

Formal Restoration Assessments

A formal restoration assessment is required for the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the Children's Court to properly consider if a child or young person (child) should return home. A formal restoration assessment brings together information about a child and their family in a structured and concise format. Assessments are intended to guide consistent and evidence-based decision making and to critically analyse the suitability of restoration. Permanency Support Program (PSP) caseworkers may be required to conduct restoration assessments.

Use this time as a checkpoint. A time to slow down and analyse the information gathered to date to make informed, evidence-based decisions such as the possibility of restoration.

Remember that assessments are only as good as the information put in them. Assessments are a time to move from intuitive, responsive thinking to analytic decision making where different perspectives are considered and information gathered is dissected and intuitive thoughts are checked for bias and evidence.

If information is biased or incomplete, the assessment outcome will be biased and incomplete.

A restoration assessment is required for

- Children who have recently been removed from their parents because they are not safe and their proposed permanency plan is restoration
- Children in long-term out-of-home care and after careful consideration have had their permanency goal changed to restoration

The Structured Decision Making (SDM®) Restoration Assessment Tool (SDM RAT) is available to PSP Funded Service Providers. Each PSP Service Provider should have a key user. Ask your DCJ Permanency Coordinator if you require further assistance.

For more information about the different pathways for restoration see [Restoration Pathway for Children Entering the Care System: The Legal Process](#) and [Restoration Legal Process from Long-Term Care \(PRM-18\)](#)

How Formal Assessments Occur

Restoration assessments are completed at different stages in a child's care journey:

- For a child who has just entered out-of-home care (OOHC), the restoration assessment is carried out a minimum of every 90 days to determine if enough change has occurred for the child to now be returned home. DCJ (with the help of PSP service providers) consider if restoration is possible and seek to have this direction approved by the court. The Structured Decision Making (SDM) Restoration Assessment Tool (RAT) is used to decide when the family are ready for this to occur. If restoration is not possible a permanency goal other than restoration is made. If a child is case managed by a PSP service provider, DCJ and PSP caseworkers work collaboratively and may conduct this assessment together.

- For children who are in long term care, a PSP service provider may review restoration, as part of casework activities like a case plan review. Consideration of restoration may occur when a placement is no longer meeting the needs of the child, and there has been a considerable change in circumstances of the parent/s.

A PSP service provider can only commence restoration work (e.g. place a child back with a parent or increase contact) after:

- DCJ endorse a permanency goal change to restoration AND
 - a section 90 has been filed with the Court AND
 - permission has been granted by the court to commence restoration work.
- PSP Service providers may use assessment tools in their restoration work, this may be the SDM RAT; or they may choose a different evidence-based assessment tool like step-by-step parent assessment tool (explained further).
- The Children's Court may require a report on the suitability of the child's arrangements (also called Section 82 report). The Court can also order a parenting capacity assessment. These are not undertaken by PSP caseworkers. These assessments are completed by the Children's Court Clinic (CCC). The NSW Children's Court Clinic is established under section 15B of the Children's Court Act 1987. The Clinic is part of the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network. (This is discussed further below).

- In some cases where there are significant complexities that need specialist assessment the PSP Service Provider may contract an independent social worker, psychologist or specialist assessor to conduct a parenting capacity, psychological or restoration assessment. PSP caseworkers should discuss with their Permanency Coordinator (PC) which restoration assessment might be the most appropriate for the child.

Guide to Formal Restoration Assessments

Legal status of the child / permanency goal/who initiated the request for restoration	Type of Restoration assessment required?	Who can do the assessment?	At what stage in the process is the assessment required?
<p>Child's legal status Interim orders – Parental Responsibility to the Minister (PRM)</p> <p>Permanency goal Restoration</p> <p>Who Initiates request? DCJ must consider whether restoration is a realistic possibility when a child enters care</p>	SDM Restoration Assessment Tool (RAT) every 90 days throughout the investigation and court process until the child is restored home safely or a permanency goal other than restoration is made. The court may also order a parenting capacity assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Court Clinic (CCC) • A specialist clinical assessor endorsed by the Court. • DCJ / PSP Service Provider with primary case responsibility 	During court proceedings
<p>Child's legal status Long term PRM</p> <p>Who Initiates request? Parents or the child (and leave granted by the Court)</p>	A restoration / parenting capacity assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Court Clinic (CCC) • A specialist clinical assessor endorsed by the Court. • The PSP service provider if they consider restoration is appropriate. 	During court proceedings if a Section 90 court application has already been filed at Children's Court

