

Young Carers’ Needs Assessment

Supporting information for use in conjunction with “No Wrong Doors”; template for local memorandum of understanding on work with young carers



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About this paper:

This information has been developed to provide supporting information for the Young Carers Memorandum of Understanding. It is intended to assist professionals working with young carers and their families, who may not have a background in children’s services, to encourage a shared understanding of children’s needs, so young carers, the people they care for and others in their families, are provided with effective support. The document was developed with substantial help from officials in the Department for Education (DfE).

Introduction:

The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children Act to make it easier for young carers to get an assessment of their needs and to introduce ‘whole family’ approaches to assessment and support. Local authorities must offer an assessment where it *appears* that a child is involved in providing care¹. This legislation is aligned with similar provision in the Care Act 2014² requiring local authorities to consider the needs of young carers if, during the assessment of an adult with care needs, or of an adult carer, it appears that a child is providing, or intends to provide, care. In these circumstances the authority must consider whether the care being provided by the child is excessive or inappropriate; and how the child’s caring responsibilities affects their wellbeing, education and development.

Local authorities should ensure that adults’ and children’s services work together to offer young carers and their families an effective service, able to respond to the needs of a young carer, the person cared for, and others in the family. This avoids the need for multiple assessments where children and adults find they are expected to give the same answers to professionals from different services, coming into their home at different times. Assessments of young carers and the people they care for are intrinsically linked. This is why the legislation allows local authorities to combine assessments. This may mean that children’s needs are assessed by professionals who will not have the same familiarity with children’s needs as social workers employed by children’s services.

¹ Children Act 1989: section 17ZA 1(a) [inserted by section 96 Children and Families Act 2014 (see below)]

² Care Act 2014: section 63(1).

Section 96. Young carers (of Children and families Act 2014)

(1) In the Children Act 1989, after section 17 insert —

“17ZA Young carers' needs assessments: England

(1) A local authority in England must assess whether a young carer within their area has needs for support and, if so, what those needs are, if —

- (a) it appears to the authority that the young carer may have needs for support, or
- (b) the authority receive a request from the young carer or a parent of the young carer to assess the young carer's needs for support.

(2) An assessment under subsection (1) is referred to in this Part as a “young carer's needs assessment”.

(3) In this Part “young carer” means a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (but this is qualified by section 17ZB(3)).

(4) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a young carer if the local authority have previously carried out a care-related assessment of the young carer in relation to the same person cared for.

(5) But subsection (1) does apply (and so a young carer's needs assessment must be carried out) if it appears to the authority that the needs or circumstances of the young carer or the person cared for have changed since the last care-related assessment.

(6) “Care-related assessment” means —

- (a) a young carer's needs assessment;
- (b) an assessment under any of the following —
 - (i) section 1 of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995;
 - (ii) section 1 of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000;
 - (iii) section 4(3) of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges) Act 2003.

(7) A young carer's needs assessment must include an assessment of whether it is appropriate for the young carer to provide, or continue to provide, care for the person in question, in the light of the young carer's needs for support, other needs and wishes.

(8) A local authority, in carrying out a young carer's needs assessment, must have regard to —

- (a) the extent to which the young carer is participating in or wishes to participate in education, training or recreation, and
- (b) the extent to which the young carer works or wishes to work.

(9) A local authority, in carrying out a young carer's needs assessment, must involve —

- (a) the young carer,
- (b) the young carer's parents, and
- (c) any person who the young carer or a parent of the young carer requests the authority to involve.

(10) A local authority that have carried out a young carer's needs assessment must give a written record of the assessment to —

- (a) the young carer,
- (b) the young carer's parents, and
- (c) any person to whom the young carer or a parent of the young carer requests the authority to give a copy.

(11) Where the person cared for is under 18, the written record must state whether the local authority consider him or her to be a child in need.

(12) A local authority in England must take reasonable steps to identify the extent to which there are young carers within their area who have needs for support.

Assessment under the Children Act and the Care Act:

The purpose of assessment is to identify individual needs and how these affect their wellbeing and to establish the outcomes that the person who is assessed wishes to achieve in their day-to-day life. The assessment will support the local authority in determining the services, if any, that should be provided.

