

Chronology Guidance

for staff in Children and Families

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this practice guidance is to provide practitioners with an outline of what a chronology is, how they can be used and what their limitations are.
- 1.2 It is essential that all children have an up to date chronology on their electronic record. It is an invaluable analytical tool to:
- support effective decision making;
 - help workers and managers make sense of events in a child's life;
 - help identify patterns and themes;
 - help inform assessments and plans.
- 1.3 Most importantly it is a key foundation stone of good social work practice. A chronology must not be seen as only an administrative activity and should be considered as a working, supportive tool underpinning sound social work intervention.
- 1.4 Lord Laming noted the importance of a chronology in child protection in both the inquiries into the death of Victoria Climbié (2004):

'I regard the inclusion in any case file of a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date chronology as absolutely essential...As the agency best placed to co-ordinate the collection of the relevant information, I regard it as the responsibility of social services to maintain the chronology, seeking the input of other agencies as appropriate.' Recommendation 58 Laming Report: a properly maintained chronology" must be kept on every file"

2. What is a chronology

- 2.1 A chronology is a succinct summary and overview of the significant dates and events in a child's life and should be informed by the child's 'voice'.
- 2.2 It should be started at the beginning of any involvement and compiled for every child and involve the whole family;
- 2.3 It is a legal document and should be updated as soon as possible after any significant event.
- 2.4 A significant event is an incident that impacts on the child's safety and welfare, circumstances or home environment. This will involve inevitably a professional decision and/or judgement based upon the child and family's individual circumstances.

- 2.5 A chronology provides a sequential story of significant events in a family's history whilst inter-weaving information about emotional and/or relationship difficulties.
- 2.6 It contributes to an emerging picture based on fact and interaction of a case, i.e. current information is understood in the context of previous information and helps inform professional judgement through a consideration of the patterns and relationship of the events and changes in the chronology.
- 2.7 It should be used as an analytical tool to help understand the impact both immediate and cumulative of events and changes on a child or young person's developmental progress.
- 2.8 The relevance/significance of an event can change over time. A historical event which appeared insignificant or irrelevant may become highly relevant and significant in the light of further information of more recent origin.
- 2.9 When making decisions about children and planning for their future it is vital that the full history is considered.
- 2.10 A chronology is NOT:
- Duplication of case records;
 - An assessment in itself;
 - Finished until case closure.

3. Guidelines

- 3.1 Children and young people are most effectively safeguarded if professionals work together and share information. Single factors in themselves are often perceived to be relatively harmless. However, if they multiply and compound one another, the consequences can be serious, and on occasions, devastating.
- 3.2 Professional judgement is required to decide on the relevance for a particular child/family of an event.
- 3.3 Information recorded in a chronology should be relevant and succinct so as not to be lost in a mass of insignificant and irrelevant events.
- 3.4 Chronologies are not only a means of organising and merging information. They enable practitioners to gain a more accurate picture of the whole case and highlight gaps and missing details that require further assessment and identification.

- 3.5 Chronological items should be more than just a record of the event. Analysis and outcomes should be included where appropriate.
- 3.6 A chronology for a child/young person may start with events that occurred prior to his or her birth if of significance.
- 3.7 Chronologies should accurately reflect family circumstances, recording both positive and negative factors.
- 3.8 Chronologies once started should be maintained and kept up to date.

4. Multi-agency chronologies

- 4.1 It provides a mechanism through which information can be systematically shared and merged, and enables agencies to identify the history of a family, providing invaluable information about a child's life experience.
- 4.2 It can reveal risks, concerns, patterns and themes, strengths and weaknesses within a family, and can identify previous periods of professional involvement / support and the effectiveness / failure of previous intervention. It informs the overall assessment regarding the care-givers ability and motivation to change.
- 4.3 The chronology is only one means of collating information and will need supplementing by reports that draw out messages from the chronology, to ensure facts are agreed and the overall pattern seen.
- 4.4 See also [WSCB Guidance](#) for further information.

5. Significant information/events

- 5.1 There are a number of significant events or incidents which should be recorded and depending upon the nature of the risks and harm, these may vary from case to case. Examples include:-
 - Missed planned appointments and contacts when the child isn't seen.
 - Contacts or referrals about the child / family.
 - Assessments undertaken and their outcome.
 - Strategy discussions / meetings and Child Protection Conferences.

- Child Protection record enquiries and Section 47 Investigations.
- Edge of Care Meetings / CIN meetings
- Non-accidental injury and significant injury or neglect events.
- Attendance at A & E / Minor Injuries Unit / Walk-In Centres / NHS Direct and other out of hour's services / admittance to hospital.
- Births, deaths, serious illness of both adults and children.
- House moves.
- Changes in family composition, including new partners, separations, non-family members moving into family home.
- Deterioration / improvement in home conditions and child's presentation.
- Criminal proceedings and outcomes.
- Civil proceedings involving family.
- Change in school, school attendance, school exclusions.
- Change in GP.
- Self-referrals and any referrals to other agencies / teams.
- Decisions to issue Letter Before Proceedings.
- Court proceedings and changes in legal status, including periods when child became looked after by the local authority.
- Details of age assessments, HR assessments, decisions and outcome of appeals in respect of asylum seeking young people.
- Police logs detailing relevant incidents at family home or in relation to family members, such as reported incidents of domestic violence, drunken behaviour of carers.
- Child running away/missing from home.
- Attempted self-harm or overdose of child, young person or family member.

- Support offered to family.
- Events showing capacity of family to work in partnership and engage with professionals.
- Frequent presence of unknown adults.
- Any event in the child's life deemed to have a significant impact on them, such as separation from main carer leading to poor attachment.
- Changes in case status including transfers, closure or change of social worker.
- Other key decisions, e.g. Children's Panel decisions.

6. Process for compiling the Chronology/Key Events

- 6.1 Chronologies are compiled in MOSAIC as a standalone process. The chronology within MOSAIC includes:
- Case notes that have been identified as significant;
 - All workflow processes on the person, e.g. assessments, visits, reviews;
 - Significant changes within the child's case file, e.g. changes to legal status, placement codes, Child in Need codes (service user group), changes in professional relationships including allocations,
- 6.2 Chronologies/Key Events should be compiled on every case when an assessment is started. For any cases where a new assessment is started and there is no chronology but there has been previous involvement either in Warwickshire or another local authority, the chronology must be backdated and recorded within Mosaic.
- 6.2 Where other professionals share relevant and significant information when lateral checks are undertaken or at strategy meetings, child protection conferences, core groups, child in need meetings, edge of care meetings or looked after reviews, this should be recorded on MOSAIC.
- 6.3 The chronology prepared for child protection case conference reports, court reports and a child personal record for Best Interests Decisions should be summarised from the Key Events in MOSAIC. Supplementary guidance and templates in respect of preparing chronologies for court can be found [here](#).

- 6.4 Chronologies are more than just an Index of significant information and where appropriate should also include outcome information i.e. any action taken in response to the event or episode.
- 6.5 The [Mosaic Children's Chronology Guidance](#) produced by the MOSAIC team provides further detailed information on the actions to be taken in Mosaic to help workers ensure that all children's files contain a full and up to date chronology.