

Changes to assessing risk in child protection

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated October 2024

This document relates to DCJs transition from the current SDM Risk Assessment to the Interim assessment approach. . Specifically, the Family Based Assessment, In Need of Care and Protection Assessment and Measuring Change assessment. Unless otherwise noted, these FAQs apply to, and are relevant for, all service providers delivering Family Preservation services. These FAQs will be updated as necessary.

An Overview

On 12 September 2024 at DCJ, the SDM Risk Assessment will be replaced by the Family Based Assessment (FBA), the SDM Risk Reassessment will be replaced by the Measuring Change Assessment and a new record, called the In Need of Care and Protection Assessment will be introduced.

The Family Based Assessment (FBA) is an interim change to the SDM Risk Assessment to support more equitable and culturally responsive child protection assessment.

The Family Based Assessment (FBA) is completed by DCJ practitioners after the SDM Safety Assessment. The timeframes for the FBA and Measuring Change Assessment remain the same as the (former) SDM Risk Assessment and SDM Risk Reassessment.

DCJ will provide a copy of the completed FBA, INOCAP record and other relevant documents with program referrals.

The URF will also be updated to reflect the assessment changes.

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When do the interim assessment changes come into effect?

The Family Based Assessment, In Need of Care and Protection Assessment and Measuring Change Assessment are planned to come into effect on 12 September 2024.

What is the Family Based Assessment (FBA)?

The Family Based Assessment (FBA) is a structured assessment supporting DCJ caseworkers to gather and analyse information to inform decisions about whether a child is:

- 1) At risk of significant harm
- 2) In need of care and protection

The removal of scoring will change the way decisions are made about whether DCJ is required to intervene to safeguard safety, welfare, and wellbeing. Caseworkers will consider the unique experiences of each child in the context of their family and network.

What can you expect from the Family Based Assessment?

The FBA is different from the SDM Risk Assessment in the following ways:

- Scoring removed – the scoring indices for abuse and neglect are not featured within the FBA as per the Risk Assessment. I.e. Outcomes of ‘low’, ‘moderate’, ‘high’ and ‘very high’ are no longer evidenced.
- Consolidated questions – there are 13 questions within the FBA, supporting a linear assessment (with no weighting).
- Strengthens opportunities for DCJ to consider strengths, protective factors and network throughout the assessment.

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- Questions are focused on how the behaviour of any adult caring for the child impacts their experience of abuse or neglect.
- The FBA is a professional judgment tool to support the gathering of information about the unique circumstances of individual families.
- The FBA leans into critical analysis of information to understand the experience of the child.
- Links to section 23 of Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998.

What does the interim assessment change mean for Program referrals?

The Risk Assessment outcomes of low, medium, high and very high will be replaced with the In need of care and protection outcomes:

- NOT In Need of Care and Protection (NOT INOCAP)
- In Need of Care and Protection (INOCAP)

What is the In Need of Care and Protection Tool?

The In Need of Care and Protection assessment tool supports DCJ practitioners to determine whether DCJ needs to take action, or if the protective measures provided by the family or network during the assessment period are sufficient to reduce the Risk of Significant Harm issues.

The INOCAP tool draws on information and analysis within the SDM Safety Assessment and Family Based Assessment.

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What do the INOCAP outcomes mean?

If a child is **NOT** In Need of Care and Protection:

- DCJ stops working with the family.
- DCJ cannot require a parent/carer to take any action if a child is not INOCAP.

Note: A referral with parental consent can be made to services and suggestions made about how to reduce the Risk of Significant Harm issues, however the parent/carer is under no obligation to accept advice provided or take up referral options.

If a child **IS** In Need of Care and Protection:

Determining that a child is In Need of Care Protection:

- Enables DCJ to require an action from a parent, including attendance at a support service
- Requires DCJ to continue to work with the family to safeguard the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child OR make a referral to a contracted family preservation service and ensure that the family are engaged with the service prior to case closure.

Does the introduction of the Family Based Assessment and In Need of Care and Protection Record mean that DCJ can automatically close their case?

The current practice under the relevant program Service Provision Guidelines (SPG's) will remain unchanged.

