



Childrens Services Operations

Practice guidance on social work chronologies.

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The scope of this guidance

This guidance is for all staff members who are employed by Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Services Operations, whether on a temporary (including agency staff and students) permanent, full time or a part time basis.

Introduction

Chronologies are one of the most discussed but least understood tools in social work practice. The lack of understanding in relation to chronologies is partly due to the differing interpretations that individuals, teams and organisations hold as to what should and should not be included within a social work chronology.

The creation of a chronology is not an exact science. It is important to note that what might be a key event in one child's life will not necessarily be relevant to another child. So to a certain extent, chronologies will continue to rely on professional judgements. However, as far as possible it is important that a consistent approach to compiling a chronology is adopted. Therefore, this guidance sets out what the expectations of Central Bedfordshire Council are in relation to social work chronologies.

What is a chronology?

A chronology is a list of significant events recorded in date order that have occurred in a child or young person's life. They provide a concise record of fact.

Why do we need chronologies?

The importance of clear and accurate case recording has been an ongoing issue within child protection inquiries since the mid 1970s and has continued to feature in some of the more recent inquiries such as the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Baby Peter. Inquiries have often concluded that a case chronology could have helped towards an earlier identification of risk. Therefore, chronologies are an important tool that can assist social workers in their practice with children and families.

A chronology is not an assessment in itself but it is an ongoing, analytical tool which social workers can use to help them understand what is happening in the child and/or families life. They enable practitioners to gain a more accurate picture of the entire case- highlighting patterns that are occurring, showing where there may be gaps in information and areas of the case that may require further assessment and attention. They can also help to examine if there is any delay or drift occurring within the case.

Chronologies, as with all our recordings, should be available to the person they are about, unless there are justifiable legal reasons concerned with risk. The child or parent should be aware that it is part of our recording and should be shown to and discussed with them.

Sharing chronologies in this way can be part of working together with families. It can help those involved to see where they have succeeded; for example in reducing their drug dependency or improving the school attendance of their child.

Sharing chronologies can also be an opportunity to check accuracy; for example, mistakes made with dates that can then easily be repeated in other records and reports.

Our chronologies need to be:

-Succinct: If every issue/contact is recorded the chronology loses its value. (It is important that chronologies do not become repeats of the case notes and so detailed that social workers and personal advisors cannot 'see the wood for the trees.'")

-Consistent and in the agreed format: Chronologies should always be recorded and stored on Framework i. This will ensure that there is a consistent approach, making it easier for social workers and managers to be able to retrieve information readily. *[In the case of fostering/adoption another format will be required due to the lack of a chronology function in adult cases.]*

-In date order: So that the case is easy to follow.

-Factual: Commentary, assessment or interpretation within the chronology should be avoided. A chronology should stick to the facts in the case.

-Regularly updated: Social workers and personal advisors should ensure that chronologies are regularly updated as the case progresses. Chronologies should be viewed as a working tool, not a final product.

What should be included in the chronology?

Ultimately it will be practitioners the who must determine the events that are significant in an individual's child or young persons life. As already stated, what might be a key event in one child's life will not necessarily be relevant to another child.

It is difficult to have hard and fast rules about what goes into a chronology – but social worker and personal advisors should always be thinking to keep the information minimal but meaningful. There is often a temptation to write up chronologies that become copies or summaries of the main case file. Not only is this time consuming, but also lessens their effectiveness by flooding them with detail. Chronologies are not mini case files.

However, the following list has been compiled as a general guide as to specific items that should be included in a chronology:

I & A, FST, CWD, LAC & LAAC, ASYLUM

Living situation:

- Child's home or placement moves [record if temporary or not]
- Episodes of homelessness, eviction
- Changes in regular living arrangements
[for example; respite or weekend stays with grandparents]
- Imprisonment/secure/sections

Household/family composition:

- All changes to family composition (birth, death, marriage, start or end of parent's relationships, leaving home), in respect of child or immediate family.
- Beginning and end of friendships that the child describes as significant.
- Acquisition & death of pets significant to child.
- Events of religious significance (for example, baptism).

Education and employment

- Start, end and changes in school
- Statements of educational need and reviews to include transitions

- School exclusions and prolonged absences for particular reasons
- SATs and GCSE results, and other significant achievements
- Start or end of employment
- Joining scouts, guides etc
- Health**
- Changes of GP
- LAC medicals/CP medicals
- Significant ill-health (requiring 2+ weeks off school or hospitalisation)
- Attendance at and periods in hospital
- Diagnoses of chronic or disabling conditions
- Other injuries that have significance, and all confirmed non-accidental injuries

Legislative:

- Legal status and change in legal status and reasons for this
- All periods of accommodation
- Offences committed
- Anti-social behaviour contracts made
- Sentences made

Interventions:

- Outcomes of assessments completed
- Managers decision making
- Referrals received and referrals made
- Strategy discussions and child protection investigations
- Visits - only where significant issue has occurred or show engagement or non engagement.
- Contact where a significant event occurs or there has been non attendance
- Panel dates and outcomes
- CIN,CP, LAC reviews and meetings- only where significance issues discussed or show engagement or non engagement.
- Start and finish of social work or other input.

FOSTERING & ADOPTION CASES

Assessment stage:

- Initial enquiry
- Assessment visit
- Registration of interest visit
- Reference visits
- Panel date
- Date of approval

Assessment stage:

Living situation:

- Cares home move [record if temporary or not]
- Placement dates- the date placement began, finished and periods of respite.

Household/family composition:

- All changes to the carers family composition (birth, death, marriage, start or end of carer's relationships), in respect of carer or their immediate family.

Interventions:

- Support visits with significant issues only- *to include injuries/illness of children, change in household composition, significant family events/change in circumstances, concerns expressed by carers about any issue*
- Unannounced visits
- Meetings where significance issues discussed
- Carers advising child making disclosure

Health

- Update of medicals

- Significant ill-health (requiring 2+ weeks off school or hospitalisation)
- Attendance at and periods in hospital
- Diagnoses of chronic or disabling conditions

Legislative/Statutory:

- Date of panel matches
- Date of panel reviews
- Changes in approvals
- Allegations against carers, LADO and concerns meeting
- Update of CRBs and References

Expectations

Social workers are expected to regularly update their chronologies. Good practice is for chronologies to be updated on at least a monthly basis.

There is an expectation for social workers to provide updated chronologies for Review Managers / Independent Review Officers before CP conferences and LAC reviews.

Social workers and personal advisors must review and analyse their chronologies. If they don't, then the chronology serves little if any purpose. Supervision is a good place to review could also be utilised as an opportunity to review each other's chronologies and identify possible patterns, drift, risks etc.

Managers and supervisors should ensure that they engage in the equality assurance process by randomly selecting cases in supervision and / or other forums to confirm whether there are chronologies present and whether they are being updated as and when required.

A computer is an aid to chronologies, not the solution

Mosaic is not able to produce a chronology in isolation. No computer system will be able to produce a chronology because a chronology requires professional judgement as to what and what should not be included.

Having clear headings in case note [that summarise what the case note is about] can assist in identifying for social workers what is / and what isn't of relevance to include in a chronology.

For example, a case note headed as 'T/call to mum' would not help the reader to understand at a glance what the note was about. However, with a few additional words this could be improved upon. In this example ' Mum has reported her son missing as he not contactable after curfew' would provide sufficient prompt for the worker to know to include this in the chronology.

Marking case notes as significant can also assist in identifying what is and what isn't relevant.

