



# Developing a Framework for the Assessment of Vulnerable Children and Their Families

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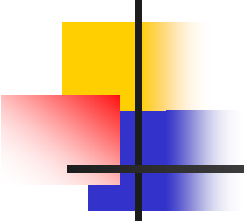
Australian Centre for Child Protection  
Summer Symposium  
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Trinity College Dublin



# Aim of presentation

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- Discuss the development of the Assessment Framework in the ROI
- Highlight how it incorporated process issues such as engagement, reflection, gendered practice and analysis



## Problems identified in child protection and welfare services prior to development of frameworks

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- Disparities about thresholds for service
- Neglect of neglect with primary emphasis on problems with a more vivid manifestation
- Problems with multi-disciplinary work
- Lack of focus on children
- Weakness in integrating information
- Need for higher profiling of family support services and evidence of their importance



# What research says about assessment frameworks

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- Frameworks establish the foundation stones for practice (Connolly 2007)
- Assessment 'both a head and a heart activity' (Horwath, 2007)
- Supervision and training are essential elements (Millar & Corby, 2005, Crisp et al, 2007)
- Requires strong leadership and a clear plan for intervention (Cleaver and Walker, 2004)



# Research findings on assessment frameworks

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- Assessment tools have been criticised for having a 'narrow, normative and prescriptive view of the world' (Garrett, 2005)
- Concerns about computer based data (Munro, 2004)
- Service users view the participatory elements positively (Platt, 2006)
- Assessment can have a therapeutic function (Millar & Corby, 2005)



# Recent relevant Irish research findings

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- Importance of hearing the child's perspective on parenting capacity (e.g. living with domestic violence) (Buckley, Whelan and Holt, 2006)
- Sensitivity to the intimidating perception of child protection and welfare services (Hayes, 2007)



# Methods used

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- Literature review on parenting capacity and assessment frameworks
- Consultancy
- Preparation of draft framework
- Piloting
- Evaluation
- Final revisions



# Outcomes from consultancy

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- Framework should be informed by practitioners, rather than top down
- No assumptions about service users willingness or motivation to engage
- Gender sensitive
- Needs to include risk



# Assessment process

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- Process of assessment needed to be clearly spelt out – more than a concept, less than a set of tools
- Emphasis on planning and reflection
- Required to differentiate between concurrent and sequential phases
- User friendly document



# Outcomes of the pilot study

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- Framework largely successful in its aims
- Need to show concurrent as well as sequential activities
- Under use of evidence for decision making
- Deficiencies in documented information about children
- Need for more communication between statutory and voluntary agencies regarding use of the framework



