

The Child's Chronology of Significant Events

It is widely accepted that children are best protected and their needs met if agencies supporting them work together and effectively share information. Single factors, incidents or events seen in isolation can appear relatively insignificant. However, when seen together they can show an escalating pattern and/or compound each other, with sometimes serious consequences.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE 2015) states, 'keeping a good quality record about work with the child and his or her family is an important part of accountability of all of the professionals whose services they use'. One of the recognised tools for developing and analysing patterns of behaviour, risks/concerns and understanding what is happening in the life of a child is a **Chronology**.

What is a Chronology?

A chronology provides a key link in the chain of understanding needs/risks, including the need for protection from harm. Setting out key events in sequential date order, a chronology gives a summary timeline of child and family circumstances, patterns of behaviour and trends in lifestyle that may greatly assist any assessment and analysis. A chronology is a logical, methodical and systematic means of organising, merging and helping make sense of information. It also helps to highlight gaps and omitted details that require further exploration and assessment. It keeps the child in mind and at the centre of our thinking when trying to make sense of the life events that are both important and impact on them. A good chronology is a vital tool to assist reflection, analysis, decision making, planning and support in the lives of children and families.

Traditionally, chronologies have been collated within Children's Social Work and made references to comments and activities from other agencies. Locally, through several Serious Case Reviews ('**SCRs**'), it has been apparent that there is a tendency to both 'start again' as well as not to give sufficient weight to information held by different agencies about the child's family.

SCRs have introduced the concept of integrating all the chronologies prepared by various agencies involved in a case, as it demonstrated that it is only when information from all agencies is pieced together that patterns of risk/progress/lack of progress and a need to review the management of the case appears obvious.

When a multi-agency chronology is collated accurately, it gives a holistic history of significant events and timelines of single or multi-agency interventions. It also highlights the effectiveness or failure of previous interventions, involvement and support. It can be a useful tool with which to consider the accumulative impact on a child both in the short and long term.

For a multi-agency chronology to be managed effectively it must be:

- **Factual, relevant, timed with dates**
- **Succinct** (if every single piece of information is included the chronology will lose its impact)
- **Simple in format**
- **Kept up to date**

A chronology is **not** an assessment or a substitute for case recordings/logs. **It is not a replacement for direct discussion and routine information sharing between practitioners either intra or inter-agency.** It is a tool that professionals in a range of disciplines can use to help them understand what is happening in the life of a child, supporting analysis and decision making.

When to Consider a Chronology

The chronology can be used when assessing and planning for a child, to help identify patterns and provide an overview of historical information. In particular chronologies can support practitioners when it is needed:

- To gain an overview of events and changes in a child's or family's life
- To help practitioners understand the impact, immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child or adult's progress
- To provide accumulative evidence of emerging needs and risks and flag when a multi-agency response may be required
- To support the early identification of patterns and issues. This can support and is part of assessing and managing risk and is particularly useful in cases where there may be no single incident
- To support assessments in considering past events and their relevance to the child and family's current situation
- To assist in the process of assessment, analysis, planning and review when working with a child and their family
- To strengthen working with children and their families and can help a child and family make sense of their life

Single Agency Chronologies

Many children will not require a chronology to be started and many agencies and settings will have mechanisms in place to support the recording and analysis of known significant events. Agencies are requested to use the template provided in the supporting guidance for single agency chronologies. This enables the effective sharing of information should the need arise.

Professional judgement is needed to ensure information is relevant to the particular child. Examples of information and events that can be included in a single agency chronology (for example health and education services/settings) are:

- Key dates, birth, life events and moves including changes in family composition, household members, carer, educational establishment, health issues/treatment
- Factual information, e.g. when a child starts or moves school, when a child becomes subject to child protection procedures
- Transitions

- Brief summaries of key professional interventions e.g. assessments and interventions (i.e. anger management, parenting programme or input on dietary needs), referral to other agencies and the outcome/ending, what helped and what didn't
- Issues for the child or adult e.g. developmental issues, significant illness, out of school/training/employment episodes, incidents re bullying, gender, culture
- Family or health issues e.g. bereavement, separations, financial problems, domestic violence notifications, substance misuse, illness/accidents, homelessness, imprisonment, missed appointments

Multi-agency Chronologies and Involving Families

Please note: a multi-agency chronology will always be in use for children where the Lead Worker is a social worker.

