



Somerset County Council and Partners' Guide to the Early Help Assessment (CAF)

1) Why do we use the Early Help Assessment (CAF) in Somerset?

Somerset Partners work together, sharing common ground, and agree that there is a common need for Early Help Assessments (CAF) to be undertaken in all the various agency settings. Early Help Assessment (CAF) is an important component of Somerset County Council and Partner's Early Help Strategy and Delivery Plan (2013 to 2015), which exists to ensure that all the children and young people of Somerset:

- Are safe, healthy and cared for
- Are treated fairly and equally
- Achieve their full potential both in and out of school
- Build self – esteem and raise aspirations
- Have better employment opportunities
- Benefit from family wellbeing and local prosperity
- Have integrated support to meet their needs

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) is the preferred assessment in **all** of Somerset's multi – agency partnerships, including the partnership between Children's centres, Health Visitors and Children's Social Care Early Intervention teams to provide both targeted and universal services for children and their families through the Healthy Child Programme.

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) is a key tool in the early identification of children, young people and families who need support. This support needs to be available from every agency as early as possible; this can only happen if children, young people or their family's needs are identified before things reach a crisis point and the right professionals and services are working together to help. The Early Help Assessment (CAF) is designed to ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right support at an early stage, before their needs escalate, and that services are delivered in a more coordinated way. One of the benefits of the Early Help Assessment (CAF) is that it reduces the number of different assessments that children, young people and their families have to undergo. This means that children and families don't have to keep repeating their story.

If a child is at risk of being abused or neglected you must follow the South West Consortium Child Protection Procedures. For more information please go to <http://www.online-procedures.co.uk/swcpp/>

2) Legal Context

The legal basis for the Early Help Assessment (CAF) is section 10 (inter – agency co-operation) and section 11 (safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children) of the Children Act 2004.

3) What does the Somerset Early Help Assessment (CAF) consist of?

A multi – agency process to enable practitioners to undertake an Early Help Assessment (CAF) and then act on the plan

A standard form to record the assessment, the action plan and review.

The assessment covers three domains: development of the child or young person; parents and carers; and family and environment. Under each domain the signs of well –being (strengths, worries/needs) are recorded.

4) How to complete an Early Help Assessment (CAF)

It is important to understand that the Early Help Assessment (CAF) is completely voluntary, so the child, young person or family must agree for an Early Help Assessment (CAF) to take place and decide who else they wish the assessment to be shared with. They should also be fully involved throughout the assessment process. The Early Help Assessment (CAF) should empower the child, young person, and family as it should be completed in partnership, wherever possible enabling them to take the lead.

There are four stages to the Somerset County Council and Partner's Early Help Assessment (CAF) process. These stages are set out below with a suggested high level guide for partner agencies. Each agency will be responsible for developing its own more detailed Early Help Assessment (CAF) procedures.

Identify Needs Early and Seek Consent

- Before you begin an Early Help Assessment (CAF) you check who else is working with the child or young person and whether an Early Help Assessment (CAF) already exists.
- If someone has already started an Early Help Assessment (CAF) contact the Lead Professional and ask about joining the Team Around the Child (TAC)
- If an Early Help Assessment (CAF) is not already in place, explain the process to the family and ask for their consent to start an Early Help Assessment (CAF). Record consent.

Assess Needs

- This step involves working with the child, young person and, as appropriate, their family and undertaking the assessment with them.
- Organise a TAC meeting, inviting practitioners that you and the family have identified as best placed to meet the needs of the child.

