

How it looks to me

Guidance on the Child Impact Tool



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The Child Impact Tool

The Child Impact Tool is a resource for Cafcass practitioners to help vulnerable children describe how any continuing significant harm they have experienced is affecting their life.

The tool can help the practitioner to understand the child's perception of the harm they have suffered, or are likely to suffer, without emotional pressure or the influence of parents and siblings, and in an environment in which they feel safe.

Why an impact tool?

The key driver in the development of this tool is the Children and Adoption Act (2006), which places a duty on Cafcass to assess risk. The tool has been developed to enable a child to share the risks and safety issues within their lives, which may have already been communicated to the Cafcass practitioner through other enquiries and through interviews conducted under guidance outlined in 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings' (Home Office, 2002). There will be many occasions when such a process may not have occurred and in this instance careful consideration should be given on how best to progress with this discussion, so that neither civil liberties, nor appropriate police action are compromised.

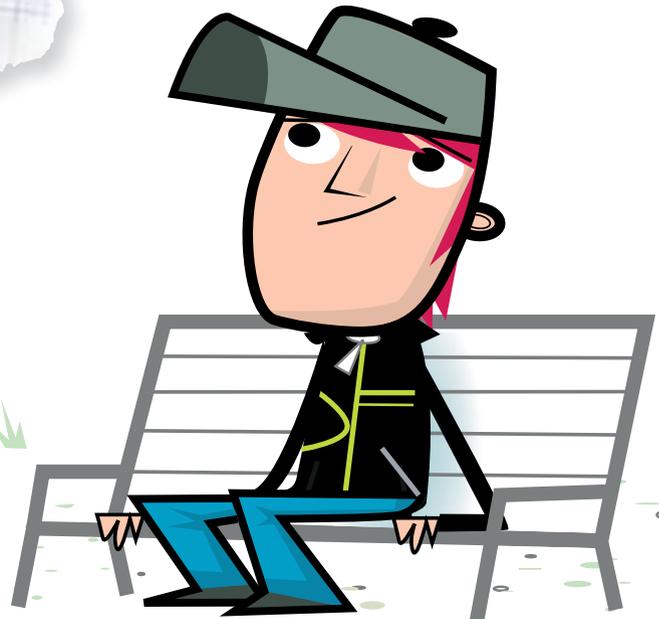
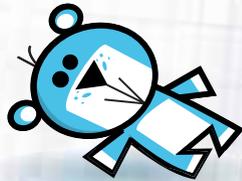
Lessons from child deaths and serious case reviews provide further confirmation of the importance of seeing, hearing and listening to the experiences of the child from the child directly. This tool offers the child the opportunity to discuss issues regarding any potential ongoing harm in a safe and non-pressured environment.

Recent inspections by HMICA, and latterly Ofsted, have also highlighted the need for Cafcass to strengthen and improve upon our risk assessment in all cases. The tool is a means of recording what the child has said and can be disclosed to the court in its own right. However, it is not suitable for recording your analysis of the child's situation, but provides supporting information about the impact on the child, in his or her own words.



“children are a key, and sometimes the only, source of information about what has happened to them - especially in child sexual abuse cases, but also in physical and other forms of abuse.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)



Promoting resilience

Research conducted by Newman and Blackburn provides a broad view of children's 'transitions' which relate to, "any episode where children are having to cope with potentially challenging episodes of change, including progressing from one developmental stage to another; changing schools, entering or leaving the care system, loss, bereavement, parental incapacity or entry to adulthood."

Newman and Blackburn (2002)

The impact of harm on the child, or the risk factors which may lead to harm, will vary with each individual. This impact is determined by the child's environment and relationships and also on the emotions of that individual. You should carefully consider the variety of ways in which a child may be exposed to direct and indirect harm and the way in which it can impact on their lives.

There may be times when the child's analysis is that they have not suffered any harm. Care must also be taken to ensure that children are not masking any emotional trauma or pain they may be experiencing. Therefore, it is vital that you begin without making assumptions to help ensure that you receive an accurate account, from the child's perspective.

