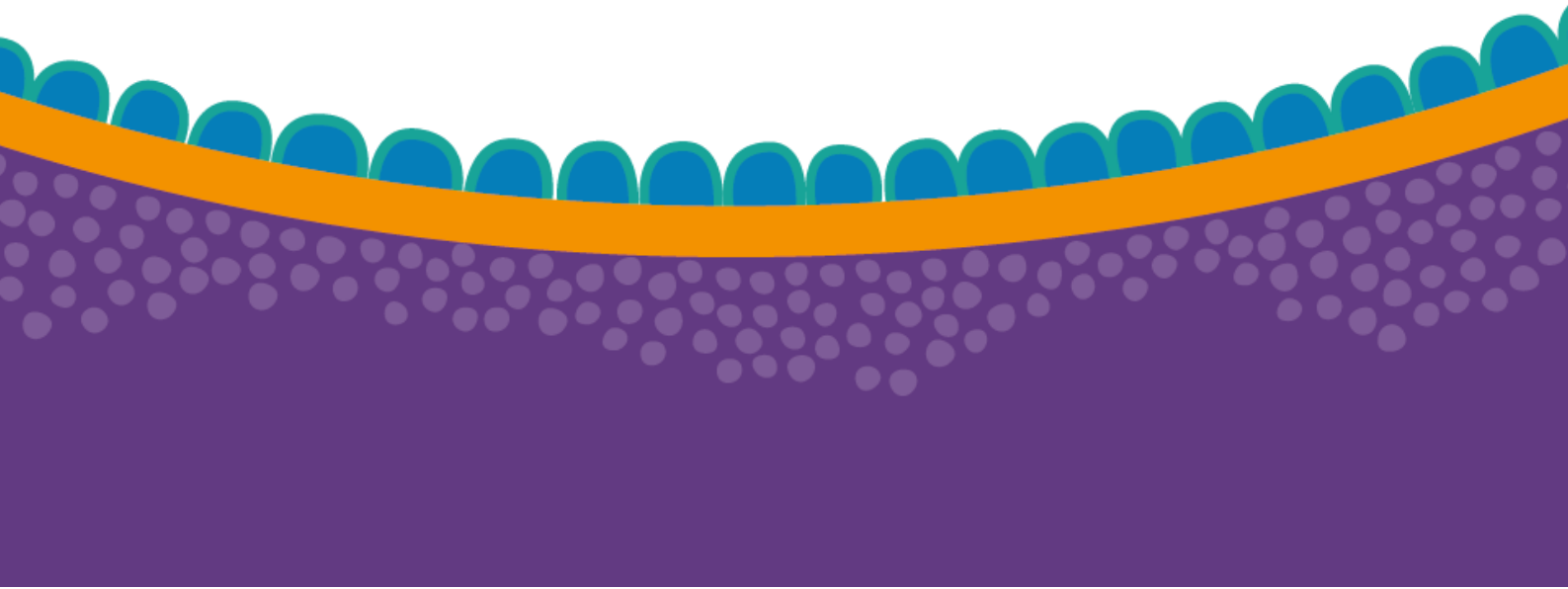
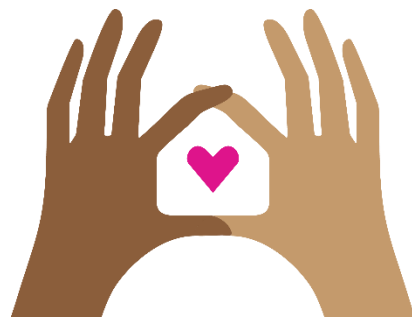


Fact sheet

# Aboriginal family-led assessment

*A cultural lens over assessment processes improves how caseworkers assess safety, risk, needs and strengths*



This factsheet was developed by the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) in partnership with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).



This introductory factsheet is one in a series that describes the four key enablers that underpin the Aboriginal Case Management Policy. The enablers include:

- Aboriginal family led decision making (AFLDM)
- Aboriginal family led assessment (AFLA)
- Aboriginal community controlled mechanism (ACCMs)
- Proactive efforts.

These factsheets define the enablers broadly. They have been designed to promote discussion amongst Aboriginal communities and service providers about how they could be effectively implemented at the local level. Local communities are unique and how the key enablers apply need to be founded on the strengths and needs of children, families and their communities.

DCJ is committed to work with Aboriginal communities to identify how the key enablers can be applied to improve work practices across the community services sector. The enablers are founded on the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles.

## Overview

Developed by AbSec, after extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities and a range of stakeholders, the ACMP and related Rules and Practice Guidance provide a high level operational framework for all caseworkers and practitioners working with Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

The ACMP applies across the entire support continuum, from targeted early intervention, child protection and Out-Of-Home care. It applies to the delivery of programs and services by a range of stakeholders including DCJ case workers, Aboriginal Controlled Organisations and other funded service providers.

Importantly the ACMP recognises the rights of Aboriginal families and Aboriginal communities in caring for their children, and the key enablers provide broad guidance on how they should be involved.

