

Bromley CAF: Frequently asked questions

What is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a tool to support early intervention. When used effectively it ensures families receive the right support at an early stage before a small need grows into a larger one. It is intended to be used as a holistic assessment of need to support multi-agency working.

The process is entirely voluntary and informed consent from the parent/carer and or young person is mandatory, so families do not have to engage and if they do they can choose what information they want to share. Children and families should not feel stigmatised by the CAF; indeed they can ask for a CAF to be initiated.

Following the completion of the assessment an action plan, agreed by the family, will be put into place and monitored to ensure that it is effective. Sometimes it is helpful to hold a multiagency meeting including the family so that information can be shared to enable everyone to plan the next steps together. This meeting is referred to as a Team Around the Child/Family (TAC or TAF) meeting.

What does the Common Assessment Framework consist of?

1. A simple **pre-assessment checklist** to help practitioners decide who would benefit from a common assessment.
2. A four-step **process (prepare, discuss, deliver, review) for undertaking a CAF**, to help practitioners gather and understand information about the needs and strengths of the child, based on discussions with the child, their family and other practitioners as appropriate.
3. A **standard form** to help practitioners record, and, where appropriate, share with others, the findings from the assessment.

What is the Pre-assessment checklist?

If you are not sure if a CAF would be useful, the pre-assessment checklist is a simple tool that helps you to consider whether the child or young person would benefit from a CAF. If they are not achieving in all the areas highlighted by the checklist, and additional services may be required, a CAF would be useful. The pre-assessment checklist is a tool to be used within your agency, it does not require consent for you to complete it, you do not share it with other agencies and you do not send a copy to the CAF team. If you decide not to complete a CAF, it could be useful to keep the pre-assessment checklist on your agency's files for future reference.

Why is the CAF process necessary?

There are four important reasons:

1. To give all practitioners working with children and young people a holistic tool for identifying a child's needs before they reach crisis point and a shared language for discussing and addressing them.

2. To ensure important needs are not overlooked and reduce the scale of assessments that some children and young people undergo.
3. To provide a common structure to record information and facilitate information sharing between practitioners.
4. To provide evidence to facilitate requests to involve other agencies, reducing unnecessary referrals and enabling specialist services to focus their resources where they are most needed.

Who needs to know about the CAF?

Anyone whose work brings them into contact with children and families should have an awareness of the CAF and either know how to complete a CAF themselves or know how to arrange to have one carried out. Everyone working with children should be aware of the sorts of situations that indicate the need for a CAF.

Who will carry out the assessment?

Agencies must agree within their teams which practitioners will be trained to undertake CAF assessments. For example in a school it will not necessarily be a teacher who undertakes the assessment, it could be the pastoral head of year, learning mentor or SENCO.

It is expected that the majority of CAFs will be undertaken or arranged by practitioners in universal services such as early years settings (for example children's centres), schools and health settings. These services are best equipped to identify possible needs in their early stages. CAFs, particularly in the context of extended schools, will help schools tackle, along with other services, a broader range of social and behavioural issues acting as a barrier to learning and attainment. Similarly, in health, CAFs will help midwives and health visitors take a broad view of the issues affecting unborn and new born infants, as part of national child health promotions; practitioners will apply these principles to older children and young people in other settings, such as health drop-ins in schools and further education colleges.

When should a CAF be carried out?

A CAF can be done at any time - on unborn babies, new babies, children or young people. It is designed for use when:

- there is concern about how well a child (or unborn baby) or young person is progressing (this includes particularly vulnerable children and young people such as persistent truants and young runaways);
- their needs are unclear, or broader than a service can address on its own;
- a CAF would help identify the needs, and provide a basis for getting other services involved.

The pre-assessment checklist can be used to help identify if a CAF should be completed.

The decision about whether to do an assessment should be made jointly with the child and/or parent. Children should always be encouraged to discuss the assessment with their parents. If the child is old enough and competent to understand, they may make their own decision.

Should a CAF be completed if it is believed a child is at risk of harm?

No, if a child is at risk of harm then the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedures should be followed immediately.

