

Safeguarding - Asylum Age Assessments

A guide to carrying out asylum age assessments for social workers

Introduction

Before planning to undertake an age assessment it is important to consider whether one is really necessary.

According to the statutory guidance:

“Age assessments should only be carried out where there is significant reason to doubt that the claimant is a child. Age assessments should not be a routine part of a local authority’s assessment of unaccompanied or trafficked children.”

It is also important to remember that a needs assessment is a different issue to an age assessment. However, the age assessment can help to inform the needs assessment, and vice versa.

Before assessment interview(s)

Having decided that an age assessment is necessary, there is a significant amount of preparation that needs to be done before actually going into the interview. Failure to properly prepare could lead to the social worker missing something of importance that could significantly affect the life of the interviewee.

The first thing to consider ahead of the interview is whether the child or young person in question could have been trafficked or have experienced abuse.

Further to this, other than the fact that they are alone in the UK, do they have any additional needs such as those related to mental, physical or emotional health disabilities? It is possible they have learning difficulties? Could the experience they had in their country of origin, or on their way to the UK, impact on their ability to fully answer questions?

In addition, the social worker must also identify the current immigration status of the individual they will be interviewing. Will they need help with this either before or after the age assessment is carried out?

Furthermore, it is vital to look at the living arrangements of the child or young person: are they in suitable accommodation currently? And where will they be staying afterwards?



As well as considering these essential questions, there are a number of practical concerns which must be considered ahead of the interview.



Firstly, do you have a clear work plan when it comes to preparing, conducting and concluding the age assessment? Have you allocated time to these specific tasks?



Is the child or young person aware of their upcoming age assessment? Have they been given all the information and support they will require in order to take part in it?



Have the necessary arrangements been made for an appropriate adult and interpreter to sit in on the interviews and assist where necessary?

It is obviously also important to decide on an appropriate venue, and to ensure both assessing social workers have collated and read some relevant country of origin and background information.

If there is relevant information available from other sources? And have arrangements been made to gather this?



During the interview



Two registered social workers need to be present for all interviews, which is obviously important to bear in mind when planning the interviews.



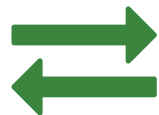
Before the interview can properly proceed, it is important to explain and record the purpose of the interview, as well as all potential outcomes, the different roles of professionals and how information is shared. The role of the appropriate adult will also need to be explained to the interviewee.



The social workers will need to ensure that the young person understands the role of the interpreter, and have confirmed that they can properly communicate with them - for example, they can understand the specific dialect. It is also important to make sure the child in question is comfortable with the interpreter.



In order to work out whether the child or young person is fit to be interviewed, the social workers also need to check on their well-being and general welfare. In addition to this, they will need to keep an eye out for any potential vulnerabilities of the interviewee, such as human trafficking or mental health concerns.



When questioning the child or young person, it is also essential that the interviewers remember that the interview itself could cause the child or young person a significant amount of anxiety and stress. Building trust at the beginning of the assessment interview(s) is likely to see the individual being interviewed speak more freely and provide a more detailed narrative.



When the social workers are making the decision as to the interviewee's age, if they are leaning towards disagreeing with the young person's account, they must give the individual a chance to discuss and potentially clarify any factors leading the social workers towards this decision.



Each part of the process must be documented, including the factors leading to decisions and conclusions. If the views of others have been taken into account, or if there were any disagreements during the process, these must also be recorded.



The assessment can and should be reviewed if new material comes to light that could change the final decision.

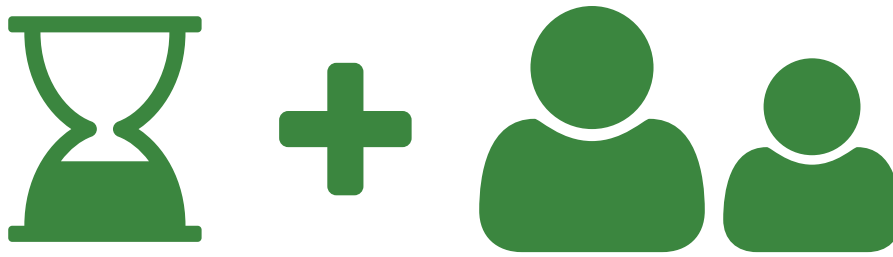
Following the assessment interview(s)

After the interview, it is essential to ensure that all the pieces of information the decision makers will need has been collected and recorded. All this information must be gathered and analysed before any sort of decision is reached.



In the case that the conclusion of the investigation disagrees with the young person's account of their age, have they been given ample opportunity to discuss the factors leading up to this decision? Are the reasons for the final decision clearly documented in the written report?

When delivering the decision to the child or young person, it must be done promptly, and with support.



If the young person is assessed to be a child, all protocols surrounding looked-after children should be followed. If they are assessed to be an adult, there still needs to be an appropriate support in transition to adult asylum support systems.

Remember, when delivering the news, that age is an important factor of identity for children and young people and if you disagree with the age a young person believes themselves to be this can be extremely distressing for them.

Further information on age assessments for social workers:

Introduction to the Joint Working Guidance

Age Assessment Information Sharing for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: explanation and guidance

Joint Working Guidance

Age Assessment Information Sharing Proforma

DfE Statutory Guidance on the Care of Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children

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