

10
TOP
TIPS

July 2020

Recording in Children's Social Work



Part of BASW England's 80-20 Campaign



Campaign
Promoting relationship
based practice

BASW
England

The professional association for
social work and social workers

Good recording and the 80-20 Campaign

BASW England's 80-20 campaign is all about time.

Social workers tell us that 80% of their time is spent on administrative tasks and not enough time (just 20%) is spent on direct relationship based social work and reflective practice.

We have created this good recording guide for social workers. The "top-tips" guide identifies how to record in a way which is reflective and children and families focussed. The guide also outlines how social workers can be more succinct in their recording.

Social workers should have more time to do the job they were trained to do and, furthermore, the children and families we work with have a right to a social worker who is both available to provide a direct service to them and, crucially, is empowered to support them to achieve the best outcomes.

We hope you find the guide helpful.

Acknowledgements

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Why is recording important?

- This is the child or young person's story of what happened and why.
- Research shows that children's voices are rarely or briefly reflected in their own records (The *MIRRA* (Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access) 2019).¹
- It is important to capture the voice of the child in recording to reflect their feelings, experiences, wishes and perspectives.
- For some children a written record will be the only resource they have to learn about their childhood and to understand decisions made with them and about them.
- If a child wants to look at, read, and understand their social work record it should be easily understood, accessible and reflect their experiences.
- Good recording supports good decision-making for children and families and allows social workers to be accountable for their work.

¹ www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/oct/childrens-voices-omitted-care-records-ucl-study-finds

1

Include the child or young person as much as possible in the process of record creation

- Social work involvement raises questions for children.
- It is important that children can look at and understand their records in a timely way.
- Records may be the only memory and biographical resource a child will ever have.
- Be creative and think of ways of capturing the voice of children in a style which works for them e.g. through drawings, storytelling, music and poetry.

2

Where possible write as though you were writing to the child or young person

- Imagine you are writing to the child, who will one day see the record.
- For example "Dear Chelsea, today I visited you at home with your mum..."
- This helps to shape the record into something clear and understandable that focuses on the child's experiences.
- Where this is not possible, it may still be a powerful tool to write directly to parents or other family members.

3

Recording should be purposeful and analytical

- The record is for the benefit of the child and when or if/when a child reviews the record it should not be hard to gain a comprehensive understanding of their life during any social work involvement and the reasons why decisions were made.
- Decisions about how to support a child or family, such as whether to end involvement or to change the way support is offered, will be based on the evidence held in recording.
- Good recording supports good decision making. Recording work also helps social workers to reflect on what is happening for children and families and to analyse the support they may need.
- If you are recording something solely for the benefit of auditors or inspectors then it is not purposeful to the child and consideration should be given to excluding this from the child's record.
- If auditing information must be recorded then it should be made clear why this is the case and retained in a way which does not impede the child's understanding of their file, should they decide to review it in the future.

4

Use photographs and other memory objects sensitively and critically

- When a person returns to their records to better understand their childhood they often hope to find personal items and photographs. These may be included in the life story work, but they should also form part of the record.
- Practitioners should be clear about the purpose of photographic material included in a child's record if it's inclusion is not for the purposes of being a child or young person's memory object.
- Social workers, particularly those working in safeguarding roles should apply professional judgement and curiosity when including photographs on a child's record and be clear on the purpose. Photographic images used in safeguarding work should not be used in isolation and without the appropriate analysis and statutory safeguarding procedures.
- Commit to life story work for children who enter care. Life story work is a key autobiographical resource and is a positive means of interacting with a child. It should capture the genuine words and perspectives of the child.

5

Records should be continuous and demonstrate accountability

- It is important that in the event a social worker exits from the life of a child that any new social worker can refer to a record which clearly charts the journey of the child and the parallel work undertaken. This will prevent the child and family having to repeat their story again and again.
 - As well as the child and family, your colleagues and managers should be able to look at your recording and understand the child's narrative and what decisions have been made and why.
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6

Make the chronology a roadmap of a child's life

- A good chronology will be both concise and give a clear understanding of a child's journey.
- It should always be supported by an up to date genogram to represent the child's family network.
- Record emerging patterns and the impact on children.

7

Allow for multiple perspectives and points of view

- Children's wishes and feelings should be included as well as your own views and aspirations for the child or young person.
- Be prepared to share differences of opinion and perspectives.
- If children, their families or other people in their lives disagree with your decisions then it is important to include and explain their opinions.
- Showing multiple perspectives demonstrates to people they were listened to and understood and builds a nuanced narrative of events.
- Remember to "show not tell". Mention personal things about the child that demonstrates you know them. (E.g. Hari was wearing a t-shirt with a character from his favourite film, and he is learning to tie his shoelaces.) Simple details can provide comfort to someone reading their record following say a chaotic childhood.
- Fact and opinion can both be recorded. It must be clear what is fact and what is opinion.

8

Records should be accessible

- The record is for the benefit of the child and family and should be written in a way that is easily understandable. If and when they review their record the child or young person should be able to gain a comprehensive understanding of their life during any social work involvement and the reasons why decisions were made.
- Be mindful of contemporary language and references which may lose meaning over time and make a record hard to understand.
- Re consider the use of institutional language. It may for example be more child friendly to say friend or school-mate instead of peer, brothers and sisters instead of siblings and home instead of placement.
- Take care of children's records. Enquire if your organisation has a system of preserving records across different mediums. Records have to be kept for at least 75 years.
- Support children, young people and care leavers to access their records. Every person has a right to access their records and should be supported to do so, whenever they are ready.

9

Consider what you include in recording

- A child's record will not be in one place, it will be spread across assessment reports, case notes, court statements, conference reports etc. It is important that there are clear and concise summaries that show your professional analysis and evaluation.
- Concerns should always be recorded clearly, with relevant evidence.
- Records should consider what is going well for a child as well as some of the assessed concerns and risks. Recording positive events and behaviours creates balance and a valid record for the child.
- High quality recording shows the relationship between you and the child and their family and your aspirations for the child.

10

What to avoid recording

- Think carefully about your own reflections or hypothesis without evidence. This can be explored within reflective supervision but may not be appropriate or helpful as part of the child's record.
- Avoid using a child's record as a repository for every piece of communication. Everything recorded on the child's record should be purposeful. Recording absolutely everything will make it harder for those coming to the record to understand the journey the child has been on and why, as they will have to wade through unnecessary information.
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations and acronyms. Social work – like other professions is full of professional shorthand, which is difficult for others to read. Records should not exclude non-specialist readers. Do not use abbreviations without at least one reference to the expanded version.
- Do not use euphemistic or non-specific language. Records can sometimes be vague and use confusing terms that can mean something to social workers but not to others. For example, "sexually inappropriate behaviour", "lack of attachment" or "controlling". When children read this it can be upsetting because they do not know the specific meaning of the phrase or the basis for the judgement.

Top Tips

Recording in Children's Social Work

- 1 Include the child throughout the recording
- 2 Write records as if writing to the child or family members
- 3 Make records purposeful and analytical
- 4 Include memory objects (eg. photos) sensitively and critically
- 5 Make sure records reflect the whole of the child's story and why decisions were made
- 6 Chart the child's journey with a chronology supported by a genogram
- 7 Include different views and opinions
- 8 Make records easy to access
- 9 Make sure recording is balanced and meaningful
- 10 Avoid jargon and vague language, do not record every piece of communication