How will I know if another agency has already completed a CAF?

Before starting a CAF, it is important to check who else is working with the child or young person, and whether a CAF already exists by talking to the family. You should also contact the CAF team on 020 8461 7174 to find out if a CAF already exists or if the family are currently involved with Children's Social Care. If an assessment exists, the CAF team will provide you with the details of the Lead Professional or person who completed the assessment so that your information can be shared with the consent of the child or young person and family. If the child/young person's case is open to Children's Social Care the CAF Team will advise you not to complete a CAF but to instead liaise with the allocated Social Worker.

What are the benefits of a CAF?

Potential benefits include:

- Quicker service provision to children and families - as a result of more appropriate referrals to specialist services.
- Better service provision to children, young people and families - due to the CAF looking at the whole child rather than the needs of the child from the perspective of one particular agency.
- Less repetition and duplication for children, young people and families - due to the CAF information being shared, with consent, between practitioners.
- Better understanding and more effective communication amongst practitioners - due to the promotion of a common language around the CAF.
- Time savings for practitioners - who will be able to build on existing CAF information rather than collecting it themselves from scratch.

We all want a positive outcome for the children and families that we work with, and the CAF will contribute to achieving this goal. The CAF will help agencies to improve joint working, communication and information sharing.

What is the process that should be followed to carry out a CAF?

Step 1: Preparation

This involves recognising potential needs and then discussing the situation with the child and parents/carers. The practitioner may talk to their manager, colleagues, or others – possibly those already involved with the child. It is important to find out whether a CAF already exists by contacting the CAF team on 020 8461 7174. After reviewing the existing information a practitioner decides whether to undertake a CAF with the agreement of the child and or parents/carers.

Step 2: Discussion

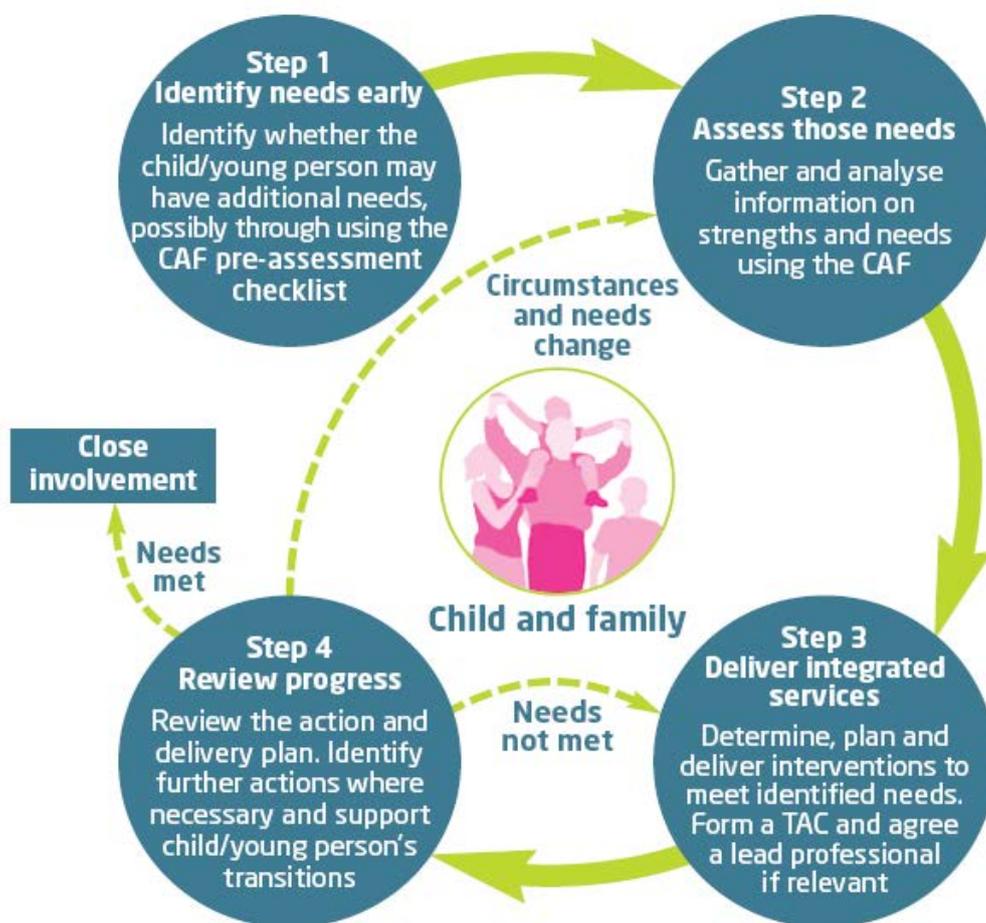
This involves completing the assessment with the child and family, making use of information already gathered from the child, family or other practitioners, and completing a consent statement. At the end of the discussion the practitioner should understand better the child's strengths, needs, and what can be done to help. Please send a copy to the CAF Team so that the CAF can be logged on the database,