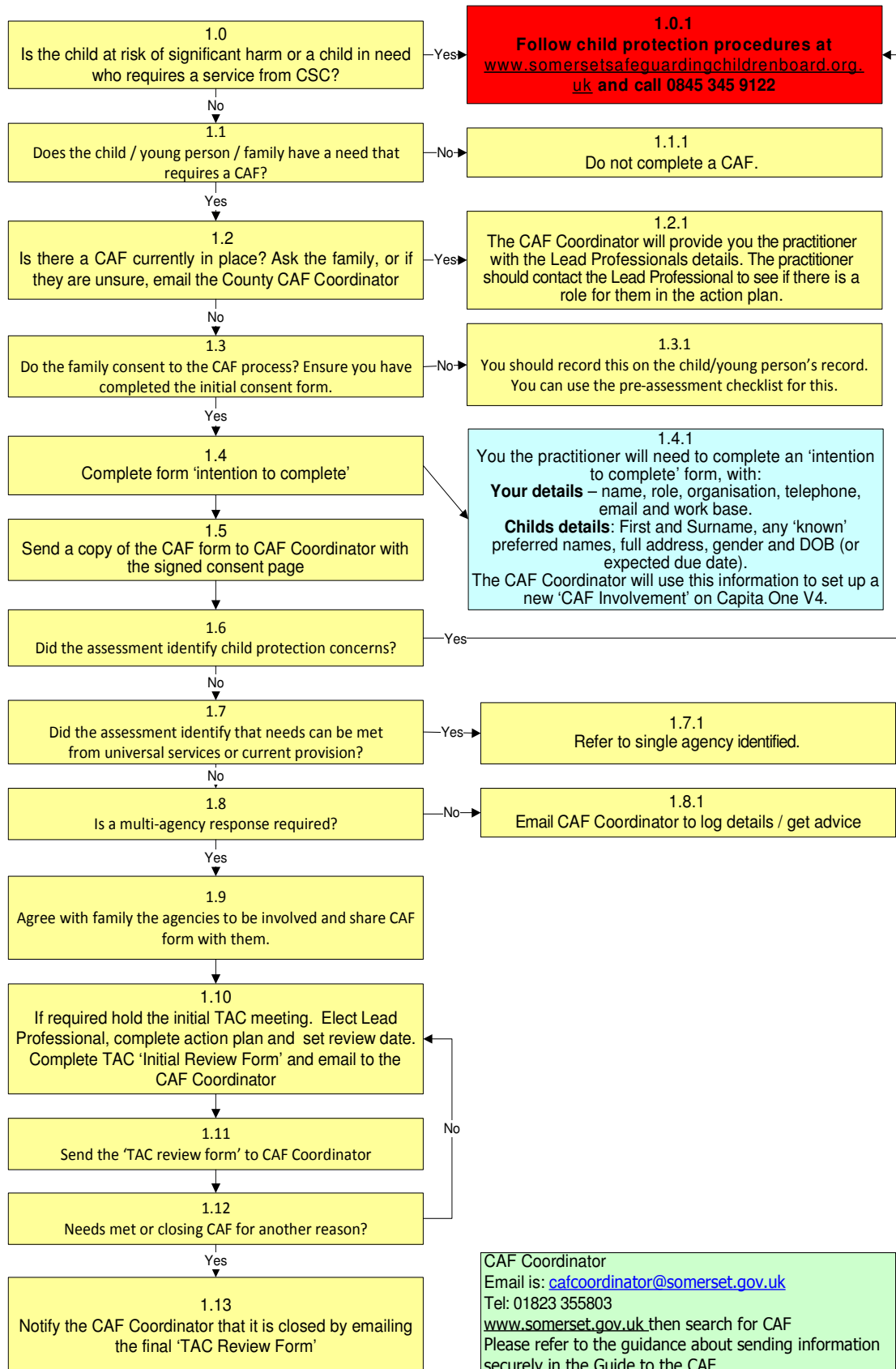
Create an Action Plan

- The TAC meeting agrees who will be the Lead Professional for the child/family
- The action plan is the agreement with the family and other members of the TAC. Using the strengths based approach of “signs of wellbeing”, identify: the intended outcomes; strengths that will support successful outcomes; the agreed actions; and who will be responsible for the agreed actions.

Review and Closure

- TAC meetings continue until the child young person or family’s needs can be met without multi – agency support
- TAC meetings review the Action Plan and set review timescales.
- When the Early Help Assessment (CAF) process can be closed it is good practice to have a meeting with the family.

Somerset County Council and Partners' Early Help Assessment (CAF) Flowchart



5) Who should complete Early Help Assessments (CAF)?

