

The Common Assessment Framework and Family Pathfinders

Purpose

This paper responds to concerns raised about the policy links between the common assessment framework (CAF) and Family Pathfinders and Think Family.

Background

The Common Assessment Framework

The CAF is a key part of delivering frontline services that are integrated, and are focused around the needs of children and young people. The CAF is a standardised approach to conducting assessments of children's additional needs and deciding how these should be met. It can be used by practitioners across children's services in England.

The CAF promotes more effective, earlier identification of additional needs, particularly in universal services. It aims to provide a simple process for a holistic assessment of children's needs and strengths; taking account of the roles of parents, carers and environmental factors on their development. Practitioners are then better placed to agree with children and families about appropriate modes of support. The CAF also aims to improve integrated working by promoting coordinated service provisions. All LA areas were expected to implement the CAF, along with the lead professional role and information sharing, between April 2006 and March 2008.

Think Family

The Families at Risk Review was established to examine how systems and services can better meet the needs of families with multiple and complex problems. Analysis from the first stage of the review showed that families at risk with multiple and complex problems are not getting the most effective support. *Think Family: Improving the life chances of families at risk*, which built on the earlier analytical work, set out a vision for an integrated system that addresses the needs of families at risk by 'thinking family' at every level, from governance to the frontline.

Think Family approaches help to provide responses to the most vulnerable families and reduce inter-generational cycle of poor outcomes. Intensive evidence based family focussed interventions, such as Family Intervention Projects, have been successful in bringing change for families with whom services have not been successful in the past.

The Children's Plan announced a total of £16m for 15 LAs to help develop new ways of delivering intensive support to families through Family Pathfinders over 2008-11. The successful areas were announced in May 2008. Family Pathfinders aim to improve outcomes for families caught in a cycle of low achievement, by supporting families in an integrated way, responding to the needs of the whole family rather than as individual problems.

Family Pathfinder areas are expected to put in place or expand family services in a number of ways, one being a whole family assessment, building on the CAF, which looks at the needs, strengths and interrelation of problems for the whole family. Whole family assessment involves agencies sharing information, with the family's consent, to build a picture of the needs of individuals within a family. This does not mean a new procedure or form is required if existing tools can be used effectively in a holistic way. This work is being evaluated by York Consulting.

Questions & Answers

Q: Why are the Think Family and Family Intervention Project (FIP) interventions using different terms e.g. key worker not lead professional?

A: To a certain extent the terms 'lead professional' and 'key worker' are interchangeable. They are both used to describe a person acting as a single point of contact for a family, who has an advocacy and support role. However a FIP key worker works with families who have complex needs and works with them over an extended period of time. The key worker role is likely to be much more involved than that of the lead professional.

Whatever the title of the role, the critical point is that children, young people and their parents or carers have access to one practitioner who acts as a single point of contact for them, who supports them in making choices about the help that they need and who co-ordinates the delivery of that support.

Q: Why is there an alternative diagram used to illustrate Think Family?

A: The Think Family diagram (see Annex 1) is used to describe the range of family and parenting services and support that a family may access or require according to their level of need. The windscreen model (see Annex 2) in the CAF guidance¹ describes the processes and tools that can be used to support children, young people and their families according to their level of need.

Q: Why is CAF not the (adapted) model for the family assessment?

A: The Think Family Toolkit lays out clearly that in assessing the needs of the family, practitioners should '*Use the Children's Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in a family focused way ensuring that concerns about other members of the family that impact on the child are recorded*'.

As with any pilot, the Family Pathfinders are exploring different ways to assess the whole family when working with families with complex needs. Some of the pathfinders are exclusively using existing assessment tools and some have developed a new 'whole family' assessment tool. In both cases individuals are assessed separately (for children this is likely to be by using the CAF although not exclusively) taking the family context into account. The Family Pathfinders are being evaluated to provide information and advice to the Department on how effective the pilot's assessment processes have been.

It is important to remember that the Pathfinders are testing out concepts in order to inform policy development, so there is no one recommended model at this stage.

Q: Should the CAF be offered where a family is found to be not eligible or possibly eligible for FIP support?