families should be made aware of this (CAF Advice and Support Team, 3rd Floor, Bromley Central Library, High Street, Bromley, BR1 1EX).

Step 3: Delivery

This involves agreeing actions that the practitioner's service or the family can deliver, and considering what may be needed from other services. According to local practice, decisions may be made through meetings with other practitioners and the family, and the appointment of one practitioner as lead professional where integrated support is required.

Step 4: Review, Review Review. The CAF plan should be monitored and reviewed regularly to identify further actions and ensure that the action plan is being delivered and is making a difference. The action plan should be reviewed and updated initially 4-6 weeks after completion, then at three monthly intervals. Of course it can be updated more frequently if required.



Who will have access to a CAF?

The individual CAF will be owned by the child/family and the practitioner who undertook the CAF process.

Information contained in the CAF will not be able to be shared without the consent of the child/family unless there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Can the CAF be used as a referral into another agency?

The CAFs role is primarily and most importantly as an assessment tool, however as a result of the completion of a CAF an action point may be to make a referral to another agency.

How will the CAF form be stored?

The CAF form will be held by the assessing agency and stored securely as a part of their case records, in line with their own policies and procedures. A copy of the completed CAF will be given to the family and to other agencies and professionals that the child, young person and family have agreed to. Those holding copies of the CAFs are responsible for storing them securely. A copy of the CAF will also be sent to the CAF team and families should be made aware of this (CAF Advice and Support Team, 3rd Floor, Bromley Central Library, High Street, Bromley, BR1 1EX).

Can a parent or carer initiate a CAF?

If a parent or carer would like to initiate a CAF, they should discuss this with someone currently providing a service to them. This may be a health visitor, school staff, or someone else.

There is no entitlement to receive one on demand.

What training is available to support practitioners?

Free CAF training is available to all practitioners within the children and young people's workforce, including statutory, voluntary and community sectors and all staff are encouraged to attend. Please discuss this with your line manager. Dates and booking details for CAF Training can be found within the Bromley Safeguarding Children's Board Training Brochure, www.bromleysafeguarding.org.

The current offer is:

Half-day: Understanding & Using Common Assessment Framework

Half-day: Developing Confidence in Chairing Team Around the Child Meetings

Bespoke training: Whilst the CAF Team would recommend the multiagency training outlined above if you have a large staff group the CAF Team would be happy to discuss coming into your setting to deliver CAF Training to your organisation/team. There would be no cost for this.

Who is the Lead Professional?

The Lead Professional is the person responsible for co-ordinating the actions identified in the assessment process and being a single point of contact for children with additional needs being supported by more than one practitioner.

If I complete a CAF do I automatically become the Lead Professional?

The Lead Professional is chosen at the multi-agency meeting if a child with additional

needs is being supported by more than one practitioner. The Lead Professional should be the person most involved in meeting the child's additional needs or who has the greatest contact/trust with the child and family.

However the CAF author is responsible for coordinating the first TAC and by default is the lead until an alternative Lead Professional has been identified.

What do I do if a parent refuses a CAF but the concerns continue?

