THERAPEUTIC ASSESSMENTS

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND RELEVANT SUPPORTS EARLY

ACT Government
Community Services

INFOSHEET

In the ACT, *A Step Up for Our Kids* strives to create a therapeutic, trauma-informed care system that helps kids grow up strong, safe and connected. A system where everyone involved – service providers, carers and families – understands the impact trauma has on a child's behaviour, health and development. A system that builds positive, safe and healing relationships and practices because of its understanding of trauma, attachment and child development.



One way we do this is by identifying early a child's challenges and putting relevant supports in place. We do this through **therapeutic assessments**.

WHAT IS A THERAPEUTIC ASSESSMENT?

A therapeutic assessment is essential to the delivery of trauma-informed care. It looks at the impact trauma has had on various aspects of a child's life to identify any challenges as early as possible so the child and you as their carer can be best supported to address them.

It looks at areas such as:

- health and development
- education and learning
- behavioural and emotional development
- culture and identity
- family and social relationships
- self-care skills.

The purpose is to develop a therapeutic and holistic view of what the child needs, and how those around them may be best supported to help the child emotionally, physically and developmentally.

WHO RECEIVES A THERAPEUTIC ASSESSMENT?

A therapeutic assessment is conducted for every child in kinship, foster and residential care. Where a child in an existing placement is experiencing difficulties, assessment may be prioritised.

WHO CONDUCTS THE ASSESSMENT?

A therapeutic assessor from the CYPS Therapeutic Assessment and Planning team conducts the therapeutic assessment. This may be the same person who meet with you for your initial carer consultation, or it may be another member of the team. Sometimes, the team may also use an external assessor.

Therapeutic assessors have a separate role to case managers but do work closely with them. They are professionally trained and have wide knowledge about the impact trauma can have on a child's development and the therapeutic supports that can help them.

WHEN AND HOW DOES AN ASSESSMENT HAPPEN?

A therapeutic assessment will be organised as soon as possible after a child enters care (it may take a number of months before an assessment can be done). The process is designed to minimise the impact on the child as much as possible.

The assessor will focus on gathering information about the child's history, exposure to trauma, its impact and the child's development from others who already know, or have already assessed, the child. This can include carers, case managers, birth family, teachers, doctors, counsellors and other professionals. This reduces stress on the child as it removes the need for them to attend multiple appointments and engage with more people unknown to them in formal assessment sessions.

The assessment process usually takes a number of weeks to complete and may include the use of questionnaires, interviews and follow-up observations of the child.

All assessors will work sensitively with everyone involved. When conducting assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, cultural input will be sought from the child's Cultural Plan, members of the Cultural Services Team and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

WHAT COMES OUT OF AN ASSESSMENT?

Once the assessor has considered all information, they will prepare a Therapeutic Assessment Report and arrange a special meeting with the child's Care Team to discuss its content. A child's Care Team includes you as their carer.

The report will include a lot of information and outline the assessor's recommendations. These will include what supports should be put in place to help you provide a therapeutic environment for the child and their ongoing development. As their carer, you are central to the recommendations as you are the child's most important resource in terms of healing and recovery from the trauma they have experienced.

WHAT CAN YOU, AS A CARER, EXPECT?

During the assessment process, the therapeutic assessor will contact you to organise a time to meet and hear information from you about the child in your care. This meeting may take place at a community venue, such as a Child and Family Centre, or at your home. There may be more than one meeting as well as phone conversations. The assessor will also share information with you about trauma, attachment and child development.

It is likely the assessor will also ask you to complete a strengths and difficulties questionnaire. They may also ask to meet or observe the child. All this information will help the assessor understand what has and is happening for the child and will inform their report and recommendations.

Once the report is complete, the assessor will give you a copy and meet with you again to go through it. This is an opportunity for you to ask questions and share any concerns you have in preparation for the Care Team meeting.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CARE TEAM MEETING?

The Care Team meeting brings together those involved in supporting the child and who have a role in decision-making around the child's life and care needs, such as their case manager, you and significant others – perhaps birth family, teachers, health professionals, cultural workers. The assessor determines who should attend. It will be held at an appropriate location where the report can be discussed privately.

The assessor will go through the report and help the group prioritise goals and strategies for the child. This discussion informs the child's Case Plan developed by their case manager and will incorporate the goals and strategies agreed to by the Care Team.

The Care Team meeting marks the end of the assessment process and the assessor's involvement with the child and you. The Care Team will work together to implement the agreed strategies in a timely manner, with the case manager overseeing the child's ongoing care needs. These needs will be reviewed every 12 months using a similar process to the original therapeutic assessment.

WILL ALL RECOMMENDATIONS BE ACCEPTED?

Everyone in the child's Care Team will have the opportunity to share their thoughts on the report's recommendations and if they agree with them. The case manager is ultimately responsible for making the final decision, and in doing so must consider the views of the Care Team. If your case manager decides not to accept a recommendation they are required to clearly document their reason why.

WHAT IF THE CHILD'S NEEDS CHANGE?

Each year, a review of the child's needs will be done. It will look at the progress made against the agreed strategies and whether the supports in place continue to be best for the child.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

You are also encouraged to read:

- Therapeutic Assessment Review Reports: Ensuring children continue to get the right support as time goes on
- My Therapeutic Assessment Report (for young people)
- Strengths and difficulties questionnaire
- Carer handbook: The go-to resource for kinship and foster carers in the ACT

CONTACT US!

For additional resources or to have a brief follow-up discussion, contact:

Therapeutic assessor:

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Phone:

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Email:

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Note: All case management queries are to be directed to your case manager.



Note: In this document, 'child' or 'children' also refers to a young person or young people under the age of 18.

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