<p>Child's legal status Long-term PRM</p> <p>Permanency goal Restoration</p> <p>Who Initiates request? DCJ /PSP Service Provider</p>	<p>SDM Restoration Assessment Tool (RAT) or an alternate evidence-based assessment tool.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agency with primary case management (DCJ or PSP Service Provider) or • Qualified clinical assessor contracted by the agency with primary case management 	<p>Prior to lodging a s90 court application</p>
<p>Child's legal status Guardianship orders or Parent Responsibility to a Relative (PRR)</p> <p>Permanency goal N/a</p> <p>Who Initiates request? Parents or child</p>	<p>A restoration / parenting capacity assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Court Clinic (CCC) • A specialist clinical assessor endorsed by the court 	<p>During court proceedings</p>

Structured Decision Making (SDM®) Restoration Assessment Tool (SDM RAT)

SDM assessments bring child protection research and evidence into tools that can be used by practitioners to check on their thinking at key points to make informed and evidence-based decisions about children and their families.

SDM assessments are used to identify critical decision-making points and improve the structure and consistency of the decisions made about, and services provided to, families. It is not a substitute for the judgement of a casework team.

The SDM RAT is designed specifically to help casework staff assess whether adequate progress has been made towards restoration, whether the child can be safely restored or whether an alternate goal should be considered.

Who Can Use the SDM Restoration Assessment Tool?

The SDM RAT may be used by DCJ or PSP casework staff who have been trained in applying the tool. It can also be a collaborative process between the two. This will

depend on the circumstances and be a decision for casework staff of both DCJ and PSP Service Providers. Where a service provider has primary case responsibility it is the responsibility of that provider to carry out assessments as part of achieving the child's goal.

If you have any questions about the SDM Restoration Assessment Tool please contact permanency.support@facs.nsw.gov.au

Step-By-Step Parent Assessment Tool

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) has developed a parenting assessment tool. The Step by Step parent assessment tool is designed for use when children are on long-term orders, but there has been a significant change in their circumstances. The tool does not replace the SDM Restoration Assessment Tool but is designed to be used alongside. The Step by Step parent assessment results in Worry Statements (about outstanding risks), for inclusion into Family Action Plans for Change. Casework staff who have been trained in the Step by Step tool can use it to complete a restoration assessment.

If you have any questions about how this tool works and using this tool visit [ACWA](#)

Children's Court Clinic Parenting Capacity Assessment

A Children's Court Clinic (CCC) parenting capacity assessment is very similar to a restoration assessment. The central question of both assessment types is whether a child can safely be cared for by a parent.

The CCC assists the Children's Court with independent expert clinical assessments for children and the capacity of parents (or others) to carry out parental responsibility.

The Children's Court is responsible for appointing a person from the CCC to undertake the parenting capacity assessment when one is required. Any party to proceedings in a care matter may request an assessment. The Children's Court will decide if a CCC parenting capacity assessment is required.

See here for further detailed information on how the [Children's Court Clinic](#) works:

Independent Parenting Capacity or Restoration Viability Assessment

A PSP Service Provider may contract (and pay for) a qualified independent clinical psychologist or specialised assessor to conduct a parenting capacity or restoration assessment after a child's permanency goal has been changed from long term care to restoration. This may happen when there are particularly complex circumstances and completing an assessment prior to lodging a Section 90 application will provide clarity to DCJ and the Court.

For less complex matters PSP service providers may conduct the assessment themselves, using an evidence-based tool.

Alternatively, an external assessor may also be asked to complete a parenting capacity/restoration viability assessment during court proceedings to assist the parties with permanency decision making.

You can find information on who is responsible for paying for assessments, [here](#).

Assessments from external assessors can be an important resource when making decisions about restoration. Caseworkers must take clinical assessments into account when making decisions, but they are not a substitute for decision making. The casework team working directly with the family will have many unique insights into the strengths and needs of a family. These insights are a vital part of decision making.

Other Restoration Assessments

Service providers may have other structured restoration assessments that they prefer. Discuss the suitability of your preferred restoration assessment with your Permanency Coordinator (PC).

For more information see the series of restoration documents on the PSP Learning Hub <https://psplearninghub.com.au/>