

Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale®



CAFAS®: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

A Parent Said It Best...

“Families want their children to get better. Expressed in functional terms, this means we want our children to be able to live at home, to go to school and get good grades, to enjoy friends and activities in the community, and to become responsible adults living independently.”

- Trina Osher, Huff Osher Consulting, from “Outcomes and Accountability from a Family Perspective,” *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 25:2, May 1998, pg. 230.

What Is the CAFAS?

The CAFAS is an assessment measure that is used to evaluate how a child handles everyday tasks, like going to school and getting along with others. Therapists typically use the CAFAS to identify behaviors and symptoms that need attention.

So why is focusing on your child’s day-to-day functioning important? Research shows that problems in day-to-day functioning can interfere with a child’s development. All children can have problems from time to time and most get over them quickly. Problems that persist can keep a child from being happy and becoming a well-adjusted adult.

What Can I Expect at the Start of Services?

Your therapist should ask you and your child about what is happening in your child’s life in 8 different areas of functioning. These areas are:

“The 8 Areas”	
Functioning Areas	Example Behaviors
School/Work	Behavior, grades, attendance
Home	Actions in the home, obeying rules
Community	Respect for others’ rights, obeying laws
Behavior Toward Others	General appropriateness of behaviors when interacting with others
Moods/Emotions	Management of emotions such as depression & anxiety
Self-Harmful Behavior	Behavior or ideas harmful to youth
Substance Use	Use of alcohol or other drugs
Thinking	Logic and rationality of thoughts/actions

After talking with you and your child, and perhaps even your child’s teacher, the therapist will complete the CAFAS. Looking at your child’s functioning in each of the 8 areas gives a complete picture of how your child is doing.

You and the therapist should re-evaluate your child’s functioning by completing another CAFAS periodically (for example, every three months). This will ensure that your child is on a course toward improved functioning. Sometimes older children participate in these discussions. You may want to talk with your therapist about whether this would work for your family.

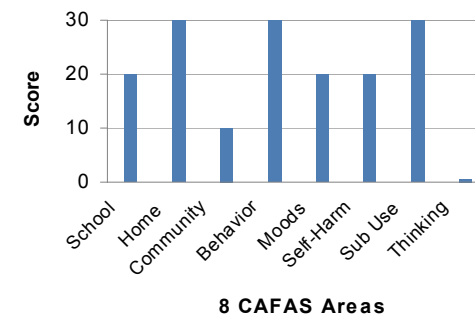
How Does the CAFAS Work?

The therapist will select items from the CAFAS that describe your child. Each item is a description of behavior. The therapist should consider your child’s worst behavior during a given time period (for example, the last 3 months). Why rate the worst behavior? —To ensure the safety of your child and to ensure that these behaviors are addressed in the treatment plan that you design with the therapist.

What Are the CAFAS Scores?

The CAFAS items are grouped into 4 levels of functioning. Each level is assigned a score. The 4 levels and their scores are: no impairment (0), mild (10), moderate (20), and severe (30). An example of a severe (30) score is the youth being expelled from school. Scores are given for each of the 8 areas. These 8 scores are added together to give a total CAFAS score. The goal is to improve the behaviors and reduce the scores. The lower the score, the better. This score can be used to track your child’s improvement over time.

The CAFAS software program prints a chart in which bars show the child’s score in each of the 8 areas (see below).



What Is My Role...



At the Start of Services?

You are the most important source of information about your child's behaviors, symptoms and strengths. As such, your child's therapist should show you the behaviors he or she selected on the CAFAS. Make sure that they make sense to you. Don't be afraid to ask the therapist to explain why he or she chose specific behaviors. The therapist will appreciate your involvement in helping to ensure that he or she fully understands your child's behaviors!

Along with your child's therapist, look over the problems and determine which are the most important areas to address now. You can also use the CAFAS form to point out your child's strengths and to help you with setting goals for your child. There is a list of strengths and goals for each of the 8 areas. You may find these helpful in describing your child's strengths or in identifying goals. After deciding on goals for your child, you and your therapist will make a plan of action for achieving these goals. Make sure that your opinions are heard! It is essential that the treatment plan be family-driven.

How You Can Use the CAFAS to Design Your Child's Treatment Plan?

You, your child, and your child's therapist can identify your child's strengths and goals and create a plan for each of the 8 areas. Here is a sample plan for Home:

Plan for Home Area	
Problem	<i>Persistent failure to comply with reasonable rules within the home</i>
Strength	<i>Takes pride in being able to do some activities independently</i>
Goals	<i>Obeys rules routinely; Helps do household chores when asked</i>
Plan	<i>Therapist & family make a "plan" for achieving goals and type it in here</i>



What Is My Role...

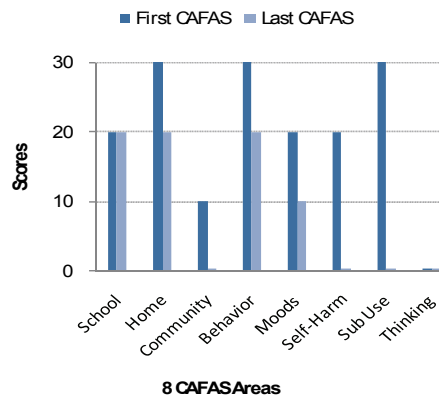
After Services Begin?

You are your child's best advocate! You can actively advocate for your child by making sure that your child's functioning is reviewed periodically. Think of it as a "check-up" to ensure that your child is really benefiting from the treatment plan.

If your child is not showing improvement in the most important areas, you may want to advocate for a change in the treatment plan or array of services. This will help to ensure that the treatment plan remains family-driven.

CAFAS scores for each of the 8 areas can be charted to show change over time. Your child may make progress in some areas very quickly, while taking much longer to improve in others. You can track your child's progress by having a CAFAS completed every 3 months or so. Change is typically made one step at a time. Be sure to celebrate even small successes! Remember, each child makes progress differently and the amount of progress depends on a lot of factors, such as quality of care and the availability of supports.

Below is a graph showing a youth's first and last CAFAS. Look at the great progress this child made!



As a parent you'll want to keep the treatment team focused! You can use the CAFAS to help advocate for the services your child needs in order to keep moving forward.



FYI

- The CAFAS was developed by psychologist Kay Hodges, Ph.D. in 1989. The CAFAS has been around longer than your child!
- The CAFAS has been used with thousands of children receiving different types of treatment throughout the United States, Canada and other countries.
- The CAFAS ratings are reliable. The therapist has completed special training to learn to rate the CAFAS the same way every time and in the same way as other therapists.
- Studies have shown that the CAFAS is valid. CAFAS scores are consistent with the severity of diagnosis. The CAFAS is a predictive indicator of services needed, length of treatment, and future problems, if left untreated.

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