

Foundations of Assessment

In the Permanency Support Program

Assessment is a key casework tool used in the Permanency Support Program (PSP). Assessments are conducted formally or informally as part of everyday casework at each stage in the child protection continuum.

Assessments help the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and PSP casework staff to understand the unique circumstances of every child or young person (child), carer and family in the PSP. Assessments focus on safety, risk, strengths and needs, and informs consistent and holistic decision making. Understanding and supporting a child, family or carer in a holistic way gives dignity.

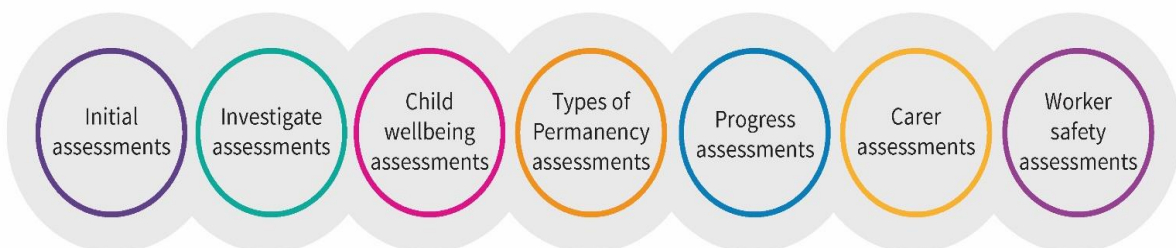
Assessments are only as good as the information you collect and put into them, if the information that informs an assessment is incomplete or biased, the decision may be also. Assessments are a point in time and document critical points in the child's life. Information you choose to include or exclude will contribute to how the child understands their own journey and the families' truth.

Understanding Assessment in PSP

There are many different types of assessments in the PSP. To understand which assessments are needed when, it is useful to think of assessments in terms of purpose and type.

Purpose of Assessment

PSP assessments can be clustered into six categories related to their purpose. These are explained in more detail on pages 5 – 9.



Types of Assessments

- **Formal assessments** need to be done within a specific timeframe using a specific template, they might be used to inform the Children's Court or guide permanency decision, these assessments might include a guardianship or restoration assessment.
- **Informal assessments** can happen at any time during everyday casework, it may include a phone call with a child's teacher or a home visit with a family when a caseworker records progress against goals and notes goals for future work.
- **Dynamic assessments** often use formal processes but are done ad hoc as the need arises, this may include a suicide ideation assessment or a personal risk assessment.

Understanding the Child and Family Holistically

To understand a child and their family holistically, you need to consider their overall wellbeing within the context of their environment. The 'person in the environment perspective' (Kondrat, 2015) is a framework that helps you assess a child, their relationships and their interactions within their environment. To understand a child's behaviour you need to understand their social, political, family, spiritual, economic, cultural and physical environment.

To help you build this holistic picture of the child you need to gather information from different people and sources, giving equal weight to each source and refraining from reaching a conclusion until you have all information and resources to make an assessment without bias or assumptions. This analysis involves applying your professional judgement, knowledge, skills and experience.

You can also understand a child's daily lived experience using [Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory](#) (Emerging Minds, 2020) it provides context of a child's characteristics, family strengths and vulnerabilities and broader community, social and economic factors. Bronfenbrenner believed that a child's development is affected by the interaction between the child and the people, organisations, institutions and society around them. The theory explains how everything you know about the child and their family is interacting with one another.

For example, when you look at a child being supported by the PSP on the **microsystem** level, you consider the child's immediate environment in which they live in, their carers, parents, family, community, school and friends.

Within the **mesosystem**, you investigate how the relationships surrounding the child, in the microsystem level, are linked. For example, consider how the relationship between carers and parents around family time affect the child.

