**Practice Note for all Practitioners,** Managers**and Staff:**

**Genograms**

**What is a genogram?**

A genogram is a visual tool which is drawn to represent the key people and relationships in a child and family’s life. Genograms also known as family trees, include common universal symbols such as circles, triangles, lines and squares when put together allows a worker to understand who is in a family and to get a sense of the different relationships.

It should cover at least three generations - children, parents, grandparents, and should include the dates of birth of the family members, rather than ages as this means the genogram will be clear on detail when viewed at different points in time. A genogram can help to identify patterns within identified relationships and across generations which might impact upon families.

This practice note will outline what we need to do to create a genogram, explore why they are important and the links with our relationship based which is at the heart of our Practice Framework and Model. It outlines how to complete a genogram including what to consider and using a case study example and provides good practice points.

**Why is a Genogram important?**

Completing a genogram with a family is one of the first things that we should do alongside an impact chronology when we begin to work with children, young people and their families. Creating the genogram with the family as part of a direct work session can help us to develop our relationship with them to get a better understanding of their family and network. This is the reason why creating genogram is linked to our relationship-based approach which is at the heart of Sandwell’s Practice Framework and Model. As a shared activity undertaken with our family it can be can be reviewed at any stage of the assessment, intervention or planning with the family.

Working with families to create genograms to understand important details of their lives requires us to consider our approach to ensure that it is informed by a respectful stance, professional curiosity and appreciative enquiry. We need to discuss with the family, where their personal information will be held and who might have access to it. Families also need to be given copies of their genogram.

A completed genogram can be used to talk to families about their history, the nature of relationships they have with each other, and any patterns of behaviour associated with one or other(s) of them. This will allow the worker to get a sense of significant events from the family's perspective - and allow them to introduce issues that have been raised as significant events by other people. Discussions with families about how and when these are created and discussed is important as they might evoke strong feelings if it is a difficult relationship or someone who has died. Further direct work sessions can be undertaken to develop this into the family’s cultural genogram, for information on this, please see the ‘Cultural Genogram practice note’.

The importance of completing genograms is also highlighted in Serious Case Reviews and by a range of Ofsted findings which has identified that completing genograms would have helped to identify significant people in the lives of children.

It is important that we ask respectful and enquiring questions about the child and family’s family and triangulate this with information obtained from other family members, key agencies such as School, health including the G.P, Housing as appropriate.

**How do we create a genogram?**

When completing a genogram, it is helpful to use a sheet of paper, coloured pens and pencils and a table (if possible) to work at. This is to make the completion of the genogram as interactive as possible. The below are common universal symbols that should be used when creating a genogram:

Separated

Unknown

(e. g. Pregnancy)

Female

Male

Deceased

Enduring relationship

(e.g. in long term relationship, marriage)

On/Off relationship

Divorced

***The correct placement and use of the symbols above are essential in accurately representing the family structure, as is the use of connecting lines that link family members together.***

The family should be involved in drawing their genogram and their inclusion will provide the practitioner with an opportunity to observe and explore family relationships, for example;

* how open family members are with each other,
* whether they describe different people/ relationships similarly or differently,
* how much they know about each other and
* how willing they are to share the information.

All genograms should start with the children and build up through the generations from parents through to grandparents. If needed, a genogram can go further than this and can also include significant others in a child and family’s life. It makes the genogram easier to interpret if the different generations are aligned accordingly on the page, for example the child and any siblings are aligned, parents, uncles and aunties are aligned and then grandparents are aligned. An example of how to start and complete a genogram can be found in Appendix 1, which is embedded at the end of this document.

The example below outlines the basic structure of a completed genogram for a family, where the identified males in the family are represented in squares and identified females are represented by circles. The coloured backgrounds are to highlight the different generations contained in the genogram:



As can be seen, a genogram provides a pictorial representation of a family and allows for the identification of support networks, relationships and involvements.

**Considerations for completing a genogram:**

Using the case study on the next page, the following examples show the impact of incorrect placement or use of symbols in a genogram.

**Case example**

John is a 7-year-old boy who lives with his Mother (32) her partner (34), and younger sister Ellie (4). His Father is (35) remarried and has a child (Sarah, 1yr) with his new wife (34). John has contact with both his maternal and paternal grandparents. There is also a maternal aunt who helps care for the children when Mother is at work.



**Example 1. Shows that parents are still together and therefore can cause confusion as to nature of parental relationships**

**Example 2. Accurately reflects the family**



**Example 4. Inaccurate as it does not link children to parents and shows that paternal grandfather has passed away**

**Example 3. Does not include all family and therefore misses out John’s half sibling, step-mother and aunt. All of whom are significant to John’s lived experience.**

There are further considerations that are needed when completing a genogram with a family for example the inclusion and placement of family members that have passed or other things such as pets which will have different meaning for individuals, families and cultures. In some cultures, for example the link with people that have passed is a source of resilience, whilst for other the passing of someone who was abusive could trigger trauma for someone.

**Further points for consideration:**

* Taking the time to start a genogram with a family can not only inform your assessment and highlight areas of strength in the family but is also a positive way to build your relationship with the family, allowing them to be the experts of their storey and increasing your understanding
* Genograms can be revisited and updated several months later to reflect the current circumstances of the family.
* As practitioners we also need to consider our approach when working with families to ensure that it is informed by a respectful stance, professional curiosity and appreciative enquiry.
* Ideally the session needs to be interactive and creative and can be completed using; flip charts, coloured pens, pictures and stickers.

**How can I evidence this work on the child/young person/young adults file?**

* Genograms created with the child, young person, young adults, parents and carers to be uploaded onto documents with a linked case note providing an analysis of the session.
* This is also part of your assessment and can be referenced throughout.

**Good Practice points**

* Even if it done separately, try and engage a range of family members in the creation or when updating the genogram to ensure that it is holistic and inclusive.
* When creating and discussing the genogram, identify areas of strengths and resilience in a family, not just concerns.
* Genograms can be developed with the family into Cultural Genograms which provide a better picture of the quality of the relationships, resources and risks within the family and wider network to inform assessments and plans.
* When undertaking this work and especially when developing this into a cultural genogram being trauma informed means speaking to the family about how they might feel and discussing what support they can access and when best to undertake this work.

**Further information and reading**

* Practice notes relating to the Cultural Genograms, Practice Framework and Relationship based practice are available on Tri-X.
* The Practice Framework and Model Booklet, Information and practice learning workshops on the Learning and Development Pages particularly in relation to Cultural Genograms.
* Appendix 1 ‘How to start a Genogram’ (attached below)

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