

# Using the Child Impact Assessment Framework

## Frequently Asked Questions



- 1. Does my organisation have to be part of an official pilot project to use the Child Impact Assessment framework?** No, the Child Impact Assessment framework, available in the [“This is me”](#) toolkit, is available for use by any practitioner working with a child who has a parent in the justice system. It has been designed to support individual children as and when the framework is useful and within formal pilot projects. There are versions for children with a [mother](#) and [father](#) in the justice system and corresponding accompanying notes for supporting children with a [mother](#) or [father](#) in the justice system.
- 2. Who is best placed to use the Child Impact Assessment framework with children?** Any practitioner who is supporting children can use the Child Impact Assessment framework. This includes staff from universal services such as health and education; statutory services such as social work; and specialist organisations such as mental health charities.
- 3. How do I broach the subject of Child Impact Assessments with families?** The use of a Child Impact Assessment is not a statutory procedure; it should be offered as a way of ensuring children are listened to and supported and on the understanding that children are free to say no. Having a family member in the justice system can make it hard for people to ask for help; many families feel ashamed or worried that they will be judged. A gentle, sensitive approach is important.
- 4. Should I do anything to follow up with the family once I have spoken to them about Child Impact Assessments initially?** Families often say that it is helpful to have time to think about an offer of support. You may want to revisit the offer of a Child Impact Assessment in a gentle, sensitive way if this seems appropriate.
- 5. What if a child would prefer to speak to someone from a different organisation or sector?** Children who helped create the framework reported that having a choice about whom they complete a Child Impact Assessment with is very important. This is often someone whom they already know and trust and may not be someone that you, or other adults, have considered. It is important that children are listened to and that they are safe. Your role may simply be to signpost a child to someone else for support.
- 6. What if the person the child would like to speak to has no training (or limited understanding of) the impact on children of having a parent in the justice system?** Children with experience of a parent in the justice system say that what matters most to them is that they are listened to by someone who is kind, compassionate, and non-judgemental. The accompanying notes contain helpful information about how children might be feeling as well as practical actions to support children. While it is not necessary to

have formal training on the impact on children of having a parent in the justice system, the [“This is me”](#) toolkit contains a list of [training and useful resources](#) to equip people to support children effectively.

- 7. What if the person the child would like to speak to does not know that the parent is even in contact with the justice system?** In this case, it is important to check that the child understands that whoever is carrying out a Child Impact Assessment needs to be aware that their parent is in contact with the justice system. Your role may be to support (with the child’s permission, of course) an initial conversation between the child and their chosen person. You can also pass on information about, and links to, the Child Impact Assessment, accompanying notes, and [training and useful resources](#).
- 8. Can families use the Child Impact Assessment framework themselves (without support from a practitioner)?** Yes, the framework was originally designed for practitioners who are supporting children, but families have said they find it helpful too. The Child Impact Assessment itself can be used to support conversations between children and their parents (including those who are in prison). The accompanying notes can help parents and carers understand how children might be feeling and what support may help. Families can use these resources in whatever way is helpful for them.
- 9. Do I need to obtain parental consent before using the Child Impact Assessment framework with a child?** No, it is not necessary to obtain additional parental consent to use the framework itself if your organisation already has consent to support a child and store any data relating to them. It is good practice, however, to inform parents about the purpose of the framework and answer any questions they may have. Under GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), only children aged 13 years and over may lawfully provide their own consent for the processing of their personal data; an adult with parental responsibility must provide consent for processing data if the child is under 13. It is helpful to remind children and parents that information about them will not be shared without their knowledge unless there is a safeguarding concern (see 17 and 18 below).
- 10. What if a child wants to undertake a Child Impact Assessment but their parent / carer does not agree?** Under the UNCRC, every child has the right to express their views on matters that affect them, and for these views to be taken into consideration (Article 12). The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy is guided by the Gillick principle which gives young people under the age of 16 the right to consent to confidential treatment without a need for parental knowledge or consent if they are deemed to have enough intelligence, competence and understanding to fully appreciate what is involved. If a parent is resistant to a child receiving support, it is important to understand why this is. Many families affected by imprisonment are fearful of decisions being made *about* them and things being done *to* them. It is helpful to reassure parents / carers that the Child Impact Assessment framework is about giving children an opportunity to talk about how they are feeling and is not a statutory process.

