



# What is a Viability Assessment?

This leaflet explains the process to see whether relative(s) or friend(s) may be able to provide care for a child if neither of the child's parents are able to.

**Brighter Futures for Children  
Friends & Family  
Leaflet 4  
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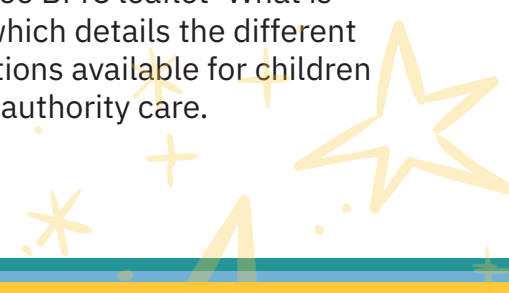
# What is a Viability Assessment?

When a local authority becomes aware that a child's parent(s), or any other adult(s) with parental responsibility, are unable to provide them with safe and appropriate care, and the child may need to be brought into its care, it must explore whether any member(s) of the child's family and friends' network could provide care in the short or longer term.

- ★ The child's family and friends network is usually considered to include the child's grandparents, uncles or aunts, adult siblings, family friends and neighbours. It may also include other adults such as teachers, carers, youth workers etc. who have been closely involved with the child.
- ★ Given this duty to explore any possible home options for the child within their wider family and friends network, the child's social worker will ask the child's parent(s) to suggest who they want Brighter Futures for Children to approach about the possibility of taking on the care of the child (whether on a short-term or longer-term basis).
- ★ Any potential family and friends carers who express an interest in caring for the child will be asked to take part in an initial screening assessment with the child's social worker. This will consider whether there are any immediate safeguarding concerns or any practical matters that may preclude them from looking after the child(ren). If the initial screening is positive, a viability assessment will be recommended.
- ★ The purpose of a viability assessment is to determine whether the relative(s) or friend(s) can provide care for the child if neither of the child's parents are able to. The assessment will also consider whether this arrangement could be limited to being short-term or if necessary, the potential carers

could care for the child permanently as part of their own family.

## What happens during a viability assessment?

- ★ When a potential family and friends carer(s) agrees to a viability assessment, a social worker based in Brighter Futures for Children's Family and Friends service will usually be allocated to work alongside the child's social worker to complete it. This worker (who is usually referred to as the 'assessing social worker') will contact the potential carer(s) and arrange to meet them.
  - ★ The viability assessment will normally be completed over several home visits to the applicant(s) and may also include video and phone calls with the applicant(s) and sometimes with their different family members.
  - ★ At the start of the viability assessment, the child's social worker will explain the child's situation and the local authority's concerns. The assessing social worker will explain the purpose of the viability assessment and ensure the potential carer(s) understands what they are being asked to consider. Discussions will take place around whether the potential carer(s) is able to take on the full-time care of the child, potentially on a permanent basis, and whether this is something they actually want to do. If the potential carer(s) feels able to make this commitment, different placement options will be discussed. This could include them caring for the child as family and friends foster carer, special guardian or adoptive parent. Please see BFFC leaflet 'What is permanence?' which details the different permanence options available for children who are in local authority care.
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- ★ The potential carer(s) should feel able to ask any questions to help them consider whether it is right for them to continue to progress the assessment.
- ★ As part of the viability assessment, the proposed carer(s) may be asked to allow Brighter Futures for Children to contact other agencies to ask if they hold any information that might be relevant to the assessment. This will include all adult members of the carer's household being asked to consent to DBS checks.
- ★ The viability assessment is intended to be a first step in the assessment journey. It is not a full assessment but will confirm whether a more detailed and lengthy assessment should be completed.
- ★ If positive, a viability assessment may also, in some circumstances (such as an emergency situation where the child has to be removed from their parent(s)' care immediately) enable the proposed carer(s) to be approved as a temporary family and friends foster carer(s) so the child can then live with them while a full assessment is being completed.

### **What type of questions are asked in a viability assessment?**

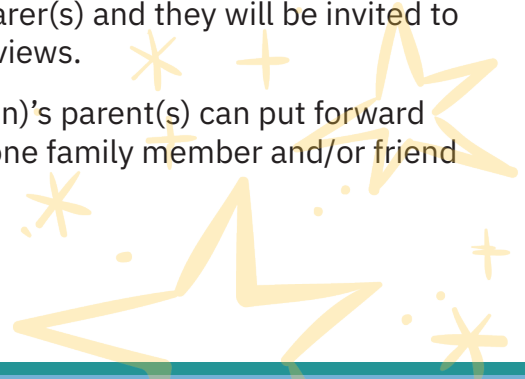
- ★ A decision to allow a child to live with a family and friends carer will have a significant impact on everyone involved. It is very important the viability assessment is completed in an open and thorough way so the assessing social worker can gain a detailed, balanced and accurate picture of the proposed carer(s) and their family circumstances.
- ★ The viability assessment should also enable the proposed carer(s) to access the information they need to make a considered

decision about whether caring for the child in the short-term or long-term is compatible with their other commitments and life plans. This first stage assessment should help everyone who is directly involved to decide whether it is fair, reasonable and appropriate for the proposed carer(s) to be further assessed.

- ★ Where a child has to live away from their parents, Brighter Futures for Children must make every effort to ensure any decision to place them with a particular family and friends carer(s) is right for the child as well as for the carer(s). Wherever possible, unnecessary moves to multiple different addresses need to be avoided to provide the child(ren) with consistency and stability.
- ★ Given the importance of the viability assessment, the assessing social worker will ask a lot of questions to explore the potential carer's relationship with the child(ren), their own history of parenting and family and their motivation for caring for the child(ren) – please see BFFC leaflet 'Questions Asked in a Viability Assessment'.

### **What happens next?**

- ★ Once the agreed assessment visits have been completed, the assessing social worker will write an report based on the information gathered. This will make a recommendation whether it is appropriate for the proposed carer(s) to be further assessed as potential carer(s) for the child(ren) and, if necessary, to become the child(ren)'s temporary foster carer(s).
- ★ The assessing social worker will share the viability assessment report with the proposed carer(s) and they will be invited to share their views.
- ★ The child(ren)'s parent(s) can put forward more than one family member and/or friend





to be assessed, so two or more viability assessments may be completed at the same time. If there is more than one positive viability assessment, the proposed carers will sometimes be invited to take part in a joint meeting (such as a Family Group Conference) with the aim of reaching a shared decision about who is best placed to go forward for a full assessment.

### Any questions?

If you have questions about any of the information contained in this leaflet, or you require further information, please contact your assessing social worker or the Team Manager of the Brighter Futures for Children Adoption & Permanence Service:

Name:

Email address:

Phone:

Alternatively, visit us online at [www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org](http://www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org)

