

Parent Capacity Assessment (PCA) Fact Sheet

What is the purpose?: The purpose of a PCA is to determine a parent's ability to meet the needs of their child(ren) and to provide recommendations towards further planning for the parents and children. Usually PCA's are requested by a Child and Family Services social worker when concerns arise in regards to parenting and an objective second opinion is warranted. The CFS worker does not complete the assessment.

Who completes the assessment?: A qualified psychologist or social worker. This is a neutral, unbiased party assessing the strengths and needs of the parents and children.

How long does it take?: Usually the PCA will take up to 8 weeks and includes several interviews with the participants, family observations and gathering of collateral information. However the length of the assessment can vary depending on different situations and whether appointments have to be rescheduled.

Is it confidential?: A PCA is confidential in that only the assessor and agency will have access to the written report. However, it is not confidential as the report can be required as a court document and may need to be sent to legal counsels and become part of the court record.

Is it like therapy or a parenting class?: A PCA is not therapy or a parenting class. The purpose is to assess, not to educate. Furthermore, the assessor is not acting as a counsellor when conducting these assessments.

What is the process?:

The process of the PCA may include, but is not limited to:

- Interview and gathering of information - the person conducting the PCA will spend time interviewing the client, this can last for 1 - 3 hours and varies depending on the assessor. The assessor will also talk with family members and other people involved in the individual's life, including the child and family services social worker to gather information which will assist in the assessment. Topics discussed include: parenting, childhood history, relationships, addictions, mental health, abuse issues etc.
- Children may be interviewed depending on their age.
- Observation - the assessor will observe the parent and children interact. This could take place in the family home, the assessor's office, or a child and family services office.
- Feedback - after the assessment has been completed the assessor may go over the outcome of the assessment with the parent. This is usually a summary of strengths and areas of concern in regards to parenting skills and capacities. This can happen in person or over the phone.

What if things are unclear?: It is important that parents receiving a PCA understand the reason it is being requested. There is always a choice to participate or not. If there are unanswered questions it is best to speak to their child and family service worker. It is also within the parent's rights to speak with a lawyer.