



# **Hounslow Guide to Multi-Professional Use of the Comprehensive Quality of Care Assessment Tool Guidance**

**Assessing neglectful parenting using the Quality of Care Structured Judgement Tool.**

**For use in all Child in Need and Child Protection cases where parental neglect is the primary concern.**

The QoC tool was created to help social workers working together with their multi professional colleagues to make better professional judgements in cases of neglectful parenting. The aim is to enhance professional capacity to accurately assess the care provided to children when there are concerns about neglect and to tackle these specific issues:-

- Lack of clarity and accuracy leading to ineffective decision making/planning with children being referred multiple times
- Neglect cases open for several years but professionals failing to adequately recognise this, to challenge parents failure/inability to adequately meet their child's needs, and professional failure to provide effective support for change
- Difficulty in making sense of/analysing multiple complex factors common in neglecting families e.g. intergenerational neglect, mental ill-health, learning difficulty, DV etc.
- Parents' difficulty in grasping professionals' concerns and lacking the understanding or motivation to change
- Some difficulty in obtaining legal orders to remove children from neglectful families

### Quality of Care grading

**The tool asks that you grade the care you believe is provided to the child.** The different qualities of care range from good to very poor quality care as below.

1. Child focused care giving	The child's needs are appropriately prioritised
2. Adult focused care giving	Adult needs sometimes get in the way of prioritising the child's needs
3. Child's needs secondary to adults	Adults prioritise their own needs, some indifference to child's needs
4. Child's needs not considered	Child's needs disregarded, level of indifference or hostility to advice

The grades reflect the extent to which the parent 'holds their child in mind'. A parent who holds their child in mind is better able to actively promote their child's welfare and safety than the parent who is distracted by their own difficulties or needs; whatever these may be.

The bulk of the tool contains colour coded descriptions of possible child care ranging from good to very poor quality. The descriptions are prompts intended to stimulate the thinking of the multi-professional team working with the child and family in CIN or CP cases where neglect is the primary concern.

The idea is to clarify the professional opinion of the quality of care provided to the child in each relevant area. If there is already a wealth of information about the family you may need to refer only very briefly to the QoC descriptions. You may be able to use the overview to quickly sketch what the professionals think based on existing knowledge of the child and family. You will then need to explain the reasons for the grading in a summary report. The descriptions are likely to be most useful to consult if the professionals disagree or are unclear. They are intended only as prompts and it's highly unlikely that they will accurately describe 'your' family. They are designed to help you decide on the general quality of care. It is for you to describe the actual care that you know, or suspect is being given to the child.

## Underlying causes

The final part of the tool prompts you to think about what might be driving or causing the parents neglect of their child's needs.

It might be that the parent has an acute problem such as a traumatic divorce or illness and their care is suffering as a result of this but with support in the mid-long term you expect this to change.

Or

This parent might have a chronic problem e.g. permanent learning disability or severe unmanaged psychotic illness or substance dependency that severely compromises their capacity to look after their child and this is unlikely to change even with support.

Or

This parent may have experienced severe neglect or abuse in their own childhood leaving them with poor abilities to manage the huge demands of parenting. They may be highly motivated to use support or they might be indifferent or hostile to support.

The tool also asks you to consider whether the identified neglect might be creating other possible risk to the child such as sexual abuse, gang involvement, radicalisation. Serious case reviews tell us that children who have been physically and or sexually abused; were also neglected, so we need to at least consider this possibility.

### **The tool has helped professionals in these ways:-**

- Identify whether there are gaps in parents' care
- To be explicit about areas where parents are strong so that this can be built on
- If there are 'gaps' the tool helps to be precise about what they are
- To clarify the seriousness of any 'gaps' in the child's care and the possible impact on the child if their parent/s continue to neglect their needs
- To create an effective plan for the child and parent/s in order to change the quality of care that the child is given and to meet their needs

**In essence it helps professionals to create a thorough assessment of neglectful parenting and impact on the child's life, and to plan more effectively.**

## Different ways to use the tool

There is **NO FIXED WAY** to use the tool. Please be flexible and creative with it. Below are some ways that other professionals have used it. You should decide what best suits your way of working and the family that you are working with. The tool **CAN** help professionals in these ways but please remember, the tool relies on your professional skill. It gives a structure but the tool doesn't do the job of assessment by itself. It is there to give a framework to gather information thoroughly and then to make sense of it.

