

CoramBAAF Conversations | What is a health assessment?

00:00:01 James Bury

My name's James Bury. I'm Head of Policy Research and Development at CoramBAAF and.

00:00:08 Ellie Johnson

I'm Ellie Johnson, and I'm the Health Consultant at CoramBAAF. And I work with James.

00:00:13 James Bury

And today, what are we going to be talking about?

00:00:18 Ellie Johnson

We're going to talk about health assessments. Those are health assessments for children in care.

00:00:25 Ellie Johnson

And the reason that I wanted to talk about this today is that it can be really really positive if social workers understand what health assessments are all about.

00:00:38 Ellie Johnson

And social workers and foster carers can be a real help in encouraging children and young people to have a positive view of their health assessment. So that's why I want to talk about that today.

00:00:53 James Bury

Brilliant, so what I'm going to do today is ask you quite a few questions about health assessments and some of the thing.

00:01:00 James Bury

And around that. So we'll we'll start with a quick one is why do we do health assessments.

00:01:06 Ellie Johnson

I think the bottom line is that we all and I think.

00:01:10 Ellie Johnson

That's quite a big word, we all.

00:01:13 Ellie Johnson

We all want children to be we all want children to be healthy now and into the future, really. And and it's just one of the things that we that we have that we can do, but there is.

00:01:27 Ellie Johnson

There are some regulations and guidance that mean that.

00:01:32 Ellie Johnson

Local authorities have to, by regulations, arrange health assessments for children in care that's right through from children from birth to 18. And and there's some statutory guidance that applies to health organisations.

00:01:49 Ellie Johnson

That asks health organisations to cooperate with local authorities when they're arranging health assessments, and so that's that's, I guess, our starting point.

00:02:00 Ellie Johnson

I think this thing that people perhaps don't realise about health assessments is that they have use for lots of different people and they're really positive and useful for children and young people, but also can be really useful for foster carers and social workers.

00:02:24 Ellie Johnson

And health professionals as well that are working with children, young people.

00:02:29 James Bury

I suppose you didn't go into in the beginning in the introduction is we introduced ourselves is that, you know is actually yours and my sort of previous experience of health assessment. So, what is in your sort of professional life, what has been your experience of health assessment?

00:02:46 Ellie Johnson

Before coming to at CoramBAAF back about six years ago.

00:02:50 Ellie Johnson

And my role was as a nurse specialist for children in care.

00:02:55 Ellie Johnson

And and I had that role for many years, probably getting on for 15 years and I had the fantastic experience of probably completing around about, I think probably around.

00:03:10 Ellie Johnson

Couple of thousands health assessments with children and young people and that was right from children and babies and children under 5 right to young people as they were leaving care so had so many different experiences.

00:03:29 Ellie Johnson

With all those children young people.

00:03:30 James Bury

That's that is a significant number of of young people and children that you've worked with in that sort of specific sort of, you know, piece of work and and I suppose from my experience, I'm I'm a social worker, my background. And so I've feel I've, I've, I've sent health assessment forms.

00:03:50 James Bury

To medical professionals and then have the information come back and then use that and engage with other professionals around around that sort of process.

00:03:59 James Bury

But what I'd say is I haven't ever actually been to a health assessment or or been a been in health assessment. So. So who does do health assessments just out of interest? So who is who is who? Who what, what? What sort of qualifications do you need to to be doing a?

00:04:16 James Bury

Health assessment. So, it does depend on where you are in the UK a little bit, there is some variability across the UK.

00:04:28 Ellie Johnson

And when children come into care, they need to be offered a health assessment, really within about the first three to four weeks of coming into care. And the first health assessment they have is normally with a medical practitioner, a doctor. Most of those doctors.

00:04:48 Ellie Johnson

Or paediatricians. Sometimes it might be a GP but services are set up differently around the UK and actually in Wales, for example, they more frequently might have this doing that initial health assessment.

00:05:10

And then when children have their review health assessments and and those are due for children every six months or every year, depending on how old children are and and that will more normally be a nurse who will do that health assessment. So the key thing is.