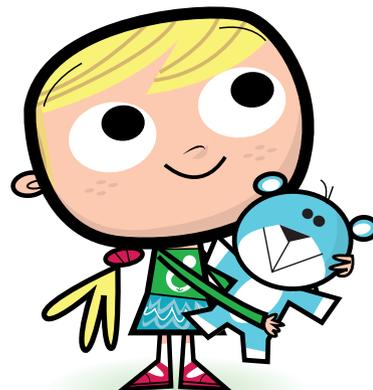
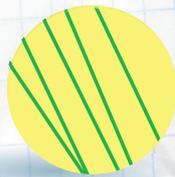
Recovery

While some children who have faced adverse life events develop psychiatric disorders others appear to come out unscathed. Research suggests that only about one third of 'at-risk' children experience negative long-term outcomes – up to two thirds seem to survive without major developmental harm.

However, resilience is likely to be rare in children who are exposed to extreme and continuous adversities. Some stressors could trigger resilient assets in children, while others may compound chronic difficulties. If children are subjected to a relentless stream of multiple adversities, negative consequences are highly likely to follow.

“Resilient children are better equipped to resist stress and adversity, cope with change and uncertainty, and to recover faster and more completely from traumatic events or episodes.”

Newman and Blackburn (2002)

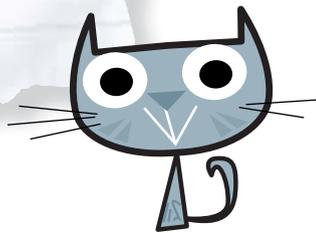
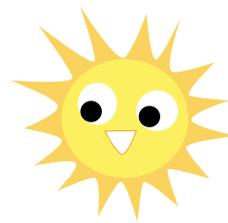


