



All sectors can have an impact on the lives of children, including through family and community contexts. Their actions should support the healthy and safe development of children, or at the very least do no harm.

DEVELOPING A CHILD LENS

What is a Child Lens?

A child lens is a child impact assessment tool. It can help decision makers to understand how their policies, decisions and actions affect children. A child lens can take many different forms such as a checklist, an algorithm, or a set of open-ended questions.

Why is a Child Impact Assessment Important?

- Many decision makers are not fully aware of the impact their work has on children and families, and the short and long term outcomes at an individual and societal level
- Children often lack a voice in decision making and need to be represented
- Positively contributing to child and family development strengthens a community and can have multiple benefits for a broad cross section of stakeholders. Negatively impacting it can have serious and costly consequences

Which Initiatives/Decisions Should be Assessed?

- This decision has to be made within the agency concerned
- The question should be asked prior to every decision, as early on as possible, whether there is any palpable impact on children
 - **If the answer is no** and no child impact assessment is called for, then this decision needs to be documented
 - **If the answer is yes**, consideration should be given to the “magnitude”, and this again should guide whether a child impact assessment should be carried out and to what degree

From Cheshire East Council, *Child Impact Assessment Guidance*.

Process for Initiating a Child Impact Assessment

Following this process should enable a staff team to answer the core question: *What are the likely positive and negative impacts of a policy or activity on local children – including particular populations of children – and what are the alternatives that might mitigate these impacts?*

1. Screening

Attention should be focused on policies and activities likely to have significant effects on children, including disadvantaged groups within this population. Less-obviously child-related areas may be the most beneficial to assess. Criteria for choosing what to assess must include timelines, financial resources, and the availability of staff with suitable professional skills and motivation. This step should result in the choice of a policy area or activity for assessment.

2. Scoping

Scoping involves determining which aspects of a policy or activity are to be assessed and translating these into a single core research question which specifies the main aspects of the policy or activity to be assessed against the principle of the best interests of local children.

3. Information Gathering and Developing Questions

Other questions are then developed to investigate the core research question in detail. They might cover social, physical, behavioural, environmental, cultural, spiritual, and economic issues, and access to services. Both quantitative data and qualitative information can be used to shape the assessment. Much of this information will be available internally or online already. The methods used to find information should be clearly explained and justified. Ideally, children will be actively involved in some capacity, voicing their opinions and experiences. The outcome of this step will be a body of child-specific information related to the policy or activity being assessed.

4. Assessment

When the team is assessing the specific policy or activity against the gathered information, it may be useful to look for win-win options. Using multiple data collection methods allows a team to undertake iterative analysis and supports the credibility of the eventual findings. The outcome of this step will be a response to the research questions pertinent to the policy or activity.

5. Reporting

Suggesting solutions is constructive, and improves the likelihood of the assessment findings being heard by decision makers. The outcome of this step is a clear and useful paper for decision makers to act upon.

From Mason, N. and Hanna, K. *Undertaking Child Impact Assessments in Aotearoa New Zealand Local Authorities: Evidence, Practice, Ideas.*

Examples of Questions Used for Child Lenses

Example 1: Child Impact Assessment Process Form

1. Describe the initiative/proposal/policy etc. What is the aim or purpose?
2. Is there a direct or indirect impact upon children?
If yes, please describe the nature and level of the impact. Consideration to be given to all children, children in a specific group or area, or individual children. Also, consideration of impact now or in the future; positive or negative; competing/conflicting impact between different groups of children.
If no, please describe why there is considered to be no impact/significant impact on children.
3. How can any positive impact be maximized?
4. How can any negative impact be minimised/neutralized?
5. Has there been a consultation with children?
Yes / No
If yes, what was the nature and outcome of consultation? (may be drawing on previous consultations/views)
If no, what is the reason for not consulting with children?

Adapted from Cheshire East Council, *Child Impact Assessment Tool and Guidance*

Example 2: Children's Rights Impact Assessment

Section 1: Preliminary Screening

1. What is being proposed? (name, description and purpose of the policy or initiative)
2. Who initiated the proposal?
3. Who is to implement the proposal?
4. Which groups of children will be affected by the proposal?
5. List the positive impacts. (note the groups affected)
6. List the negative impacts. (note the groups affected, gaps or inconsistencies in the proposal)
7. Has there been any consultation in the development of the proposal? (note the groups, methods and outcomes)
8. What conclusions have been reached by you? Is the proposal the best way of achieving its aims, taking into account the best interests of children?
9. What recommendations should be made and who should be informed of them?
10. Is a full impact assessment required? (if yes, proceed to Section 2)

Section 2: More In Depth Assessment – Section 2 asks for further elaboration on questions 1 through 9 as well as:

11. What relevant information or evidence is available internally?
12. What relevant information or evidence is available externally?
13. Is further information or evidence required? Does the assessment have gaps in information, data collection or expertise?
14. Is there disagreement as to the likely impact of the proposal on children?
15. Has the do-nothing option been considered?
16. Can alternatives to the proposal be suggested?
17. What compensatory measures may be needed to avoid/mitigate a negative impact?
18. What overall impact will the proposal entail for other policy areas or agendas, or other professionals or groups in their work with children?
19. Are there any other relevant issues?
20. Should particular individuals or groups be made aware of the assessment?

Adapted from: *Children's Rights Impact Assessment*, Scotland. For more examples of assessment tools, please refer to Pompu, K. *Child Lens Tool Information Package*.

Evaluating the Efficacy of a Child Lens

- Monitoring the accuracy of risk and impact predictions is important.
- Evaluation questions can be added at the end of the child lens tool to have users assess it for its quality and usefulness.
- Questions could revolve around whether or not the tool improved the value of the decision making, the quality of discussion or the involvement of stakeholders.
- Questions could also explore:
 - What factors – harmful or beneficial – were identified that would not have been without the tool?
 - Did the tool allow for the better mitigation of harmful impacts or enhancement of beneficial impacts?
 - How well did the tool help to clarify the elements of trade-offs in policy making by better identification and description of the elements involved and their interrelationships?

Key Resources

Cheshire East Council. *Child Impact Assessment Tool and Guidance*. Safeguarding Children Board, Sandbach, UK, 2010.

http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/social_care_and_health/children_and_families/lscb_-_safeguarding_children/child_impact_assessment_guide.aspx

Children's Rights Impact Assessment. Scotland Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2006.

www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=10983

Mason, N. and Hanna, K. *Undertaking Child Impact Assessments in Aotearoa New Zealand Local Authorities: Evidence, Practice, Ideas*. Auckland, 2009.

www.unicef.org.nz/store/doc/OCC_CIA_180309.pdf

National Assembly for Wales. *Developing Health Impact Assessment in Wales*. Cardiff, 2000.

www.hiaconnect.edu.au/files/Developing_HIA_in_Wales.pdf

Pompu, K. *Child Lens Tool Information Package*. Prepared for the Vancouver Coastal Early Years Advocacy and Awareness Working Group, Vancouver, 2010.

<http://vancouver-coastal-early-years-framework.org/>