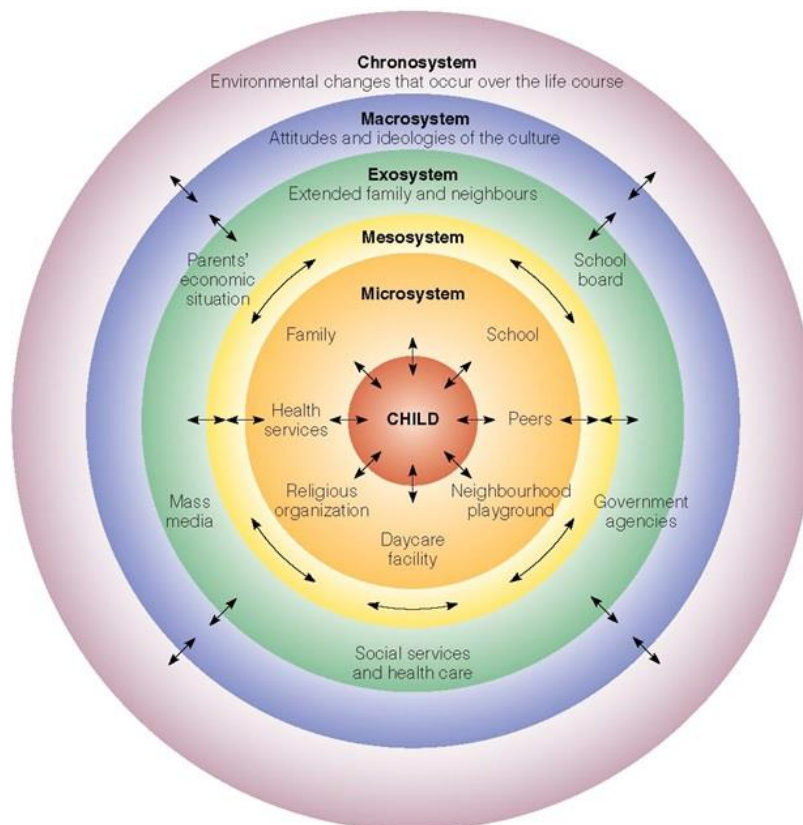


Diagram 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model

The **exosystem** level helps you to think about how wider societal systems could be influencing children, families and carers. For example, how do portrayals of Aboriginal people in the media affect the child and their family? How can you help children and families explore how they resist these portrayals?

The **macrosystem** assists you to understand how broader cultural ideas might be influencing the child and your work. For example, how do dominant cultural ideas about nuclear families affect the child, their family, the carer and you? What does that mean for children being raised by grandparents or other relatives?

The **chronosystem** is about the passage of time. How have the changes in these systems changed over time affected the child? How does that affect the child's growing identity, behaviour, social interactions and learning abilities?

Tools Used in Assessment

There are different tools used in a holistic assessment that allow you to gather information to gain a full picture of a child and their family's situation. Some examples of affective engagement tools are:

- **Genogram** – this is a visual diagram of a child's link and connections to both biological and relational over several generations. It is a living document that changes and adjusts over time. For more information, please read the [Genograms](#) factsheet.
- **Eco-map** – helps you identifying the child's family dynamic, a child's connection to their community and support system and the support a child requires.
- **The three houses** – this tool helps you discuss a child's worries, concerns, strengths, risks and protective factors in houses 1 and 2 (house of worries and house of good things). You can discuss a child's dreams, hopes and interests in house 3 (house of dreams). The child can draw or write in the houses or you can help them.
- **The safety house** - this visual tool helps you have conversations with a child about long-term planning of safety, belonging and wellbeing.

Skills of Holistic Assessment

Caseworkers prompts:

- be curious about the family's experiences and how they interpret the world
- ask a child and their family about what works best for them and be flexible in your approach
- be compassionate, trustworthy, reliable and consistent
- develop an understanding of how children, families and carers want to participate and engage, modify your approach to suit their needs
- always consider the child's perspective and position within the family

- continuously adjust and review how you help a family to create change
- be aware of your body language so a child and their family do not misinterpret you which could trigger unexpected reactions in the child and/or family
- be aware of the child and family's emotional cues and respond to signs of discomfort, distress or anger with empathy.

In your conversations:

- keep the child central (their views, development and their experiences)
- keep in mind that the child is their own expert (hear them and ask them about their experiences and how they see and interpret the world)
- consider the child's whole experience, not only the reason you are working with the family
- get an understanding about the family's language and beliefs around abuse (for restoration and preservation)
- get an understanding about the carer families' beliefs about culture, family connection and their role in supporting this
- be culturally responsive
- consider the family's experience of disadvantage
- listen, do not assume you understood their story the first time
- spend time with the family, observe and interact (what are their strengths, how do they handle stressful situations)
- discuss your concerns but also their worries and experience
- be non-judgemental
- ask what the family would like to change or see changed
- include all family members in your interactions
- consider the family's vulnerabilities that impact parenting skills and abilities
- find out who is important in the family (whether they live in the home or not)
- provide structure, clear expectations and time frames (this will assist the family to feel safe)
- collaborate with and collate information from other casework staff, agencies and DCJ to obtain a full picture of the family's situation
- in cases of sexual assault or family domestic violence, be aware of not being groomed by the perpetrator (reflect in supervision on your interactions with them).

Please see: [Formal Restoration Assessment](#) and [Relationship-Based Practice](#) for more information.