**Factors
that promote
resilience in
children are:**

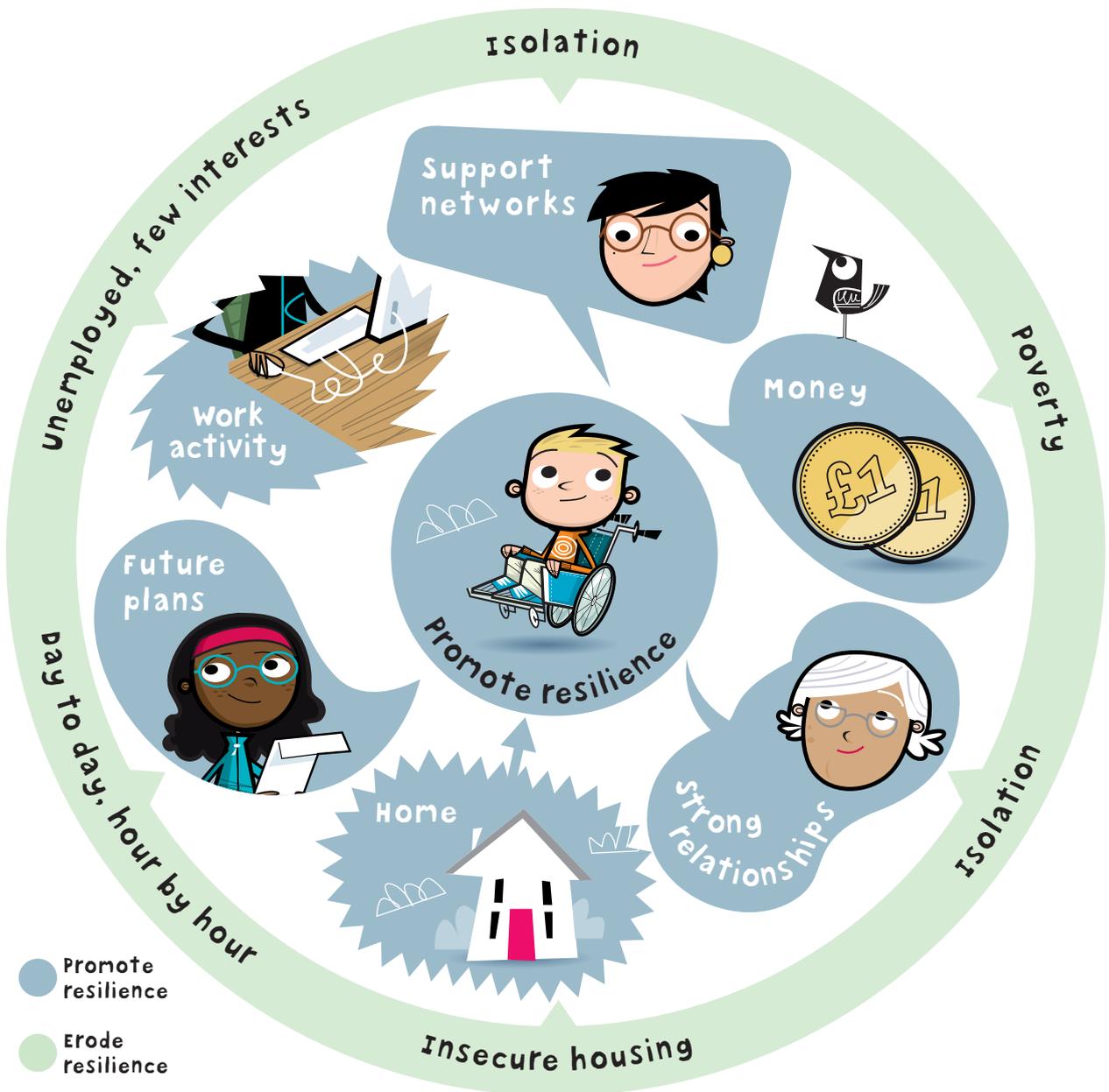


- Strong social support networks.
- The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute.
- The capacity to reframe adversities so that the beneficial, as well as the damaging, effects are recognised.
- The ability, or opportunity, to 'make a difference' by helping others.
- Exposure to challenging situations which provide opportunities to develop both problem-solving abilities and emotional coping skills.
- Positive school experiences.
- A sense of control and a belief that one's own efforts can make a difference.
- Participation in a range of extra-curricular activities that promote self esteem.

Research suggests that actively incorporating resilience promoting strategies in services to children and young people can have a significant impact on long-term recovery. Research by Newman and Blackburn (2002) shows that a key factor for children who have experienced severe adversities is their capacity to recognise any benefits that they have accrued, rather than focussing solely on the negative effects. This can be the platform for growth and for overcoming traumatic experiences in a positive and optimistic way.



Resilience resource map



Benefits of using this tool

This tool can be used as part of the wider safety assessment (see Safeguarding Framework 2.31) and in the planning of various cases including:

- as part of a Section 7 (Children Act 1989) report
- as part of a Section 31 report in public law proceedings
- in Rule 9.5 cases
- in early dispute resolution work.



The tool can also form part of the initial, interim or final analysis in a report or position statement to any court in any proceedings.

The tool can help you in your work by:

- Helping the child to retell their experience, should they wish to do so.
- Helping you and the child to jointly record their information, providing a transparent record for the child, the file and the court.
- Enabling the child to contribute to their own safety planning by considering the issues affecting them.
- Enabling the child to see that the information they have given has been recorded accurately and reflects their experience.
- Enabling you to look at the impact of the incident(s) through the child's eyes.
- Enabling you to consider the child's needs, wishes and feelings from a child-centred perspective.
- Providing significant information to you about the child, which can inform your analysis and proposed intervention by the court.
- Ensuring that the child is given a full opportunity to:
 - be informed
 - be seen and heard
 - participate.
- Enabling the child to be involved in their case planning and that of their family, if they so wish.



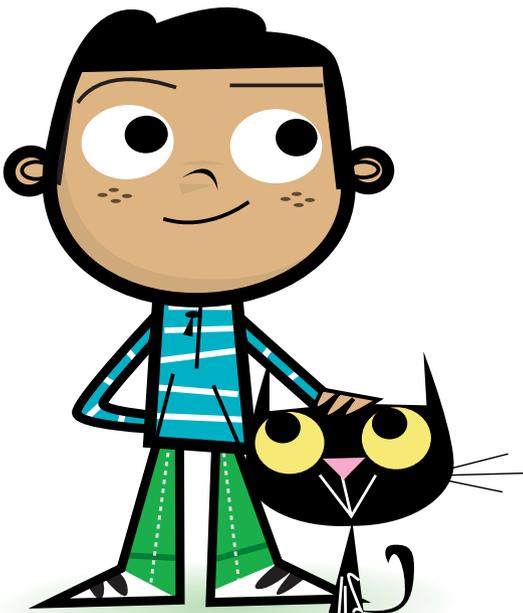
How to use this tool

Before meeting the child

Before meeting a child it is important that you gather as much information as possible from other agencies about their involvement to help avoid duplication of discussion and questions for the child. At times, information may emerge that needs to be reported to the police or local authority concerning possible criminal offences that have not previously come to light. This tool is not intended to be used as part of an interview with the child in a Section 47 enquiry. On those occasions, you should refer to the guidance outlined in, 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings' (2002). Further information on Section 47 referrals can be found in 2.61 of the Cafcass Safeguarding Framework.

