

CARE AND PROTECTION

ADVOCATES TIP SHEET

A SAFETY ASSESSMENT - WHEN DCJ CASEWORKERS COME TO VISIT

This tipsheet is designed to help advocates ensure that DCJ safety assessments are accessible, fair, and practical for parents with cognitive disability

1

Pre safety assessment

2

During safety assessment

3

Post safety assessment

4

Advocate toolkit

Pre safety assessment

Self reflection and mindset

- Be honest about your own biases. You must believe that, with the right supports, this person is the right person to parent their child.
- Avoid deficit-based language, as it can be used against the parent in court. Always use strength-based language with DCJ. Instead of "Parent is unable to..." use "With X support, parent can..."

Practical preparation

- Ask the parent how they prefer to communicate. Do they need Easy Read, an interpreter, or frequent breaks? Inform DCJ of these needs before the meeting, if possible.
- Help the parent ensure the home is tidy, dangerous items are locked away, and the fridge/cupboards are well-stocked with food, medicine, and hygiene products.

Pre safety assessment

- Work with the parent to list their safe people and supports (Easy Read - Safety assessment prep sheet)
 - Informal - Family and friends.
 - Formal - NDIS providers/ therapists/supports
- Help the parent list the parenting tools they have in place to look after their child, e.g., charts, daily planners, timers, special equipment (Easy Read - My parenting story)
- Work with the parent to prepare their answers to common questions that are asked at a safety assessment (Easy Read - Safety assessment prep sheet, Easy Read - My parenting story)

Legal rights

- Ensure the parent knows they can have you present. If DCJ arrive unannounced, the parent can call you and put you on speakerphone.
- Remind the parent that the assessment starts from the very first interaction. Everything said or done is recorded and may be used in court.
- Everyone has the right to legal advice. If they need help, contact either:
 - Ability Rights Centre (ARC): (02) 9265 6350
 - Legal Aid NSW Head Office (Haymarket): (02) 9219 5000

During the safety assessment

- Don't answer for them. If you speak for the parent, DCJ may interpret it as a lack of competence.
- If a question is too complex, speak up: "I'm finding that phrasing difficult to follow; it's likely my client is too. Could we rephrase that?"
- Record the caseworker's name, office, and contact details. Take notes but focus only on factual events, as these notes can be subpoenaed by the court later.
- Watch for signs of overwhelm. Advocate for a break if the parent is struggling.

Post safety assessment

- Sit with the parent to discuss how they feel and clarify what they understood the next steps or agreements to be. Ask the parent to tell you in their own words to gauge understanding.
- Check written plans for deficit-based language or medical inaccuracies. Ensure that the person's disability is described accurately and not based on assumptions. Ask for changes to be made, if required.
- This process is distressing. Encourage the parent to book a long appointment with their GP to discuss a Mental Health Plan if they don't already have one.

Advocate toolkit

- Easy Read - Safety assessment prep sheet
- Easy Read - My parenting story
- Child Protection Guide for Families and Easy Read versions – this guide was written by DCJ and provides a good overview of the care and protection process. It is worthwhile reading through this guide and explaining it to the parent in a way they can understand.

