



REPORT WRITING WORKSHOP FOR LA SOCIAL WORKERS

Devised and delivered by
Erin Bagral, Vicky Overall, Laura Bywater & Trudy
Barras
Cafcass
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Workshop Programme

- Brief Introductions
- Purpose, Desired Outcomes;
 1. Summary of the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP) in relation to Private Law
 2. Improve report writing skills using case planning, evidence based tools, analysis, child's voice and plain English



The purpose of the CAP

The CAP came in to force on 22nd April 2014; it is designed to assist families to reach safe agreements where possible out of the court setting. If parents/families are unable to reach agreement, and a court application is made, the CAP encourages swift resolution of the dispute through the court.

Practice Direction 12(B) Para 1.2



CAP Questions...

- What does CAP mean?
- What are the key terminology changes?
- Do we adopt the new terminology in the welfare checklist in public law proceedings?

From the Beginning

- Early Intervention (EIT)/First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment (FHDRA)-a brief overview what happens in Court at FHDRA and the importance of LA Safeguarding Checks
- When does the Court order a S7 report?
- ADCS Protocol



Advice to the Court

Menu of Options – safeguarding or non risk cases:

- PD12J – Finding of Fact
- Separated Parents Information Program
- Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme
- Child Contact Intervention- preparation for contact and supported contact
- CPPP pilot – requires a 16.4 appointment
- S7's, s37's, 16.4's
- Cafcass or Local Authority?

Some Useful Resources

The Parenting Plan is a key resource for parents to work through and record agreements and which encourages them to exercise their Parental Responsibility.

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/divorce-and-separation/parenting-plan/>



Section 7 Reports ordered on...

- Spend Time With (Contact)
- Live with (Residence)
- Prohibitive Steps Order
- Specific Issue i.e. name change, schooling, jurisdiction issues

Secondary Issues Arising From Above:

- Shared Residence/Change of Residence (Live with)
- 16.4 Guardian



Section 7 Reports

- CAP: the Court is not the third parent. Onus is back on the parties to exercise their PR to make suitable arrangements for their children. Reduce case duration. The longer the case is in court, less value on the child's needs. Child is at the centre of the proceedings.
- Wishes and Feelings is a significant element of the Welfare Checklist, and important to balance against risks/vulnerability factors.
- Recommendations should reflect the stepped phasing-in of child arrangements - the medium and longer term future for the child.
- Stepped recommendations negate the need for addendums and reviews





Case Planning....

- What is the problem? (parents stuck in conflict)
- What is the RISK? How do we evidence/measure this – how we make it safer?
- What is my mandate/remit? (sec 7,37 FAO?)
- What is the goal? (Parenting Plan)
- How am I to get there? (what methods/tools...signposting)
- Involvement with extended family members/siblings
- What time do I have? (mindful time to file will reduce)
- How shall I report and evaluate outcomes?
- Assessment/Safeguarding on-going. When to stop & go back to Court? – 16a risk assessment



Good Practice

- Children and young people have a voice (letter to judges/direct work tools /meeting with judges)
- Cases are screened effectively upon transfer
- Contact with child/parties made quickly
- No delay principle applies
- Reduction in extension requests
- Safeguarding concerns are identified appropriately and acted upon immediately
- S7 reports are completed in a timely manner and shared with parties



What Children Need

- To know that they are loved by both parents
- That they will not be abandoned
- That the separation is not their fault
- To know that adults may fall out, but children are still special and cared for
- **That they are included and informed, but not responsible for decisions**
- Parents emotionally available for them

What Children Need cont...

- To have changes explained in a sensitive, timely and appropriate way (preferably by both parents)
- Consistent and predictable patterns of care
- Stability with limited changes and disruption
- To feel that they belong in both homes
- That their feelings and concerns are heard
- To be distant from the conflict, not burdened with adult issues and inappropriate information
- Not to feel emotionally responsible for one or both parents
- Able to maintain relationships with extended family