<p><b>Complete with colleagues who know the family</b></p> <p>Use in supervision or consider a professionals meeting. Use the tool as a series of prompts to grade the care you think the parents are giving to their child. In this way you can discuss the evidence of different professionals and differences in opinion. Use the summary on page 6 of the PDF to plot your overview. Using this method, it is possible to complete an overview assessment in 2 -3 hours. This does require some prior knowledge of the family and their history.</p>	<p><b>Share with parents/children</b></p> <p>Some families have welcomed the opportunity to complete certain sections of the assessment with a professional. Some parents who experienced neglect as children have very little idea of what good enough care looks like. Graded descriptions of care can provide some parents with a more concrete idea of the care they could work towards rather than the blanket term 'neglect'.</p> <p>It is unlikely that many parents would cope well with attending a meeting where professionals are exploring the QoC. It's likely to be more constructive to hold a professionals meeting, collate an outline assessment and share the results with parents/children separately.</p>
<p><b>Using it with a 'new' family</b></p> <p>There is always something known about the families referred to Children's Social Care. This may be referral info, previous case history, case transfer summary. You can use the assessment to plot pre-existing information to give yourself an overview to start from. You can then use the tool to gather additional information either directly from the family or from other professionals.</p> <p>A social worker could do this alone or with a manager or one or two colleagues from partner agencies.</p>	<p><b>Combination of methods</b></p> <p>It's likely that most cases will benefit from a combination of these different approaches, <b>OR</b> devise your own approach.</p> <p>Professionals who have become familiar with the tool have developed approaches that suit them and the children and families they work with. The key is to familiarise yourself with the tool by using it.</p>
<p><b>Use the tool to review changes in parenting over time</b></p> <p>The tool enables you to be specific about the positives in parenting and areas of care that need to change. As with all cases; change, or lack of change in parenting needs to be made explicit, and inform planning for the child. The overview tool can be used to quickly review with partners the parents progress, or in some instances you might need to 'dig deeper' using the prompts with in the tool to gather more information or to assist your analysis.</p>	<p><b>Review periods/timescales</b></p> <p>No assessment is static, and if we are working with a family we always expect some level of change. The QoC assessment should be reviewed using the various elements it offers to share progress or lack of progress with parents and with other professionals using the timescales within which you are working; either CIN or CP.</p> <p><b><i>(CIN meetings, Core groups, Review case conferences etc)</i></b></p>

## TOP TIPS

### DO

### DON'T

#### **DO Familiarise yourself with it**

Some workers carry the PDF around in their bag so they can become familiar with and refer to it to prepare for visits and if appropriate to show to children/parents.

#### **It's not a form!**

Don't use it as a form to complete. It's a tool so use it like that to support your practice. It can help you and other professionals to gather and analyse information to understand the quality of care given to the child and think about the positive and negative impact this has the child.

#### **DO Share with family**

Think about at least showing the tool to families so that you can share the basis of your work. Some workers have found this helpful because it feels less personal, less 'blaming'. It allows you to say 'this is why I think you are here, this is what I have seen or have been told' do you agree?' 'If not tell me why'. **A parent summary was developed by a social worker to help parents understand professional concerns. You may find this helpful to use.**

#### **Don't do it alone**

Don't complete this on your own. Partner agencies have all signed up to use the brief version of the tool and to contribute to a social work QoC assessment. You can ask partners to complete a section, or many workers are finding it more helpful to do it together.

#### **DO. Undertake balanced assessment**

Think about the positives as well as the problematic areas of parenting otherwise you might miss strengths and skew your assessment. Part of the strength of this assessment is its balance and fairness to families

#### **DON'T. Use for case recording**

Don't use the tool to record chronological events. It is called a 'structured judgement tool' because it is intended to support you in making sense of the actual care that is being provided to the child. It does not lend itself to and is not intended for conventional case recording.

#### **DO USE. Visual overview**

Use the overview on page 6 of the PDF. This allows you, other professionals and the family to see where the strengths lie and which areas are concerning

#### **DON'T write a huge report**

Concise reports make more sense to those you want to read them so don't write a huge report for a case conference. The report should be your analysis of the strengths and concerns. You could use the overview to share your analysis.

#### **DO. Use it to 'structure your judgement'**

The tool is designed to help you to make sense of the wealth of complex information often gathered about neglectful parents. Workers have said it assisted them in being clear about where the strengths and difficulties lay in a family, helping parents understand concerns better, and developing specific plans to help them to change.

#### **DON'T use it as an actuarial device**

The tool is called a structured judgement tool for a reason. It is **not** intended to 'give you the answer' by adding up the gradings you give to the areas of care. It is meant to help you gather relevant information and opinion about a child's care to gain a detailed overview. This overview needs to be considered by professionals and sense made of the potential seriousness of harm that has been or is likely to be caused to the child and (if appropriate) a plan created to help the parent/s make changes in the appropriate areas so that they meet their child's needs adequately.

**DO. Be specific.**

The tool asks you to consider what the care of the child actually **IS** and asks you to grade that care.

You might observe this yourself; a partner/colleague may share their view; a child or their parents might tell you if you ask them relevant questions e.g.

*'tell me about the bedtime routines in your family, what happens before bedtime, what time do the children go to bed, how do you settle them . . . .'*

*'what would you say about your home? What do you like/not like about it?'*

**DON'T delay sharing findings with parents.**

Don't fail to share your findings with parents and child if they are of a suitable age. Particularly in child protection case conferences and review meetings parents have the right to have prior knowledge of the likely discussion. Failing to do this is likely to alienate them and create defensiveness. It is unethical practice.

**You may find it helpful to use the (optional) parent summary to help parents understand the concerns that you and other professionals have and what they need to change to better meet their child's needs.**

**DO. Use the language of the tool.**

IROs say neglect is the label most upsetting to parents. The message parents hear is 'you are an unfit parent'. That is why we called it the Quality of Care assessment. Please us that language. It is less stigmatising, empowering (and more accurate) to say;

*'we are going to use this tool to look at the care you are giving to your child'*

it's not helpful to give the judgemental message that;

*'we are going to look at where you are neglecting your child'.*

Social worker code of conduct requires us to empower families so think about how to introduce the tool to a family. Avoid stigmatising further.

**DON'T feel obliged to use the tool if neglect is NOT the primary concern.**

There are some cases where 'neglect' might be the category of a CP plan but in fact parental neglect might NOT be the main issue. This is most likely to be in CCE and possibly CSE cases. In such instances workers are at liberty to discuss the case and using the Quality of Care tool in supervision discuss whether the case is best served by using the QoC tool or whether another assessment is more appropriate to the child's needs. This decision should be recorded and if necessary discussed with/communicated to the IRO