Explaining confidentiality

- This is the child's document, but as a practitioner, you cannot promise to keep the information you are given by the child confidential.
- Before you start work on the tool it is important that you explain to the child that the information they share with you may have to be disclosed to the court, because of our duty to keep them safe. The coverage of the document will help you to do this by setting this out visually for the child.
- If the information is to be shared with the court, this should always be done in discussion with the child. It is also important that you explain to the child that other people, including their parents or carers, will hear what they have said.



Which children should use the tool?

As a practitioner you should use your professional judgement on how this tool is best applied, as one approach will not suit all children and young people. An early analysis of the child's developmental understanding will enable you to assess if such a tool is suitable for use.

Practical tips for using the tool

The tool can be used flexibly and broken down into manageable sections and completed at the individual child's pace. It has been designed for you to work through in chronological order, enabling you to gradually build up an understanding of the child's world, rather than immediately focusing on potentially upsetting aspects of their life.

It can also be used in conjunction with other tools such as the My Needs, Wishes and Feelings packs. Pre-verbal and non-verbal children may be more at ease with play and art mediums to express their circumstances.

For some children, observational assessments of their behavior can be an important form of communication in itself. Some non-verbal communication can have significance on what the child wishes to express.



The child is not expected to complete this tool on their own. You should keep a written record of any direct work and whether or not this tool has been used. It is important to make a separate note of the questions you have asked the child as this information needs to be evidenced.

Children may choose not to write down their concerns or circumstances themselves and may want you to write it down in their presence, but using their words. This will still be an engaging process for the child as they will see that the information they have shared with you has been recorded and will be kept as a record of their discussion with you.

Talking about difficult issues

Your role as a practitioner is to find a balance between enabling the child to discuss the impact of potentially distressing events in their life and asking them to re-visit upsetting events. When preparing to talk to a child about domestic violence or any other safeguarding issues, you may wish to allow extra time and care to provide the right circumstances for this to take place and to make it as non-threatening as possible.



Good practice checklist

- Try to keep focused on how a child's perception of safeguarding issues can be different from that of an adult.
- Interview the child alone to give them the opportunity to share their feelings about the impact any harm has had on them.
- Help the child to tell their real or 'thick' story, once they feel more secure, rather than their 'thin' or coached, defensive story. (Kohli, 2006)
- If you use direct questions, they should not be leading or frequently repeated during the interview or associated with any other kind of pressure. They should be followed by open-ended questions that invite the child to say more. (Jones, 2003)
- Let the child know about any further professional support that may be helpful to them.

“It is important that even initial discussions with children are conducted in a way that minimises any distress caused to them and maximises the likelihood that they will provide accurate and complete information.”

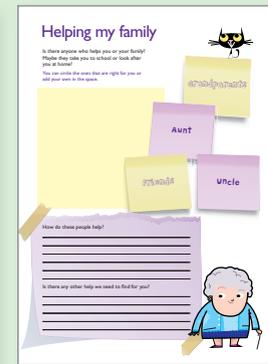
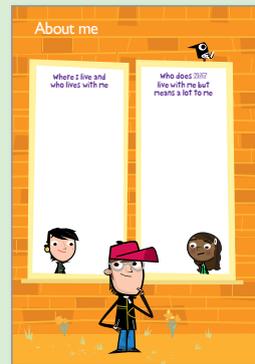
Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)