00:05:33 Ellie Johnson

That the person doing the health assessment does need to be a health practitioner of some kind. It does vary.

00:05:40 James Bury

Of the things, do they take place in sort of like, where do they take place or take place and practices do they? What's the sort of usual environment where a where a where a health assessment might take place?

00:05:52 Ellie Johnson

Again, that can vary around the country depending on how services are set up so.

00:06:01 Ellie Johnson

Ideally, it would be wherever children and young people, and perhaps their carers choose to have the health assessment, but we know the reality is sometimes that's not always possible, so it can be as a sort of health clinic, and that can be in hospital or it could be a health facility in the in the community.

00:06:24 Ellie Johnson

But it also could be in the foster carers home or wherever the child is living.

00:06:34 Ellie Johnson

So my experience was more often I would go and see children with their foster carers or in their residential homes and go and visit them and have a, you know, an hour of their time wherever they were.

00:06:51 Ellie Johnson

But just very occasionally, maybe in school, but that's not so, that's not so, common.

00:06:57 James Bury

That's interesting. So that that my perceptions is of of of young people going to a clinic somewhere and being seen by someone. So it's really interesting to hear them being visited at home and and that being sort of what happens.

00:07:12 S James Bury

And I suppose just what do young people think about their health assessments and your perspective? I mean, you've obviously there's, there's your experience of 1000 young people and children. You know, they all have different experiences. But what? What do young, how young people find their health assessments?

00:07:28 Ellie Johnson

Young people, I think sometimes are quite anxious about health assessments before they come.

00:07:35 Ellie Johnson

They may sometimes not have an awful lot of information about what health assessments are, who's going to be there, what's going to happen at the health assessment.

00:07:47 Ellie Johnson

And that's really where foster carers and social workers can really help, because if those people can explain to children and young people and reassure them about their health assessment, they can reduce that, that worry for the child.

00:08:06 Ellie Johnson

I think I actually remember some young people who perhaps had had a couple of health assessments that were really keen to come back and have a another chat with somebody that they'd already met. So,

so some children and young people we're we're quite keen to come along and there was, you know, a real variety. There's been some work done with young people asking them about health assessments.

00:08:37 Ellie Johnson

So there's PhD researcher who a couple of years ago did a study with young people and she asked them a lot, a lot, of questions about what, how they felt about their health assessments.

00:08:50 Ellie Johnson

They did say that they felt they hadn't had enough information about what health assessments were, and a lot of young people reported that actually, and this is a bit worrying, they reported that they didn't really feel that they'd given their consent to what was happening. So they sort of arrived at appointment and didn't really know what it was about.

00:09:11 Ellie Johnson

And what was really positive in that study actually was that a lot of young people reported that that their health professionals that they met were really interested and welcoming and actually sort of helped them with some of things that they wanted to talk about. Some of their worries and concerns. So that was very positive.

00:09:32 James Bury

And I think that's really interesting because when I reflect back on practise and I sometimes remember that that period, you know in ahead of that initial health assessment, that would often be after quite probably quite a trip.

00:09:48 James Bury

You know, difficult and intensive periods running up to say the proceedings where where a child, where a decision may be made to for a child to become looked after and and then there's a load of load of work to do sort of immediately after from the child's going to their.

00:10:07 James Bury

Where they're going to live to meeting new people they're living with, and then all of the things that go along with that and then part of that is arranging this initial health assessment. And just looking back, I sort of wonder about my own practise in terms of talking to young people about what was going to happen and this part.

00:10:27 James Bury

Of you know.

00:10:28 James Bury

The process, which would involve them and So what would you say to so what would be the key message you'd say to sort of social workers in that situation?

00:10:37 Ellie Johnson

Yeah, I think it's it's really, it's really important for social workers to really get to know the local system for health assessments, for health assessments. So there will be a system in terms of somebody in the social care team will do a referral, a notification that a child has come into care and is going to need a health assessment.

00:11:03 Ellie Johnson

That's often an administrative task, and sometimes social workers aren't quite aware really of who's who's doing what. And so the first thing is that social work, knowledge of the local system and then I think if social workers can.

