

ParentAssess

An assessment framework for parents with
learning disabilities or additional needs



What Makes ParentAssess Different?

A publication for Family Courts, Legal
Representatives, Children's Guardians,
Independent Social Workers and
Local Authorities



Sarah Lowe (formerly McLinden) is the author of ParentAssess. She is a qualified social worker with over 30 years of experience working with children and adults who have learning disabilities. Since 2002, Sarah has worked as an Independent Social Worker in the Family Courts. She has completed in excess of 600

assessments and assessing parents with a learning disability has been her area of specialism. She has also completed a range of training in parent/child observation and attachment at the Tavistock and Portman Clinic.

In developing ParentAssess, Sarah spoke to parents, legal advocates, social workers and experienced assessors.

Sarah says: 'A key issue is that the assessment needs to be accessible and I have designed it to encourage parent involvement as well as being clear and easy to read. An important element of the framework is that it considers cognitive and cultural diversity to reflect the broad range of parents that we assess. The framework is designed so that it can be easily updated to incorporate changes that occur as the issues we explore with parents evolve. The ability and potential of a parent cannot be assessed without understanding the challenges they face and ParentAssess includes a course for assessors that develops their skills in working with people who have learning disabilities or additional needs.'

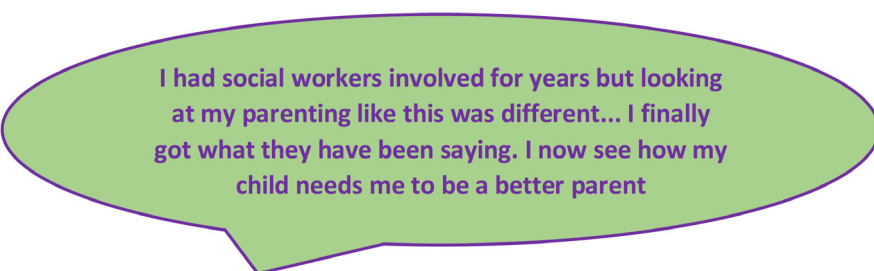
Specialist framework

ParentAssess is a specialist framework that is designed to assess parents with a learning disability or additional issues such as:

- mental health
- trauma
- exploitation
- domestic abuse
- alcohol or drug misuse
- offending

It has been developed to ensure that parents fully understand and are involved in the process.

Importantly, the child's experience of being parented and their views are considered. The parent is also helped to understand the impact of their parenting.



I had social workers involved for years but looking at my parenting like this was different... I finally got what they have been saying. I now see how my child needs me to be a better parent

It is designed to be clear, understandable and measurable to parents and legal advocates.

There is a useful direction in the case of D (A Child) (No 3) 2016 and following the guidance ensures these vulnerable parents are treated fairly. These principles are embedded in the ParentAssess Framework and all assessors are trained to ensure they encompass these in their work with the parent.

ParentAssess uses a traffic light system to represent the parent's level of parenting capacity over 5 domains:

- The child's experience of being parented
- The parent's daily living skills
- How the parent functions
- Specific issues such as domestic or drug abuse
- Support

ParentAssess can be completed in the same time as existing frameworks and we recommend 8-12 weeks depending on whether the parent needs to work at a slower pace. Usually there are 6 sessions with the parent, plus observations of the parent with their child. The support network is also carefully explored as this is usually of particular importance with parents who have a learning disability.

A software programme can be purchased that is easy to use and makes it quicker to complete an assessment, but the framework can be used without this if preferred. The Knowledge and Confidence Tool is designed so that it can be updated to keep it in line with current issues; this does not affect the software programme and avoids the need to purchase new software versions.

What makes ParentAssess different?

- It is specifically designed for use in Family Proceedings and is Re D compliant.
- The parent is enabled to understand the process and outcome. The whole framework is designed to be easy to read and understand.
- The assessment is completed by one trained assessor who must be SWE registered, as different people assessing the parent can be confusing.
- The questions asked of the parent are no different than would be asked of a parent without a learning disability, so importantly the bar is not set higher.
- The child's experience of being parented is at the centre of the assessment. Issues such as attunement, attachment and the child's developmental journey are considered carefully.
- ParentAssess covers additional issues that often affect these vulnerable parents, such as domestic abuse, offending, mental health, drug and alcohol abuse.

Specialist trained assessors

Working with a parent who has a learning disability requires specialist knowledge of:

- How to read a cognitive assessment and understand the possible impact on daily living and parenting
- How to communicate with the parent and build a relationship with them
- How to convey information about issues, which can be very complicated, in a way the parent can understand
- How to measure a parent's ability to change and learn
- How to observe parent/child interaction in a way that informs the assessment
- How to write without using jargon and complicated phrases to ensure the parent has meaningful access to the report
- Understanding the specific issues which these parents often face

ParentAssess training focuses on developing skills in working with parents who have learning disabilities.

What parents asked for

We want a chance to learn how to parent better

Assessors must give opportunities to learn and the way in which the parent is able to change and adapt is considered.

We find it hard to translate cartoons into real life so can this be different?

