

# Principal Social Worker's Practice and Learning Bulletin July 2022



## Welcome to July's edition of the bulletin

Hello everyone

In this edition of the bulletin I have revisited assessments. Improving the quality of our assessments in all areas of our work has been a practice focus for some time. To support this the L&D team have been offering a days face to face training focusing on Assessment, Analysis and Planning; this is well attended and future dates are being added.

The second part of the module will be the focus for September and October focusing on Assessing Risk and Safety Planning. Training can be booked through Evolve.

Also in this edition

- How to use genograms effectively
- A blog about mindfulness
- As usual I have included some learning from Serious Case Reviews.
- As always there is lot of information about the training available at the end of the bulletin.



As always, please let me know if you want to see something in the bulletin or want to contribute.



Best wishes

**Traci Taylor**

Principal Social Worker/Service Manager



### My Journey into Mindfulness continues.....

Have a look at the picture on the left - Which one describes you? I suspect for the majority of people it is Mind Full; work is busy, home life can be busy.

Before I started on my mindfulness journey via Mark Anslow's 8 week mindfulness course I was definitely Mind Full and don't get me wrong I can still be in that place but I have learnt over the past 4/5 weeks techniques to help me combat feeling overwhelmed with thoughts about all the things I

need to do, and things I didn't do at work; you get the picture. Now I am half way through the course it is good to reflect on my learning and experiences of mindfulness so that you can think about what it could achieve for you.

As a reminder, mindfulness can be described as 'a practical way of changing your life for the better' (Gary Hennessey) . In the workbook I am using (given as part of the mindfulness course) it is described as -

*'Mindfulness is the gentle effort to be continually present with experience'*

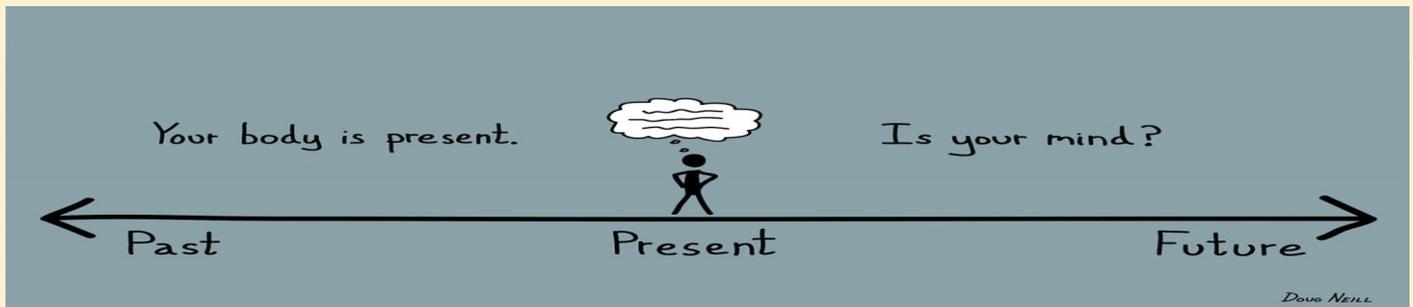
*And*

*'Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally'*

Also I think it is probably good to mention that mindfulness is not about teaching yourself to meditate and not have any thoughts. Of course there are some meditation techniques used in mindfulness (which are fabulous and I am sure that I and a couple of other people in my course have actually fallen asleep for a split second). Firstly it is impossible not to think, even when I am being talked through a meditation by Mark my head can be bombarded by random thoughts but this training has taught me what to do with those thoughts and bring myself back into the present to experience what is happening here and now.

My personal goal in attending this training was to feel what it is like to be mindful but also because I liked the idea of slowing things down so that I could enjoy experiences without life rushing by; I always feel that weeks speed by, weekends go by even more quickly and I am getting older faster than I want to be.

The image below is a really good visual representation of being mindful; one of the things we worked with was about how much of our life is done on autopilot which essentially means that our body is going through the action but our brain is elsewhere; examples of autopilot are eating, brushing our teeth, driving (I don't remember this journey).



We tend to remember past events and think about the future but do not appreciate things that we do in the present. I started my practice with this by mindfully brushing my teeth; I know it sounds weird but don't knock it until you try it! This is really thinking about the whole process; what the toothbrush feels like, looks like, how it feels in my mouth, the sound it makes. By doing this I found that I concentrated so hard doing this that the experience stopped me thinking about what I was going to do when I got to work (that has been my daily practice for years and years) effectively wishing my life away.

Through practising the techniques we are learning I have found that I can easily slip into mindfulness when doing very ordinary things which can become extra ordinary when you are really 'present'; I notice things differently; and enjoy things more, I feel more peaceful.

