

CAF Guidance for managers and practitioners

What are the benefits of a CAF, and why is it important?

Benefits of the CAF to families and practitioners:

- reduces the number of time a child/family have to repeat their story
- encourages practitioners to see the child, young person's and family's needs in a more holistic way, and to recognize strengths and well as needs
- supports better shared understanding and communication between different practitioners, by encouraging a common language around assessment between agencies
- empowers the child, young person and family, as the CAF should be completed in partnership with the family, keeping them at the centre of the process, and with their full consent
- supports earlier intervention, as it helps practitioners to identify and meet a child's needs at an earlier stage, before problems reach crisis point
- based on research and best practice in working with families, providing an evidence base which is trusted by other services
- can help identify unmet need and inform strategic planning and commissioning

Importance of CAF Nationally:

- it is part of legislation (The Children Act 2004), as a result of being one of the recommendations made by Lord Laming following Victoria Climbié's death
- it is a key element of government guidance; 'Working Together 2011' in relation to multi-agency information sharing and means of delivering early help services
- it is seen as a benchmark of good multi-agency working by Ofsted, who now scrutinize the use of the CAF and early help, in the same way as the rest of safeguarding and social care services for children

Importance of CAF Locally:

- it is a key strand of [Barnet's Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy](#), and many of the performance and impact measures contained within this local strategy directly relate to the use of the CAF
- all children with additional needs, requiring services from the council will be required to have had an assessment and have a SMART Action Plan (either via a CAF or a statutory assessment depending on the threshold of need)
- the CAF will be the only route to access targeted support from internal Early Help Services, including from the Youth and Family Support Service.
- local CAF data will be used as a means to measure early help intervention and impact
- use of the CAF will be included as a target for most children's commissioned services.

Benefits of e-CAF

This system will allow practitioners to:

- share and store information more securely
- save time, as no need to re-enter information across forms or when creating a family CAF
- provide clearer pathways for a range of targeted early help interventions
- allow the child's journey to be tracked, with alerts to remind practitioners when reviews are due.
- provide a clear interface with the Children's Social Care database ICS, so that cases can step-up and down seamlessly between thresholds.
- provide accurate and easily accessible data about CAF activity

How does the CAF process work?

The CAF provides practitioners working with children, young people and families with a common assessment process, including:

- A simple to use [Pre-Assessment CAF Checklist](#), as an internal and optional tool to help practitioners decide whether a child has a range of needs and whether these needs are broader than a single agency can meet on their own. This Checklist can be used alongside [Barnet's CAF and Children's Social Care Thresholds Document](#).
- A standardized, e-enabled CAF assessment form to carry out an assessment of the child's needs. This assessment covers three key areas: the child's needs and strengths, the parenting and the wider family and environment.
- A [Distance Travelled Measure](#), known as Parent, Child Indicators (PCIs). This enables families to indicate on a scale of 1-5, the degree as to how concerned they are about each need discussed in the assessment (with 1 being of least concern and 5 being of most concern). This measure helps children, their families and practitioners to see improvement in areas of need identified in the assessment, and helps to see if the action plan is working. The score is re-assessed at each review and therefore will indicate the impact on improving outcomes for children and their families.
- An [Action Plan](#), which needs to outline targets which will make a difference to the child and their family; that are clear and achievable and which state who will carry out the various actions and by when.
- The [CAF Review](#) – The CAF Action Plan should be reviewed at least every three months, to ensure that the CAF action plan is on track, and that all the agreed actions are being carried out. The Review Meeting should be arranged and chaired by the person who is leading the CAF, known as the Lead Professional. The family (including the child/young person, wherever appropriate) should be part of this meeting, as well as any other professionals involved in supporting the family. Those attending the Review Meeting (who are sometimes brought together earlier to help

devise the initial CAF Action Plan) are known as the Team Around the Child or Team Around the Family.

- The Closure Process – Once all the actions in a CAF Action Plan have been achieved, or if no longer relevant, then the CAF episode should end. Ideally the decision to close the CAF should be made with the family and the other professionals involved at a final Review/closure meeting. A CAF can close for a number of other reasons, such as; the family have left the borough, the child has reached adulthood; the family have withdrawn consent, or the child's needs have increased and they now require a more specialist, statutory service from Children's Social Care, the Youth Offending Service, or Tier 4 Mental Health services.

In Barnet, it is expected that a CAF should not remain open for more than a year, as any longer than, then it is likely that the action plan will start to drift. It is considered best practice therefore to start a new CAF episode, in order to re-assess the child's needs and draw up a new action plan if required.

The e-CAF system will require the Lead Professional to provide a closing summary and reason for closure, on closing a CAF episode.

What are the roles of the CAF Assessor, the Lead Professional, the Team Around the Child member and CAF sign-poster?

- ***The CAF Assessor (also known as CAF initiator)*** – is a practitioner, usually from the local children's workforce who has identified that a child they are working with, has additional needs, which are broader than can be met by universal services. They can see that it may be helpful to find out more about the child's needs and to coordinate and access some additional support for the child.
The CAF Assessor will often be practitioners working in universal services, such as in schools, pre-schools, children's centres or primary health services, The CAF Assessor will complete the CAF assessment on line, using the local e-CAF system, once they have obtained consent from the family.
- ***The Lead Professional*** – is the person who acts as the single point of contact for the child, the family and other practitioners. They coordinate and drive the whole process, ensuring that the action plan is delivered and reviewed. They are not however responsible for the actions of other agencies, apart from their own.
The Lead Professional works best when they have a positive and trusting relationship with child and family and also when it is someone who has the skills, ability and capacity to carry out the role. Very often the Lead Professional will be the same person who has initiated the CAF, but not always, as it will vary from case to case, depending on a child's primary needs. For example, depending on a child's needs, the Lead Professional may be a school nurse, health visitor, youth worker, or voluntary sector worker.

- ***The Team Around the Child (TAC) member*** - can be any professional from any agency who is working with a child or their parent, when they have something to offer to support deliver the action plan for the child. This could include an adult mental health worker, or substance misuse working, supporting a parent, or a Housing Officer, or GP, as well as all those agencies working closely with the child. It may be that the practitioner working with the adults may not be able to attend all the TAC meetings, but they can still contribute, by providing a verbal or written report to the Lead Professional prior to the meeting.
- ***CAF Sign-poster*** - Most local children's workforce practitioner will be expected to initiate CAFs or take on the Lead Professional role if appropriate, but it is acknowledged that some practitioners, primarily those working with adults, may not have the capacity or knowledge to carry out a child-centred assessment of need; for example a GP or an adult mental health practitioner, they however may be well placed to identify a family in need of support and may be the first professional that a family chooses to seek for help. In these situations, the professional should make a referral to the [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#), who will determine whether a social work service is required or a CAF. If a CAF is required, the CAF Team will be asked to identify an appropriate CAF Assessor and Lead Professional.