**11. Do I need to go through all the sections of the Child Impact Assessment framework?**

No, the framework has been designed to be used at various stages of the justice system (arrest, court, imprisonment or community sentence, and release), and you can pick and choose, depending on the needs of the child. It may be, for example, that you start with the section about having a dad in prison but after a few weeks, it becomes apparent that the child was traumatised witnessing the arrest; you can use the arrest section to talk about the impact of this and then return to the prison section, or other sections, as needed. The questions are intended as a guide to start a conversation and in many cases will lead to additional questions, depending on how the conversation with the child develops.

**12. Does the Child Impact Assessment need to be completed online?** No, the framework is available online, and the form can be downloaded and completed electronically if that is helpful. It can also be printed out and filled in by hand. There is a section that encourages children to use more creative ways of expressing their feelings (for example, drawing a picture or writing a poem) if this is helpful. The Child Impact Assessment framework belongs to the child and should be used in whatever way works for them.

**13. How can I use the Child Impact Assessment framework with babies and toddlers, children with limited, or no, speech, and children with additional needs?** While the questions provided in the framework are not designed for very young children or those with limited, or no, language, the spirit of the questions (gaining an insight into how a child is feeling, what support might help them, and who is best placed to offer that support) can be encapsulated if a creative approach is taken. Nursery staff can use observation, craft activities, and very simple conversation to gain an understanding about a child's relationship with a parent. Midwives and health visitors can understand what babies are saying from all that is going on around them, their body language and the way they cry (or not). For any child who is non-verbal, or does not have the vocabulary to describe their feelings, there is an added responsibility for the person completing a Child Impact Assessment to look much further than the child and to consider the relationships they have and their non-verbal cues of behaviours and attachments.

**14. How do I keep a record of any actions that have been agreed?** The most important aspect of the Child Impact Assessment framework for children is the section on agreed actions. Children are encouraged to write agreed actions in their own words. This belongs to the child themselves and can be kept by them (if they would like this) and / or by your organisation. You should use your organisation's protocols for storing data. Records can be stored in hard copy or electronically. Openness and transparency are key; children should know what information about them is being stored and why. If any information needs to be shared with other people or organisations, children should be informed of this and given an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

- 15. How do I know the Child Impact Assessment has made any difference?** Children themselves will be the best judges of this! The Child Impact Assessment framework was designed to ensure that children are listened to, supported, and included in decision-making about that support. The “[This is me](#)” toolkit includes an [evaluation form](#) that you can use with children and their parents / carers to demonstrate the difference this has made. You can also use this form to record the difference it has made to you in your role.
- 16. How do I record any positive outcomes?** You can use the [evaluation form](#) to note outcomes, and your organisation may also have ways of gathering evidence of outcomes and impact. Any outcomes that are used in reports, blogs, or funding applications should be fully anonymised to preserve confidentiality.
- 17. What if a safeguarding concern arises during a conversation with a child?** As well as being child-centred, the Child Impact Assessment framework must also keep children safe. It is important that staff have a thorough understanding of [safeguarding and child protection measures](#). When completing a Child Impact Assessment, you should always adhere to your own organisation’s safeguarding / child protection policy, bearing in mind that having a parent who commits, or is accused of, an offence, or goes to prison, is not a child protection concern in and of itself.
- 18. Do I share the information the child has disclosed (other than safeguarding concerns)?** Not without informing the child. The Child Impact Assessment framework is designed to give children a safe space to talk about the impact on them of having a parent in the justice system. Conversations should be confidential, and any sharing of information must be open and transparent. Children should know who knows what and, crucially, *why*; this can help to build trust. If there is a safeguarding concern, it is helpful to let the child know that you are concerned about them and that you need to share these concerns with people whose role it is to keep children safe.
- 19. Do I need to report anything back to the Prison Reform Trust?** No, the Child Impact Assessment belongs to the child and is confidential. Prison Reform Trust Associate Sarah Beresford is collating feedback from across the UK and would like to know in what ways the Child Impact Assessment framework is useful and whether it could be improved; you can email her at the address below.

**If you have any questions that have not been addressed here, please contact Sarah Beresford on [sarah.beresford@prisonreformtrust.org.uk](mailto:sarah.beresford@prisonreformtrust.org.uk)**