That has not happened because I take notice of me brushing my teeth; but learning how to ground myself through breathing techniques, slowing myself down and by using by body mapping (concentrating on different parts of the body, how does it feel, what are the sensations etc.)

We have learnt about how the brain is wired and that as its job is to keep us alive it is constantly on the look out for threats; just because we have evolved and unlikely to encounter a wild animal who wants to kill us doesn't mean our brain has stopped fight, flight or freeze responses; instead it focuses on the negativity we experience which lands and embeds in our thought process whereas it takes 15 seconds for a positive experience to land with us. This has explained to me why I am likely to ponder and go over negative encounters (that email that just pushes your buttons) rather than think about the numerous positive interactions I have had with colleagues that day; although I am conscious of this and am changing my own thought processes.

You probably think that it is a luxury to go and spend 2 hours per week learning how to be mindful; and I do get that; it is so busy at work that you could have written up that assessment or visited that family; typed up some minutes; however how important is your health? The science behind mindfulness is powerful and evidences that it can improve your mental and physical health and that it can improve your sleep. Paradoxically, it can create more time for you.

Mark Anslow is a qualified mindfulness practitioner and is running a series of 4 week courses and 8 week courses; he also offers 2 drop in sessions per week. If you are keen to see if this works for you then drop Mark an email on [Mark.anslow@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:Mark.anslow@bradford.gov.uk)

# Assessment



## TOP TIPS FOR A GOOD ASSESSMENT

- The assessment should be **holistic**, draw together a family history with reference to prior information and chronologies and recognise the existing strengths and skills of the child and family. The assessment framework identifies all the areas that should be covered.
- It should be conducted in a structured way with the full and active involvement of the parents/carers and child. Other family members should be involved where possible especially if they have made a referral expressing concerns.
- Its purpose is to identify the child/young person's and other family members' needs and agree on the desired outcome of any involvement.
- The voice of the child/young person and their wishes and feelings must be ascertained and recorded where possible and due consideration given to them, having regard to his/her age and understanding. It is good practice to upload any work the child or young person has completed on to the records.
- It is possible to gain an understanding of the child's feelings through a range of age-appropriate techniques, or techniques to overcome communication barriers. It should be rare in an assessment for the voice of the child not to be taken into account. It is good practice to upload any work that the child has done as part of the assessment process to the file to evidence their voice.

- Where parents or children have any communication or understanding difficulties this needs to be taken into consideration and steps taken to address this; this could be the use of an interpreter, using an advocated or using a specialist assessment tool.
- Relationship building is key; be respectful and be aware of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Do not use jargon or acronyms but instead use straight forward language that is easily understood and check that the children/young people and their families understand why you are working with them, be honest about any concerns and what needs to happen next.
- Ask open ended questions rather than questions that require a yes or no answer (closed questions); this will enable you to get more information and explanations.
- Be curious—do not just take things at face value but check it out, ask questions to clarify meaning so that it adds to the picture that you are seeing.



## Demystifying Analysis - What is analysis?

“...examining the elements [of an issue]; gaining a better understanding of it; and then selecting a course of action” (Wilkins and Boahen, 2013; p2).

Analysis can also be described as ‘**showing your workings out**’; how you came to the decision and recommendation based on the information you have gathered. Analysis is something that we have struggled with in Bradford but if you follow the tips below of how to do this it should demystify the act of writing an analysis; this is also covered in our assessment training and we will be offering a bespoke workshop around analysis later in the year.

There are 4 main stages to writing the analysis section of an assessment.

### Stage 1 - Making sense of information to self and others

- Understanding the core issues** - why am I doing this assessment?
- Explaining ‘how’, ‘why’, ‘what’?** - what does the information tell you?
- Taking an inquisitive and critical approach to information:** cross-checking sources, self-critiquing, listening to service users’ criticisms (often described as professional curiosity)
- Organising the data**—to make sense of what you have collated.

## Stage 2 - Interpreting the data: formal and informal reasoning

- **Contextualising the data: law, ethics, practice** - understanding information gathered by putting context to the situation including the legal framework you work within. (formal reasoning)
- **Gut feeling** - What did your gut instinct tell you when you met with the family for example; (informal reasoning)
- **Practitioner wisdom** - Using what you know through reflection and experience to help you make sense of the information gathered (informal reasoning)
- **Formal knowledge: national and local policies; theoretical and research knowledge, models of practice, analytic tools** - Using the infrastructure that informs your practice, our policies (pre-birth for example); our model of practice and what we have learnt from serious case reviews, and research; and linking in with theory.

