

Impact chronology – Practice Guidance and Procedures

- **What is a social work Impact chronology?**

Chronologies are not simply a list of events but rather a tool to capture and consider an analysis of the child's lived experience which can inform analysis and assessment. Chronologies also allow us to consider the impact on children of their life experiences.

They provide a clear account of all the major changes and significant events in the lives of the child(ren) and family, pulling together the knowledge of and information held by agencies involved with the child, adult or family.

An impact chronology should be used as an analytical tool to help understand and be clear about the impact to the child, both immediate and cumulative, of key events and changes in a child or young person's developmental progress.

A chronology is a mandatory document and needs to be started when we become involved with a child and family, it also needs to be updated, maintained and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Remember – It's not our story, it's the child's. Poorly maintained or absent chronologies lead to gaps in the child's life history.

- **What is the purpose of a chronology & why should it be started first?**

Findings from numerous Serious Case Reviews have concluded that a chronology could have supported the earlier identification of risks to the child(ren).

The Jay Report (2014) on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, found "It is likely that the absence of structured chronologies contributed to key information being missed when decisions were made".

Lord Laming stated in his report 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".

Taking the research into consideration, preparing a chronology at the start of any intervention is invaluable as it will lay out events in order highlighting experiences for the child which when seen as an isolated incident may not identify the significance of the risk when compared to viewing a number of 'isolated events' which present as persistent and therefore have a cumulative impact.

The chronology is not a running record of everyday events nor are they a regurgitation of detailed recordings already on file, they should not replace case notes or records which include more detailed and sensitive information.

Impact chronologies are essential to:

- Gain an overview of events and changes in the lives of the child(ren) and family, help to understand the lived experience of the child and the impact that this is having on them.
- Help practitioners understand the impact, immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child and family's progress
- Provide accumulative evidence of emerging needs, risks and strengths and flag when a change of plan may be required.
- Support the early identification of patterns and issues. This supports, 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.
- Support assessment 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, young person and family.
- Support identification of resources and further interventions, to understand what has worked in the past and what has already been tried, this understanding prevents repeated interventions which may not be in the best interest of the child.
- Strengthen working with children and their families and help a child and family make sense of their life, for e.g. through recognising patterns of behaviours with parents struggling to sustain change, starting life story conversations with a care leaver, helping them make sense of their experiences and reasons for decision making by the Local Authority.
- Identify areas that require further exploration.

Remember: where there is more than one child, there is a need to distinguish between the sibling group in respect of impact. They may all be exposed to the same environment / incident, however the impact that this has on each individual child is likely to be different.

- **What is recorded in an impact chronology?**

The chronology provides a brief, factual record of significant events in sequential date order, and may include; **(see also practice tips)**

In sibling groups, whilst the events may be the same for all of the children, the impact will be variable therefore within the significance / impact section of the chronology the impact on each child needs to be recorded individually

Significant changes in the family structure, (to include positive events)

For example: Date of birth of parents, other births, deaths, marriages, divorces, new partners and separations, Unemployment, accidents, injuries, domestic violence incidents, , mental health, domestic violence, other critical incidents (leading to investigation), hospitalisation, arrests, court appearances, prison, youth custody, deaths.

Factual information and events including missed/not brought to appointment, when a child starts or moves school, missing school, exclusions, offending behaviour, changes in peer relationships, running away/missing from home, all house moves with locations if significant, (for eg, house move means child can walk to school rather than 3 bus rides, or equally its significant because the family are more isolated from their support network due to the location), include if there are a substantial number of house moves over a short period of time, including temporary moves; people moving in; homelessness, eviction; changes of placement, loss of support and services offered to family; specialist assessments; allocation of workers; transfer or closure of case. Change of schools; exclusions and prolonged absences; exam results or significant achievements; special educational needs. Significant ill-health; self-harming behaviour; periods in hospital; injuries; diagnoses of chronic or disabling conditions; patterns of missed appointments, engagement in specific health services resulting in positive outcomes.

Key points to consider:

Detail - The chronology should contain sufficient detail but not substitute or replicate case recording

Involving the child and family - Involving the family in the chronology promotes and strengthens family participation, develops an understanding of family members perspectives on events and their impact on individuals, and helps to identify progress or lack of progress.

Assessment – it is not an assessment, but a useful tool in assessment and practice. It is not an end in itself, rather a working tool which promotes engagement with families.

Aids decision making – it needs to be reviewed and analysed – a chronology which is not reviewed regularly is of limited relevance. It also needs to clearly outline the **impact** so that detail collected may be increased if risk increases.