Overview of Common Assessments Used in PSP

Initial Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Mandatory Reporter Guide	If child protection concerns meet the threshold to report to the child protection hotline	Mandatory reporters (teachers, healthcare staff, social workers, police) whenever they have concerns for the safety of a child	Mandatory Reporter Guide
Risk of Significant Harm assessment/SDM screening tool (ROSH)	If the report made to the helpline meets the threshold of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH)	DCJ caseworkers,	DCJ internal tool
Triage	If a ROSH report requires a face-to-face response or if it should be referred to a preservation or early intervention service	DCJ MCW at individual Community Services Centre (CSC), within 24 hours – 10 days of the initial report screening in (depending on priority level)	DCJ internal triage and allocations processes

Investigative Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Safety assessment	If a child is safe in the care of their parent/s	DCJ caseworker, within a set number of days, depending on the seriousness of the report	SDM Safety Assessment
Risk assessment	The ongoing level of risk a child is in if they remain with their parent/s	DCJ caseworker, within 28 days of the initial report	SDM Risk Assessment
Risk re-assessment	If the level of risk has increased or decreased over time	DCJ caseworker every 90 days	SDM Risk Re-Assessment
Alternative assessment	The safety of a child when the alleged perpetrator does not live in the same household OR when the child is in OOHC	DCJ caseworker within 28 days of a ROSH report	DCJ internal tool

Child Wellbeing Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Strengths and Needs assessment or Measures of wellbeing assessment	The strengths and needs of a child in PSP against the 8 domains of wellbeing	PSP service provider caseworker in preservation and Brighter Futures	SDM Strengths and Needs Assessment
Suicide ideation assessment	If a child has a realistic plan and	Any caseworker in PSP immediately if a child directly or indirectly suggests	PSP service providers may use their own tool. Guidance can be

	means to commit suicide	they may commit suicide	found at Health NSW
Child to child placement matching assessment	If it is safe and appropriate to place a child into a placement with other children	Any caseworker in PSP before a new placement is made for a child	PSP service providers will use their own tool.

Types of Permanency Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Restoration Assessment Tool (SDM RAT)	If it is safe to return a child to the care of their parent/s by considering risk, progress against the FAP goals and family time	DCJ or PSP service provider casework staff, every 90 days	SDM Restoration Assessment Tool (SDM RAT)
Formal Restoration Assessment (other) or Parenting Capacity assessment	If it is safe to return a child to the care of their parent/s by considering the child, parent/s and carers holistically	PSP service provider, Children Court Clinic, specialist clinician	Please see: Formal Restoration Assessment
Guardianship Assessment	If prospective guardians are able to provide permanent care to a child, and ensuring guardianship is the best permanency goal for the child	PSP service provider, Accredited assessors	Please see: Guardianship Assessment (Factsheet coming soon)
Adoption Assessment	If prospective adoptive parents are able to provide	PSP service provider, Accredited adoption service	Please see: Adoption Assessment

	permanent care to a child, and ensuring adoption is the best permanency goal for the child	providers, Accredited assessors	(Factsheet coming soon)
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Progress Assessments (casework assessments)

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Dynamic assessment to inform a review of a Family Action Plan	A family's progress against their goals	PSP service provider sometimes in conjunction with DCJ	Please see: Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration
Dynamic assessment to inform the review of an OOHC case plan	A child's strengths and needs against the 8 domains of wellbeing	PSP service provider	Please see: Case Planning in Out-Of-Home Care
Permanency Goal review	The most suitable permanency goal for a child in OOHC or progress towards permanency goals	PSP service provider and DCJ permanency coordinator	Dynamic assessment, ongoing casework and all assessments on the child, family and carer

Carer Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Foster Care Assessment	If a community member is suitable to provide general foster care to a children or children not yet known to them	PSP service provider carer recruitment staff, when community members register their interest in being assessed	Please see: Foster Care Assessment

Relative and Kinship Care Assessment	If a family member or significant person is suitable to provide kinship care to a child or children known to them	PSP service provider carer recruitment staff, when a family member is sought for care or expresses interest	Please see: Relative and Kinship Care Assessment
Reportable Allegations assessment	If a carer has posed a risk or danger to a child in their care	PSP service providers in collaboration with DCJ staff	Kids Guardian Reportable Allegations Scheme templates

Worker Safety Assessments

Assessment name	Assesses:	Who conducts the assessment and when	Tool used (if any)
Pre-Assessment Consultation (PAC) and Assessment Consultation (AC)	Any known or predictable possible dangers to staff in carrying out a face-to-face assessment	DCJ CWM with the DCJ caseworker and PSP service provider Manager and caseworker	DCJ internal tool
Personal safety assessment	The level of risk faced by staff in the given situation	The individual staff member as the need arises	Dynamic assessment

Also see [Case Planning and Assessment](#)

References:

Emerging Minds (2020). The child and their local ecology. Available: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389678/obo-9780195389678-0092.xml>

Kondrat, M.E. (2015). Person-In-Environment. Oxford Bibliographies. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195389678-0092. Available: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389678/obo-9780195389678-0092.xml>