## What is Aboriginal family-led assessment?

Aboriginal family-led assessment (AFLA) is the process of applying a 'cultural lens' over current assessment processes to improve how caseworkers assess safety, risk, needs and strengths.

Aboriginal family led assessment sets the foundation for Aboriginal case planning. AFLA helps with meaningful engagement and consultation to gather information from the perspectives of the child, family and community. It supports development of case plans using Aboriginal family-led decision making processes (AFLDM).

AFLA is used at key points in the Aboriginal Family Strengthening and Child Safety continuum of support.

## Principles of Aboriginal family-led assessment

- Culturally appropriate in approach to dealing with Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities
- Holistic understanding of and approach to a child or young person's circumstance
- Aboriginal understanding of health and wellbeing



- Strengths based, family centred
- Trauma-informed.

### What is meant by ‘applying a cultural lens’?

Applying a cultural lens over the assessment process means a family-centred approach to understanding the child and their family context.

The use of cultural knowledge, standards and values provides this context to Aboriginal children, young people, families and community.

Applying a cultural lens is critical in assessing a child’s safety, welfare and wellbeing. This includes the child’s ongoing care and protection. It assists caseworkers to better assess safety, risk, needs and strengths of children and their families and make informed decisions about the support required. Importantly, it is used to prevent harm, preserve families and achieve restoration.

**Culture is a fundamental part of AFLA.** The process aims to:

- assess the family needs and strengths
- identify and clarify the family members’ values, concerns and future aspirations
- ensure cultural standards and expectations of assessment are maintained
- support the family to identify practical, educational, therapeutic and advocacy supports
- inform case plan goals and strategies
- identify cultural needs including healing and emotional wellbeing supports.

It involves gathering information relating to the family’s community, culture and Country; family structures and environments. This includes Aboriginal child rearing practices and the impact of trauma, including intergenerational trauma, on the child and family’s emotional wellbeing and disadvantage.

The AFLA process works to ensure the care and support provided to children and families is holistic and culturally appropriate, strengths based and family centred. The Aboriginal Child Placement Principles are central to the understanding and application of AFLA.

### Who is involved in AFLA and what are their roles and responsibilities?

#### *The child*

The child is given information to help them understand the process of AFLA, and supported to share their views and opinions. Where appropriate their views are clearly documented and become the center of the assessment process.

#### *Child’s family and significant others*

Families are supported and empowered to actively engage and lead the process, providing information relative to the safety, risk, needs and strengths of the child and family. The family’s full participation, including kin and other significant others, is important to ensure the process incorporates the diversity and uniqueness of Aboriginal families. Different to many western cultures the Aboriginal extended family and the community play a key roles in the upbringing of children.



## Caseworkers

The caseworker has a range of responsibilities to ensure the views and opinion of the child and family are central and families feel safe and empowered to contribute to the assessment process. This includes ensuring:

- assessment models are sensitive, include cultural considerations, and are understood by all involved
- the ongoing involvement of the child's family and community
- the assessment process is open and transparent
- relevant information is recorded and made available for family
- discussions with family and community are clear and honest
- family are aware of future steps in the assessment, and where appropriate, re-assessment, and are updated with any relevant changes
- all concerns related to risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports and safety and risk assessments (SARA) are clarified.

Wherever possible an Aboriginal practitioner leads the assessment process, or supports non-Aboriginal caseworkers throughout the assessment process. Building strong relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) in the district will support this process.

### **Aboriginal family-led assessment within the continuum of support**

Aboriginal family led assessment has an important role across Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Tier 2) and Aboriginal Child Safety (Tier 3).

Through the implementation of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy, AbSec, in partnership with DCJ, aims to identify processes and good practices about how AFLA can be integrated into day-to-day support service planning and delivery.

#### **Tier 2: Aboriginal Family Strengthening (family preservation)**

Family Strengthening provides targeted and intensive supports for children, young people and families that address risks and aims to prevent more intrusive responses.

Services are flexible and tailored to individual family needs to build the capacity of key adults caring for children. This is critical for the preservation of children and their families.

Services include Brighter Futures, Intensive Family Based Services, Functional Family Therapy - Child Welfare (FFT-CW) and Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect (MST-CAN).

It is critical that Aboriginal family led assessments are integrated into the case planning process.

#### **Tier 3: Aboriginal Child Safety (out-of-home care)**

Child Safety seeks to strengthen the capacity and skills of the community to support its vulnerable families, by providing supports and services for a child who has experienced maltreatment. This ensures their safety, wellbeing and welfare.

These approaches focus on restoration and reunification, maintaining important relationships and promoting cultural connection. They ensure children stay in their communities when it is not safe for them to remain with their parents.

Services cover restoration, foster and relative/kin care arrangements, Intensive Therapeutic Care, and leaving care and after care planning.



Aboriginal family led assessments must continue to be applied in the development and review of care plans and case plans. Importantly these must be informed by cultural care plans and cultural support plans.

