

Action points for professionals undertaking assessments with young people who offend

Assessments of young people who offend help us identify the most effective type and intensity of service provision and assist in appropriate action planning. Youth justice assessments of children and young people need to recognise that offending behaviour is often a response to unmet need and should take place within the context of a detailed assessment of social, developmental and psychological needs as set out in the [GIRFEC approach](#) and [Child and Adult Protection guidance](#). Assessments should also always comply with the standards laid out in the Scottish Government's [Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation \(Frame\) for Young People](#).

- Detailed information will need to be gathered from the young person. Facts and feelings will need to be explored, and the assessment should be supported by an understanding of the young person's needs and strengths. Practitioners may need to use a range of methods, strategies and skills to interview and engage the young person in order to understand their internal world and draw out their individual story.
- Engaging with the young person's family will help ascertain what supports might be available from family members. Evaluating the family's attitude towards their child's offending behaviour (and empathy in relation to the victim) will help the practitioner understand how they can support the child to stop offending. An understanding of family history, functioning and dynamics will also be an essential part of the assessment.
- What the practitioner learns from meeting with the child and family needs to be placed next to what is learned from secondary sources of information. Having an account of the offence from the police is extremely important to balance the young person's version of events and a full chronology will help thinking about the behaviour in a developmental context.
- All assessments of young people involved with offending behaviour of a serious or persistent nature should be informed by a structured risk assessment tool. A list of relevant risk assessment tools can be found in the RMA's [Risk Assessment Tool directory](#). The use of risk assessment tools appropriate to the case can provide a sound empirical basis for the identification of relevant risks, needs and protective factors. The tool can also assist the practitioner in risk formulation – the exploration of how, why and when offending occurs and the identification of relevant risk and protective factors. This formulation should involve descriptions of possible future behaviour in terms of what, when, who, why, impact, imminence etc.
- The practitioner should use their analysis to formulate a view on the best way forward to promote the child's well being and to help them move on from offending behaviour. The final report should contain a clear plan of action focussing on reducing dynamic risk factors, increasing protective factors, outlining how progress will be measured and highlighting any necessary risk management measures. Assessment conclusions need to be grounded in evidence of what works with young people who offend. In recognition of the rapid developmental changes that can occur in adolescence re-assessment will be necessary every 6 - 12 months
- Further guidance to support assessments with young people who offend can be found at www.cjsw.ed.ac.uk

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