Practice Matters 

Section 47 Investigations

What is a Section 47 (S47) Investigation?

Investigations or enquiries under S47 of the Children Act 1989 is a key duty of the Local Authority and they must be undertaken by an experienced social worker in circumstances whenever a child in their area has been taken into police protection, is the subject of an Emergency Protection Order or there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. The decision to initiate a S47 Investigation is agreed at a strategy discussion involving as a minimum social care, the police and health. Often a S47 Investigation is part of a joint investigation with the police where there is a possibility that a crime has been committed. Child Protection medicals and police interviews are often undertaken. S47 Investigations should be completed within a maximum of 15 working days.

Why have a S47 Investigation?

The aim of a S47 Investigation is to understand the nature and impact of the risk(s) involved, on the child(ren), in order to decide whether and what type of action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is suspected of, or likely to be, suffering significant harm; this includes deciding whether an Initial Child Protection Conference is necessary or a Review Child Protection Conference needs to be brought forward if the child is already subject to a Child Protection Plan.

How to carry out a good S47 Investigation?

* Have a plan – Do you understand what risks you are investigating? Who you need to talk to, to get as full an understanding as possible about those risks and what information you need from them? Plan the questions that you need to ask to ensure you get the information you really need; rather than general/basic information about the child/family and situation.
* Make sure you understand any relevant history both in relation to the risks and the family or others subject to the investigation.
* See and speak to all child(ren) individually and separate from their parents/carers (as soon as possible and within 24 hours) to get their account of what has happened to them, in their own words. Will this be done jointly or as a single agency? How can you help the child to tell their story; use age appropriate language, tools etc. Don’t use leading questions and remember that TED questions can be very helpful (Tell, Explain and Describe). When recording, you should use the child’s words / voice and upload to Mosaic any direct work.
* Ensure the child remains at the centre of your investigation; keep thinking IMPACT.
* Speak to all parents and anyone else with parental responsibility or considered relevant to the investigation, having already established any potential conflict of interest with a police investigation during the strategy discussion. Be curious if stories contradict or don’t seem true to what is already known about this child, family or situation. Challenge any contradictions/inconsistencies.
* Keep an open mind, don’t look to confirm what you may initially believe; remain professionally curious throughout.
* Regularly update your manager and reflect on your findings with them.
* If a child is not safe attend to that risk immediately; put an Interim Safety Plan in place until a fuller/ multi-agency plan can be developed. Make sure that plan is shared appropriately.
* Analyse all the information/evidence you gather to really understand what is happening; what the lived experience of the child is and has been.
* If your investigation finds risks aren’t as high as initially considered and thresholds are lowered, further assessment work can take place within the Single Assessment.