

Welcome to October's Practice and Learning bulletin which is our 4th edition.

The focus for this month's bulletin is learning from Serious Case Reviews and complaints alongside learning about what '*No recourse to public funds*' means and how we, as professionals can support people who find themselves in this position.

The bulletin will also start to feature any learning complaints and there is a short section in this edition.

I have received some suggestions for future features – thank you for those. If you would like to see something in the bulletin for your specific area of work, please make contact with me. My contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

Traci Taylor – Principal Social Worker



Learning from complaints

We use the outcomes from the complaints we receive to look at our practice and to learn from any mistakes that we have made. It is an important part of quality assuring our work.

There are 2 key findings from recent complaints; both focus on good practice, professionalism and working openly and in partnership with children, young people and families. Please make sure that you practice the following at all times.

- When contacted by children, young people, or their family by telephone, email or letter must be responded to.
- When a case closes you must make sure that the child, young person and their family are aware of the outcome and that the case is now closed.

Focus on Practice – Safety Planning.

WHY WE NEED TO USE SAFETY PLANS INSTEAD OF A CONTRACT OF EXPECTATIONS

When we are worried about the safety/well-being of children we need to make sure that interventions are put in place to keep them safe. Often social workers use a contract of expectations, also known as a working agreement, which outlines the expectations. This could be that the parents do not use drugs when caring for their children or that a member of the family cannot remain in the house for example. The agreement details the consequences of breaking the agreement.

However, the use of such contracts or agreements has been heavily criticised in serious case reviews, in legal judgements courts and by inspectors etc. The concerns are that there is a false sense of the child/young person being safe if this agreement is in place. Parents often feel under duress to sign them and they are not a legally binding document.

Safety plans (using Signs of Safety methodology) used appropriately and in partnership with parents and carers can be much more effective way of building working relationships with families and reducing the risk of harm.

Bradford CSC is now committed to not using contracts and replacing these with safety plans instead.

SAFETY PLANS

Safety plans are a way of working with families using the strength based approach of Signs of Safety; to be effective safety plans need to be seen as a collaborative process undertaken by the family and worker together and focuses on the question ***what needs to happen to ensure the children are safe in their own family?***

To write a meaningful safety plan you need to identify the concerns, 'what are we worried about?' the family's strengths, 'what is working well?' and then set safety goals, 'what needs to happen next?'

Goal setting is an important aspect of safety planning; safety goals should be about an outcome that demonstrates a reduced risk of abuse/neglect and increase safety and stability. The goals should describe the specific actions parents and/or the worker need to do to achieve the safety goal. As with all of our plans the actions should be SMART – **Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time- limited.**

The plan needs to be regularly reviewed against the child's plan so should be discussed in CP Reviews, CIN Reviews and Child in Care Reviews.

Look out for Signs of Safety Training being offered in inductions and as refresher training.



Serious Case Reviews



People whose first language is not English - summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice

Case reviews were completed following children who were involved in:

- Abuse and/or neglect
- Exposure to domestic abuse
- Suicide
- Being killed by a parent.

The language barrier in these cases identified that language barriers can sometimes impact on effectively assessing, supporting and protecting families. As we know in all of our work that good communication is essential in building relationships and, therefore, a lack of a common language is a significant barrier.

Learning from these reviews highlights the following findings and learning points.

Efforts should always be made to **ascertain the first language** of service users and, measures put in place so they can express their views.

Imbalance of power between parents – if one speaks English and the other doesn't the English speaking parent effectively filters things through them; this is likely to mean that professionals get an incomplete picture. Parents may also find it difficult to resolve issues between each other so things escalate.

Children involved in adult topics – children born in the UK often act as interpreters for parents meaning that they are exposed to adult topics which is inappropriate for their age. Also a parent may be less likely to disclose concerns/abuse if through their child. This is equally true if the interpreter is a friend, relative or neighbour.