How to use this tool

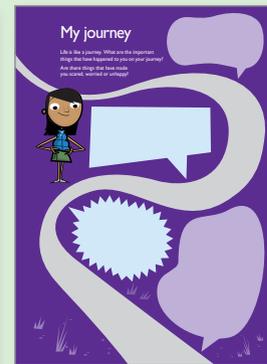
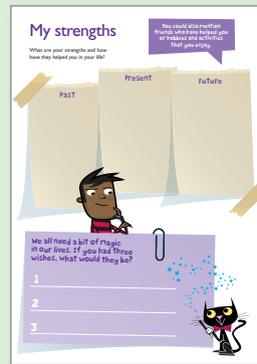
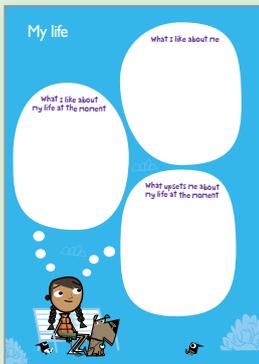
How to use individual impact tool pages

The sheets are designed to be used in chronological order to help a child or young person to gradually open up about how any continuing harm is affecting their lives. However, you should use your professional judgement as to whether each sheet is appropriate for the individual child you are working with and whether additional tools could also be usefully employed.



'About me' and 'Helping my family'

These sheets are designed to help a child talk about the people they live with and the relationships they have with them. They can facilitate a discussion about whom they trust and rely on for help and support. There are many different living situations to take into account, including looked after children who may feel they have no home.

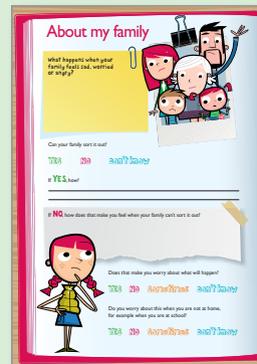


‘My life’ and ‘Things that make me’

Research shows that resilient children are better able to adapt to change and recover from traumatic events. These sheets are designed to encourage resilience in children by helping them to reflect on the positives in their lives, whilst also allowing them to talk about areas in their lives that are upsetting to them.

‘My strengths’ and ‘My journey’

These sheets are designed to encourage resilience in children by helping them to talk about any coping mechanisms they have developed to help them deal with adversity. They also allow the child to talk about the major events that have occurred in their life and to describe how they have been affected by them.



'My worries' and 'Feeling safe'

You can use these sheets to help you and the child explore any factors in their life that are affecting their well-being. They can also be used to explore the child's perception of safeguarding issues and the factors that contribute to their sense of safety.

'About my family' and 'My hopes for the future'

The 'About my family' page will help you explore the child's home environment and the impact it has upon them. In your discussion you could include the following questions: Do your parents / carers act differently when they are worried or sad? If yes, when does this happen? And how does that make you feel?

'My hopes for the future' offers the child the opportunity to talk about the future and to explore whether there are elements in their life that they would like to change.



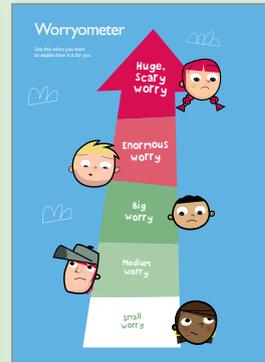
‘Sorting things out’

This sheet assumes that you have explained the court process and that the child has an understanding of what the court is able to do. The child might want to share with you the help they feel they need and you can use this sheet to explore what support could be provided to them in the form of other services or referrals.



‘My space’ and ‘Worryometer’

These are pull out sheets that you can use throughout your work with the child. ‘My space’ allows the child to draw or write down anything that is of importance to them. The ‘Worryometer’ can be used in conjunction with a range of sheets such as ‘My worries’ and ‘Feeling safe’ and offers the child a visual way of explaining how they are feeling.



References and credits

This tool was developed by:

- The Cafcass Young People's Board
- Christine Smart, Cafcass Children's Rights Director
- Anthony Douglas, CBE, Cafcass Chief Executive
- Cafcass Legal Services

Several groups and organisations were consulted during the development of this tool including:

- Cafcass Children's Rights Team and National Cafcass Children's Right Group
- Cafcass Safeguarding Group
- Cafcass Young People's Board
- Cafcass Extended Corporate Management Team, and Service and Practice Improvement Board
- Cafcass Children's Engagement Board
- Children's Rights Director (Ofsted)
- DCSF Safeguarding Unit
- Office of the Children's Commissioner

References:

- Cafcass National Standards
- Cafcass Children's Rights Policy
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