

# Guidance note: Child-friendly version of the CoE Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool

This note is intended to support adults in using the child-friendly version of the Child-Friendly Justice (CFJ) Assessment Tool with children and young people. It provides key context, guidance on how to introduce the tool, and suggestions on how to frame the process in an accessible and meaningful way.

The purpose of this guide is to help adults use a visual tool developed as part of the [joint European Union–Council of Europe project ‘Child-Friendly Justice’](#). The video is a child-friendly version of the Child-Friendly Justice (CFJ) assessment tool. It was developed in close collaboration with children and young people and with the support of [Defence for Children International Belgium/ECPAT - Child Friendly Justice European Network](#), and the illustrator James Munro. The guide provides essential background information, advice on how to present the tool, and suggestions for structuring the process in an accessible and relevant way.

## Background & purpose

The child-friendly version of the CFJ Assessment Tool has two main objectives:

- To help children understand what the assessment tool is, why it exists, and how it contributes to protecting the rights of children in contact with justice systems across Europe.
- To explain, in a simple and accessible way, the main principles of how justice systems are assessed, and how children can take part in this process.

The tool is designed not only for children, but also for the adults who accompany them, ensuring that participation is meaningful, informed, and respectful.

## Explaining the tool to children

When introducing the tool to children, it is important to:

- **Fostering a relationship of equals:** You are there to gather the children’s views and to help them discover a tool designed specifically to support their rights.
- **Use simple and concrete language:** Explain that the tool helps “check how well the justice system works for children” and whether it treats them fairly and respectfully.
- **Emphasise their role:** Make it clear that their experiences, views, and opinions are valuable and can help improve the system.
- **Explain the idea of ‘assessment’:** You may compare it to reviewing or rating something (e.g. giving stars), to show that the system is being looked at carefully to see what works well and what could be improved.
- **Highlight key principles:** Use visual or practical examples to explain concepts such as participation, dignity, fairness, non-discrimination, and acting in the best interests of the child.

## Providing context

Children should understand that:

- The assessment is carried out to **improve justice systems**, not to judge individuals, to improve the experience of children in contact with the justice systems.
- There are **criteria and indicators** (such environments, communication, and language used by adults) that help guide the evaluation. In the video, the following icons are used:



**Child-friendly justice  
in the law**



**Access to child-  
friendly information**



**Best interest of the  
child**



**Right to be heard**



**Holistic approach /  
Collaboration**



**Training of  
professionals**



**Child-friendly  
environment**

- Their participation is part of a broader effort to ensure that systems are more responsive to children's needs, rights, and individual capacity.
- The results of the assessment are used by institutions and authorities to **identify strengths and make improvements over time**.
- It is helpful to reassure children that there are no "right or wrong answers", and that their honest perspectives are what matter most.

## Summary of the video

The video illustrates, in a simple and visual way, how the assessment process works.

It begins with an inspector arriving in a country to evaluate how child-friendly its justice system is. The inspector uses a set of criteria, reflecting the indicators of the assessment tool, to guide the evaluation. Different aspects of the system are reviewed and given a score using a five-star scale, depending on how well they meet child-friendly standards.

The inspector first looks at the legal framework of the country. In the scenario presented, the legal basis is relatively strong and receives a moderate score.

The inspector then meets three children, each with a different experience of the justice system:

- one in the context of parental separation,
- one in detention detention,
- one in a hearing at the police station.

In each case, the inspector listens to the child's experience and perspective. Together, they compare what the child experienced with what a child-friendly approach should look like. This includes elements such as whether the environment is appropriate for children, whether the child was able to actively participate, whether communication was clear and adapted to the child, whether professionals were properly trained, etc.

Based on these exchanges, the inspector and the children jointly assess different aspects of the system, again using the star rating.

At the end of the video, the inspector and the children present their findings to national institutions. This final step highlights that the purpose of the assessment is to provide feedback and encourage authorities to improve the system based on children's experiences and identified gaps.

## Using the video as a support tool

The video (1 minute 30 seconds, without text or voice-over) is designed as a universal and accessible entry point. An additional version with voice-over in English exists for old children/young people. Adults play a key role in providing the necessary context before and after viewing.

Before showing the video:

- Briefly explain that it shows an "inspector" reviewing how child-friendly a justice system is.
- Introduce the idea that different aspects are being observed and rated.

After viewing the video:

- Facilitate a discussion to unpack what was shown.
- Ask children what they understood, if they noticed some specific details, how the children in the video were involved, etc. Clarify if needed that the "stars" represent how well the system respects children's rights.
- Some examples of questions:
  - Ask them to focus on the characters and their roles: *who is the cat? What is its role? Who are the children? What happened to them? Which different adult characters are shown?*
  - Ask them to focus on the concept of evaluation: *What is happening in the video? What does the cat do when it gets off the train? What does the cat do with the children? Why does it have a magnifying glass? What does this book represent?*
- Feel free to watch the video again, even if it means pausing at specific scenes. Analysing the various messages in the video takes time.

## Supporting meaningful participation

Adults should ensure that:

- Children feel safe, respected, listened to and supported throughout the process. Introduce a safety net setting out specific actions: *listening without interrupting, using 'I' when I speak, getting to the child's level, etc.*
- Information is provided in a way that is appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Do not hesitate to use pictograms to make communication easier.
- Participation is voluntary and children can choose how and whether they wish to contribute. Encourage different forms of expression beyond just speaking and writing; drawing and collage are powerful tools for expressing one's views.
- Children's comments are taken seriously and, where possible, followed up on.

The key message for children is this: justice systems can and should be improved, and children have an important role to play in making them fairer, more respectful and better suited to their needs and rights.

*This deliverable was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Its contents and opinions are the sole responsibility of the speaker(s). Views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.*