A: FIPs provide intensive support for the most vulnerable families, many of which will have been in contact with services already and therefore will have had a common assessment before they were referred onto a FIP. On exit, the CAF and lead professional processes could be used to help families to continue to receive the right

¹ The Common Assessment Framework for children and young people – A guide for practitioners

level of support from services via a CAF support plan. Similarly, if a family is referred but the service is deemed inappropriate for their needs, if there is not one in place, the CAF may be offered.

The CAF can be the initial method of assessing the needs of a child or young person referred to a FIP. However, the whole family approach used in FIPs means there is a need to build on CAF to ensure there is an assessment of the needs of the whole family. FIPs are advised to use a family assessment based on The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families. The assessment carried out by FIP key workers should clearly identify areas of need within the family and conclude with clear recommendations for the type of intervention needed to tackle the family's support needs. Assessment reports should be agreed with families and then presented and used as a basis for discussion at the assessment review meeting. In ensuring that key workers are able to assess the family effectively, a programme for developing their skills in undertaking assessments is currently being considered.

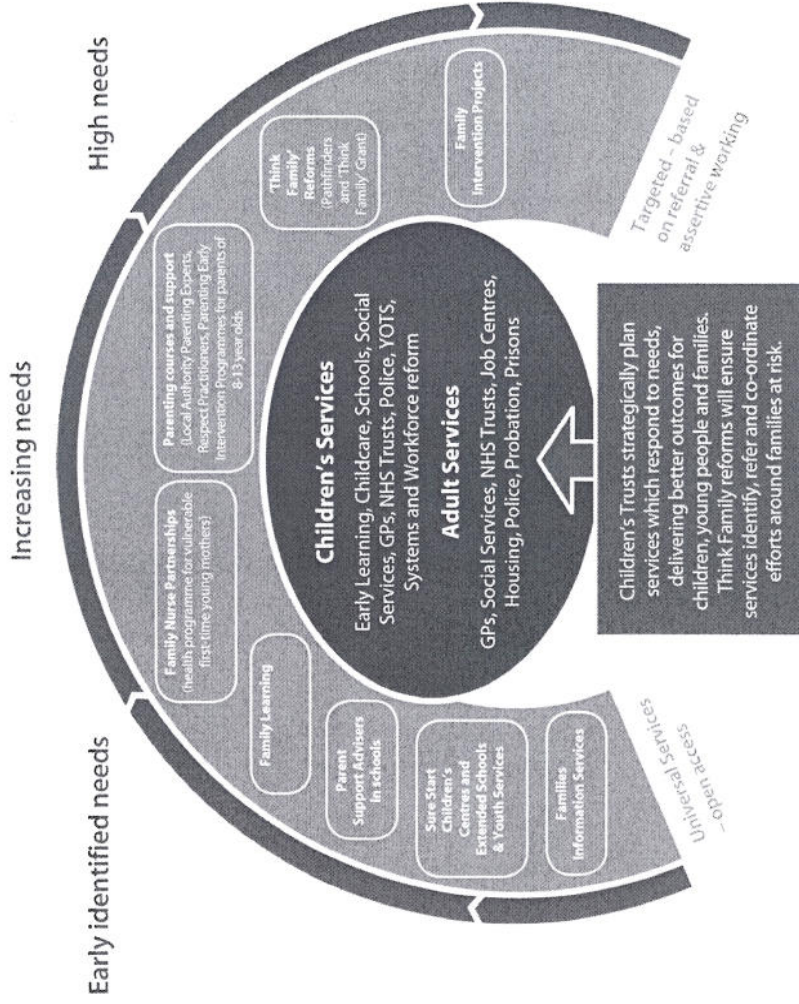
Q: Why don't FIPs focus on the ECM principles?

A: Support offered through a FIP is agreed in partnership with the family. The key workers use a solution-focussed approach, identifying the family's strengths and agreeing actions through a "contract" between the key worker and the family. The support aims to improve outcomes for children by supporting each member of the family. The evaluation of FIPs has found that they have been successful in achieving improvements in the five ECM outcomes for children.

Q: How will Think Family fit with the development of National eCAF?

A: The National eCAF system has been built ready for the first Early Adopters to test from the first quarter of 2010. The evaluation of the Think Family Pathfinders and the whole family assessment models they have been testing will report in mid 2011. The Department will consider the implications of what the Family Pathfinders evaluation finds for National eCAF and any future releases of the system.

Parenting and family support services in local areas



Processes and tools to support children, young people and families

