



Understanding Harm and assessing Risk and Impact

LFJB Conference 2025



Our vision

“ For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family courts, we seek to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere, and every time. We prioritise their safety and welfare, their voices and their unique needs, taking full account of their families and those connected to them.”

Safe beginnings/early endings: a child's journey through family court proceedings



- In the Work to first Hearing Team our role is unique.
- We usually do not have any interaction with the child(ren) but our enquiries and the recommendations we make can have a long-lasting impact.
- Not only through childhood but beyond.

It can be a challenge to find out a true picture of a child without speaking to them.



How do we bring children to life in WTFH?

Application details:

Abbie (2) lives with her mother, Ms A. This is Ms A's application for a Child Arrangements Order to determine Abbie's live and spend time with arrangements.

The application suggests Abbie's parents separated in 2024 and that Abbie's time with her father, Mr B, has been inconsistent with Abbie last seeing him a month ago. Both parents hold parental responsibility for Abbie.

Reviewing agency checks:

We look to see if you or your family have been known to Cafcass before and read those records. This helps us to understand your past and your family history.

We ask for information from the Local Authority.

We ask the police for information about your parents or other significant people in your life..

We think about speaking to other people who might know you and your family, like your school.



How do we bring children to life in WTFH?

We use the interview with parents or carers to focus on you, your needs and the impact of the situation on you.

We try to make sure the safeguarding letter is child focused and paints a picture to the court about you.

We attend the FHDRA



Assessment and
Child's Plan

Case recording

Abuse



Physical abuse



Sexual abuse



Verbal abuse



Emotional neglect



Physical neglect

Growing up in a household where:



There are adults with alcohol and drug problems



There are adults with mental health problems



There is domestic abuse



There are adults who have spent time in prison



Parents have separated

Impact of Delay!

Living with uncertainty

Effect on mental health

Not being able to see important people in their life

Living with anxiety

Being made to see people they don't feel safe with

Effect on school work

Constantly living with professionals in their life

Living with conflict within the family

Affects the ability to make and maintain relationships



CHALLENGE

1

How long does 50 weeks feel to you? Really *think about this and put yourself in the child's shoes: how would 50 weeks feel to them?*

2

How can you really **get to know** the children and young people you work with and understand the impact delays are having on them?

3

How do **YOU explain** the delay to the child or young person?
We all have a collective responsibility for this.

4

Ask the children and young people you work with about how the delays are affecting them and take action.

5

Think about how **YOU** as an individual contribute to the delays: is that expert report *really* going to add value; are your reports filed on time; is that additional assessment going to really make a difference; is a 16.4 appointment really necessary; is the case management in proceedings robust enough?

6

THINK: Am I putting the needs of the child before the rights of the parent?

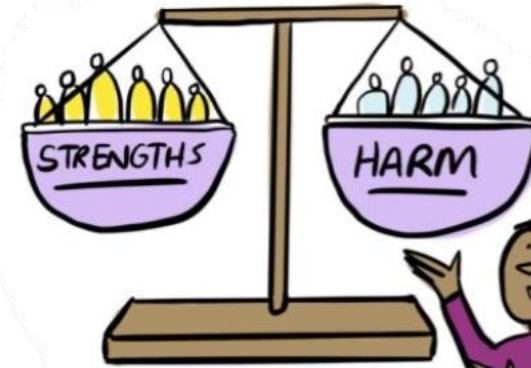
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DO NOT NORMALISE DELAY!

ALWAYS consider the impact this is going to have on the child.

