups/dass">www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/groups/dass</a>).  The <b>Adult Well-Being Scale</b> (Snaith, 1978): Can be used as a measure of general mood.</p> <p>Other reliable and valid measures of mood (see Dawe et al, 2002) include: The <b>General Health Questionnaire</b>; <b>Spielberger State Trait Anxiety Scales</b>; The <b>Beck Depression Inventory</b> and <b>Beck Anxiety Inventory</b>.</p> <p><b>Alcohol use</b>  The <b>Alcohol Use Disorders Inventory Test (AUDIT):</b> A ten item measure to detect hazardous, harmful and dependent drinking in the last six months. The AUDIT-C contains the first three quantity and frequency questions and is a sensitive measure of recent alcohol use.</p>
Wider ecological context	Assess: (i) the quality of the parents' relationship (ii) the availability of social support and parents' willingness to engage with this support (iii) financial and housing difficulties (iv) quality of the home environment.	<p><b>Quality of relationships</b>  <b>Dyadic Adjust Scale:</b> A widely used measure of relationship satisfaction. A seven item version has been developed and appears to be a valid and sensitive measure (Hunsley et al, 2001).</p> <p><b>Social support</b>  The <b>Multidimensional Scale of Social Support:</b> Differentiates between actual and ideal levels of support.</p> <p><b>Stress</b>  <b>Parenting Daily Hassles Scale:</b> Assesses the frequency and intensity of 20 common 'hassles' that can affect parents caring for children. Helps give a wider perspective on family processes that may be affecting the child in either a positive or negative way. The <b>Recent Life Events:</b> Provides a measure of major events over the past 12 months that have an enduring negative effect on the parent.</p> <p><b>Quality of the home environment</b>  The <b>Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory</b> (Caldwell and Bradley, 1984, 2003): Designed to measure the quality and quantity of stimulation and support available to a child in the home environment. The focus is on the child in the environment, the relationship between the child and their family surroundings.</p>

# research in practice

## Reflection checklist

As with any assessment, it is important that your assessment of parents' capacity to change is underpinned with evidence and that you have challenged your own thinking and presumptions. Use the method described at [www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange](http://www.rip.org.uk/frontline/capacitytochange) and then ask yourself the following questions:

### Stage 1

- > In undertaking a cross-sectional assessment, have I explored each domain and how they relate to each other, keeping my focus on how each factor affects the child's developmental outcomes?
- > When taking baseline measures, have I used the right tool for the job? See overleaf for a selection of measures that can be used to support assessment.
- > Have I ensured the baseline measures were taken in the best possible environment? What environmental factors might have affected the measures I took at this point?
- > Have I ensured the parents understood the purpose of the assessment and baseline measures?

### Stage 3

- > Is the plan clear and jargon free?
- > Where specific interventions are planned, are these evidence-informed?
- > Is the plan sufficiently tailored to this family's specific needs?
- > Does the plan build on strengths and positive elements within the family?
- > Does it offer a balance of challenge and support?

### Stage 2

- > Have I worked with the parents/family to create goals that are meaningful for them?
- > Can progress against the goals we set be measured? Do we agree what progress will look like?
- > Have I consulted with other professionals to get the goals right?
- > Are the goals expressed in a way that is clear and jargon free?
- > If we need other professionals to measure progress, are they aware of the goals/plan too?
- > Are the goals appropriately stretching without being unrealistic within the timeframe?

### Stage 4

- > In re-administering the measurement(s) used at Stage 1, have I ensured this was done in as similar a situation/context as possible?
- > Have I considered any factors within the parent(s) that might skew the re-assessment?
- > Have I considered any factors within myself that might skew the re-assessment?
- > Have I explored what new evidence has emerged and how this affects my decisions regarding the child?

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