

THE USE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN PARENTING ASSESSMENTS

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Introduction

Whilst assessment tools have long been a part of social work practice, there is an increase in emphasis on them in contemporary social work and the contribution they make to forming evidence-based assessments.

Assessment tools have many benefits. They provide structure and focus to the assessment, inform case planning and enable the gathering of appropriate information and analysis of this. They provide a level of transparency and objectivity, enable comprehensive exploration of the issues and test out hypotheses and preconceptions. They identify protective and risk factors, as well as resiliencies and vulnerability, while addressing and clarifying safeguarding issues and how to mitigate these. They also contribute to the ecological perspective of assessments, adding to the evidence base and illuminating the child's developmental needs and the parents' ability to meet these needs.

There are also limitations to assessment tools. Parents, unsurprisingly, may wish to portray themselves in a positive light and therefore information will also need to be drawn from other sources in order to triangulate the evidence. Information-gathering tools may not address all of the issues needing to be explored, therefore have to be used flexibly. Some assessment tools require specific training to allow their usage; children and families are all unique and there is no 'one-size fits all' method. Overall, whilst assessment tools enhance evidence-based practice, they do not replace professional judgment, or the knowledge and skills which undertaking parenting assessments require.

This article will explore the use of assessment tools within parenting assessments. Types of assessment tools will be discussed, together with specific examples and how these can be assimilated into the Assessment Framework and contribute effectively to the assessment and analysis. An illustrative case example will demonstrate the effectiveness of the use of a variety of assessment tools and also some of the limitations.

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