CIAF

Child Impact Timeline Tool



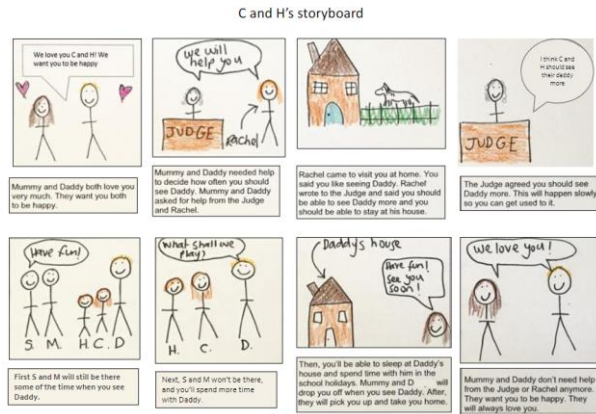
Always looking at **BOTH** for balance



GET INTO THE DETAIL TO IDENTIFY THE **RISK** (PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL!)

Evidence from other agencies





In person Visits to Children



What do we mean by 'behavioural detail'?



What does this detail mean for me?



Understanding Harm



Assessing Risk





XXXX is between 50-54.

XXXX is male

XXXX is a millionaire.

XXXX has children.

XXXX main residence is in Los Angeles.



Now with
behavioural
detail.....

XXXX was born on 2 May 1975 at Whipps Cross University Hospital in Leytonstone, London, England.

XXXX is a 50-year-old male, white, British male.

XXXX primary residence is in Holland Park, London.

XXXX is married to Victoria (aka Posh Spice) whom he shares 4 children too, three male and one female.

XXXX is a celebrated English former professional footballer who is known very well in England for playing for Manchester United and being regarded as one of the greatest set-piece specialists and one of the best players of his generation, known for his passing, crossing, and free kicks.

XXXX is the president and co-owner of Inter Miami CF and co-owner of Salford City.

XXXX has more than 65 tattoos covering a large part of his body, including tattoos on his hands, neck and head

XXXX enjoys Bee keeping and making honey.

XXXX says “I've got this obsessive-compulsive disorder where I have to have everything in a straight line or everything has to be in pairs,”

David Beckham



David was born on 2 May 1975 at Whipps Cross University Hospital in Leytonstone, London, England.

David is a 50-year-old David's primary residence is in Holland Park, London.

David is male, white, British male.

David is married to Victoria (aka Posh Spice) whom he shares 4 children too, three male and one female.

David is a celebrated English former professional footballer who is known very well in England for playing for Manchester United and being regarded as one of the greatest set-piece specialists and one of the best players of his generation, known for his passing, crossing, and free kicks.

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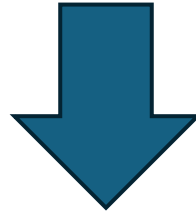
David has more than 65 tattoos covering a large part of his body, including tattoos on his hands, neck and head

David enjoys Bee keeping and making honey.

David says "I've got this obsessive-compulsive disorder where I have to have everything in a straight line or everything has to be in pairs,"

Reports to Court

There are concerns that Maisie has experienced domestic abuse.



Behavioural Detail

Over the past three years, there have been seven police call outs to Maisie's home following domestic abuse incidents involving her parents. Maisie has shared that she was very scared when she heard Daddy shouting at Mummy and it made her wake up. Maisie told me that she saw her Daddy punch Mummy in the tummy and Mummy fell to the floor and was crying. Maisie also said that she saw Mummy throw a vase at the wall and it smashed into little bits and there was water everywhere. Maisie said she thinks she was four when this happened, and this was the last time she saw Daddy. Maisie said that she is really worried about seeing Daddy because she does not want him to shout or hit her or her Mummy again. Maisie's parents have shared that they have had arguments that have got out of hand, especially if there had been alcohol involved. They don't think that Maisie will have been affected by these incidents because she has been asleep in bed upstairs.



any missing pieces?

Is anything missing?



Psychological Assessment of an adult or child



Finding of Fact



Psychiatric Assessments



DNA Paternity Testing



Medical Expert assessment (in cases of suspected non-accidental injury or fabricated or induced illness).



Independent Social Worker Assessment



Hair Strand Testing (Drugs/Alcohol)



Parent and Child Residential Assessments

SAFE FAMILY TIME

Children and young people should always be your priority when considering Family Time, not the adults.



