

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Executive



Single and Multi-Agency Chronology Practice Guidance

Guidance for Practitioners Completing
Chronologies

FINAL 1.1 - February 2020

Introduction

It is widely recognised in almost all Serious Case Reviews, that children and young people are most effectively safeguarded if professionals work together and share information. Single factors in themselves can often be perceived to be relatively harmless. However, if they multiply and compound one another the consequences can be serious, on occasions, devastating.

“A common theme from many of the reviews was that there was a tendency to ‘start again’ and not give sufficient weight to what had already been known about the families , also reported in previous Ofsted reports, was that none of the main agencies had a complete picture of the child’s family or a full record of the concerns”. (Ofsted 2010).

Locally it has been apparent that when a timeline of significant events (chronologies) from agencies are drawn together for the purpose of case reviews, information emerges that was not known or shared previously. The consideration of a family and child’s history must be sufficiently taken in to account in order to fully assess the needs of and risks to children.

What is a chronology?

A chronology is a tool that practitioners from a range of disciplines can use to help them understand what is happening in the life of a child, adult or family. Simplistically it is a list, in date order of all the major changes and significant events in a child’s, adult’s or family’s life. It provides a brief and summarised account of events, action taken and outcome to give an immediate overview.

Chronologies can be compiled by a single agency or be multi agency/integrated, pulling together the knowledge and information held by agencies involved with the child, adult and family. They can also represent significant events regarding a child, a sibling group, an adult or a family.

Chronologies in themselves are not an assessment; however they are a useful part of an assessment. The chronology should not replace case notes or records which include more detailed and sensitive information. There should be a clear distinction between the case record (detailed record) and the chronology (summary).

A chronology should be started when an agency becomes involved with a child and it is then updated and maintained on an ongoing basis. It is important to remember that a single-agency chronology does not provide a complete picture of the family’s life and circumstances, only a multi-agency chronology can do this.

The purpose of a chronology

The purpose of a chronology is to record significant events and changes for a child. It is not a running record or detailed record of everyday events. The chronology needs to be considered when assessing and planning for a child, to help identify patterns and provide an overview of historical information. Chronologies are essential:

- To gain an overview of events and changes in a child’s, young person’s or adult’s life.
- To help practitioners understand the impact, immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child’s 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 i.e. in neglect.
- To support assessments in considering past events and their relevance to the child's, adult's or family's current situation. To assist in the process of assessment, analysis, planning and review when working with a child, young person and family
- To strengthen working with children and their families and can help a child and family make sense of their life.

Key factors for an effective chronology

Accurate - A chronology must be based on up-to-date and accurate case recording. Any inaccuracies or deficiencies will impact on the quality of the chronology and limit its usefulness. If any inaccuracies are discovered, clarity should be sought and if required the chronology amended.

Up to date - Chronologies should reflect the best knowledge about a child or adult's history at a point in time. It will need to be amended and updated in light of any new information received. Each agency should review and update their chronology on a regular basis, best practice is to add the information about the significant event or change as they occur.

Detail - A chronology should contain sufficient details about a significant event or change but it should not be a substitute for recording in a case file or professional records. Chronologies should NOT be repeats of the case file, be time consuming to compile, so detailed they are difficult to read or so overwhelming that important issues or patterns are lost amongst the detail. Deciding detail of an incident or change is a matter of professional judgement.

Multi agency/integrated chronologies - A multi agency/integrated chronology brings together chronologies created by different agencies and presents them coherently. Effort should be made to seek out and confirm information from a variety of sources; the child, the adult and family, agency records and information held by other services. It is particularly important that multi agency/integrated chronologies include the source and date of the information, with a record of the justification for why information was shared. Multi agency/integrated chronologies can be important in identifying critical events in the lives of children or adults and assist in decision making when working together with vulnerable children or adults and families. They can give a more rounded picture, for example a single incident may take on a far greater importance in the life of a child or adult when placed in the context of a proper, time lined integrated chronology.

The multi agency/integrated chronology should be regularly reviewed, analysed and updated. This should be a shared responsibility between the practitioners for gathering, recording and passing information onto the person who has agreed to collate the chronology and can be completed at meetings and reviews. Compiling a multi agency/integrated chronology needs careful co-ordination and close working between the agencies involved, and requires individuals to note all matters which may constitute a significant event.

If a multi agency/integrated chronology is to be compiled it is good practice to obtain consent from family members before contacting other agencies for information. For support and

guidance on information sharing refer to your agency's information sharing policy and the national guidance 'Information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers' (2018) located at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721581/Information_sharing_advice_practitioners_safeguarding_services.pdf

Involving the child and family

Chronologies are a part of recording and as such should be available to the person they are about. Involving the family in the chronology provides opportunity to check and ensure accuracy of information in a chronology. It also promotes and strengthens working together with children, adults and their families, as it helps to obtain family members perspectives on events and develops an understanding of their impact on individuals in the family. Sharing the chronology with the family can support them to reflect on the content and help develop their understanding of the child/adult/family as well as identify progress or lack of progress.

When to complete a Multi Agency Chronology?