In carrying out their functions under the Children Act local authorities are subject to a broad duty to promote children's welfare. Children defined as "in need" will be those whose vulnerability is such that they are unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health and development, or whose health and development ("wellbeing") will be significantly impaired without the provision of services³. The worker carrying out the assessment will also have to consider the needs of other children in the family and the general circumstances of the child's parents and wider family.

Under the Care Act, local authorities have similar duties to promote the "wellbeing" of adults with care needs and of their carers. The concept of wellbeing involves taking account of how a wide range of factors will affect how an individual chooses to live their life. These include:

- their personal dignity (including treatment of the individual with respect);
- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- protection from abuse and neglect;
- control over day-to-day life (including the manner in which they are provided with any care or support)
- participation in work, education, training or recreation;
- social and economic wellbeing;
- family relationships and the support offered by their family network;
- the suitability of their accommodation; and
- the support provided by their friendships and social networks.

These factors do not represent a comprehensive list. The relevance of any specific factor will depend on the views, preferences and wishes of the individual taking part in the assessment process.

Assessments of young carers must recognise that each child is a unique person on their own journey to adulthood and maturity. Professionals responsible for assessing children should be able to recognise their individual developmental needs⁴ and whether these are appropriate for the child's age and level of maturity. It will be important for professionals to recognise and understand whether any variations in development are the result of the child having needs which would indicate that the local authority should offer services to promote

³ The Young Carers (Needs Assessments) Regulations 2015 – 4(2)(h)

⁴ Children have needs across a range of dimensions: see Annex A.

their welfare as a child in need, including services to safeguard the child from abuse or neglect.

In complex and challenging situations attention may be diverted away from the child. There may be a risk the child's voice will get lost in the voices of the adults involved. For this reason, it will be important to speak to the child alone, wherever possible⁵, and to observe how they relate with their parents and siblings. It will be helpful, with the child's agreement, to speak to their teachers and to other relevant adults.

Assessments of a young carer must always take into account the capacity of their parents to offer a level of care necessary to respond appropriately to the child's needs. Parenting capacity⁶ will need to be assessed in the context of the family's structure and how family members relate to one and other and to their wider community. Where the person is a young carer, caring for their parent (or a parental figure) it will be important to protect the child from taking on a role in which they feel responsible for "parenting" the adult who would usually be caring for them.

The kinds of issues that a professional carrying out young carers' needs assessment may need to consider includes:

- how the parent responds to the child and their behaviour;
- how they understand and respond to the needs of their child and how this response influences the quality of the child's relationships and their sense of security;
- how parental health impacts on their capacity to meet the child's needs – parents may find it difficult to respond to some aspects of the child's needs, perhaps as a result of mental ill-health, or because a parent's physical impairment means there could be practical limitations which, for example, prevent them from attending meetings at the child's school
- the impact of their past experiences on their ability to understand and respond to the child's needs
- their ability to recognise difficulties and accept any help; and
- their capacity for change.

Care of children, though, does not take place in a vacuum. Their parents' capacity to offer them safe, emotionally nurturing care will be influenced by the family's personal histories and by a wide range of other factors. These will include housing, employment, income, the community where the family lives and their access to wider networks of support. In practice, the knowledge a professional has of community resources and of sources of information and advice may be an important factor in arranging support to prevent a young carer from taking on the responsibility for offering a level of care that is inappropriate and/or excessive.

⁵ The Young Carers (Needs Assessments) Regulations 2015 – (2)

⁶ See Annex B

In carrying out young carers' needs assessment it is important that:

- information is gathered systematically and carefully and is precisely recorded;
- information is checked and discussed with the young carer and with the adults concerned; and
- differences in views about the child's caring role and how this affects the child's wellbeing are understood and clearly recorded.

The young carers' needs assessment should take into account the strengths of a family, as well as identifying any challenges faced by its members. This involves identifying factors that protect the child from an inappropriate care-giving role alongside their vulnerabilities. Throughout the assessment process, the professional responsible must identify the impact on the child of what is happening in the family.⁷ It is important to separate the child's understanding and their wishes and feelings about the outcome of the assessment from those of the adults in the child's network.