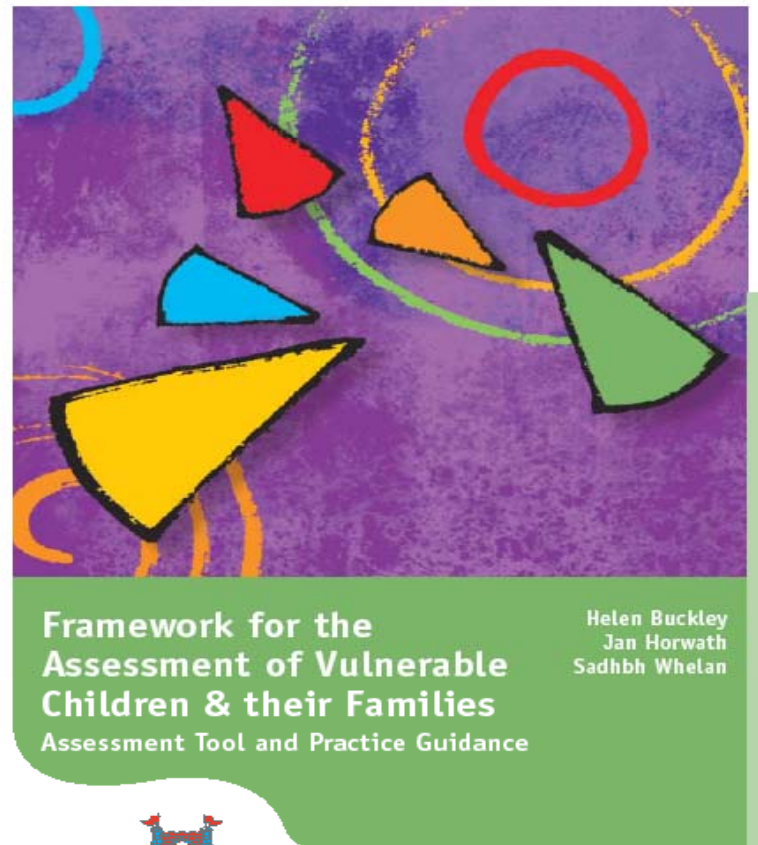
# Shaping of Assessment Framework

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- One document including the tool, no additional scales or measures
- Qualitative assessment
- Based on principles
- Time lines to be agreed on a per case basis
- Core assessment
- Role of coordinator/manager



# The Finished Product



# The Assessment Wheel

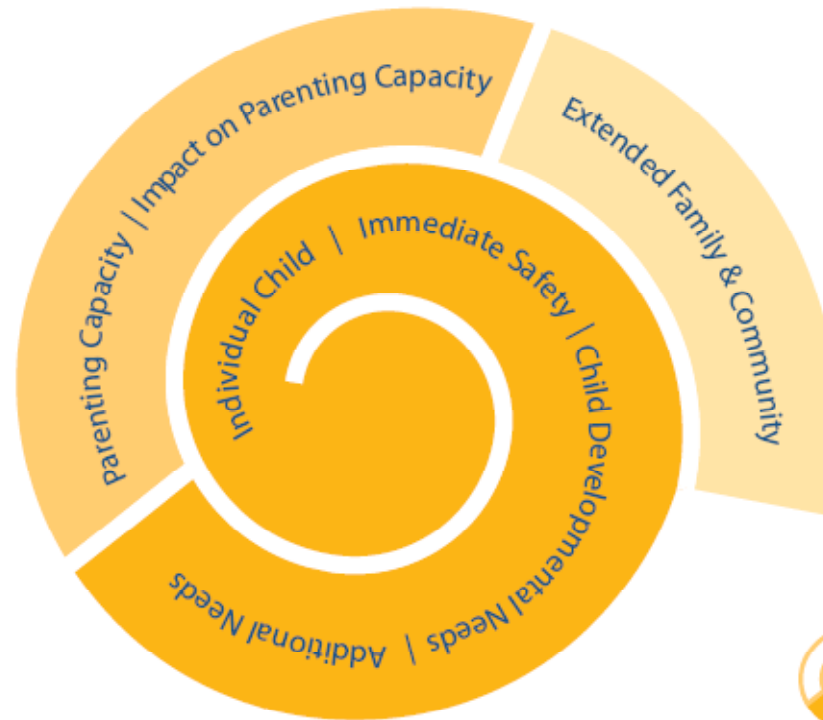




# Symbols: the spiral

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## The **3** Dimensions of a Child's Life: The Spiral





# Assessment Domains

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- Child's needs – specified, including safety needs and any additional needs experienced by children with chronic illness or disability or children from ethnic minorities
- Capacity of caregiver to meet specific needs and consideration of any social factors impacting on their capacity
- Capacity of extended family and community to strengthen parenting capacity or compensate for any weaknesses

# Collaborating Multidisciplinary Contributions

## Multidisciplinary Early Contributions

Multidisciplinary work is organized and structured to gain expertise in child protection and welfare. Clinical factors are (professionally) reviewed (or not) in relation to child and family and the type of information that they can provide.