You cannot undertake a CAF unless the child or young person and/or their parent/carer agree. The CAF process is entirely voluntary. If a CAF is refused and you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child or young person, you should follow the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

A child/young person/family not consenting to a CAF does not prevent you from continuing to work with, offer services to and make referrals for the child or young person. However you should explain to the family the benefits of having a CAF.

What type of issues might warrant a CAF being completed?

The needs in many cases will be cross-cutting and might include:

- disruptive or anti-social behaviour
- overt parental conflict or lack of parental support/boundaries
- involvement in or risk of offending
- poor attendance or exclusion from school
- bullying behaviour or experiencing bullying
- special educational needs
- disabilities
- disengagement from education, training or employment post-16
- poor nutrition
- ill-health
- substance misuse (includes alcohol)
- anxiety or depression
- housing issues
- pregnancy and parenthood

When might I need to arrange a Team Around the Child/Family Meeting (TAC/F)?

The Team Around the Child/Family process begins at the point at which a child/young person has been assessed, using the common assessment framework, as requiring a multi-agency response. It is recommended that a TAC Meeting be considered when:

- You cannot meet the family/young persons' needs from within your own organisation
- There are more than three agencies involved with the child or young person (excluding GP)
- Telephone sharing of information is not enough
- You have consulted with other agencies that may be able to offer assistance or direct services in an effort to meet the need or help to reduce the concerns

- The family's needs have not been satisfactorily linked to services
- There is a need to arrange close co-ordination of different agencies/organisations with the family
- There is a need to decide who should take the Lead Professional role. **This is particularly important in respect of transition points for example a child leaving primary school to move on to secondary school**
- You are finding it difficult to gather the information to complete the CAF. In this situation the TAC should set timescales for completing the assessment as well as identifying how any immediate needs can be met
- There are long-term neglect issues and therefore a need to ensure that full chronology of information is shared across the agencies involved

What are the responsibilities of Team Around the Child/Family members?

- Each practitioner in the TAC is responsible/accountable to their home agency for the services they deliver to the children, young person and families and for delivering the activities they agree to carry out as part of the action plan.
- TAC members are jointly responsible for developing and delivering the action plan to meet the needs of the child or young person, and achieving the intended outcomes identified through the CAF.
- Each member of the TAC must keep the family and Lead Professional informed about progress in their area of responsibility, providing information promptly when requested and attending meetings.
- Each member of the TAC meeting should be encouraged to de-jargonise and ensure that they are clearly understood by all.

Can I ask the CAF Team to chair TAC meetings?

In certain circumstances the TAC meeting can be convened and chaired by a member of the CAF team. This is on a request basis in respect of the more complex CAFs or if there are extenuating circumstances that indicate the need for an independent chair. It would be unusual for the CAF Team to remain involved beyond the initial TAC and the first review.

When does the CAF process end?

The CAF should be closed when additional needs/concerns have been appropriately met or needs are clear and met by family or assessing agency and the family are in agreement.

Complete CAF Closure Form indicating that the CAF can be closed; evidence the positive outcomes or the reason for closure i.e. consent withdrawn or family have moved out of the area and send a copy to the CAF Team.

Within Bromley, a CAF will be closed if the case is open to Children's Social Care.

What is the role of the CAF Team within Bromley?

1. To maintain an accurate record of all CAFs completed on children and young people in the borough

2. To offer support and advice to workers using the CAF process
3. To provide a range of free multi agency training courses and visits to organisations for on-site support and assistance

How does the CAF Team get information to keep accurate records?

- By asking for a copy of all CAFs to be sent to the CAF Team so that these can be logged onto the system. The CAF team will read through every CAF and make sure that there is evidence that the parents/carers have consented to the CAF and that there is an appropriate plan in place.
- By asking for updates from the CAF Author and Lead Professional about CAFs logged on the system to ensure that we know whether the CAF remains open and work is actively being reviewed or whether the CAF can close.

What sort of things do people call the CAF Team for advice about?

These might include: -

- Checking to see if a CAF already exists for a child/young person
- To discuss whether a CAF is the most appropriate way to support an individual family
- To seek advice about what support is available for families
- To seek advice about situations that are not improving