00:11:22 Ellie Johnson

Get to know maybe a couple of people from the local health team that are doing these health assessments to maybe if they've never been to a health assessment before, they can go along and find out, maybe go along with one of their children to a health assessment and find.

00:11:39 Ellie Johnson

Out what health assessment is all about, you know what the clinic is like that's used locally and then they'll probably find out that actually a lot of health teams try really hard to be, as you know, as flexible as they can be with appointments in the first for the initial health assessment.

00:11:59 Ellie Johnson

So a lot of health teams will, you know, contact foster carers and have a conversation over the phone and say, you know, we really appreciate this couple of weeks is particularly busy with a lot of meetings.

00:12:11 Ellie Johnson

Probably going on.

00:12:13 Ellie Johnson

Maybe new schools and Doc GP to sort out and things like that and. And so there'll often be, you know, an individual conversation about, you know, how we, how can we make sure that the appointment time works for everybody? It is tricky because.

00:12:34 Ellie Johnson

Health professionals, you know, are bit based on time and so that can be quite, quite difficult.

00:12:45 Ellie Johnson

But I think yeah, just for the social worker to really find out about what happens locally so that they can then explain that to foster carers that might not and as well what what health assessments are all about.

00:13:00 James Bury

Are there any sort of health assessments that you can recall yourself that are sort of either ticking, memorable, or just or just actually like in completing a health assessment. Some of the things that you

found really sort of useful and powerful that sort of enable that to feel like a good health assessment for you and for particularly for the young person or the child?

00:13:20 Ellie Johnson

Yeah, yeah, it's it. It is really important to think about what is a good health assessment. One of the things that foster carers and social workers and children, young people really need is for all their health information to be collated into one place, because if their.

00:13:39 Ellie Johnson

Parent isn't there, parents basically have all the information about their child's health history in their memory, in their experience, and if that parent isn't going to be there alongside a child, then we need to do that in a different way.

00:14:00 Ellie Johnson

And so actually one starting point for a good health assessment is when you have been able to gather all that all that information together that can be from social worker, from parents, from records, and that you feel like you've got.

00:14:21 Ellie Johnson

A real picture of that child's health up to now. So that's a stock. That's the basic starting point for a really good health assessment and that's very reliant on social workers passing on information. And and it's, you know, yeah, sometimes.

00:14:39 Ellie Johnson

It is appropriate for parents to attend the health assessment, the first health assessment or or all health assessments with their children. Sometimes it's not appropriate, but actually and, and that's where we often in health rely on the social worker thinking about that thinking.

00:14:58 Ellie Johnson

Is this?

00:14:59 Ellie Johnson

Appropriate for the the parent to attend the health assessment appointment with the child, because then the health practitioner can directly ask all those questions to the parent and that can be really good starting point.

00:15:18 Ellie Johnson

I think in terms of sort of memorable, that's what I'm talking about at the starting point for a really good health assessment. And then there's the whole thing about.

00:15:27 Ellie Johnson

You know, we really want the the children to feel like their health assessment is all about them.

00:15:38 Ellie Johnson

For them to feel comfortable and for them to be able to raise any concerns and worries they've got about their health.

00:15:44 Ellie Johnson

Obviously, that's really quite tricky. Like you said, James, this particularly the first health assessment and this is, you know, really difficult time in a child's life. So to so. So to sort of make that a comfortable experience can be really tricky. And that's really very dependent offering.

00:16:04 Ellie Johnson

And the foster carer or residential social worker helping the child feel comfortable and I.

00:16:14 Ellie Johnson

Was more often doing review health.

00:16:16 Ellie Johnson

Assessments and so that would be.

00:16:21 Ellie Johnson

Six months or a year, perhaps after a child has come into care. So that's a that's a different situation. Actually. The carers know the children much.

00:16:32 Ellie Johnson

Much better. And it is, yeah, a different context.

00:16:38 Ellie Johnson

I think the health assessments that stick out for me sometimes are about the unusual places.

