

Manchester Alliance for Community Care



The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) A Toolkit

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About this toolkit

This toolkit is for any practitioner working with children, young people and families who wants to know more about the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and when to use it. It is particularly aimed at voluntary and community sector organisations working in Manchester.

It provides an overview of what CAF is; guidelines for how to integrate CAF into your work and information about the integration of CAF within the local context of Manchester. It also includes an example of a good practice case study showing how a local voluntary and community sector organisation has integrated CAF successfully into their work.

For more information about CAF please contact:

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1. What is the Common Assessment Framework?

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services and all local areas in England. It aims to help the early identification of children and young people's additional needs and promote co-ordinated service provision to meet them.

What does the CAF consist of?

- A simple pre-assessment checklist to help practitioners identify children who would benefit from a common assessment;
- a process 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;
- a standard form to help practitioners record, and, where appropriate, share with others, the findings from the assessment;
- A delivery and review form

Who will use the CAF?

Every practitioner in the children and young people's workforce should understand the government outcomes for all children and young people as set out in Every Child Matters (ECM). They should know about the CAF and how to undertake one. Every manager offering services to children and young people should ensure at least some of their staff are equipped to undertake common assessments.

How does the CAF link with other assessments?

The CAF has replaced the assessment aspects of the Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR). Other assessments such as universal checks and specialist assessments (for Children in Need; those with special educational needs etc) remain in place. However, the CAF may be appropriate to be used before, after, or in conjunction with these assessments to help understand and articulate the full range of a child or young person's needs.

CAF benefits

- The CAF provides 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 provides an easy to use assessment that is common across services. It helps embed a shared language; support better understanding and communications amongst practitioners; reduce the number and duration of different assessments that historically some children and young people have undergone; facilitate early intervention and speed up service delivery.
- The CAF promotes more effective, earlier identification of additional needs, particularly in universal services.
- The CAF improves integrated working by promoting coordinated service provisions.

2. CAF – A Guide for Managers and Practitioners

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) have produced a web resource which provides guidance for managers and practitioners implementing the CAF process. It helps describe how through effective early intervention and by tailoring service delivery to support children and young people we help meet their needs and improve their lives.

The [Managers' guide](#) is for all strategic and operational managers across all children's services who have responsibility for implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), to ensure better outcomes for children, young people and their families. It includes:

- Background
- CAF and integrated working
- Introduction to the CAF
- The CAF process
- Role and responsibilities of managers
- Operating the CAF across Children's Services
- Resources

The [Practitioners' guide](#) is for all practitioners who want to know about the CAF and how to use it. It includes:

- About the CAF for children and young people
- Who will do a CAF and when?
- What makes a good assessment?
- CAF and integrated working
- CAF and specialist assessments

The guidance has recently been refreshed (March 2010) to update the documents in line with recent policy changes, and to make them more accessible. The CAF guidance now includes the updated CAF form, information about subject access requests, as well as new advice on sharing and storing of CAF forms.

Both guides are available as an online resource at <http://iwtools.cwdcouncil.org.uk/> or as hard copy documents on the DfE website at <http://www.education.gov.uk/vocabularies/educationtermsandtags5983>

DfE Website

A series of revised CAF materials including practitioners' and managers' guides, CAF forms, pre-assessment checklists and supporting tools are also available on the DfE website:

<http://www.educationandyoungpeople/sen/earllysupport/esinpractice/a0067409/everychildmatters>

3. Integrated Working

In delivering services to meet the needs identified for a child or young person where more than one agency is involved, one of the practitioners takes a lead role to ensure that meetings of all the practitioners concerned are convened, and services are delivered that are integrated, coherent and achieving intended outcomes. This practitioner is called the **'Lead Professional'** and should be supported by a **'Team Around the Child'** (TAC). This team is made up of professionals from across the children and young people's workforce convened together to meet the needs of the child or young person. The lead professional is not responsible for delivering all of the services needed by the child or young person.

The lead professional role has three core functions which can be carried out by a range of practitioners from across the children and young people's workforce:

- act as a single point of contact for the child, young person or family
- co-ordinate the delivery of the actions agreed
- reduce overlap and inconsistency in the services received

They are accountable to their home agency for their delivery of the lead professional functions. They are not responsible or accountable for the actions of other practitioners or services. Many practitioners in the children and young people's workforce can be a lead professional at certain times for some of their cases (including staff and volunteers).

Team around the Child and Lead Professional: Managers and Practitioners Guides

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) have produced a web resource which provides guidance for managers and practitioners on the team around the child and lead professional role. You can download it at <http://iwtools.cwdcouncil.org.uk/>.