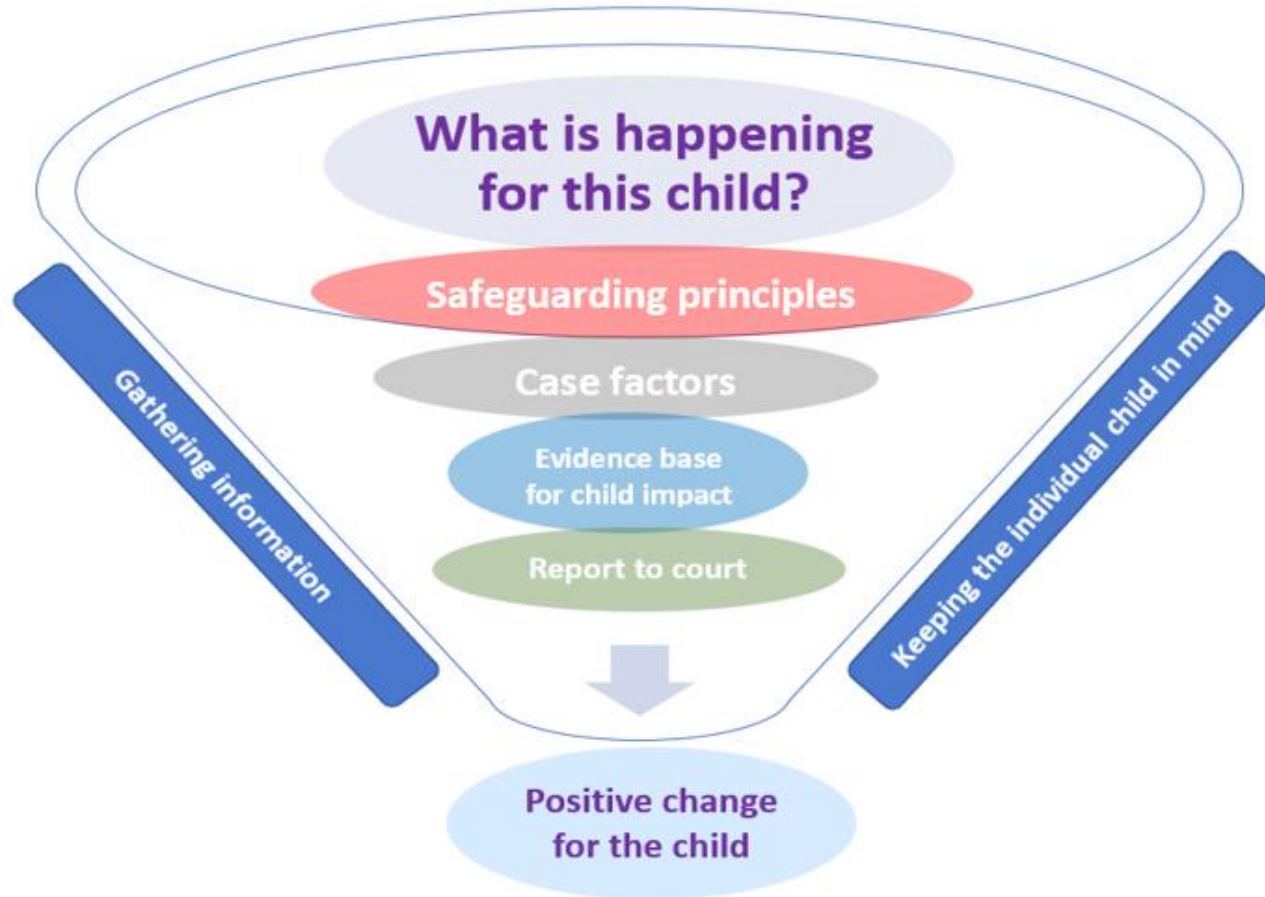
Analytical Reports

- So... we have our plan & we know what children need
- How do we gather the evidence?
- Use of Child Impact Assessment Framework

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/professionals/ciaf/>



CIAF



We've gathered our evidence using:

- Safeguarding information
- Tools
- Interviews
- Direct work / observation
- Other third party info – school/ GP



How do we tell the court what we think and get them to listen?

Converting a narrative paragraph into an analytical paragraph

Before and After Example exercise



Example A

- **Can you tell what the risks are?**
- **Is it easy to read and understand?**
- **What does Lucy want?**
- **Will she be safe with these recommendations?**



Example B

- Can you tell what the risks are?
- Is it easy to read and understand?
- What does Lucy want?
- Will she be safe with these recommendations?
- Which do you prefer A or B and why?



Writing an analysis for Court

- Begin with context: what are the issues/questions/disputes? – what does the court want?
- BRIEFLY summarise the events: what happened; who said/did what, to whom?
- Evaluate and assess the information you have
- Evidence based analysis- what do the issues/risks/concerns mean for the child and what evidence/examples do you have to support this?



Writing an analysis for Court (cont)

- Add your own observations and point of view
- There should be a clear link between your point and the information gathered
- Use this as the lead into conclusions and recommendations
- Recommendations- what can be realistically done to remove or reduce the issues/risks/concerns?
- No surprises!