00:16:45 Ellie Johnson

I I was with young people.

00:16:52 Ellie Johnson

Sometimes young people aren't that keen on coming to a clinic, and they're also not that keen on you on sitting down with you when you arrive at the foster carers home and and so it can be difficult to encourage young people to engage in the conversation.

00:17:12 Ellie Johnson

I definitely I used to take my dog my spaniel, sometimes. Obviously by prior arrangement with some residential homes, because young people would really like to sit down with me and the dog and have a conversation. So that's.

00:17:30 Ellie Johnson

Possibly some of my more memorable health assessments.

00:17:34 James Bury

Thinking about it purely from a real engagement point of view, you're trying to help a young child, young person sort of be feel comfortable and confident to, to actually talk with you and engage with that assessment was that was what you were thinking about.

00:17:47 Ellie Johnson

Yeah, I I never found. I never found it that easy to sit down with a a form and write on it. I never used to do that because that was the way that I particularly worked. I'd have a conversation.

00:18:07 Ellie Johnson

And I'd know what what things I was wanting to to to talk about with the young person, but I wouldn't sort of sit down and do a question and answer thing, but that's just the way that I used to work. And so so sometimes there I would be.

00:18:25 Ellie Johnson

Trying to engage with uh young person in in whatever with whatever they wanted to do, sometimes just to sort of break down those that that awkwardness. If I've got to sit here and talk to a health professional.

00:18:42 Ellie Johnson

I do remember.

00:18:43 Ellie Johnson

I happened to be on a trip once with a group of young people who were.

00:18:50 Ellie Johnson

Sort of 16 and 17. And I knew there was a I I was on a outdoor pursuits trip because I was really lucky. I used to be able to do those those sorts of things as well.

00:19:03 Ellie Johnson

And and I knew there were a couple of young people in the group that had.

00:19:09 Ellie Johnson

Decided they didn't want to come to their health assessment a couple of months before and but I ended up canoeing with this one and young man and and I was in the back of a double canoe with him and he was in the front and we ended up chatting about all sorts of things and.

00:19:28 Ellie Johnson

Actually, at the end of the day on the river, I said Ohh, you know what, as we've talked about a lot of things that I would have talked about.

00:19:38 Ellie Johnson

You know, if you'd come to see me for your health assessment and and I sort of asked him, can I write up your health plan? Because that's what we like to produce out of a health assessment is a actual plan

of Action for Children, young people and carers and social workers, so that if there's anything that needs following up.

00:19:58 Ellie Johnson

Missing any referrals that we need to make to make sure that young people get the services that they need. That's what we'll do in a health assessment. That's the outcome of the health assessment is a health plan for that child and young person.

00:20:11 Ellie Johnson

And and for all that information to be collated for social workers and foster carers and GP's to refer to as well, and so at, at the end of that day, I just asked him and said, look, actually, we've talked about all those things. Can we and can I write you a health plan from what we've talked about today and.

00:20:30 Ellie Johnson

He was happy with that.

00:20:31 Ellie Johnson

And so that's what.

00:20:32 Ellie Johnson

We did.

00:20:33 James Bury

I mean that. Yeah, that sounds so. Yeah, that's sort of thinking outside.

00:20:36 James Bury

The box to.

00:20:39 James Bury

So actually, you know you've you've got you've got that engagement in that moment actually that that could could work in terms of being a health assessment. And I suppose you sort of you've sort of said that what what is the outcome and the information that comes out. So you've got the health plan, what what is anything else that comes out from the health assessment?

00:20:59 Speaker 1

In terms of the information discussed and the.

00:21:02 Ellie Johnson

The health professional really needs to look at the child's previous health history, think what's happened in the past, what things might affect that child's health, and and they do need to do a bit of analysis of that. And then.

00:21:20 Ellie Johnson

Summarise that and explain those things that in a way flag things that that social workers and carers may need to be.

00:21:31 Ellie Johnson

And aware of because of the child's past health history that can be to do with information that we have about the child's family health. So there might be things that in the future we need to be thinking about for that, for.

