Home Conditions Assessment Tool Guidance
Background

Workers can use this tool to assess the physical aspects of the home environment. It provides a clear focus for working with families on very specific aspects of parenting and of the impact of poor home conditions on their child.

This scale may appear critical, but workers necessarily make judgments about the safety, order and cleanliness of the place in which the child lives. The use of a list helps the objectivity of observation.

Like all methods of assessment this tool should not be used in isolation – other sources of information, including the quality of the parent-child relationship will contribute to overall assessment using the National Practice Model. The home conditions tool has been introduced in Aberdeenshire to complement existing GIRFEC tools, and aid practitioners and families in their work on home conditions and standards. It has not been introduces as a standalone assessment and assessment information gathered through use of the tool should be incorporated as part of an assessment of wellbeing.

It was acknowledged that there was no universal tool in Aberdeenshire to monitor home conditions & poor home conditions were noted to be a feature two Initial Case Reviews undertaken in Aberdeenshire (February 2017, November 2018).

Article 27 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

“Parties should recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The Parents or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capabilities, the conditions of living necessary for the child’s development”.

(UNCRC, 1990)
The Scale

The assessment is based on the *Family Cleanliness Scale* devised by Davie *et al* (1984). It was included as an 11 item checklist in the Family Pack of Questionnaires and Scales published by the DOH as part of the ‘Assessment Framework’. The Home Conditions tool was amended and extended by Bruce Thornton and colleagues in response to user feedback and became a 20 item scale with a scoring system of 0 to 3 introduced. Originally it was scored ‘yes or no’. The terminology used in the original scale was adapted and one item removed.

This version of the home conditions tool was further amended and extended by the Aberdeenshire working group tasked by the Operations and Practice Sub Group of Aberdeenshire’s Child Protection Committee. It is now a 22 item scale. Copyright for its use is retained by Bruce Thornton and Associates and the license to use the tool in Aberdeenshire was jointly funded by Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership and Children’s Services Social Work.

Use

The scale can be used as a checklist to provide a framework for initial observation of home conditions. It is particularly appropriate to use during an initial visit if home conditions are already identified as an issue. Once used, it is a method of keeping track of progress or deterioration. The significance of your observations may vary according to whether the visit was announced or unannounced.

The assessment should be undertaken jointly with a parent/carer. It is essential to attempt to complete all sections; however, should access be denied this should be recorded in the notes section along with the reason provided for the “no access”.

Observations should always be shared with a parent/carer. This should help promote a discussion about any wellbeing concerns, and the changes necessary to improve the home conditions.

*Aberdeenshire Children and Young People’s Charter* highlights the importance of listening to children’s views and including them in any decision-making as far as possible.

Identified items can be a focus for a piece of work. This might be to encourage the caregiver to attend to something that could pose a health risk to the children, or to bring in additional support where the parent is unlikely to be able to improve matters without help.

The scale should reflect the impact or relevance of the home condition for that particular child. E.g. a badly soiled floor will have a different impact on a very young child who is crawling compared to its impact on an older child. This should be reflected in the notes scoring.
Scoring

The Scale is scored from 0 – 3, ranging from the ‘Issue does not exist’ to ‘Very apparent-serious impact’. Items are scored on the basis of what is observed. The scale charts the child environment as it is. This provides an objective baseline. Depending on the age of the child, different items may cause more or less concern. The higher the score the greater the concern.

If there is more than one child, it may be appropriate to complete the assessment in relation to the child most affected by the home conditions.

Some of the items may require further action. Further action may be indicated regardless of a low or high score. You can make a note that further action is required by ticking the ‘flag for attention’ box.

For each of the 22 items (Section A), there is space to make some notes about your observations. It is important to make specific comments about what was observed, and the impact on the child. This reminds you when checking back, to track what progress has been made and to provide specific evidence of what you have seen. Recording in the notes section should preferably be recorded in the family’s own words E.g. “There is cat poo on the kitchen floor and this might get on a child’s hands and make them ill” rather than recording “There is animal faeces on the kitchen floor and this is unhealthy”

At the end of the list of 22 items there is space for you to record the number of items that scored 3,2,1 or 0 (Section B). This enables comparison over time and for the identification and harnessing of strengths-based practice. As the home conditions are observed to be improved or there are examples within the home of well maintained conditions, these can be harnessed to improve the areas which have been flagged for attention or are having significant impact on the child.

Assessment Decisions (Section D) – Please record your overall conclusions as a result of this assessment. If you find yourself ‘very concerned’ this may trigger Child Protection concerns, and Child Protection procedures should be followed. Where there is a need for further visits to monitor progress, you should consider whether this should be planned or unplanned. The home conditions tool, as mentioned previously, is not a standalone assessment tool, therefore, practitioners would need to consider the home conditions in the context of the My World Triangle, Resilience Matrix and Wellbeing Indicators. Making any onward Request for Assistance to other agencies e.g. Social Work should be completed providing a full assessment and Request for Assistance documentation as per local GIRFEC arrangements.

Tasks for the Family/Agency (Section E) – Your visit may lead to an agreement with the family about tasks they will undertake before your next visit. Make sure that these are specific and that you and the family understands your expectations of them. Understanding the family’s response to your concerns and how they set about changing their routines is very important. Difficulties with change are often underestimated, and workers sometimes expect a lot of families without having understood the reasons why change may be problematic. Families may also require assistance at this stage to prioritize tasks and may require practical support to achieve this. Any support offered should be recorded on the task plan.
Completion

The Home Conditions Assessment Tool takes about 45 minutes, when completed together with parents/carers.

Comparison

A comparison sheet is available to monitor progress/deterioration. This can be found on the Aberdeenshire GIRFEC website.

Recording

You should consider recording use of the home conditions assessment tool within agency contact records. Any significant wellbeing concerns within a child or young person’s chronology.

The home conditions assessment should be stored securely as per your individual organisation and GDPR guidelines.

Section C allows for the views of the parent/carer or child/young person’s views to be gathered and presented.

Reference

