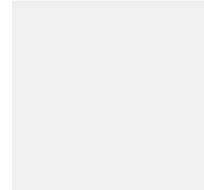


Co-Working Protocol



This chapter was added to the manual in August 2015.

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1. Introduction

Effective service provision depends on skilled and consistent information sharing; sustained collaboration; understanding and mutual respect between agencies and professionals (Multi-agency threshold guidance - Identifying need and Analysing Risk when working with Children In Walsall November 2013).

Co-working can provide excellent opportunities for the development of students and newly qualified or inexperienced social workers. With careful planning and regular Manager oversight a co-working arrangement can be conducive to improved outcomes for children and families. However, without careful planning and oversight co-working can result in confusion, drift and a lack of accountability.

Co-working can take place within and across teams and services.

Walsall's vision and ambition for children as detailed in the Children and Young People's Plan is based on what children have said including:

- ***I tell my story once;***
- ***Support and services join up around me;***

- ***People do what they promise.***

These key messages are central to effective co-working within and across teams.

2. Advantages of Co-Working

With careful planning and regular supervision co-working can enable an experienced worker to model good practice to a student, an ASYE or an inexperienced social worker. This might include modelling direct work with children, demonstrating appropriate engagement with and challenge to parents/carers, demonstrating how to chair meetings, presenting information to meetings and court and drawing together reports, assessments and plans.

Co-working can provide opportunities for reflective discussion between the co-workers following visits and meetings but also in formal supervision with the Manager.

Co-working can help to reduce the burden on a social worker when a case involves a high level of complexity and/or when working with a large sibling group. It can provide different perspectives on a case and allow sharing of different areas of knowledge.

These advantages can contribute to improved practice with more reflective experienced workers and with inexperienced workers gaining competence and confidence.

3. Potential Disadvantages

In the absence of planning from the outset, co-working inevitably becomes parallel working characterised by inconsistent, conflicting messages shared with children and families; poor information sharing; a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities; ineffective assessment, planning and review of plans and a much reduced opportunity for developing the less experienced co-worker.

4. Process

To ensure that the advantages of co-working succeed the following protocol should be followed in all co-worked cases within teams.

1. Whenever a case is co-allocated within a team the team manager will meet with the co-workers and record an MDR that sets out:
 - The case responsibilities and tasks for each worker in terms of visits, completing reports, assessments and plans, recording, chairing meetings, presenting information to meetings and court;
 - Communication between the co-workers clarifying frequency of case discussions and responsibility for recording these;
 - Frequency of supervision of the case with Manager and both workers attending.

2. The initial meeting between the manager and the co-workers will clarify the learning opportunities for the less experienced worker in all cases where this is relevant. This is likely to include:
 - The experienced worker taking the lead initially to model good practice in engaging with children and families, chairing meetings, presenting to meetings;
 - The experienced worker taking responsibility for key reports, assessments etc but involving the less experienced worker in the thinking process behind the work and with the less experienced worker increasingly contributing to the work in line with confidence and ability;
 - Both workers to commit to regular reflective case discussions with the resulting analyses to be added to the child's record in the discussion with colleague case note and in formal supervision with the team manager. In addition evidence of learning should be added to the worker's supervision records.

3. Review of the arrangement in formal supervision must include consideration of the effectiveness of the co-working in terms of:
 - Progressing the plan for the child. Is the co-working arrangement pro-active in information sharing, completing tasks, improving outcomes for the child? Are there delays, disagreements, uncertainties about roles? If so these must be addressed urgently with the child kept at the centre of thinking and with an MDR explaining how any issues have been resolved;
 - Development of the less experienced worker in relation to point 2.