PRINCIPLES

- Family Time that is **safe** and **benefits** us is important to help us build or maintain relationships with significant people in our lives.
- We **expect and need to be involved** in the planning and decision-making around our Family Time.
- We need to feel **confident** that our Family Time arrangements will be safe and expect that you will be able to tell us why and how you know this.
- **Reviewing** is an important part of understanding whether Family Time is meeting our needs.
- **We especially need to know** that if the court orders family time, what the consequences are and for who, if we don't want to or don't feel safe to attend.

PLANNING

- **Understand** what our experience has been.
- Think about our age, needs and uniqueness, including culture, ethnicity, faith, and ability, when planning **your engagement with us** and for our Family Time arrangements.
- **Be honest** and explain beforehand that we will be talking about Family Time. This helps us to prepare for difficult conversations.

MEETING WITH US

- **Be flexible** in your approach to engagement with us and the resources you might use.
- **Explain** again what you will be talking to us about and tell us that you understand that this may feel worrying and confusing, that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is okay to have messy feelings.
- **Be clear** about who you will share information with and why.
- **Be open and honest** with us about why you think it is or is not safe for us to spend time with a family member.



Sharing recommendations with children



THE CHILD'S VIEW OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

35. I have shared with Katie that having completed my enquiries including speaking to her parents, to professionals like her teacher and her school nurse as well as thinking carefully about her wishes and feelings, I am in agreement with Katie that she should continue to live with her Mum and her baby sister, Jane. I have also shared with Katie that I think it is important that she should have a relationship with both of her parents, and that we need to make sure that any arrangements for Katie to spend time with her father are safe and do not make her feel worried as she has shared that she felt worried when she was spending time with her Dad before. Katie told me "that's exactly what I want. I want to live with Mum and my sister and I also want to spend time with my Dad if he doesn't shout anymore. It would be better if someone else can be there when I spend time with my Dad."

Signed: *S. Smith*

Name: Sally Smith

Cafcass Role: Family Court Adviser

Date: 05/05/24

Toolkit for Judges to write to children

- Members of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) have supported in the development of a toolkit for family Judges, to help them write to the children and young people at the centre of their proceedings.
- The toolkit explains that Judges writing to children and young people is a vital way to ensure they are heard and feel supported to understand what the family court has decided for them and their family.
- Download the toolkit
- It's a really helpful aide for Judges and other professionals to support in writing the letters for children.



You were a further concealed pregnancy and were born withdrawing from substances, requiring medication and observation in hospital until your symptoms had decreased, at which time you were discharged into foster care with Becky and Charlie.

re not seen you since they left the hospital after you were born.

t Hearing on 26/09/24 an Interim Care Order was made which meant that the ere given Parental Responsibility for you, which they shared with Gemma. This Local Authority to decide where you live and who you see. Gina and Tom did not go and they did not engage with the Court process or consistently with the Throughout these proceedings, I have had no contact details for them and their e been unknown.



ildren's Guardian for your brother Ben and so had an understanding of Gina and commit consistently and engage with services. Due to the long-standing issues, I sued Court timetable, to ensure that your permanency planning could be achieved

ot be safely cared for by their parents, the Court say Local Authorities must there are any family members or wider family network who can be assessed to lorker Carrie spoke to all the people who care for your older brothers and sisters, r family network. Sadly, there was nobody who felt able to care for you.

f Videocall Kevin with foster carer Becky on 22/10/24. You had lots of red hair t had blue eyes. I felt that you looked a lot like your brother Ben who I had also first born. You were dressed in a lovely, fluffy onesie suit and were asleep all. Becky told me you were 11lbs 3oz when last weighed and that you had been hospital into their care on 07/10/24. Becky said that you had been showing signs idrawal in the first week or so, but these had settled. Charlie told me you were cky said you were 'a perfect little boy'. Becky sent me a photo of you taken after weve included at the bottom of this letter along with a photo taken on the day I al enquiries.

were 11lbs 3oz and were in age 3-month clothes. After all the activity, you settled off to sleep Becky and although I had thought you looked so much like Ben, having seen more recent pictur of both Ben and Liv, I felt you look even more like your sister Liv. It was really dear to me th. Becky and Charlie had done a great job of caring for you in your early months Kevin, and they spoke with real warmth and pride about you.

