

## A guide to compiling chronologies and when to write multi-agency chronologies

### What is a Chronology?

A chronology is a record in date order of all the significant events and changes in a child or young person's life.

Many agencies will have systems for starting a chronology as soon as they start to work with a child or young person, as they are a live tool that can assist in improving practice.

### Why should you write a chronology?

There are three main reasons for writing a chronology.

- 1) It can be used in order to make sense of the life events which have been important for a child and their family, as part of any kind of assessment and to assist with decision-making and intervention.
- 2) It is a tool that allows the worker to identify, and make sense of, patterns of events or behaviour in the life of a child and their family.
- 3) It is a tool which can enable reflection and analysis on the part of the worker and others; practitioners and their supervisors will find chronologies particularly helpful to use in supervision.

### What to include in a chronology

Critical incidents and key decisions made about a child or family should always be included. The temptation to "include everything" may be attributable to the fact that it is often only with hindsight that one can see which events in a child's life have been significant for them. However, this temptation should be avoided in order to make the chronology a workable and useful document for both the workers and the child and family.

Chronologies need to have a sense of purpose: There is a difference in recording an unsuccessful home visit as part of a chronology in order to justify an action has been taken, as opposed to recording this as part of a pattern that needs to be explored around parental engagement and co-operation. Effective and concise summarising is key to the production of a working document.

Chronologies should contain facts alone, without analysis or interpretation of the facts: While the chronology itself should exclude professional judgement, such judgement will need to be exercised in deciding what is relevant to include. Chronologies should not be a repetition of detailed case records, but rather brief bullet points: Workers need to be familiar with the historical case information and be able to identify critical incidents and events in the child's life.

A chronology needs to be regularly reviewed in order to improve analysis and reassess the relevance of recording an event in a child's life: Sharing the chronology with the child and their family should be part of this review process.

### Using Chronologies

Effective chronologies enable us to see the ways in which an individual child or a family have functioned over time and to examine how families have managed their own circumstances, as well as how professionals have managed the case over time. A chronology is only as useful as its accuracy and the frequency with which it is maintained. A good chronology will meet a wide range of needs if it can be used as a reflective tool to plan sensitive and helpful work with children and their families, considering the welfare of the child as paramount.

### **When to write a multi-agency chronology**

A multi-agency chronology should commence as soon as concerns are identified, and partners meet together to discuss them. This can be done at multi-agency meeting in order to share the task and so that any emerging patterns can be seen at the earliest opportunity.

Multi-agency chronologies can assist contextualisation of the issues and assist decisions. As the function of a multi-agency chronology is to assist the professionals in analysis and decision making, it is important to include positives in terms of the impact of changes in circumstances and outcomes of intervention rather than with the aim of presenting a 'balanced view' which may be of more relevance for a single agency chronology.

As important as the events themselves are it is the actions that were taken that helps pinpoint what has been effective or ineffective in the past. Professional judgement is required to decide on the relevance of an event for a particular child or family. The multi-agency chronology should be a balanced document and should include parental strengths as well as weaknesses.

Chronologies should be routinely updated at multi-agency meetings to assist assessment and inform decisions and planning.

### **Compiling Multi-Agency Chronologies**

Each agency is expected to compile a chronology to reflect their own agency involvement and what is known about the child and family when a case is opened. Single agency chronologies should be brought together as soon as the need to provide a multi-agency response is identified e.g. starting an Early Help Assessment or a referral to Children's Services. Bringing the chronologies together will be the responsibility of the lead professional and may take place at the first discussion or multi-agency meeting. The combined chronology may then be updated at future multi-agency meetings.