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Background

A number of case audits and Serious Case Reviews in Northumberland have found that assessments of children were not always analysing the information obtained in a meaningful way.

Typically, assessments were excellent in terms of the information gathered, but did not analyse the meaning of the information to make sense of that information.



Why it matters

Information which professionals had gathered has, on occasion, not been included in assessments, leading to poor decision making regarding children's lives, and has resulted in professional errors. If assessments do not involve analysis of the information gathered; it becomes impossible to understand the child's life and improve the outcomes for the child.

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Questions to consider

1. How many times have I left a house feeling relieved to be leaving – and how do you include this in your assessment?
2. What are your techniques for staying child focussed?
3. What are your techniques for protecting yourself against the pain of empathising with the child?
4. How do you ensure that you focus on outcomes for children?
5. How do you ensure that you really listen to what the child is telling you?
6. What is the one thing you can do differently to improve your assessments?



Information

Good assessments:

1. Focus on outcomes for children;
2. Involve children and their families (in addition to collating contributions from relevant agencies);
3. Are informed by evidence which has been gathered

4. Are a continual process, not a one off event

5. Are able to build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties for children and families

6. Consider the history of the family, particularly the impact of the history on the parent's capacity to care for their children safely.

7. Are holistic in approach and include multi agency and inter disciplinary information;

8. Are informed by evidence from research.

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Principles of Good Assessment

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What to do

Some questions which might help are:

6. Do I know the full history? Have I considered the history and its impact on the child and family fully?
7. Have I seen the full picture? What would an overview reveal?
8. Have I involved all the agencies that work with this child/family
9. What is relevant evidence/ research evidence here?

1. How good are we at listening to children? And how can we improve?

2. How good are we at involving all the family in assessments? What one thing could we do that would make it better?

3. Does this assessment account for all the information? Is there discrepant information?

4. How attached am I to my current assessment? Should I be changing my mind?

5. What are the strengths in this family/child? And can I help build resilience on these?