Goodbye letter

For children and young people

26/02/25

Kevin Williams

Cafcass reference: 1250292

Dear Kevin,

I am writing to let you know about the important decisions which have been made for you in the Family Court. I hope this letter can be kept safe for when you are older and may wish to understand more about why you do not live with your birth Mum Gemma and birth Dad Terry. Hopefully in your Memory Box there will also be a copy of the Introductory Letter I sent you when you were first born.

I have been your Children's Guardian and it has been my role to be your independent 'voice' in the Court proceedings, to instruct your Solicitor and to make recommendations about the Local Authority - North East Lincolnshire Council's plans for you, ensuring these are safe and robust.



The Local Authority applied to Court for an Order after you were born because they were worried Gina and Tom could not care for you safely and that you would be at immediate risk of significant harm if you were to live with them. This is because Gina and Tom are birth parents to 8 other children in total and none of these children are in Gina and Tom's care. You are the 4th child of both birth parents, and the 3rd for whom a plan of adoption has been endorsed by the Court.

The concerns about Gina and Tom are long-standing over more than 10 years and include long-term class A substance and alcohol misuse; criminality; instability; homelessness; domestic abuse; and physical harm. Gemma has served a 4-month prison sentence for neglecting to seek timely medical care for your brother after he sustained non-accidental injuries including a fractured arm when he was between 4 and 5 months old.



Having completed my enquiries, which included speaking to your Independent Reviewing Officer Richard who had ratified a plan of adoption for you, I filed my final case analysis and agreed with your Social Worker, recommending to the Court that Care and Placement Orders be made, which would allow the Local Authority to find you a Forever Family via adoption.

The final Hearing took place on 13/01/25 before Judge Harlip at Grimsby Court, with your Social Worker Carrie, a barrister for the Local Authority, myself and your Solicitor Rosemary Houghton attending. After considering the papers filed, Judge Harlip handed down her judgment and made the Orders sought.

Now that Court proceedings have come to an end, so does my work with you Kevin.

All that remains is for me to wish you all the very best for your future.

I hope ALL your dreams come true.



Photo taken 22/10/24



Photo taken 07/01/25

Mind Your Language!



Members of the Family Justice Young People Board have compiled a list of words and phrases that they often hear during family law proceedings. They want to encourage all professionals to stop using these and to think about the ways in which they speak to children and young people and how they refer to them in their reports, on file and to other professionals.

I am not a **CASE** or a **number**. I am a person, so please don't talk about how many cases you have or about your case plan. Talk about how many children and young people you are helping.

A **connected child** usually refers to my brothers or sisters. They are not connected. They are my family. Also don't use the word **SIBLINGS**. Say brothers and sisters because this is how I refer to them.

I am not a **subject child** or an object. I would like to be referred to by my name. The proceedings are about my life. The only thing worse than being referred to as a subject child is a **non-subject child**. Please think about how you talk about the people involved in family law proceedings.

Third party or parties. What does this even mean to me? Please refer to them by name.

Me and my family are not **service users**. This sounds too formal and unconnected. We are a family and I am a child.

Looked After Child (LAC). This makes me feel patronised and as though I am different. I am a child like any other. Please don't label me.

I am not a problem or a **problem child**, but I may be faced with problems and challenges that make me react in a way that is difficult to others. Think about how the label 'Problem Child' will affect me.

CMS, ISO, KOL, CYP Any sort of acronyms in my notes is confusing. I am not sure what they mean, and I don't understand how they are important to me. Write or say them in full and give me an explanation.

Beyond parental control. This is very upsetting to hear and to read about. It makes me feel that I have no hope or that there is no way to change or make things better. Think about how you describe me. What will I think about myself in later years if I read this?

Section 7, Section 47, Section 37. Please can you make sure that I understand why you need to write a report about my life and current situation, who the report will be shared with and I will want to share with you my thoughts too.