A multi-agency chronology can be used where the family are being supported through multi agency co-ordinated support. It must add value, for example, where there are concerns that timely progress is not being made or to help a family consider the impact of significant events from each other's perspectives.

When a multi-agency chronology is started, it is good practice for children and their families (as appropriate) to **be involved** in the development of a multi-agency chronology which includes understanding the purpose of the chronology. Chronologies are part of recording and as such should be available to the person they are about. Involving families provides an opportunity to check and ensure the accuracy of information in a chronology. It promotes working with children and their families, gaining important perspectives on events and understanding the impact on different individuals in the family. It can help a family reflect on the current situation and identify progress or lack of progress.

Multi-agency chronologies can also be used as part of professionals' meetings.

Who Co-ordinates a Child's Multi-agency Chronology?

Each agency involved with a child and their family should collate key information into a single agency chronology of significant events and where working with partner agencies actively work to combine and consolidate this into a child's multi-agency chronology. This means the identified Lead Worker will request each agency share their chronology of significant events of the child and their family for this to be collated into one multi-agency chronology, called, the 'Child's Multi-agency Chronology'. The *Child's Multi-agency Chronology* should be held securely electronically and should be regularly updated to inform planning and intervention. There should be only one multi-agency chronology for each child.

What is Included in the Child's Multi-agency Chronology?

A **significant** event is one in which the outcome of an action/inaction or incident/event has, or may have, a **major impact** on the health and well-being of the child and their family. This should include positive significant events. A significant event may also impact on actions needed in the plan for the child.

Within the confines of this guidance it is not possible to detail everything that might be seen as a **significant** event. Practitioners from each agency will be expected to exercise some professional judgement as the chronology needs to contain **sufficient detail, but not every detail** contained in the case file/log recording.

The following is a generic list of guidance as to the type of information that **may** constitute a **significant** incident and/or event to be included. This is not an **exhaustive** list:

Examples of significant events in a multi-agency chronology

- Key dates such as dates of birth, life events, moves
- Child protection enquiries and outcomes, including physical and sexual abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation
- Education – behaviour changes, exclusions, unauthorised absences and school changes
- Death of a significant relationship figure e.g. parent, sibling, grandparent
- Changes in household composition, including one parent leaving household
- Changes in contact arrangements with separated parents
- Unemployment and homelessness
- House moves/relocations
- Major conflict with birth family or peer group
- Changes in family e.g. birth, removal of a child or termination of a pregnancy
- Disability, illness, mental health (child, young person or in family) including A&E attendance and hospital admissions
- Teenage pregnancy
- Substance abuse – child or in family
- Thoughts and/or actions of self-harm
- REPEATED failure to be brought to health and dental appointments
- Change of Lead Worker
- Change in status of the child e.g. becomes 'looked-after'
- Contact with person convicted of sexual or violent offences
- Changes in child protection and/or legal status
- Court proceedings
- Children with sexually harmful behaviour
- Child missing from education, home or care

- Domestic abuse
- Police Involvement
- Criminal justice activity in relation to family members where relevant
- Significant person enters or is released from prison

Accuracy is vital, as mistakes concerning important dates and events, for example, can creep into records and be replicated over and over again in assessments. Such inaccuracies are both distressing to families and also impact negatively on the understanding and identification of risks. It is always important to check dates and facts with the child and their family as appropriate.

Analysis of the Child's Multi-agency Chronology

Once an assessment has been completed together with the chronology it is the responsibility of the Lead Worker to call a multi-agency meeting (Team around the Child) to consider and co-ordinate the future plan of support/intervention. Such a plan will consider the impact of the patterns/information contained in the multi-agency chronology and the assessment to consider the best way forward in working to improve the circumstances of the child.

It is important practitioners do not attempt to analyse information outside their professional discipline e.g. a teacher analysing medical information or vice versa.

From this analysis a *Child's Plan* will be developed, regularly reviewed and updated.

It is important that the *Child's Multi-agency Chronology* continues to be updated. The *Child's Multi-agency Chronology* must be reviewed and updated by the multi-agency group to ensure ongoing analysis of the patterns and information to avoid drift. This maintains a clear focus on the child.

N.B. The *Child's Multi-agency Chronology* is a stand-alone document and as such should be attached to other documents such as assessments and reports.