The starting point for any assessment will always be – ***children are children first.***

⁷ The Young Carers (Needs Assessments) Regulations 2015 – 4(3)

Young Carers' Needs Assessment:

The wishes, feelings and aspirations of young carers and their families should be at the heart of a young carers' needs assessment. Many young carers may be highly motivated to make a positive contribution to their families but professionals helping them will need to ask what needs to be done if their caring role limits their potential? Young carers will need the same access to education, career choices and wider opportunities as other children in the community who do not have care responsibilities

When assessing the needs of a young carer, the professional(s) responsible must consider whether any of the caring responsibilities the young carer is undertaking are inappropriate, taking into account the child's own needs. The assessment should take into account the impact of the child's caring role on their health and development. For example considering:

- whether the child's caring role limits their educational opportunities, perhaps because it means there are reasons why they are absent from school; or
- whether caring prevents the child from building relationships and friendships; or how caring affects the child's physical and emotional wellbeing.

The assessment must also reach a view about whether any of the child's caring tasks are "inappropriate", in view of child's personal circumstances. Inappropriate tasks could include:

- personal care such as bathing and toileting;
- carrying out strenuous physical tasks such as lifting;
- administering medication;
- maintaining the family budget;
- or offering, precociously mature, emotional support to the adult e.g. if, in effect, the child is "parenting their parent".

Similarly the assessment must determine whether a young carer is giving "excessive" care. Whilst a child might carry out relatively minor care tasks within their competence, the time these take up and the demands they make on the child could place significant limits on their life – e.g. if the level of care interferes with school attendance or isolate the child in the home.

In any assessment involving a young carer, they, and other children in the home, should always be offered the opportunity have a private conversation with the assessor in case there are issues they find difficult to talk about in the presence of adults. Thought may need to be given as to how prepared and ready a child will be to confide in an unfamiliar professional visiting the home. Children may frequently require encouragement to express their wishes and feelings. In some circumstances it will be helpful to involve an adult who has the child's confidence in the assessment to offer the child support and to advocate on

their behalf. For some children, use of informal non-verbal techniques, will enable the child to make a full contribution to the assessment of their needs as a young carer.

The results of a young carer's needs assessment will include establishing whether the child should be provided with services as a "child in need" (under section 17 of the Children Act). The local authority should provide services where the assessment results in evidence that the child is:

17(a) ... unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health and development without the provision for him of services by a local authority; or

(b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services...

The assessment must also determine whether the need to provide support to a young carer could be prevented by providing support to the person they care for or to another member of their family⁸.

"Whole Family Approaches"⁹

A whole family approach involves the professionals concerned being able to recognise how the child's wellbeing and development is affected by their caring role; and understanding the extent to which this care is (or will be) relied upon by the family, including the wider family, to maintain the wellbeing of the person cared for.

Local authority adult and children's services may have overlapping responsibilities in arranging to assess and, if appropriate, support young carers and the person they care for. The primary responsibility for responding to the needs of a young carer rests with the service responsible for assessing the person they support, rather than depending on the age of the carer. This means that:

- young carers of disabled children are, the responsibility of children's services; whilst
- it will usually be the responsibility of adult services to identify whether children in the household/ family network are expected to assume inappropriate or excessive caring responsibilities for parental figures, or other adults.

It may be helpful for local authority services for children and adults to develop a protocol to describe how they will work together when assessing both young and adult carers and the people in their care¹⁰. The protocol will need to set out arrangements for sharing

⁸ The Young Carers (Needs Assessments) Regulations 2015 – 4(2)(e)

⁹ Refer to *The Care Act and Whole Family Approaches*

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/5756320/The+Care+Act+and+whole+family+approaches/080c323f-e653-4cea-832a-90947c9dc00c>

¹⁰ <http://www.adcs.org.uk/download/misc/working-together-to-support-young-carers-adcs-adass.pdf>

information in a way which facilitates joint working but has regard to issues of confidentiality and personal privacy. There will be value in involving local health services, voluntary sector organisations representing carers and also young carers themselves in developing this protocol.