I do not have **behaviour issues**, but rather you have observed some aspect to the way that I respond to things can be challenging. Write or talk about what you have observed and the possible causes. Put yourself in my shoes. How would you react? Is my reaction a fair response to my situation?

Access, and contact suggests that I need permission. Who gives the permission? What happens if they say no? Also, what are my rights? Instead talk or write about me 'spending time with' a member of my family.

Final order – This is the last order made by the family court. The court expects all the people named in the order to keep to it and do as it says and can punish adults if they don't.

Foster carer – People who give a home to children and young people who need a safe place to live. They may have children of their own, or other foster children living with them, in which case you would all live in the same house together.

Guardian's report – The family court will ask the children's guardian to write a report to help it make decisions about a child or young person. The report will include information on their wishes and feelings and a recommendation from the children's guardian on what they think is best for the child. The report will also include information from the other people involved such as the parents and any other individuals such as experts.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) – IROs help to make sure the best decisions are made for children looked after by the local authority. Their main focus is to make sure that the care planning process for each child or young person is meeting their needs, and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

www.cafcass.gov.uk



TOP TIPS

For Social Workers working with Children and Young People

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) are a group of over 50 children and young people aged between seven and 25 years old who live across England and Wales. All of our members have either had direct experience of the family justice system or have an interest in children's rights and the family courts. You can find out more about the FJYPB at www.cafcass/fjypb

The FJYPB have devised these top tips for social workers who work and engage with children and young people in the family courts, based on their own experiences.

- 1 • Allow enough time to get to know me and for us to build up a trusting relationship. Be friendly and approachable. It may take time for me to feel comfortable talking about personal issues.
- 2 • Ask me when and where I would like to meet with you. Please don't assume that my school is the best place. Also please let me know in advance about the meeting.
- 3 • Be creative and use different tools and methods that will help me talk about personal things with you. Let's also have some fun along with more serious discussions.
- 4 • Be honest with me. Keep me updated about any decisions made or possible changes to my life. Make sure I really understand what is happening and what my options are.
- 5 • Be easy to contact. Give me your contact details (telephone number and email address). Get back to me as quickly as possible if I contact you.
- 6 • If you can't meet with me or you go off work absent, make sure I am informed. Also ensure I have another person I can contact if I need to. Who knows what is going on with me?
- 7 • Please do share my information if you have to hand over to another social worker. Make sure that the things that are important to me don't get lost or forgotten.
- 8 • Be prepared and please read my case file before we meet. I do not want to have to keep repeating myself.
- 9 • Remember the important dates and achievements for me. Don't just get in touch for reviews and meetings. If you are writing reports about me offer to share the information with me.
- 10 • Ensure I know how I can give feedback and who I can talk to if I am unhappy with something.
- 11 • I understand that you have to share some information with other people, but not everyone involved in my life needs to know everything. Please respect my privacy and ask me for permission of what information I want sharing and with whom. Please be aware that I might be embarrassed if you share specific information about me.
- 12 • My siblings are very important to me, but I may want different things to them. See us as individuals. Meet us separately and together.
- 13 • Remember that I have family and friends that are important to me and I might need your help to maintain those relationships.

Practice aids

Resource	Guidance on use	Source
‘Say it your own way’: Children’s participation in assessment resources	Private/public law: resource of direct work practice aids. Collection of worksheets – some similar with the Cafcass How it looks to me but there are others that can be used to explore the child’s experience at home and in placement.	DfE and Barnardo’s
Adapted worry meter	Private/public law: this meter (from a little bit happy to hugely happy) is to be used with the Cafcass emotion stickers to add depth to the feeling the child or young person has picked).	Cafcass practice aid
Board game	Private/public law: the aim of the game is to build a sense of trust with the child or young person. The emotions of the board allow them to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings without feeling like they are being questioned. It is made to feel like a game, as the practitioner is intended to join in and share thoughts and feelings.	Cafcass practice aid