Somerset County Council and its Partners should ensure that at least some of their staff are equipped to undertake Early Help Assessments (CAF).

6) When should an Early Help Assessment (CAF) be undertaken?

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) is generally used with children and young people including unborn babies up to the age of 18. It can be used for young people over 18 where appropriate; usually to enable a smooth transition to adult services. The Early Help Assessment (CAF) can also act as a referral tool into a range of targeted early intervention services and should always accompany a referral to Children's Social Care, (unless there is an urgent safeguarding concern). The decision to undertake an Early Help Assessment (CAF) is a matter of professional judgment and a practitioner should discuss with their line manager or their Early Help Assessment (CAF) service lead. The Somerset Early Help Assessment (CAF) Pre – assessment Checklist can be used to assist with this decision making process and reference can be made to Somerset's Threshold Guidance which is Appendix 1 of Somerset's Early Help Strategy and Delivery Plan 2013 – 2015.

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) should be used when:

- the child, young person or their family has additional needs which cannot be met by the assessing agency alone
- the child, young person or family's needs are unclear or broader than the remit of the practitioner's service
- an Early Help Assessment (CAF) would help identify needs and/or get others to meet them
- there is more than one agency involved and an Early Help Assessment (CAF) will provide a common structure to record and share information between practitioners and to co-ordinate support more effectively
- a concern is raised by or about a child, young person or their family

It may not be necessary to complete an Early Help Assessment (CAF) on every child. Some examples of when an Early Help Assessment (CAF) may not be necessary are:

- **If a child is at risk of being abused or neglected you must follow the South West Consortium Child Protection Procedures. For more information please go to <http://www.online-procedures.co.uk/swcpp/>**
- The child, young person or their family does not have any additional needs
- There is clarity about the child and family's needs which can be met by your own agency
- The child/family have not given their consent for an Early Help Assessment (CAF) to be carried out
- Children in care

- Children subject to a child protection plan
- Care leavers
- Children with known complex disabilities or known complex health needs and a recent complex assessment has been completed
- Children with significant mental health problems
- Children involved with the Youth Offending Team

Should you need help in deciding whether an Early Help Assessment (CAF) should be undertaken contact your own agency's Early Help Assessment (CAF) Lead for advice.

7) Sharing Information Safely, Securely and Appropriately

It is the duty of every person who handles personal information to ensure that it is kept safe and secure and only shared with those who have a legitimate reason to see it. Before starting an Early Help Assessment (CAF), as a minimum requirement, a check must be made to find out if one already exists. Contact should be with the County Early Help Assessment / CAF Co-ordinator on 01823 355803. The Early Help Assessment / CAF Co-ordinator will check that the person making the request for information is a practitioner with a legitimate reason. If so, the Co-ordinator will be able to confirm if there are other practitioners or a lead professional currently working with the child, young person or family. If there are, information can be shared between them if the necessary consent of the family has been obtained. This will help to gain a full picture of the child, young person or family's situation and enable the practitioner to determine whether they need to remain involved, join an existing Team Around the Child or begin an Early Help Assessment (CAF).

As with any other personal information, a practitioner undertaking a common assessment should only share information with a third party with the explicit consent of , where appropriate, a child, a young person or family , unless in the practitioner's judgment there are sufficient safeguarding concerns to share information without that consent. Where there are any doubts, this confirmation should be provided by the Agency Early Help Assessment (CAF) Lead.

Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the information contained in the Early Help Assessment (CAF) where possible this information should be sent by secure email such as GCSX; CJSM; PNN; NHS Mail; SECURESEND; EGRESS or as a password protected file. In the absence of secure email Early Help Assessments (CAF) may be sent by special delivery post. Please refer to your organisation's data protection policies on the available methods for secure communication of sensitive and personal data.

8) How does the Early Help Assessment (CAF) link with other assessments?

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) may be used in conjunction with all relevant specialist assessments - where appropriate for children in need; vulnerable learners and so on. However, while you may use the Early Help Assessment (CAF) to inform your specialist assessment, it is also important to check that the information is accurate and up to date.