A whole family approach to assessment should not be used as a mechanism to reduce time or cut corners. Consideration needs to be given to each family's preference around the location, timing and form of assessment. Individual family members may have different preferences and needs. Young carers and their families should be supported to select the assessment approach most likely to work for them.

Combining assessments for young carers and their families, where all parties agree has the potential to offer them an uncomplicated gateway which opens the way to the right kind of help. Where assessments are combined, the professional responsible for the assessment must have appropriate knowledge, skills and training.

An approach that can be used is 'together, apart, together', where an assessment starts by bringing family members together, then works individually with each relevant family member and comes back together at the end to look at how the range of identified needs impacts on family members, as individuals and as a group.

Apart from reaching a shared understanding of the whole family's needs, assessments should separately identify the needs and wishes of the young carer; the person being cared for; parents (if different from the person being cared for) and of other children in the family.

At times assessment may lead to plans to support more than one member of the family that may also be the responsibility of different organisations. In these circumstances, plans should be coordinated, rather than developed in isolation from one another. If all relevant parties, including adults and children in the family, agree, plans for different family members can be combined to form a single plan. Where a combined plan is not appropriate, plans involving different services should at the very least be coordinated.

Any combined assessment must identify which professional will be the lead for coordinating services to the household along with information about the roles and responsibilities of other professionals. The lead professional will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the plan and keeping it under regular review.

Safeguarding¹¹

Keeping children (and adults) safe from harm and abuse is a vital aspect of joined-up working. Services for children and adults working together will need to recognise the vulnerability of children and accept joint responsibility for identifying, responding to and for protecting any young carers who are suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Protocols between children and adult services about the provision of assessment and support to young carers and their families should include information about the procedures to be followed where there are child protection concerns. Staff in adult services who are involved in work to support young carers should be appropriately trained in recognising harm and in reporting concerns about a child's welfare and safety. This training must ensure staff understand the importance of prompt referral to children's services and how to make such a referral.

Safeguarding children must always be a priority for every service coming into contact with young carers. However, local arrangements to support young carers and their families should not be presented in a way that could discourage young carers and their families from seeking information, advice or requesting an assessment.

Planning to respond to the needs of young carers and of the "whole family"

Some assessments may reach the conclusion that no further action is necessary. More commonly, assessment will lead to the development of a plan by the services involved describing what support is agreed for the young carer and/or for the person being cared for and for the wider family.

The complexity and severity of a young carer's needs will determine the scope and detail of the plan. Plans must describe the areas where support is required, if the child is to achieve a reasonable standard of health and development. This will include information about support provided to the child to maintain their participation in school, or in further education or training; and any practical or emotional support needed by the child. Plans will need to include a clear set of objectives with associated measures that can be used to evaluate whether or not the support provided to the child is effective in responding to their needs. Objectives and timescales will need to be realistic and agreed by the child. Plans following a young carer's needs assessment must always maintain the focus on the child; even if the resources listed in the plan are directed at offering support to the person with care needs to prevent the young carer from having to provide inappropriate and/or excessive care.

¹¹ Detailed statutory guidance is given in *Working Together 2015*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

The plan should include details about the contribution, roles and responsibilities of all services providing direct support to the young carer, the person they care for and to the young carer's parents, if different. It will be good practice for all services contributing to the plan to sign the plan and to keep their own copy.

It is most important that a record of the plan is provided to the young carer, to the person they care for and, if different, to their parents. This record must be in an appropriate format that takes into account the age and understanding of the young carer. The record must include details about whether the young carer has been assessed as a "child in need". The plan must also include the arrangements for future review.

All plans developed following a young carers' needs assessment might helpfully include:

- Information about how the child will be helped to thrive outside their caring role – e.g. to participate in school, education or training; to maintain or achieve an appropriate standard of health; and to enable the child to enjoy and achieve, in the same way as other children who do not have caring responsibilities;
- Details about any support to be provided to the parents of a young carer to build their parenting capacity; and to prevent the child from taking on an inappropriate or excessive caring role;
- Information about local young carers groups and sources of community advice and assistance.