00:21:46 Ellie Johnson

That child, and so the health professional will sort of go through that process as sort of summarising.

00:21:52 Ellie Johnson

And analysing that information, and very often, we find that children and young people, particularly as they come into care, that they've missed out on.

00:22:05 Ellie Johnson

Uh health services and that, you know, we might need to be making sure that they are referred into those services again and that we perhaps try and advocate for children to receive those services.

00:22:20 James Bury

I've had. I've just. I I remember. I I was working with a child and and I've found that after the health assessment that they were asthmatic and that I hadn't been fully in and actually I was. I was quite, you know, as their social worker I thought I should have been aware of of that detail but my the risks of sort of in other areas but I haven't been.

00:22:41 James Bury

Looking at that and.

00:22:41 James Bury

So then sort of foster carers, it's really important that they have.

00:22:45 James Bury

Their asthma inhaler and understood how to use it and and and how to support the the young person in in using that and so it's it's things like that that came out to me but I that's one I.

00:22:54 James Bury

I certainly remember.

00:22:56 Ellie Johnson

Lots of people have said to me in the past, look, children, young people can go to their.

00:23:00 Ellie Johnson

GP and all their normal health services. Why do we have these extra health assessments for children in care, but actually?

00:23:09 Ellie Johnson

You know, GP appointments normally 10 minutes long, isn't.

00:23:12 Ellie Johnson

It if that's.

00:23:14 Ellie Johnson

You know, there's an awful lot that we need to think about for children that are perhaps no longer, you know, with their, with their parents. And so there is quite a lot to think about, and it often does take maybe an appointment of up to an.

00:23:29 Ellie Johnson

Hour long to go through all the things that that we want to, so we definitely will be doing some sort of health tips for children, young people as well.

00:23:42 Ellie Johnson

And so, for example, you know we know a lot of children perhaps have problems sleeping.

00:23:51 Ellie Johnson

And so we'll, you know, as a health professional, we'll be in the position to give some health hygiene tips for children, young people. That's just an example. And and we might follow that up with some extra information that we'll add to the child's health plan so that they can go away and and and go and look at those.

00:24:10 Ellie Johnson

Those tips that we've given them again.

00:24:14 Ellie Johnson

And uh.

00:24:15 Ellie Johnson

But the other thing is that this is a real opportunity for social workers or carers that have got a particular concerns about a particular aspect of a child's health, and so it might be that it's something that perhaps they're not thinking the child needs to go to their GP or.

00:24:35 Ellie Johnson

To you know, another health service about, but it's something that, you know, they want to ask a health professional, some some sort of expert advice on. So it's a really good opportunity. The health assessment to do that and actually.

00:24:53 Ellie Johnson

It can be difficult if you're with a child, sometimes as a carer or social worker to ask those questions in front of the child. So most health professionals are really happy for a carer or social worker to call them for their health assessment.

00:25:13 Ellie Johnson

Or maybe after the health assessment and say actually.

00:25:16 Ellie Johnson

We, you know, I'd like to just discuss this in a little bit more detail and it wasn't appropriate. It's not going to be.

00:25:21 Ellie Johnson

Appropriate to discuss.

00:25:22 Ellie Johnson

That when the child's there as well. So it's very much should be used as an opportunity for carers and social workers as well, to have that sort of direct conversation with a health professional.

00:25:37 Ellie Johnson

Got that child's health records in front of them.

00:25:41 James Bury

Yeah. Having that sort, that's communication and feeling ready to make a connection with another professional or someone that you're working with just to add that bit extra if there is something in the back of your mind that.

00:25:53 James Bury

You think is.

00:25:56 James Bury

And just what? What helps children and young people benefit from the appointment. I mean, we've talked a bit about the sort of benefits of sort of like actually having the health health appointment and the purpose and the reason is anything that sort of you see as a real benefit from this.

00:26:12 Ellie Johnson

Sometimes children and young people can be really.

00:26:18 Ellie Johnson

Worried about uh going to all sorts of different appointments and seeing all sorts of different people, particularly when they're in.

