



### Writing With The Child In Mind

#### **What is 'writing with the child in mind'?**

"Writing with the child in mind" is a style of recording which:

- uses plain language
- is jargon free
- is factually accurate
- clearly separates facts and professional opinion
- reflects what children say (recognising that their words, drawings, facial expressions, body language and behaviours are all a form of communication which we need to be in tune with)
- is written in a rights-focussed way
- does not blame children for their experiences of abuse or neglect and recognises behaviours which are response to, or caused by, their experiences of abuse or neglect
- includes children's strengths, wishes, feelings and experiences and what life is like for them
- recognises children have a right to see what's written about them and may have access to their files in the future

#### **Why do we write with the child in mind?**

Writing with the child in mind increases the reader's understanding and levels of empathy about children's needs and experiences. When we write in this way, it is more likely that we will include strengths and positives about children and their family, as well as what is not going well. We are also more likely to develop child-focused decisions and interventions, avoid technical language and reliance on confusing acronyms. The tone and pitch of our writing is warmer, the language is more sensitive, and it shows the care and attention which we give to children and their families. Writing with the child in mind means that our analysis, rationale and decisions are easier to understand to the reader, including as if the child is 'looking back' at their file as an adult.

#### **What it is not**

We work with children of all ages and abilities so it is important to remember that 'writing with the child in mind' doesn't mean writing a report so that the child can understand it 'in the here and now'. It is writing in such a way that the child, in the future possibly as a young adult, could read reports about them and understand the service they experienced, what the social worker was thinking and the reasons why specific decisions were made.

Writing with the child in mind does not mean that we hold back from being clear about risks, concerns or difficult subjects. The reports which social workers write carry a lot of importance and power and have a range of audiences and purposes. People who will read them include parents, carers, managers, colleagues, other professionals, decision makers at panels, professionals' meetings and conferences. The clearer we communicate in our written reports, with the child in mind, the easier it is for **all** audiences to understand our process of thought, our analysis of a child's situation and the action we have taken.

### When do we do it

In the Duty and Assessment Team all Single Assessments are "written with the child in mind" – this includes assessments undertaken under S17 of the Children Act, and reports to Initial Child Protection Case Conference.

### How do we do it

If you are new to writing in this way, it can take some getting used to, but most social workers say that they prefer this style of writing. It isn't necessarily a longer way of writing a report – for example key information or accounts of important conversations can still be recorded in succinct ways. A key part of our Family Safeguarding approach is that social workers get to spend more time with children and that report writing is proportionate to the issues facing the child and the family we are working with.

Some examples:

	Written with the Child in Mind
Child did not engage	When I met you, you seemed tired and wary, and you found it hard to make eye contact.
'CSC received a referral from TVP stating Dad had been arrested for an assault against Mum last week'	Children's Social Care started this assessment after we received a referral from the police, stating that your father had punched your mum in the face, causing a black eye on the 1 <sup>st</sup> December. The police had come to your home, after your mum had called 999. The police reported that your father was drunk when they arrived and that both you and your mum were frightened and crying.
Ms X has attended all midwifery appointments and been open and honest about her alcohol and drug use.	Your mum has attended all 3 midwifery appointments. She has said to the midwife that she stopped drinking 2 months ago when she first found out she was pregnant. She states that she has continued to smoke cannabis, approximately 3 joints a week.
Child is sending nudes to an adult online	I believe that you are being groomed and exploited by an adult over the internet, and being coerced to send naked images of yourself to them
The child said that...	When I visited you, you told me..

**What do children say is important in social work and what do adults who used our services at children think?**

How we write about children in their files is important, and those who use Social Care services often tell us that it is a combination of this, plus the actions social workers take that make a difference to their outcomes.

“do what you will say you do”

“listen to me, even the things I don’t have the words for”

“explain why you do the things you do”

“don’t judge me”

“Reading my file has been a double-edged sword. It is full of hard-hitting, unpredictable and challenging information but it is also helping me put the past to bed. Sometimes I even find myself laughing at what I read! But above all, it is helping me to own the label of being a looked after child.”

### **Want more information?**

Below is a list of resources on recording from a range of organisations

BASW’s top ten tips on recording:

[Layout 1 \(basw.co.uk\)](https://www.basw.co.uk/layout/1)

Bracknell Forest Children’s Social Care – Language Which Cares Pledge (for you to read, sign up and share with your manager in your next supervision):

Views from a Care Leaver – What I’ve Learnt from reading my social services file  
[LocalGov.co.uk - Your authority on UK local government - What I've learnt from reading my social services file](https://www.local.gov.uk/your-authority-on-uk-local-government-what-i-ve-learnt-from-reading-my-social-services-file)

The Mix Support Community – an online forum for 18-25s – this thread shows the views of young people about specific language, how their records are written and the impact on them  
[I got my social work files — The Mix Support Community](https://www.themixsupportcommunity.com/)

If you want to improve your skills in Writing with the Child in Mind use the above resources and speak with the Principle Social Worker.