Plans should only be combined if all parties agree and if combining plans is in the best interests of all involved. Where one of the plans is for a child they must have capacity to agree to their combination, or if the child lacks capacity, the local authority's assessment must demonstrate that a combined plan is in the child's best interests.

Review

The purpose of review is to give thorough scrutiny to whether the plan is operating as intended to minimise the risks of the child having to carry out inappropriate or excessive care tasks.

Where a young carer has been found to be child in need the plan should be reviewed at the same intervals as plans for other children in need in the authority.

Putting into practice a whole family approach to review requires the lead organisation to establish that the plan remains effective for everyone. Reviews must offer the opportunity for all children and adults concerned to have their say. Again, it will be important to allow all involved, and in particular children, the opportunity for private conversation, perhaps as part of preparing for a review meeting.

The review should consider how best to maximise the wellbeing of the whole family, but it will be important that in considering how the plan responds to the needs of adults sight is not lost of the child's needs. The review may need to identify issues where there are differences of opinion between the adults concerned and any young carer, or other children. The professional leading the review should aim to reach agreement as to how to resolve these, recognising children's distinct needs and vulnerability and the duty to prevent them from assuming an inappropriate or excessive care role.

The review may conclude the plan needs to be revised, perhaps as a result of changes in individual circumstances. The lead professional would then be responsible for identifying the key issues to be re-evaluated, the services necessary to contribute to a revised assessment and an outline timescale for updating the plan.

Transition

There is a risk that effective planning and support for a young carer may be disrupted at the point where they have to make the transition to legal adulthood. Collaborative, joined-up, working between services for children and adults is especially important over this transition period. Discussions about any needs for support into adult life should be a feature of assessment and planning for young carers throughout their teenage years.

Sections 63 – 64 of the Care Act introduce new duties towards young carers making the transition to adulthood. The Act requires local authorities to seek a young carer's agreement to undertake an assessment if it considers they are likely to have needs for support when they reach legal adulthood, at age eighteen, and also if the timing of the assessment offers "significant benefit". The timing of any assessment should be discussed with the young carer and their family. Where the needs of a young carer and their family are complex, early planning for transition will be essential. Conversely, there will be little value in completing a transition assessment at a prematurely early stage. Much of the information necessary to complete a transition assessment may already be included as part of the young carers' needs assessment. This should already include details about any support provided to help a young person prepare for their challenges they are likely to face as they take on the responsibilities of adulthood.

Transition assessments for young carers must also specifically consider whether the carer is able to care now and whether they prepared and willing to continue to be a carer after they reach adulthood at eighteen.

Transitions assessments must place the needs of the young person at the centre and focus on their future hopes, wishes, feelings and ambitions.

The matters that should be included as part of this assessment could helpfully include:

Family relationships: including the potential and capacity of their family network, parents, siblings, other relatives and friends, to help and encourage the young person to make a positive transition;

Social support: including the young person's relationship with friends and involvement in support networks – e.g. groups for young carers/ young adult carers;

Education, training and employment: arrangements for young people to complete their secondary education and move on to higher education, training or employment;

Accommodation and independent living: including the young person's future plans and any intentions they may have to live independently. These plans may link to their ambitions to go to university or seek employment away from their home area;

Health, development and general wellbeing: including recognition of the young person's physical emotional and mental health needs and an evaluation of their capacity to obtain access to health care in the same way as other young people who do not have care responsibilities;

“Financial literacy” and skills in financial management: including information about how it is expected a young person will support themselves financially in future.

