**Chronologies**

The word chronology comes from the Greek “Chronos” which means time, whilst ‘ology’ is basically about studying. So, the word chronology can be taken to mean the studying of dates and times to find meaning. A chronology is basically a list of significant events in date order. It enables us to study events and can help identify emerging patterns, highlighting potential concerns.

A chronology should frame your understanding of a service user and their family, and tell the story of their lives. In this respect, they complement a genogram and ecomap nicely – the chronology describes the past while the ecomap describes the present and the genogram overlaps with both.

Thinking of the chronology as an administrative exercise – something that has to be done for the agency or court requirements – therefore misses the point. It fulfils an important practical role first and meets statutory requirements second, rather than the other way around.

**What makes a good Chronology?**

* The child and family (not the agency) are the focus and it accurately reflects their lived experiences. By creating a chronology at the start of your work it enables you to understand and consider the family history and functioning. Your exploration of family history is laying the ground for a more useful working relationship. Consider whether when the child or young person reads this would they recognise themselves and the life they have experienced to date?
* It identifies significant incidents and events for the child and family. After preparing a comprehensive chronology, you’re better equipped to comment or provide reflective feedback when someone raises an issue with you: you can point out where a pattern has repeated, or what they said previously about the same issue and how it differs from what they’re saying now.
* It records organisational intervention and actions taken. This gives an overview of the impact of interventions and shows whether professional services have been effective or not. This is vital for risk management plans and contingency planning. A chronology showing repeated interventions over time, with no lasting impact, provides a counter-argument to over optimism.
* It is a working tool, which is routinely updated. If you have been working with a child and family overtime you will learn more about their history as well as the present. It is important to add this detail as well as any new information.
* It contains sufficient detail to understand the event so that patterns can be seen but not be too detailed that it is difficult to plough through. The level of detail will increase in line with risk increasing.
* It will be reviewed and analysed regularly. Chronologies can suggest hidden patterns, and help build a hypothesis. It should be utilised as a key tool in an analytical assessment.

A chronology is an essential part of any good assessment, a vital foundation for analysis, and a useful tool to help a social worker develop rapport with service users. Chronology training is available to all frontline practitioners and is bookable through SAP.

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