Professional judgement - Professional judgement is required to decide on the relevance of an event for a particular child or family

Clarity - A simple test is that the chronology must not confuse or mislead in assisting the reader to reach a clear understanding of the case. When the chronology has been completed, read it to make sure that crucial events have not been omitted and ask yourself if it aids understanding.

Balanced - The chronology must be a balanced document. It is important to consider parental strengths as well as risk posed

- **The impact chronology in the legal process**

The aim is that the impact chronology that you use in your daily practice can have the end column removed (source) and can then be lifted into the statement to Court.

The purpose of the chronology to be submitted to the court is to assist in understanding the case history by identifying and dating key events. A good social work chronology can help to cut down on the need for the filing of statements.

- **Where does the updated chronology need to be used?**

The child's chronology needs to be reviewed in every supervision

Key review points for the child

Available at all 3-way meetings and Gateway meetings

Remember: No case to be closed or transferred without the chronology being up to date.

- **Accountability and who starts the chronology and when**

- If a new child open to social care with no historic family involvement – the initial allocated worker receiving the assessment from MASH starts a new chronology which is then updated in line with significant events / sequence of significant events
- If a child who has a recent referral to MASH but had had previous history with social care and there is a historic chronology on case file and where the referral is being passed for assessment the initial allocated worker receiving the assessment from MASH worker will start a new chronology but in the first entry completes a synopsis of previous experience for the child and what impact this has had (one statement)
- If a child who has a recent referral to MASH but had had previous history with social care and there is no historic chronology on case file and where the referral is being passed for assessment the initial allocated worker receiving the assessment from MASH will start a new chronology but in the first entry completes a summary of previous involvement (there may be a number of contacts) and impact (one statement)
- If the child is already open to social care and receiving a service, the allocated worker starts a new chronology but in the first entry completes a synopsis of previous experience for the child and what impact this has had (one statement).

Practice tips for child centered recording in chronology

It is a good discipline to remember that the child may read the recording at some future date. This will help ensure that records are honest, balanced, and respectful and reinforces the need for individual impact to be understood for each child in the family.

The chronology must reflect the complexity of the child's life, and the interventions of key people in their life.

The chronology must be clear in the current impact on the child, this to include what we can see the impact being i.e. child is visibly distressed and hiding when parents have physical altercation and / or the known likelihood of impact if there is no change i.e. we are not seeing current distress but we know from research that this is likely to impact on their emotional regulation, healthy relationships etc in the future.

Chronologies must have good grammar and spelling. There must be no unnecessary, unexplained jargon. The tone must be appropriate, i.e. no slang.

When speaking about specific individual care must to be taken to ensure that they are clearly identifiable within the chronology to avoid mis identification at a later date, for example where there is more than one carer involved with the children the term dad could result in confusion as to who is being referred to not just in the present but also in the future if updating a chronology in a number of years' time. When referring to professionals, ensure that it is clear what their role is.

Source and location on child's file ie who told us and where further details can be found eg referral/case note entry dated....

It is crucial we keep our chronologies as concise as possible. If every issue or contact is recorded, the chronology simply loses its value. It is, therefore, important that chronologies do not become repeats of the case notes and so detailed that we cannot see the wood for the trees.

We understand that it is difficult to have hard and fast rules about what goes into a chronology – but you 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.

So, we are looking for entries to be either bullet point style or a short sentence or two. Remember the detail can be elsewhere. But also remember the entry must be meaningful. You can argue that "Telephone call from mum" is concise, but it tells us nothing about the significance of the call (if there is any) and is unhelpful and succeeds only in cluttering up the chronology. However: "....." tells us something worth reading. The detail of the allegation can be found in the case file.

Of course, there may be times when "missed appointments" or "children not seen" takes on significance. A "child not seen" because he's at an after-school group is understandable. However, if a pattern seems to be emerging that is harder to explain or understand, it will be worth recording these. Even so, rather than have, say, 25 different entries reading "Leo absconded from placement" – it might be better to sequence these into one entry. For example:

*1 Jan – 31 March – 25 incidents of Leo absconding
1 April – 30 June – 17 incidents of Leo absconding
1 July – 30 Sept – 5 incidents of Leo absconding*

Remember:

The facts laid out in a chronology will help us with our analysis of the case: so let nothing clutter our thinking.

A good chronology should be at the core of identifying a child/young person's needs and the validity of care plan and intervention

References:

Jay, A (2014) Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, 1997-2013

Laming, H (2003) The Victoria Climbié Inquiry, London: Cmnd 5730 HMSO

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