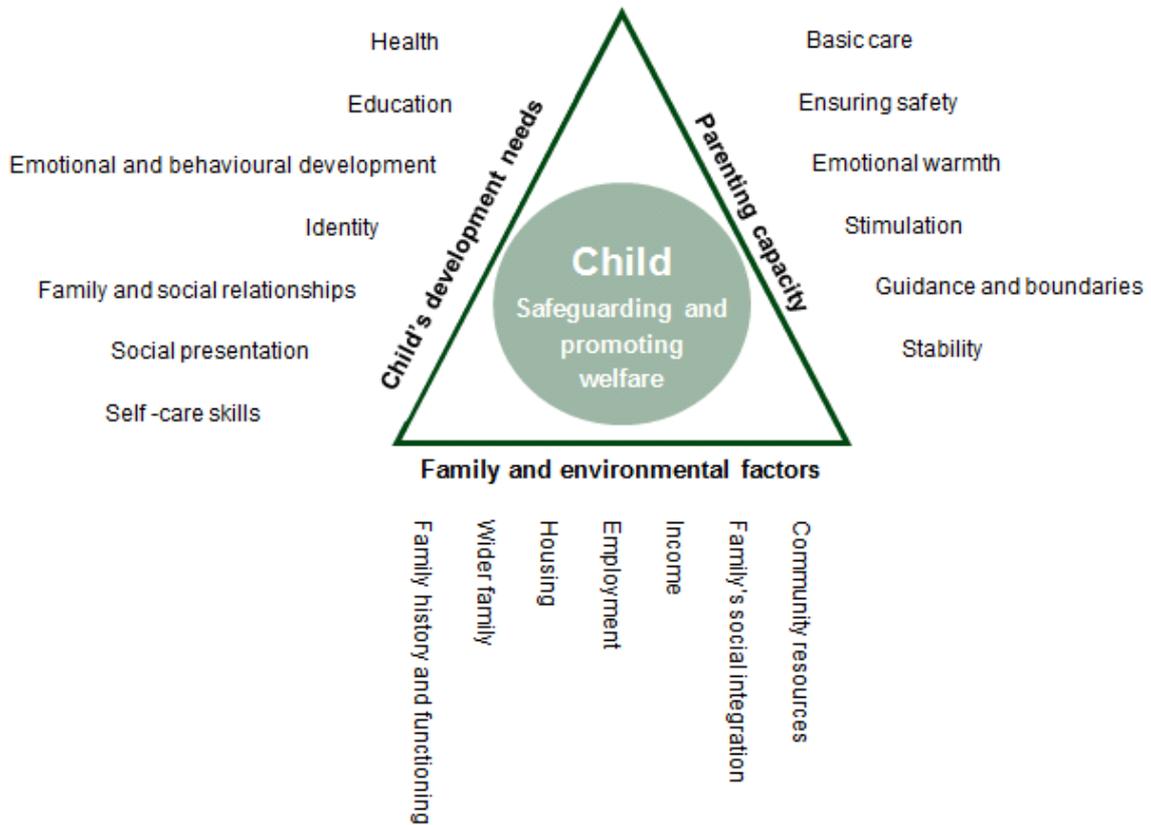
If an authority decides it will not carry out a transition assessment it must provide a written explanation of the reasons for this to the young carer and to their parents. This could include information about whether this decision will be reviewed in future, alongside information about support available in the community. It should also offer advice and information about how best to avoid the young person developing support needs in future.

The duty to identify young carers

Section 96(12) of the Children and Families Act requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to identify the extent to which there are young carers within their area who have needs for support. These changes align with changes in the Care Act requiring local authorities to offer assessments of need to adult carers and to identify adult carers with unmet needs within their local population.

The new duty on local authorities to identify the extent to which there are young carers in their areas with support needs means the local authority must do what is possible to reach out to young carers and their families to prevent young carers from remaining hidden in local communities.

Annex A – Dimensions of Children’s Need



Annex B – Dimensions of parenting capacity

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 or 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.
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.
Stimulation	Promoting child's learning and intellectual development through encouragement and promoting social opportunities. Includes facilitating the child's development and potential through interaction and communication, talking and responding to the child's 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. Facilitating child to meet challenges of life.
Guidance and Boundaries	Enabling the child to control their own emotions and behaviour. The key parental tasks are demonstrating and modelling appropriate behaviour, emotional control and interactions with others and guidance which involves setting boundaries, so the child is able to develop their personal values and conscience, and social behaviour appropriate for the society where they will grow up. The aim is to enable the child to grow into an autonomous adult, holding their own values, and able to relate to others rather than having to be dependent on rules outside themselves. This includes not over protecting children from exploratory, 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 child's developmental progress; also ensuring children keep in contact with important family members and significant others.