## Stage 3 - Planning and decision-making

- **(R)evaluating the information** - Using stages 1 and 2 to look at the information again to be satisfied that you have collated the right information and that you understand what it is telling you to help you to make the right decision.
- **Clarifying the purpose of actions** - What are you trying to achieve? Are your plans going to be effective and purposeful? Will they meet the needs of the child?
- **Situating actions on the 'evidence' – for example research evidence, the available information, previous actions** - using evidenced based practice such as observations made, linking in research evidence where relevant such as Serious Case Reviews, thematic reviews etc.
- **Examining implications or consequences** - What will happen if you do nothing? What will happen if you do something? Again, this is a balance of the information you have and what this means. The child being central to this decision making will help with this action.

## Stage 4 - Presenting the analysis effectively

- **Evidencing the above** - Show your workings out; this is the rationale of how you came to your decision about what happens next.
- **Showing different voices and opinions** - It is important that your analysis is balanced and that you have considered different options.
- **Explaining or considering opposing viewpoints** - This could be to show why parents or partner agencies disagree with your concerns or a course of action; balance out your own view with theirs and explain the differences and reasons for them.
- **Carrying your readers and listeners with you** - The analysis is the 'story' so should be succinct summarising the information you have but should not be a description or a repeat of the information but an explanation of what all this information means.
- **Concluding and recommending a course of action** - the conclusion and subsequent recommendations have arisen from a clear understanding of the situation (a child is living with), the impact of the situation and what needs to happen to either change or improve the situation or continue to support the situation as is.

# GETTING STARTED WITH GENOGRAMS



## What is a genogram?

Genograms are a visual tool which is used: **“to display physical bonds between individuals composing a family or social unit”** could also be described as a type of family tree and is a ‘snapshot’ of the family structure showing who is in the family.

## Why do we use genograms?

We use genograms when we work with children, young people and their families to understand the support network they have access to, or potentially have access to.

When genograms are completed with child or their family as part of direct work or assessment session or discussion, it helps us to understand who they have a close relationship to and helps them think about who could support or help them; it also helps us to understand anyone they are estranged from, and the reasons for this including who is a risk. Genograms are an intervention in their own right if used correctly; it is an important aspect of working with our families and should be one of the first things to complete with them.

The construction of a genogram can be a powerful tool and one that we may need to refer to in times of crisis or need. The genogram is a working document and can be updated as often as we need to. The genogram should include all family members/ important people including people who the family say that they do not have contact with and anyone who are deceased.

Every file needs to have a comprehensive genogram completed in line with our internal Practice Standards.



# FAMILY TREES

## Rules to constructing a genogram

If you understand the following rules, you will be able create the most complex genogram without any problem, and others will be able to understand your work.

The male is always at the left of the family and the female is always at the right of the family

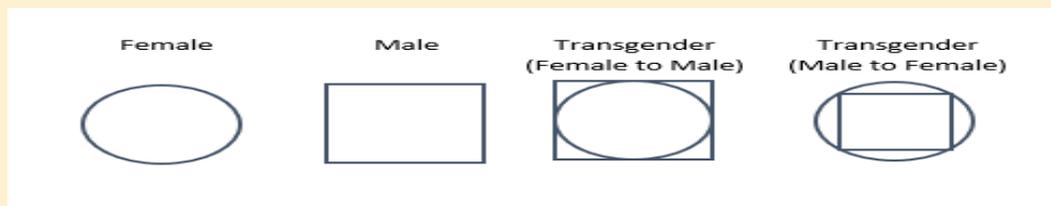
A partner must always be closer to his / her first partner than the second (if any), third partner and so on.

The oldest child is always at the left of the family, the youngest child is always at the end of the right of the family

The genogram should include at least 3 generations and all brothers and sisters of mother and father, and significant relatives of the parents (i.e. aunts and uncles) should be added.

It should include all family members including people who the family say that they do not have contact with and anyone who is deceased.

## Genogram Symbols



A person's name and age can be placed either inside or above the symbol that represents them on the genogram. For anyone deceased put a cross through the box.

