



# Engagement, analysis and reflectiveness: Developing a Framework for the Assessment of Vulnerable Children and Their Families

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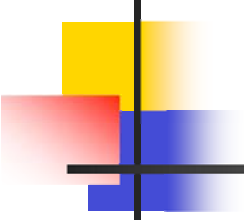
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AIFS Seminar  
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# Aim of presentation

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- Discuss the development of the Assessment Framework in the ROI
- Highlight how it incorporated process issues such as engagement, reflection, gendered practice and analysis



## Problems identified in child protection and welfare services prior to development of frameworks

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- Disparities about thresholds for service
- Neglect of neglect with primary emphasis on problems with a more vivid manifestation
- Problems with multi-disciplinary work
- Lack of focus on children
- Weakness in integrating information
- Need for higher profiling of family support services



# Recent relevant Irish research findings

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- Importance of hearing the child's perspective on parenting capacity (e.g. living with domestic violence) (Buckley, Whelan and Holt, 2006)
- Sensitivity to the intimidating perception of child protection and welfare services (Hayes, 2007)



# What research says about assessment frameworks

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- Assessment can have a therapeutic function (Millar & Corby, 2005)
- Supervision and training are essential elements (Millar & Corby, 2005, Beth et al, 2007)
- Service users are positive about involvement (Platt, 2006)
- Assessment 'both a head and a heart activity' (Horwath, 2006)



# Research findings on assessment frameworks

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- Establishes the foundation stones for practice (Connolly 2006)
- Requires strong leadership and a clear plan for intervention (Cleaver and Walker, 2004)
- Assessment tools have been criticised for having a 'narrow, normative and prescriptive view of the world' (Garrett, 2005)
- Concerns about computer based data (Munro, 2004)



# Outcomes from consultancy

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- Framework should be informed by practitioners, rather than top down
- No assumptions about service users willingness or motivation to engage
- Gender sensitive
- Needs to include risk



# Assessment process

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- Process of assessment needed to be clearly spelt out – more than a concept, less than a set of tools
- Emphasis on planning and reflection
- Required to differentiate between concurrent and sequential phases
- User friendly document



# Shaping of Assessment Framework

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- One document including the tool, no additional scales or measures
- Qualitative assessment
- Based on principles
- Time lines to be agreed on a per case basis
- Core assessment
- Role of coordinator/manager



# Outcomes of the pilot study

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- Framework largely successful in its aims
- Need to show concurrent as well as sequential activities
- Under use of evidence for decision making
- Deficiencies in documented information about children
- Need for more communication between statutory and voluntary agencies regarding use of the framework

# The Assessment Wheel

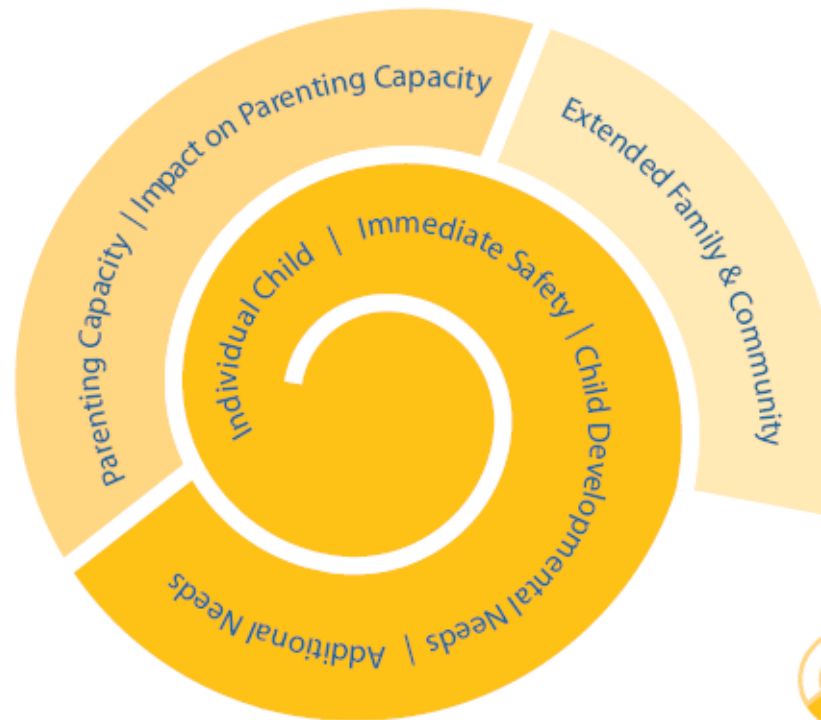




# Symbols: the spiral

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## The **3** Dimensions of a Child's Life: The Spiral





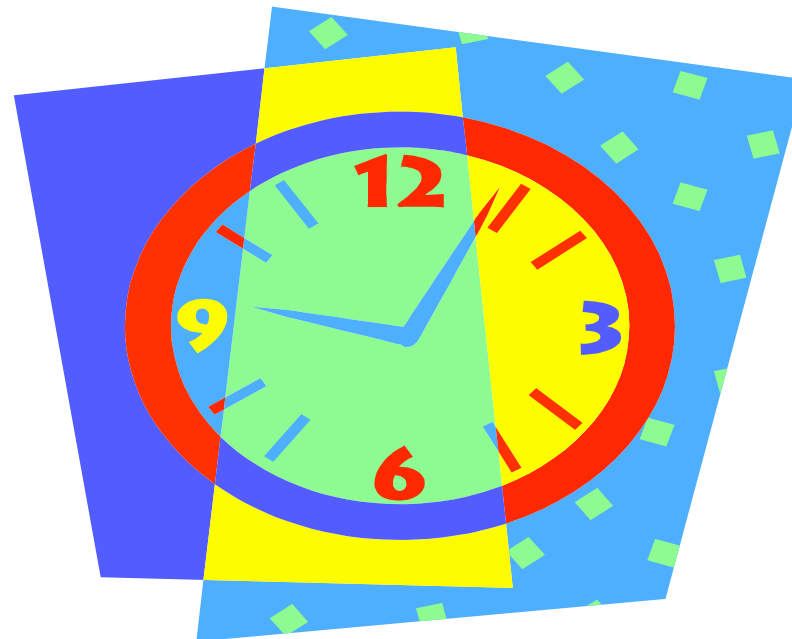
## Key questions:

- What facts, observations and opinions do you have to support the information gathered?
- What does this mean in relation to the child's safety, welfare and development?
- How do practice experience, research findings and literature inform this part of your assessment?
- Should an intervention be made now? If so what?
- Where is the parent/carer within the change process?



# Knowing the child

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# Areas for reflection

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- Engaging families
- Considering caregivers' incentive to change
- Promoting participation
- Reflecting on information using the key questions
- Using the evidence
- Recording



# What's different?

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- Centred in on the child as opposed to child centred
- Guides through the entire process rather than information gathering
- Encourages workers to reflect at all points



# Training issues

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- Child development
- Knowledge base on factors that affect parenting
- Multi-disciplinary working
- Assessment skills
- Influences on decision making



## Supervisory issues

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- Acknowledge and address coping mechanisms adopted by staff
- Accept that bias and distortion are inevitable from time to time, including groupthink, fixed ideas, over optimism and over-pessimism
- Encourage workers to self challenge



# Organisational issues

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- Promotion and support of multi-disciplinary work
- Development of structure and context – not just an add on
- Promotion of a positive image of the system



## Loose ends

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- Difference between initial and full assessment?
- 'One size fits all' approach
- Expectation that the assessment framework will make decisions on its own
- Difficulty in bringing different professional on board