



About assessment at Adoptionplus

At Adoptionplus we believe a good assessment is the foundation for successful action, whether that be further intervention or simply by knowing and understanding more, can be sufficient in and of itself. This guide explains what is involved in the assessment of children and families.

What to expect from our assessments

Families and social workers can expect a comprehensive assessment looking at what is known to be important to adoptive families:

- An understanding of the child's attachment representations
- An understanding of any blocks to having the relationship which the child needs and the parents hope for
- An understanding of the impact of a child's early experiences on their day to day functioning
- A comprehensive assessment report which is clear and yet detailed enough to be a useful reference to families, professionals and other decision makers
- An approach which is based on a Charter that explains our commitments to families, values and responsibilities.

How we conduct our assessments

Our assessments are split over two half days beginning with the parents at the first assessment. This is because we want to determine, with parents and professionals as appropriate, the goals of the assessment and plan what areas we need to focus on when we meet the child(ren).

An invitation letter will be sent out and with it there will be several questionnaires for parents to complete and bring with them. These include:

- A measure of the understanding, skills and confidence in the relationship with their child including three specific concerns rated for their impact and intensity (*using the Thinking About your Child Questionnaire*)
- A measure of the emotions and behaviour of their child (*using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*)
- A measure of the child's planning, working memory, emotional regulation and self-organisation (*using the BRIEF questionnaire*)

The first half day with parents and any invited professionals involves:

- Establishing hopes and expectations of the assessment
- An understanding of the child's functioning day to day including their attachment behaviour
- An understanding of any sources of additional stress for the parents which may impact on their capacity to parent their children with confidence, empathy and joy as a result (*using semi-structured interview and the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale*)
- A review of the background of relevance to the child and identification of any documents which may be useful
- An understanding of the development of any concerns and identification continuing strengths
- Explanation of use of video in assessing families, with forms for consent to be considered and returned next time
- A plan shared with the parents of how we will conduct the assessment with their child. This will also include a discussion with parents of how to explain the assessment to their child if needed

Use of video

With the consent of families, video is used to ensure assessments are conducted discretely without the need for a team member to be present. Video of individual assessments, which do not require the parent to be present, are also taken. Video allows the detailed analysis required to understand the needs of children and families.

It can also be useful for parents to see areas of note during the child's individual assessments. We usually find children and families soon forget the cameras are on. A guide on our data storage policy is available on request.

Information on our assessments for children and who they will meet is available on our website.

The second day involves:

- An explanation of the assessment and activities to come for the child
- An introduction to Adoptionplus for the child
- An explanation (as appropriate) of the use of video
- An emphasis on the importance of being settled and relaxed

Depending on what the primary areas of concern are we may:

- Invite you and your child to play structured games (using the Marschak Interaction method)
- Invite your child to complete a play based assessment of attachment representations (using the Story Stems assessment method)
- Interview your child together with you and separately using either play, interview and or questionnaires to understand them better (using interview and play based activities)
- Assess their learning, cognitive abilities, memory, coordination, executive functioning or attention (see information on our Neurodevelopmental assessments)
- We may wish to speak with schools and will discuss this on either the first or second day seeking consent where appropriate.

What our assessments cannot do

We cannot diagnose psychiatric disorder but know when this may require further assessment.

When the assessment is finished

When we have finished the assessment, we analyse all the information and arrange to meet with the parents and any relevant professionals to share the findings and develop a collaborative plan for action.

After we have met we will finalise the report and, because it is usually substantive, distribute this for final checks before circulation.