**PSW Brief August 2019**

Through the work of the Practice Development Team and Service Audits Case Recording has been highlighted as an area for improvement.

Fundamentally, case recording documents the day to day life of the child. It tells the child’s individual story, including the strengths within the family, the areas where support is required, and states any concerns raised.

Case recording is essential for hypothesising, analysing and planning. It forms the basis for the child’s chronology, assessments and any formal reports needed.

Case recording assists in making sense of the available information, ultimately impacting on decision making, asking what is going on within the family. Have we got the right plan for the child? Description without analysis makes it hard to understand how and why some critical decisions have been made.

A ‘Good’ child’s record should be able to show what’s happening for a child at any given time. This means that a manager, new social worker or the Emergency Social Work Team can pick it up and immediately understand what a child needs.

**What makes good case recording -**

* The reader needs an up to date concise summary that shows the reason we are involved, what the concerns are, what the plan is for the child and the social worker’s professional analysis and evaluation.
* The child is always at the centre of case recording, their names need to be spelt correctly and their relationships clearly explained. When recording a visit to the child, the record is about the reason for the visit as well as its contribution to the assessment/plan. The importance of not just what happened or was said, but what this means for the child.
* The records should clearly reflect the child’s experiences and the impact on them of any failure to properly meet their needs. Avoid social work jargon and ensure the plans are bespoke to each child and family.
* Parental views on the child’s experiences need to be obtained and recorded, including their level of engagement and motivation to change.
* The child’s wishes and feelings and their understanding of what is happening in their life needs to be explicitly recorded, and how they were obtained. Ensure you have recorded your observations, particularly for young or non-verbal children. Ask yourself would someone reading the file get a sense of the child’s personality, opinions?
* Language is important. Anything that implies victims were to blame for any abuse they suffered during childhood can compound the impact of the abuse. Avoid comments about ‘lifestyle choices’ and children ‘placing themselves at risk’.
* Information should be recorded as close to the event as possible. Case records can lose their validity if written days later. If a disclosure is made by a child, write it down as soon as you can and ensure this is in the child’s own words.
* Decision making needs to be clear about why the decision has been made, who made the decision and what the outcome for the child and family will be. Assessments and Plans need to be updated to reflect the decisions made and the next steps.

In conclusion, case recording is a complex, yet necessary social work skill with lots to consider. Being reflective and thoughtful will ensure you are respectful and sensitive when writing about the child and their family.

Sandra Carnall, Principal Social Worker. August 2019.