The manager's guide includes:

- The lead professional and integrated working
- The team around the child and lead professional
- Roles and responsibilities of managers
- Resources

The practitioner's guide includes:

- The team around the child and the lead professional
- The lead professional and integrated working
- Being a lead professional
- Management, supervision, training and development
- Resources

Manchester's Think Family Strategy

Manchester's Think Family Strategy embeds the principles of CAF and team around the child as it is based on the assumption that in Manchester, all partners delivering services from universal to targeted, working with either individual family members or groups of family

members will expect their staff to adopt a whole family, holistic approach to all of their customers.

4. CAF in Manchester

Following the implementation of the CAF project in Manchester in March 2008, significant progress has been made in supporting services with training and development around CAF and providing agencies with the tools to carry out the assessment and planning processes with confidence. This has enabled the CAF project to recently end and be mainstreamed as part of effective integrated working in the City.

Registering CAFs & updating database information

You will need to check if a CAF has been completed before starting a CAF. This can be done by contacting the Children's Services CAF Team by phone (0161 234 7285) or cafit@manchester.gov.uk. Once you have completed a CAF you still need to register it. You can do this by contacting the CAF Team by:

- E-mail: cafit@manchester.gov.uk
- FAX: 0161 274 7082

CAF Training

CAF training is available across the city and is now managed by Training Shared Services. The following training courses are run regularly:

- CAF Level 1: Awareness Briefing
- CAF Level 2: Practitioner Training
- CAF Level 2: Manager/Supervisor Training
- Lead Professional, Team Around the Child, Child and Family Plans Training
- Assessment Skills, Communication and Engagement Training
- Charing Meetings Training

For more information about these training opportunities including dates of courses please contact: the Training Shared Service Centre on 0161 227 3218 or email tsc@manchester.gov.uk.

CAF Champions

It is recommended that organisations considers identifying CAF Champions at three levels:

- Senior/Strategic
- Operational Manager
- Practitioner

These CAF Champions will ensure CAF is implemented in their organisations and that it becomes integral to your day to day practice. They will make arrangements for you to access advice guidance and support and will update you with local and national developments. MACC will be recruiting CAF champions in the future. For more information about this contact Nicola Shanahan at MACC.

Quality Assurance of CAFs

The quality of CAFs across the city is good and to keep improving outcomes for our children and young people it is important that this high standard is continued. Each service should already be monitoring the quality of assessments as best practice to identify support and training needs of staff. A quality assessment tool is available on the [Manchester City Council](http://www.manchester.gov.uk) website. This is in line with the national framework. For general information about the national framework see the DfE <http://www.education.gov.uk> website.

Key contacts

CAF Team details as above

Training Shared Service Centre

(0161) 227 3218

Useful links

A series of documents to support practitioners to carry out CAF's are available on the Manchester City Council website at:

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/4435/common_assessment_framework_caf

5. Using CAF in Practice – The Routes Project

Part of the Black Health Agency, the Routes Project provides support to international new arrivals and families with children aged between 5-16, newly arrived in Manchester. Many clients come from refugee and asylum seeking communities. They provide assistance to families to access mainstream support services such as schools, GPs, dentists, housing services, benefits advice etc. They also aim to help families become less isolated and excluded from society by meeting people from their home community and locally in the area where they are living. They work with families, providing emotional support, accessing services and advocating where services are limited or inaccessible and provide information about their needs to other services.

How do Routes use CAF in their work?

The Routes Project regularly uses CAF to assess the needs of the families they are working with and to enable them to coordinate support across different professionals. Routes Family Support Workers regularly take the Lead Professional Role.

What have they found to be the benefits of CAF?

- By coordinating CAF meetings with families, it ensures that interventions are focused on the views of child and family.
- Families find it very beneficial to have one point of contact.
- Families often don't realise what's happening behind the scenes in terms of their support. Families who have undergone a CAF and particularly those who have been involved in Child and Family Meetings, are able to see how different services are interconnected. This is very empowering for families.
- A CAF gives families more control in decision making as it focuses on the steps the family wishes to take.
- It stops the need for repeating information to different professionals.
- By facilitating CAF meetings, professionals are much better able to speed up processes. Routes have found, for example, that through the use of CAF the time it takes to get a school place for a child with special education needs has been significantly reduced.

What do you need to think about if you're going to complete a CAF

- VCS providers are well placed to coordinate a CAF (Routes Project have advised Sure Start staff about how to complete CAFs).
- It is a significant administrative task to coordinate a CAF meeting.
- Completing a CAF can be intimidating to professionals at first however the impact of completing a CAF always outweighs the effort.
- Always use an accessible location and times that suit all professionals. Even if you get some apologies, go ahead with CAF meetings as you will still get some benefit!
- Once a CAF meeting has taken place, it takes the pressure away from the Lead Professional as support is delegated across services.
- Think about the need for interpreters and how to share costs across agencies.

For more information about the Routes Project go to <http://www.blackhealthagency.org.uk>