00:26:26 Ellie Johnson

Care and sometimes the health assessment appointment, it's.

00:26:30 Ellie Johnson

A way of can be a way of.

00:26:33 Ellie Johnson

Really engaging young people and saying, actually.

00:26:38 Ellie Johnson

It's, you know, it's OK. Health professionals are OK, you know.

00:26:45 Ellie Johnson

And it's it's not an appointment where we're doing anything very invasive with a child or young person. So we're not normally giving injections or taking blood or.

00:26:59 Ellie Johnson

That sometimes, particularly younger children, then they might need a little bit of a physical examination, but it's not that invasive an appointment, and it can.

00:27:13 Ellie Johnson

You know, help children feel comfortable with, you know, visiting health professionals generally. So that's one sort of positive thing about about health assessments that they then might find it easier to engage with.

00:27:31 Ellie Johnson

With other appointments.

00:27:35 Ellie Johnson

I I think it.

00:27:37 Ellie Johnson

Can also give.

00:27:39 Ellie Johnson

And children and young people are sensed that we sort of really care about their individual health and well-being.

00:27:47 Ellie Johnson

And and that we are, you know there is something just for them. We're spending a dedicated.

00:27:57 Ellie Johnson

Or to thinking about their them individually so it can make it. Hopefully they can feel like it's an appointment for for them.

00:28:10 James Bury

I mean, I I just sort of reflecting like I would always whenever I received to having filled out that initial sort of health information which had then gone to.

00:28:20

Right.

00:28:22 James Bury

Gone to gone.

00:28:23 James Bury

To health practitioners and then have return. Otherwise find that there would be quite a lot of really rich.

00:28:29 James Bury

And really important information that would come back.

00:28:32 James Bury

To me, as child social worker, that and and quite often things I didn't realise about them, which just added to sort of a bigger picture.

00:28:41 James Bury

Again, sort of probably leading into.

00:28:44 James Bury

A A looked off child review meeting as well and would be written some of the information from there would be hugely important as well. Just sort of any sort of like final sort of like thoughts or top tips or anything that you want to sort of say about health assessments.

00:29:04 Ellie Johnson

In general, well, I think social workers that support foster carers can really pass on to tips.

00:29:12 Ellie Johnson

Some tips to foster carers as well new foster carers. You know, a lot of foster carers obviously are used to going to these appointments, you know.

00:29:21 Ellie Johnson

But just some really simple things like, you know, encouraging foster carers to take some things along with them to help the child feel comfortable, some, you know, some snacks and a drink and some of some toys.

00:29:41 Ellie Johnson

If they're younger children to play with and for, it is just really helpful. If Foster care is sort of.

00:29:52 Ellie Johnson

Give a very positive.

00:29:56 Ellie Johnson

View of the health assessment. So even if it is really hard for them in their very busy week to fit in this appointment, maybe travel to a an appointment, you know, we know that is really difficult if they can sort of.

00:30:15 Ellie Johnson

Just sound very enthusiastic that you know it's a good it. This is great. You know, we're just.

00:30:23 Ellie Johnson

Gonna go along.

00:30:24 Ellie Johnson

And have a chat with the doctor and they can do that explaining with the child. And so sometimes we need the social workers to encourage foster carers to do that.

00:30:35 Ellie Johnson

And and I mean and. And they often do.

00:30:38 James Bury

And I can sort of imagine that as well. And just in terms of just the knowing the business of of foster carers and just how many.

00:30:47 James Bury

Sort of. Different schedules and routines and school runs and picking up to for family time. Just all of that is just, you know, there's so much to manage that it's just particularly around that often in that sort of initial period as well when a child's become looks after that, there's.

00:31:06 James Bury

A lot going on that.

00:31:07 James Bury

It can be so, so I can see how that's sort of really important advice and and yeah, could be challenging.

00:31:12 James Bury

So yeah, that's good advice. Well, that's about it. So thanks so much, Sherry. I've learned already quite a lot just from this conversation. So I just want to say thanks so much for all this conversation. And yeah, we'll listen to this online when it goes up.