Child Care Worker (Community and Residential)	Early Years/Primary Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of involvement with the family</li> <li>Interaction with parents</li> <li>Child's development (social, intellectual), health, emotional and school needs and abilities</li> <li>Child's participation in and contribution to work of agency</li> <li>Child's care history</li> <li>Child's knowledge and understanding of their family</li> <li>Child's likes and dislikes</li> <li>Child's relationship with parents, carers and siblings</li> <li>Child's special interests and strengths</li> <li>Child's well-being (including work, performance and learning)</li> <li>Child's social relationships (and quality of contact)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of involvement with the family</li> <li>Development and learning of child</li> <li>Developmental milestones - child based on the set context</li> <li>Current appearance of child</li> <li>Child's mood and energy</li> <li>Child's ability to perform tasks</li> <li>Child's level of comprehension of world</li> <li>Form of child's interaction</li> <li>Form of child's interaction related to specific issues and identified children in attachment</li> <li>Attachment style</li> <li>Form of child's ability to form relationships, especially with the carer</li> </ul>
Family	Service Workers (Child Protection Services)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on support to each other, play of the carer in the home</li> <li>History of involvement with the family</li> <li>Family's willingness to engage with services</li> <li>Form of child's interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of involvement with the family</li> <li>Information regarding current and past difficulties with the family</li> <li>Information regarding past interventions and outcomes with the family</li> <li>Information regarding the treatment of other children with the family</li> <li>Family patterns of functioning</li> <li>Needs of the children</li> <li>Parental beliefs and capacity</li> <li>Support networks available to the family</li> <li>Access to the family home</li> <li>Availability and reliability of other family members and others</li> <li>Availability of resources of state</li> <li>Motivations</li> <li>Core history of the children</li> </ul>
Community Professionals	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notification of child protection support services</li> <li>History of work with children and families</li> <li>How nature and quality of contact with the family</li> <li>Family's experience of contact with services (including and outside community)</li> <li>Child's experience of contact with services</li> </ul>	



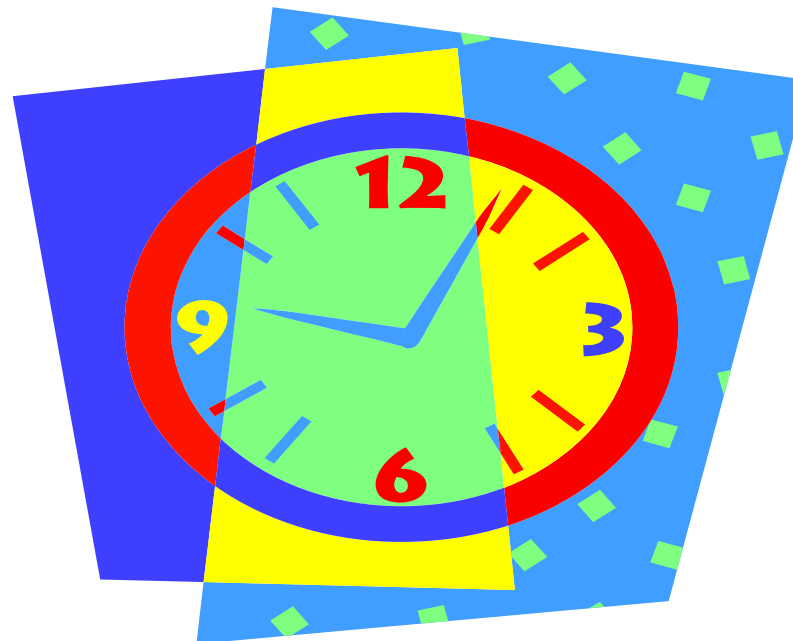
## Key questions:

- What facts, observations and opinions do you have to support the information gathered?
- What does this mean in relation to the child's safety, welfare and development?
- How do practice experience, research findings and literature inform this part of your assessment?
- Should an intervention be made now? If so what?
- Where is the parent/carer within the change process?



# Knowing the child

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# Practice Guidance

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- Linked to tool with coloured tabs, symbols and index
- First part offers elaboration on different phases of assessment
- Second part provides summaries of research on relevant topics



# Areas for reflection

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- Engaging families
- Considering caregivers' incentive to change
- Promoting participation
- Reflecting on information using the key questions
- Using the evidence
- Recording



# What's different?

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- Centred in on the child as opposed to child centred
- Guides through the entire process rather than information gathering
- Encourages workers to reflect at all points



# Training issues

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- Child development
- Knowledge base on factors that affect parenting
- Multi-disciplinary working
- Assessment skills
- Influences on decision making



## Supervisory issues

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- Acknowledge and address coping mechanisms adopted by staff
- Accept that bias and distortion are inevitable from time to time, including groupthink, fixed ideas, over optimism and over-pessimism
- Encourage workers to self challenge



# Organisational issues

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- Promotion and support of multi-disciplinary collaboration to encourage skill sharing
- Development of structure and context – not just an add on
- Promotion of a positive image of the system



## Loose ends

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- Difference between initial and full assessment?
- 'One size fits all' approach
- Expectation that the assessment framework will make decisions on its own
- Challenge involved in bringing different professionals on board