If currently they stay open for the SDM Risk Reassessment, they would continue to remain open for Measuring Change Assessment. If program guidelines currently say DCJ can close after referral then they would check on engagement and close at that point.

Will the referral state specifically what program the family is being referred for, or will DCJ expect the provider to assess the level and intensity of intervention required?

The URF requires caseworkers to select the program in which the family are being referred to. This will be unchanged.

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Are children/young people individually assessed under the Family Based Assessment?

Yes, the Family Based Assessment allows for the context of each individual child or young person in the home to be assessed. Caseworkers will be required to talk to the strengths, vulnerabilities and experience of individual children/young people within the assessment narratives.

Will program providers continue to receive referrals for families in their entirety or only for those children/young people that have Risk of Significant Harm concerns identified?

Referrals to programs will continue to be family-based, this will remain unchanged. One of the purposes of the Family Based Assessment will move the focus of assessments to capturing the experience of children and young people and how this is impacted by parental behaviour, rather than focusing on the parental behaviour itself.

What was the rationale for the removal of the scoring and there being 'no outcome'?

The SDM Risk Assessment outcomes of low, medium, high and very high classify similar families of similar characteristics who may be more likely to experience subsequent system involvement if there is no further intervention.

The In need of care and protection assessment guides a decision about whether DCJ needs to work with a family to safeguard or promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child or if adequate arrangements are in place. This considers the unique individual circumstances of a child in the context of their family and network which is consistent with DCJs statutory decision making obligations.

Will service providers receive the In Need of Care and Protection (INOCAP) record, in addition to the Family Based Assessment (FBA)?

Yes, the In Need of Care and Protection (INOCAP) record will be provided as part of the referral process. The record supports DCJ practitioners to determine the type of action required and helps inform a family's eligibility for family preservation programs.

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Will services receive the Measuring Change Assessment if the family is open long enough for this to be completed?

Yes, where applicable, program providers should receive a copy of the Measuring Change Assessment. Similar, to the Risk Re-Assessment, the Measuring Change Assessment will be a collaborative process and reliant upon feedback from the program provider and the family's progress towards the goals of the Family Action Plan for Change.

What is not changing for program providers under the interim assessment approach?

- There will be no update to Service Provision Guidelines given the current recommissioning process.
- There will be no change to reporting requirements for Infoshare.

Is it likely that the cases we will receive referrals for will change due to the shift to the interim assessment approach?

Providers will continue to receive referrals of a similar nature to those received under the (former) SDM Risk Assessment. Eligibility and suitability will still need to be considered by both the DCJ casework team and the provider receiving the referral, and in consideration to the In Need of Care and Protection record.

For the likes of providers who are delivering Family Preservation (Brighter Futures and Youth Hope), the proposed eligibility criteria for these programs under the Family Based Assessment is *Not in Need of Care and Protection*. Assessments with a finding of *In Need of Care and Protection* referrals may be considered but should be reviewed in line with the service eligibility criteria, service provision guidelines and as per the capabilities of the team delivering the program.

If DCJ closes but the family disengages, are program providers still required to re-report since the intervention required is no longer in place?

In instances where a family chooses to no longer participate in a program, the service provider would consider whether there is continued suspected ROSH to the child, apply the MRG and make a report if issues are still present.

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Will cases currently open automatically be re-assessed with the new tools?

No, there will be a transition period of 60 days for cases with an open Risk Assessment to be finalised before the move to the Family Based Assessment.

Is there an expectation that providers develop their own Risk Assessment at referral?

No, unless this is a tool or practice that the provider already has in place. Practice on receipt and acceptance of referrals remains unchanged.

Can you please give more detail in relation to changes to Danger 9 in the Safety Assessment regarding DFV? ie, what will those changes include?

The updated definition for Danger 9 in the SDM Safety Assessment is:

Domestic/family violence – perpetrated by one adult against another adult in the household with the intent to coerce, control or threaten or cause fear – poses an imminent danger of serious physical and/or psychological/emotional harm to the child/young person.

The child/young person has been physically, psychologically or emotionally harmed and/or is in imminent danger of serious harm due to the actions of a perpetrator of domestic or family violence.

Domestic violence involves an ongoing pattern of violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against an intimate partner or former partner in order to control, dominate or harm that person. A child/young person does not have to be physically hurt or in danger of physical harm in order to be seriously harmed by domestic violence.