Social Isolation – where families live in areas where their own language is not widely spoken; this leads to a lack of a support network and can lead to depression.

Misreading children – lack of speaking, being withdrawn, behaviour seen as a lack of understanding or speaking English and not considering this as potential signs of abuse or neglect.

Learning for Improved Practice

1. Be aware of language issues and barriers to communication.
2. Record the families/individuals first language and share with other agencies
3. Ensure that all written communication is in the families first language
4. Use professional interpreters – do not allow other family members, neighbours or friends to interpret.

Hidden Men - Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice

These findings follow SCRs where children were killed or seriously harmed by men.

Men play an equally important role in children's lives as females; they have a great influence on the children they care for. However, SCR's and internal audits find that despite this, men can be ignored by professionals who tend to focus almost exclusively on the quality of care children receive from their mother or female carer.

From the analysis of the cases in the review there are two categories of 'hidden men':

- Men who posed a risk to the child which resulted in them suffering harm.
- Men, for example estranged fathers who were capable of protecting and nurturing the child but who were overlooked by professionals.

Risk Factors Identified:

Lack of information sharing between adult's and children's services – professionals involved with men, i.e., probation workers, may not share risk factors with the professionals supporting the children and (ex) partner.

Relying too much on mother for essential information – for information about the men in the child's life; she may not be honest about this. Also professionals do not talk to enough people involved with the child to ascertain vital information.

Not wishing to appear judgemental about the parent's personal relationships – this ignores potential risks from casual relationships.

Overlooking the ability of the estranged father to provide safe care – failing to identify and engage them.

Learning for Improved Practice:

1. Identifying the men in the child's life
2. Involving fathers – emphasise the importance of a father's role in their child's life to a child's well-being
3. Men as protectors – an estranged father or ex-partner could give crucial information to safeguard children.



Focus on Practice –Children and Family with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

What is NRPF – this is an immigration status restricting access to public funds, including mainstream benefits such as welfare and housing. Obviously people need support if they are in this immigration category and Bradford as a NRPF team; it is important that children's services works closely with this team.

Despite the NRPF status families and individuals may have the right for financial support from CSC to 'avoid destitution' or because they have a health condition.

This work is complex and it is important that you understand what NRPF means and how to support families where we have a duty of care. A new Practice Guidance has been written and has been added in to Tri-X; please make sure that you read this and access when and if you need to.

LATEST ADDITIONS TO TRI-X

Tri-x is being updated regularly with new practice guidance and policies. In October the following documents were added:

- Single assessments
- Diversity wheel
- Duties to parents and carers
- Children and families with no recourse to public funds
- Supervision policy
- Student handbooks
- ASYE handbook and templates

You can also access the West Yorkshire Safeguarding procedures via the Tri-x link – click into the WYS site; it is set up in a similar way and you can access;

- Policies and procedures
- Resources
- Safeguarding children partnership websites
- Working Together to Safeguard Children

Additionally, you can register for updates so you are alerted when new things are added.

[Tri-x procedures and practice guidance](#)



All the learning in this bulletin will be followed up by the practice supervisor in your team – it will be on your team meeting agenda to look at what we can do to make sure that the learning in this bulletin is embedded in the work that we do with children and families. Let us know how you get on!

CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Have you set up an account for Research in Practice? If not please take the time to do this by clicking this link– <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/events-training/> - there is an option to set up membership; being a member gives you access to lots of CPD opportunities through Webinars, podcasts for you to watch/listen at your convenience, news and views, topics of interest etc. There is something for everybody no matter what your role. Some of the ones on offer are -

A reminder also that you can access webinars, articles and information from across the region at www.childrensocialworkmatters.org

CSWM brings all 15 local authorities of Yorkshire and Humber together in one place.

Next Month.....

In next month's bulletin: Parenting Groups; Pre-birth Assessments; Learning from Research about contact/family-time and Learning from Research about the Lived Experience of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic children.



For Feedback or suggestions please contact Traci Taylor, PSW at -

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