Lessons from Serious Case Reviews have taught us that if all the pieces of information held by separate professionals about a child's life were shared appropriately, and in a timely manner, the outcome for the child concerned may have been very different. It is for this reason that a multi agency chronology should be started as soon as there is multi-agency involvement i.e. My Plan/My Assessment/My Plan+, EHCP, TAC, Strategy Discussion, Child in Need, CP etc. The Lead Practitioner should hold the chronology. The Lead Practitioner should be identified as soon as there is more than one agency working with the child and their family and there should be clear agreement of how and when the Lead Practitioner role will be handed over when an agency ceases their involvement.

The Multi-agency Chronology should commence verbally as soon as there is multi-agency involvement. Some families have very long and complicated histories – the compiling of a chronology will be a more onerous task and cannot be completed within a short period of time. It is essential that as much work as is practicable is completed in the early stages and continued commitment and time be given to the completion of a full chronology through the course of working with a child and their family. In cases where there are child protection concerns, all attempts should be made to create a multi-agency chronology as part of the information shared at the Initial Child Protection Conference.

At the Initial Child Protection Conference, when a child or young person is made the subject of a child protection plan, the continued requirement of a Multi-agency Child Protection Chronology will form part of the child protection plan – the chair of the conference will task the Core Group with adding detail to the outline plan and to develop and keep up to date a multi-agency chronology. Depending on the case, the Core Group will decide on the most appropriate professional to have oversight that the chronology is kept up to date and reviewed at each Core Group meeting.

What to record in a chronology?

It is important that a chronology is not a repeat of the records you hold for this child/family, it should include significant events/circumstances only.

There are a number of core incidents/circumstances, which should be recorded. Dependent upon the nature of the harm, these may differ from case to case. There is not an exhaustive list; however below are several examples of core incidents that could be included:

Family and Environmental Factors:

- Changes in family care structure e.g. through separation, divorce, bereavement, custodial sentence
- Information relating to health or parental lifestyles of parents/carers that significantly impact on the child
- Changes in family circumstances e.g. housing (including the need for emergency accommodation), employment, pregnancy, birth of a sibling, emotional wellbeing
- Significant events where a child or young person is victim of or witness to a serious crime
- Police logs detailing pertinent info re family members/family home e.g. reported incident of domestic violence, drunken behaviour of carers etc.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour on the child or parents
- Incidents of the child going missing/being found
- Any incidents of cruelty or mistreatment of animals

Child's Development – Health

- Positive or negative changes in health related problems in relation to the child or their parents/carers, such as disability, substance related issues, mental health issues etc
- Changes to child's physical or emotional wellbeing
- Kept or missed appointments for ante-natal, post-natal appointments, immunisations, child health surveillance, hospital appointments
- Incidences of hospital admissions
- Change in GP (e.g. this could be particularly significant in cases of Fabricated and Induced illness)
- Incidents of domestic abuse and/or injuries
- Attempted suicide or overdose

Child's Development – Education

- Positive or negative changes in school performance, attainment or achievement
- Significant periods of absence e.g. illness, pregnancy, truancy
- Positive or negative changes to school attendance
- Social inclusion within the school setting including evidence of bullying or positive support networks
- Any threats or actual incidents of violence to staff by parents or child
- Children being taken out of school to be home educated
- Positive or negative changes in parental presence, engagement or support with child's learning

Assessment and Intervention

- Allegations/disclosures made by the child
- Assessments e.g. family support
- Strategy discussions/meetings
- Section 47 investigations
- Child becoming subject to a CP plan/CP plan ending
- Referrals to other agency's about the child and/or family.
- Dates and reasons for child being looked after and accommodated
- Referrals to other agencies/teams
- Any other relevant concerns or positive events

There are also a number of other incidents/circumstances, which may be significant to the child and family, depending on their circumstances. This could be a significant observation during home visits e.g. the frequent presence of unknown adults, evidence of damage to the property, negative or positive interactions between parent and child, poor home conditions found on visit etc. If chronologies are to accurately reflect family circumstances, positive factors should also be recorded (e.g. families engagement with professionals, child's presentation in school significantly improves etc).

The above list provides a small number of examples and it is essential that practitioners use their professional judgement in identifying pertinent information. There is a risk that a mechanical approach to completing a chronology that automatically records predetermined 'key facts' could weaken the focus and role of professional judgment which are vital to effective practice. A chronology must never become an end in itself.

Format of a Chronology

The formatting of shared information should be done so in a simple, agreed format. This should include:

- Date and time - The date the episode event is said to have taken place (not the date of recording)
- Age of child
- Key event - the significant piece of information e.g. police log of reported incidence of domestic violence: report from school that child arrives from home hungry, unkempt and tired: missed medical appointments: allegation of non accidental injury: anonymous referral regarding child left unsupervised: Section 47 enquiry etc.
- Action taken
- Outcome - Comments should inform the reader of key decisions taken, any action taken and the outcome in response to the event or episode.

An example chronology template can be found at Appendix One. Please note, this is provided as an example only. There is not an expectation that it will be used in all instances or replace existing chronology templates already in use within organisations.

Appendix One

Agency Chronology of Involvement (Example)

Name of Agency		
Name of Child	DOB	
Name and Job Title of Person Completing Chronology		
Date Completed		

Date/Time	Name of person/people involved	Event description	Actions/Outcomes	Comments