Drawings and cartoons used in other frameworks have been replaced by photos of situations and things the parent is likely to see in everyday life.

We want our good points to be noticed

Assessors are required to produce balanced assessments and identify positive aspects of parenting.

We don't want a long report full of big words

In ParentAssess an additional Parent Report provides an overview of the outcome in clear, straightforward language. This report format has been highly praised by the Court and parents' advocates.

We want to know if we can parent with support

The support network is carefully assessed and important questions are asked:

- Is it the support the parent wants?
- Are expectations on all sides clear?
- Is it realistic and sustainable?
- Is it right for the child?
- Will it make sure the child is kept safe?

What legal advocates asked for

I want an assessment that is thorough

ParentAssess is based on the DOH Assessment Framework 2000 and is comprehensive.

The assessment framework needs to have been tested

ParentAssess has been in use since 2016 and has consistently received positive feedback.

I want the assessor to understand how my client functions and consider recommendations from the psychological report

Assessors are trained in reading cognitive reports and incorporate recommendations when working with the parent.

I want a clear balanced assessment with tables I can read and interpret

This is one of the many advantages of ParentAssess; areas of strength and weakness are instantly recognisable. It takes about 5 minutes to learn how to read a ParentAssess table, illustrated below:

Assessor's Summary

Green This is what the Parent does well	Amber These are areas where there are some concerns but with help the parent is likely to develop their parenting skills within 6 months	Red These are things where there are serious concerns and where the parent has not shown enough insight or ability to change
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child's health• Child's development• Child's hygiene• Child's education• Offending - none• Gambling - none• Cultural Issues• Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental health / MH• Parental self-care• Parental Day to Day Living Skills• Safety in the Home• Money• Parental history• Trauma• Previous relationships• Dealing with Stress• Multi-Tasking• Social Media• Child's play• Child's routine• Child's diet• Child's home• Sibling relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alcohol Use• Drug Use• Domestic Abuse• Child's emotional needs• Child's behaviour• Child's protection• Decision Making• Learning/ Changing• Relationship• Managing Risk

ParentAssess tools

There are a number of tools used in ParentAssess that use the traffic light system and visual tools. Assessors are trained to use the tools in a way that helps the parent learn and understand more about their parenting.

Strengths and Concerns is a form that helps the assessor understand how the parent sees things and it gives an indication of their level of insight. The form also gathers the views of the social worker and the two perspectives are compared in clear tables that are given to the parent at an early stage of the assessment. This tool forms the foundation of the assessment and helps the assessor to focus on the areas where change is needed. Parents have said they find this form really helpful.

Knowledge and Confidence Booklet asks questions about different areas of parenting and uses a range of visual aids in the form of photographs. This tool is not a test, but more an aid to discussion and provides further insight. It helps the parent work out areas where they feel confident and it helps the assessor gain understanding of the parent's knowledge base and identify where they might need more support.

Feelings Chart is used with children over 4 years old to understand their experience of being parented. For younger children the assessor is encouraged to speak to others such as their carers, nursery or wider family to build a picture of the child's experience of being parented.

Observations are usually carried out at 3 points of the assessment using a specially designed form. Parent/child observation should always form an important part of any parenting assessment and sometimes extended contacts can be useful where the child is no longer in the parent's care.

Outcome Table is a chart of the results – on the next page is part of this table. It shows the progress of the parent or where there are concerns. Each column represents the results from each of the tools used. In the final column is the Assessor's findings of each area of parenting and the rationale for their findings will be found in the Assessment Report. Legal Advocates have commented that this assists with cross examination because it is easy to see how the opinion has been reached.

Assessor's Summary outlines the final view of the assessor. The evidence supporting this is in the Assessment Report which is detailed and outlines the analytical basis for the assessor's conclusion and recommendation.

The Abridged Parent Report is a shortened version of the Assessment Report that explains the outcome to the parent in an easy to understand format as it is vital that this information is accessible to them. Many parents have said they find the longer Court reports intimidating and hard to understand.

Outcome Table (first 2 sections)

Child's experience	S&C Mother	S&C Father	S&C SW	K&C Mother	K&C Father	K & C PA	Obs	Obs	Obs	Child	Other Tools/ Info	PA
Child's health	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	●
Child's development	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Child's hygiene	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Child's education	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	●
Child's play	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Child's routine	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Child's diet	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Child's home	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	●
Child's emotional needs	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Attachment	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	○	○	●
Child's behaviour	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Child's protection	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	●
Sibling relationships	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Daily Living	S&C Mother	S&C Father	S&C SW	K&C Mother	K&C Father	K & C PA	Obs	Obs	Obs	Child	Other Tools/ Info	PA
Parental health	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●
Parental self-care	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Independent Living Skills	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Safety in the Home	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●
Money	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●
Employment	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Housing	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	●

ParentAssess



Please visit our website to find out more about ParentAssess, this includes details of the Assessor Training Courses.

If you would like to request a presentation outlining how the framework is applied, please contact us by email.

Website: www.parentassess.com

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