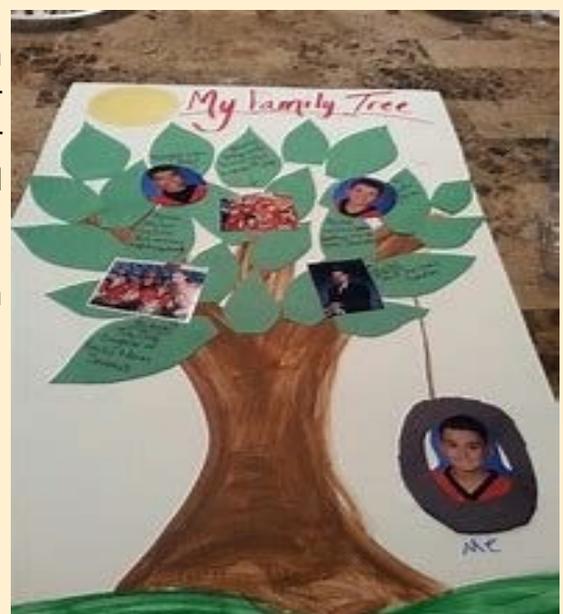
The use of lines between family members; a thick line shows a strong connection whereas a jagged line can show that the relationship is stressful. Where relationships end two lines should be put through the line joining them.

## Child Friendly Genograms

Understanding a child's view of themselves in the family is crucial. For some children, completing a genogram can be a positive activity, especially when there are complicated family dynamics or when completing life story work. There is no right way of completing a genogram with a child; the focus should be on where they want to start and who they may want to include such as pets and friends.

It is not essential to accurately record a genogram as we would with adults; allow the child to use their own shapes to define the important people in their lives. Ensure that any work completed with the child is added to the child's file.

This is a fun activity for children; for adopted children this can be saved in a memory box or example.



# SERIOUS CASE REVIEW

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) is an independent body set up to identify, commission and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases in England. It brings together experts from different sectors including social care, policing and health to provide a multi-agency view on cases which raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.

The panel reviewed the circumstances leading up to the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson in 2020.

Star and Arthur were murdered by their mother's partners; both were women. I have revisited the learning arising from the review specifically around practice and practice knowledge. Awareness of these key findings will influence our focus on how we work with families and how we conduct our assessments and our interventions; you will find that in a number of our training sessions we refer to the learning from this review where it is relevant to the subject matter.

## **Practice and practice knowledge**

For both Arthur and Star professionals did not have a clear understanding of what daily life was like for the children. The review identified a number of reasons for this.

- There was limited direct work with the families. For example, in Arthur's case, it was often the voice of his father that was heard by professionals rather than his own.
- There was a lack of reflection and further exploration into how the children and families presented themselves during visits.
- There were failures to talk with and listen to the views of wider family members. Different family members raised concerns about potential abuse with police and social care professionals on multiple occasions. However, despite family members knowing the children well, their voices were not heard.
- There were gaps in specialist skills around interrogating and analysing evidence; the versions of events given by parents were too readily accepted and photos provided by wider family members were not properly examined.
- In both cases, professionals were often kept at arm's length by those who were perpetrating abuse. For example, professionals were prevented from coming into contact with the child, or consent to share information was not provided.
- Practitioners' biases and assumptions impacted on how they assessed risks to the child and made decisions about their safety.
- The impact of the parents' own experiences on their ability to care for their children were not fully explored or understood.
- The risk posed by new partners was not fully considered. For example, a range of historic and current domestic abuse issues were present in both cases, but the risk posed to the child was not thoroughly explored.

All of the above findings are explored in our Assessment training modules alongside specific training around professional curiosity (which is re-launching this month), disguised compliance, working with hidden partners, domestic abuse modules etc.

I fully appreciate how busy everyone is but it is important that you continue to discuss with your line manager how you can access learning and development in your supervision.

## **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

### **LP training Module 2 – Early Help assessment and SMART planning**

Tues 5 July 3.30-5pm

Tues 19 July 3.30-5pm

### **LP Training Module 3 – Team around the family and Impact measurement**

Thursday 7 July 3.30-5pm

Wed 20 July 3.30-5pm

### **Motivational Interviewing**

Thurs 4 July 9.30-11.30am

### **Assessment Analysis and Planning**

4 July Assessment Analysis Planning (part 1)

12 July Assessment Analysis and Planning (part1 )

19 July Assessment Analysis Planning (part 1)



### **Trauma Informed Practice**

15<sup>th</sup> July Trauma Workshop 2

20th July What is Trauma

### **Adoption**

20 - 21 Adoption Law and Practice (2 day course)

### **Neglect**

28 July Poverty and Neglect

**If you have not already done so please set up your learning accounts with the following; both are excellent sources of information, resources and webinars.**

**Research in Practice:** [www.researchinpractice.org.uk](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk)

**Children's Social Work Matters:** [www.childre socialworkmatters.org](http://www.childre socialworkmatters.org)

As a learning organisation feedback is really important to us to make sure that we are getting things right. Please have your say about the training and development being offered via your evaluation forms as we are using this feedback to adapt our workshops.

As always thank you for your feedback and suggestions.