

Dimensions of Parenting Capacity

The following information is intended as a guide to support individuals to make professional judgements using their knowledge and experience. All practitioners should consider consulting with line managers, well informed multi-agency colleagues and nominated specialists within agencies.

Understanding at each level of need builds on the previous level. It is important to consider what access to service responses children and young people have had at each level, and not assume a different level of response is necessarily required.

Critically important to a child's health and development is the ability of parents or caregivers to ensure that the child's developmental needs are being appropriately and adequately responded to and to adapt to his or her changing needs over time.

It is important that parenting capacity be considered in the context of the family structure and functioning and who contributes to the parental care of the child. In situations where there is cause or concern about what is happening to a child, it becomes even more important to gather information about how parenting tasks are being carried out by each parent or caregiver in terms of:

- Their response to a child and his or her behaviour or circumstances
- the manner in which they are responding to the child's needs and the areas where they are experiencing difficulties in meeting needs
- the effect this child has on them as individuals and parents and caregivers
- the quality of the parent and child relationship
- their understanding of the child's needs and development
- their comprehension of parenting tasks and the relevance of these to the child's developmental needs
- the impact of any difficulties they may be experiencing themselves on their ability to carry out parental tasks and responsibilities
- the impact of past experiences on their current parenting capacity
- their ability to face and accept their difficulties
- their ability to use support and access help
- their capacity for adaptation and change in their parenting response.

The parenting tasks undertaken by fathers or father figures should be addressed alongside those of mothers or mother figures.

In some families a single parent may be performing most or all of the parenting tasks. In others there may be a number of important caregivers in a child's life, each playing a different part which may have positive or negative consequences.

A wide range of adults, for example grandparents, step relations, childminders or babysitters may have a significant role in caring for a child.

An understanding of the impact the parents and carers relationships with each other may have on their respective capacities to respond appropriately to their child's needs is also important.

Basic Care

Providing for the child's physical needs, and appropriate medical and dental care.

Includes provision of food, drink, warmth, shelter, clean and appropriate clothing and adequate personal hygiene.

Ensuring Safety

Ensuring the child is adequately protected from harm and danger.

Includes protection from significant harm or danger, and from contact with unsafe adults/other children and from self-harm. Recognition of hazards and danger both in the home and elsewhere. The impact of using the internet unsupervised should be considered and the possible access to unsuitable material and dangerous people.

Practitioners should be aware that culture can explain the context but not the cause of the behaviour or action of an individual parent. A parent who injures their child with a belt may say this form of punishment is cultural. The cultural context may explain the parents anger within the expectations that he or she has of the child but will not explain why the parent hit the child when other parents from the same culture in a similar context may not use physical punishment at all.

Emotional Warmth

Ensuring the child's emotional needs are met and giving the child a sense of being specially valued and a positive sense of own racial and cultural identity.

Includes ensuring the child's requirements for secure, stable and affectionate relationships with significant adults, with appropriate sensitivity and responsiveness to the child's needs. Appropriate physical contact, comfort and cuddling sufficient to demonstrate warm regard, praise and encouragement.

Assessment should consider the variety of potential indicators the presence of appropriate stimulation in an adult child relationship within a social and cultural context.

Stimulation

Promoting child's learning and intellectual development through encouragement and cognitive stimulation and promoting social opportunities.

Includes facilitating the child's cognitive development and potential through interaction, communication, talking and responding to the child's language and questions, encouraging and joining the child's play, and promoting educational opportunities. Enabling the child to experience success and ensuring school attendance or equivalent opportunity. Helping the child to meet the challenges of life.

Assessment should consider how children's learning may be encouraged in a variety of ways and that the trappings of a stimulating environment such as toys and play equipment are not guarantees of a stimulating environment for the child.

Guidance and Boundaries

Enabling the children to regulate their own emotions and behaviour. The key parental tasks are *demonstrating and modelling* appropriate behaviour and control of emotions and interactions with others, and *guidance* which involves setting boundaries, so that the child is able to develop an internal model of moral values and

conscience, and social behaviour appropriate for the society within which they will grow up. The aim is to enable the child to grow into an autonomous adult, holding their own values, and able to demonstrate appropriate behaviour with others rather than having to be dependent on rules outside themselves. This includes not over protecting children from exploratory and learning experiences.

Includes social problem solving, anger management, consideration for others, and effective discipline and shaping of behaviour.

Stability

Providing a sufficiently stable family environment to enable a child to develop and maintain a secure attachment to the primary caregiver(s) in order to ensure optimal development.

Includes: ensuring secure attachments are not disrupted, providing consistency of emotional warmth over time and responding in a similar manner to the same behaviour. Parental responses change and develop according to the child's developmental progress. In addition, ensuring children keep in contact with important family members and significant others.