What will the approval process look like at DCJ for the Family Based Assessment?

The approval delegation remains with the DCJ Manager Casework.

The Family Based Assessment still goes through the same DCJ approval pathway as the (former) SDM Risk Assessment and requires DCJ Manager Casework approval to be ‘completed’.

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Are there any additional skill, qualification, or experience requirements for professional judgment to be used in the Family Based Assessment (FBA)?

Caseworkers and Manager Caseworks will receive additional training, supervision and resources to further develop capability in relation to professional judgment. This is inclusive of renewed practice guidance and an assessment manual, which detail how to gather the information required to inform the FBA and how to analyse this information. Furthermore, the Caseworker Development Program, for new Caseworkers to DCJ, is being amended to allow for the inclusion of professional judgement within the learning content.

The principle of professional judgment is embedded within the DCJ Practice Framework. Casework Specialists will support and coach caseworkers to further develop this capability and will play a pivotal role in the implementation of the Family Based Assessment Tool.

Will there be training and resources available to Family Preservation providers?

Access to information and resources will be available via the microsite. This will include the publishing of the PowerPoint presented at the sessions held on 26 and 27 August 2024, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet and a *Change Matrix*.

The *Change Matrix* translates the assessment changes as they will appear on referrals to program providers, from the previously scored outcome of the Risk Assessment to the FBA and In Need of Care and Protection outcome.

Providers are encouraged to contact the Family Preservation mailbox if they have any queries that are not answered by the information provided.

How long is the interim period expected to be?

DCJ has committed to working in partnership with AbSec, Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) and Aboriginal communities to review the assessment policies, practice, procedures and frameworks, that govern statutory child protection assessment. The Interim approach to assessment in child protection will remain in place while co-design on the future approach occurs.

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How will DCJ caseworkers confirm service eligibility in lieu of the former Risk Assessment scoring outcomes (Low, Moderate, High & Very High)?

Eligibility and suitability will still need to be considered by both the DCJ casework team and the provider receiving the referral.

The narratives and rationale within the Family Based Assessment and In Need of Care and Protection (INOCP) record will inform service eligibility and suitability. The INOCP record will note what Risk of Significant harm issue was identified and will help program providers to understand the basis for the referral.

Further information around how the change from Risk Assessment scoring outcomes to the Family Based Assessment and In Need of Care and Protection record can be found in the criterion summary.

Prior to the Interim Assessment Approach the rules for closing when families were working with PSP-Family Preservation program was two SDM Risk reassessments with an outcome of 'medium'. In the absence of these outcomes what are the rules for closure for these families now?

The Measuring Change assessment replaces the risk reassessment.

The Measuring Change assessment asks:

- Whether DCJ needs to continue working with the family
- Or, if there are adequate protective measures provided by the family, network, services or community that mean DCJ can exit the family's life and close the plan.

A decision that DCJ does not need to remain involved does not mean that all issues need to be completely resolved. It supports thinking about whether it is safe/good 'enough' and the family can continue to resolve the issues with other (non-statutory) support.

To close when a family is involved with a PSP – Family Preservation program the Measuring Change assessment is completed by the CSC in collaboration with the service provider. If there is an agreed outcome of 'no' to the question of '*does DCJ need to remain involved with the family to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child?*' the plan for the family can be closed.

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What do we do if we receive a referral with no INOCAP assessment?

Prior to the interim approach SARA was not mandatory in order to make a referral for programs like Family Preservation (former BF and YH) and FFT-CW. As before, referrals can still be made to those programs if the safety assessment, FBA and INOCAP have not been applied. See below.

Preservation Program streams	Interim Approach eligibility
Family Preservation (former Brighter Futures and Youth Hope)	Safety Assessment (SA) and Family Based Assessment (FBA) <u>is not mandatory.</u> If applied; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA = safe • FBA = completed • INOCAP = NOT INOCAP ** INOCAP referrals may also be considered for referral & negotiation.

If referrals are missing any mandatory assessments for other programs, please contact the caseworker or CSC to request the assessments be provided.

Appendix A: Family Preservation Programs_ SARA INOCAP criterion

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