One Minute Guide

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Social Work Chronology

 No 3, January 2019

 V1. 14/10/19

Chronologies are a timeline of the child’s life. The chronology provides an overview of key incidents. It is a “sequential story” of significant events in a family’s history. It contributes to an emerging picture; significantly, current events are understood in the context of historical information. It will contribute to the practitioner’s understanding of the immediate and cumulative impact of events and changes upon individuals within a family and therefore inform decision making. An up to date chronology is a requirement for every open case to Children’s Social Care, enabling practitioners to gain a more accurate picture of the whole case. A good quality chronology is an effective tool for informing the assessment of children and their families.

A chronology is not expected to be a repetition of the narrative contained in process or case recordings, but bullet points indicating incidents, events or issues within a family or which significantly affect a child’s life. It therefore requires familiarity with the case information, and analysis to identify the critical moments in a child/family’s life experience. It must be relevant and succinct so that important events are not lost in insignificant and irrelevant details. A significant event is an incident that impacts upon a child’s safety and welfare, circumstances or home environment. Each entry should have an impact analysis and highlight any risk/protective factors. The analysis should put the event in context such as whether it is a first incident, part of a pattern etc. This will involve professional judgement based upon the child and family’s individual circumstances.

**To be of value a chronology should be:**

Succinct – If every issue/contact is recorded, the value of the chronology is diluted;

Simple in Format – This will ensure that information is efficiently merged and sorted;

Informative – This will assist with the decision making process.

A number of core issues should always be considered but may not be relevant for every case. Use professional judgement re significance:

Births of significant persons

Deaths of significant persons

Education, training and employment details

Referrals to Children’s Services

Strategy discussions

S47 enquiries

Child Protection Conferences

Child absconded or missing from home or care of a Local Authority

Admissions to the care of a Local Authority

Discharges from the care of a Local Authority

House moves

Persons moving in and out of the household

Details of new partners
Significant incidences of anti-social behaviour
Significant assessments by any professional agency (E.g. EHCP)
Significant referrals to key partner agencies (E.g. CAMHS)
Criminal proceedings
Significant police service logs
Incidences of reported domestic abuse
Schools attended and changes of school
School inclusion and attendance issues
Changes in significant health professionals
Mental Health issues
Other significant health issues.

Other issues that are significant to a particular family may also be recorded, for example, an observation during a home visit. Positive factors should also be recorded in order to provide balance, examples are:

Evidence of the family’s engagement with professionals

Parent’s self-referral for support

Child’s presentation in school significantly improves.

A chronology must also form the basis of any assessment undertaken with respect to children and their families. It can be used with family members to gain an insight into particular family member’s perspective regarding key events. There is an expectation that the allocated social worker updates the word document chronology on an ongoing basis and, at a minimum, uploads to MOSAIC every six months. The chronology episode remains open on MOSAIC, at the six monthly update the current chronology episode should be closed and a new episode opened with this latest updated chronology. Practice Managers are responsible for ensuring each child’s chronology is updated and ensuring the chronology is used as part of the supervision process in planning next steps.

Useful Links:

[Research in Practice: Court orders and care proceedings-chronologies](http://coppguidance.rip.org.uk/court-application/chronologies/)

[Research in Practice: Re-unification in Practice](https://www.rip.org.uk/news-and-views/blog/reunification-in-practice/)