

Tricky situations and difficult questions

Most common assessments will be straightforward. Parents and children / young people will recognise for themselves that they need extra help and welcome efforts to provide this in a co-ordinated way.

However, there will be situations that require practitioners to work with additional tenacity, creativity and sensitivity. Some examples and possible response are below:

Situation: The CAF practitioner feels strongly that a child has additional needs but the parents are unwilling to co-operate with a CAF. There is no evidence that the child is at risk of harm.

Response : Explore their reasoning – What are they worried about? Explain they retain of control of the process and can decide things for themselves. Have they had some form of intervention in the past which was a negative experience? Explain what might happen in the future if these early concerns are not addressed now. Explain the benefits to the child / young person of having a proper needs assessment and services based on that assessment. If the parents remain unwilling to engage with the CAF process you should discuss this with your manager to identify a way forward. Practitioners will need to decide if and how this child or young person can be supported and monitored via the universal services.

Situation: The CAF practitioner feels that there could be domestic violence against the mother from her male partner but this is not acknowledged.

Response: This should not be ignored – children and young people living in homes where there is violence are at greater risk of poor outcomes. However, this is a sensitive area and direct questions such as “Does your boyfriend beat you up?” are often not answered honestly. Indeed a woman may often find it difficult to acknowledge to herself that her partner is violent or may be fearful of having her children taken away if she admits there is violence in the family. Indirect questions such as “Do you feel safe and secure?” or “How is conflict addressed in your family?” may elicit a better response. If a woman does disclose that she is experiencing domestic violence, she should be assured that she will remain in control of things, or where child protection procedures need to be followed, that she will be kept fully informed of actions and progress. Discuss with her what help and advice she might need and try to help her access this as soon as possible. If a child or young person tells you that their mother or female carer is being abused, you should arrange to speak to the woman alone to ascertain more information. Never discuss the issue of domestic violence with the possible perpetrator present as this could endanger the woman and children even more. Remember that, whilst women and children are the most frequent victims of domestic violence, women can also abuse men and domestic violence can occur between same sex partners. Further advice and good practice guidelines can be obtained from Leeds Inter-Agency Project (LIAP).

www.liap.org.uk Tel: 0113 3952140 email: liap@leeds.gov.uk

Situation: The parents are not being very forthcoming about their own background – you suspect they are hiding something.

Response : Many parents may have things in their past they do not want to reveal to you e.g. a period of criminal behaviour, drug-taking, their own abuse as a child. A common assessment does not require a full exploration of someone's past as it is a solution-focussed process that looks forward rather than back. However, events in a parent's past may or may not have an impact on their own ability to be a good parent. The CAF practitioner should ask the parent very generally about their own past and family background. This can be done factually to start with e.g. Where do your parents / brothers/ sisters live? Do you see much of them? etc. If a parent wants you to know about any problems in their family background, this will give them an opening to say so. Practitioners need to be aware that parents who may have had poor parenting experiences or been in care could have very limited family support. Again, indirect questions such as "When did you leave home?" or "Who were your main carers when you were growing up"? may be better than direct questions such as "Were you ever in care?"

Situation: The CAF practitioner finds evidence in the home of excessive alcohol or drug misuse or suspects parents to be regularly intoxicated.

Response: Many drug or alcohol abusing parents can manage their addiction in such a way that the impact on their children is negligible. However, others may be abusing drugs or alcohol to such an extent that it does impact on their childcare e.g. because they cannot get up in a morning to take a child to school. Practitioners need to approach this with sensitivity. Try talking to the parents to establish their own understanding of the issues – do they think they have a problem? Are they getting any help? Get them to describe their daily routine from getting up in the morning through to going to bed at night. How much is it affected by drug and alcohol use? Discuss with the child or young person – what is their daily routine like – how much do they look after themselves? Look after their parents? Are they able to access all the services and activities their friends can access or does the parent's addiction inhibit this? Further advice on working with families where there is drug and alcohol abuse can be obtained from agencies such as BASE 10 (work with using young people and parents Tel: 2433552), T3 (for more complex or serious situations Tel: 2443399), Leeds Addiction Unit (where parents are using substances Tel: 2951300) or West Leeds Community Drugs Service (Tel: 2553331)

Situation: CAF practitioner has made an appointment for a home visit on several occasions but the family are never in.

Response: This could be for any number of reasons – family may have forgotten, they may be chaotic or disorganised, something else cropped up, or they are trying to avoid the assessment. Remember Common Assessment is consensual – families do not need to have one if they do not want one. Discuss with your manager or a colleague what you should do next e.g. write to the family, contact the family through school or nursery, try visiting opportunistically at a time they might be in etc. Suggest they think about it and get back to you within the next week. Describe the benefits of the CAF and what is in it for them. Discuss with manager or colleague whether there may be evidence of significant harm requiring a referral to Social Services or evidence of some other acute concern such as a parental mental health issue. If there is no evidence of harm and family have simply chosen not to co-operate with the CAF, record this in the CAF record as "CAF abandoned" and discuss within your

agency as to how the child or young person will be supported and monitored via the universal services.