What?

So what?

What now?



Point

- Ms Smith disclosed a 15 year history of cannabis use.
- She told me she has tried to stop using when Billy is in her care.

Evidence

- Her hair strand tests are positive and do not seem to show a reduction in drug use.
- Her keyworker at AB drug project told me her attendance has been erratic.

Analysis

- Although Ms Smith has some insight into the impact on Billy, she has not yet made real changes.
- With this long history I am pessimistic about her chances of success in the short term at least and she is likely to remain unreliable and forgetful.



Common areas where some social workers slip up in reports.

Irrelevant, inappropriate information

“Michael is a large baby. Clearly his size is inherited genetically from his father, who is a proportionately large person.”

From an Ofsted inspection of a Cafcass team, which criticised practitioner’s files on children and families for containing “irrelevant, inappropriate” information.

“D has explained that she thinks she will shortly start her menstrual cycle. D is prepared for her first period. She would appear to have no outstanding needs in this respect.”

From an Ofsted inspection of a Cafcass team, which found “the relevance of some statements was not clear” in a report on an 11-year-old girl.

Meaningless phrases

“She has a bubbly personality.”

“You wouldn’t believe the number of times that people say this,” says Alison Paddle, former chair of Nagalro. “It doesn’t mean anything and it’s a cliché.”

Illogical conclusions

“There was domestic violence but, because the parents had recently separated and the father was not on the scene, the kids were no longer at risk.”

Consultant Joanna Nicolas was concerned to see this in a report recently because of the flawed conclusion reached by the practitioner. “We know from research that that’s when the children are most at risk,” Nicolas says.

This article is published in the 29 July 2010 edition of Community Care under the headline, “How to write a good report”

Plain English

- Presenting information that the intended audience can understand in a single reading
- Choosing words that are respectful but plain, and commonly understood
- No social work jargon
- Giving people whose lives will be affected by what you write a fighting chance to understand what you have written



Say What?



- “I do not intend to address the couple’s relationship suffice to say it is imbued with ambivalence: both having many commonalities emanating from their histories that create what could be a long lasting connection of alternative relationships that are a reflection of this. Such is this connection that they may collude to undermine the placement.” (TP)
- “The report was so riddled with jargon “it might as well have been a foreign language... I have to question whether [TP] was able to communicate orally...” (Judge Lea Nottingham Court 2015)
- “Due to SH’s apparent difficulties identifying the concerns, I asked her to convey a narrative about her observations.” (TP)
- “What would be wrong in saying, ‘I asked her to tell me?’” (Judge Lea)

And finally...

- De-clutter – spaces, paragraphs, alignment, font, paragraph all to make it easy to read.
- Check names and check again.
- Final edit – punctuation, grammar.
- Leave it, have a cuppa, re-read aloud!



EXAMPLE S7 REPORT GROUP TASK

Thoughts:

- What was good?
- What would you change?



Children as active participants

- Is there evidence of children being enabled to make choices where appropriate?
- When and where did you see the child/ren?
- Have children and young people been fully engaged in the process?
- Clear communication with the child is evident.
- Information is communicated to and from the child.
- Letter from parents or from yourselves or both to the child explaining what next or what was agreed.
- Top tips from FJYPB: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board/>

Remember



Cafcass
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service





At the Dispute Resolution Appointment (DRA) the court will...

- (1) Identify the key issue(s) (if any) to be determined and the extent to which those issues can be resolved or narrowed at the DRA;
- (2) Consider whether the DRA can be used as a final hearing;
- (3) Resolve or narrow the issues by hearing evidence;
- (4) Identify the evidence to be heard on the issues which remain to be resolved at the final hearing;
- (5) Give final case management directions.

Summary - Impact

- The value you add to the child's welfare by delivering a robust **analytical** report
- Good Outcomes, Success Stories



Some Useful References

- <http://www.cafcass.gov.uk>
- PD 12(B): (CAP 2014) Issued 22 April 2014
- <http://www.advicenow.org.uk>
- www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk
- www.splittingup-putkidsfirst.org.uk/parenting-plan
- www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk/find-service.php
- www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parenting-plan
- <http://theparentconnection.org.uk/programmes/programmes/getting-it-right-for-children-when-parents-part>



Feedback & Thanks!

- Feedback Questionnaire





Contact Details

erin.bagral@cafcass.gov.uk

Service Manager Durham LT team Cafcass

vicky.overall@cafcass.gov.uk

Practice Supervisor LT team Durham Cafcass

