Guidance on Compiling a Chronology

What is a chronology?

Chronologies are a vital tool for practitioners working with children and their families, supporting practice in a number of different ways.

They are crucial to:
- ❑ Capture significant events in a child and family's life.
- ❑ Consider the child's felt and lived experience.
- ❑ Understand the source of actual and potential harm impacting on children and young people.
- ❑ Identify protective factors and to decide next steps for intervention in a range of contexts.

Compiling and analysing chronologies serves as a foundation for relationship-based practice as they provide an overview of what has happened in families' lives, aid understanding of what their experience of services and professionals might be, what can be learnt from this, and how this can be worked with to effect change in the future. *Dartington: Research in Practice (2022)*

A chronology is a table which should include 3 columns:
1) The date of when the actual event occurred.
2) Brief overview of what happened (significant event).
3) The impact this had on the child.

What events need to be included in a good chronology?

Every family open to Children's Social Care should have a working chronology which is a 'live tool' that is regularly updated to reflect the developing story of the family. Chronologies play a key role in assessments, as an analytical tool to help create the assessment and point of reference for the completed assessment.

Signs of Safety is vital when collating information for a chronology:
- ❑ Using 3 Columns analysis and Harm Matrix will help to inform the chronology, with significant events and strengths.
- ❑ Danger statements will assist with impact to the child/ren.
- ❑ Thinking chronologically also complements the use of a safety circle/genogram/ecomap as it frames our understanding of the people you are supporting and their wider network.

All chronologies should include significant events:
- ❑ Key dates such as births, deaths, marriages, divorces
- ❑ Transitions and changes: house moves, change of education provision, change of care provision, new partners, parents separating, people moving in or out of the home, new allocated worker
- ❑ Key dates for Children's Services involvement: referrals, S47 enquiries, strategy discussions, start/review/end of plans, conferences, transfers between teams, legal planning meetings, start/end of Cared For Child provision, immigration status.
- ❑ Start and end of assessments or interventions by a professional agency - e.g. CYPS
- ❑ Any court hearings and orders made
- ❑ Missing episodes
- ❑ Any significant events relating to issues such as CSE, physical harm, mental health, youth offending, criminal offences, DA reports, health/illness, disclosures made

Note: please refrain from copy and pasting a CCN (Child Concern Notification) into the chronology. Only include a succinct overview of the CCN.

Use of professional judgement is needed as to recording events specific to the needs of a particular family. For example:
- ❑ Where there is neglect, home conditions, appearance of children etc might be recorded
- ❑ Where there are issues with mental health, presentation of mood during home visits could be recorded
- ❑ Where there are concerns about substance misuse, drug test results/presentation during visits could be recorded
- ❑ Where there are issues of engagement, attempts of visits, successful/unsuccessful visits, unannounced visits could be recorded

Chronologies should be a balanced record and should also include positives such as:
- ❑ Evidence of improvements in issues such as home conditions, school attendance, engagement with professionals
- ❑ Positive reports from professionals
- ❑ Parent's self-referral for support

Entries should be succinct and informative: not long and full of excessive amounts of detail. The chronology should include facts and specific details, not analysis and opinion.

The chronology can be single or multi-agency. A multi-agency chronology can support an integrated multiagency response to a family.

Learning from practice reviews: In the sad case of Star Hobson, evidence was not pieced together in the round. Each referral was treated as a different episode and the evidence was not looked at altogether. *An effective chronology would have identified patterns*.

How can I use a chronology?

Chronologies should be used as part of the assessment, planning and decision-making processes to:
- ❑ Understand a family's history and how they have come to be where they are today
- ❑ Map changing risk and concern over time
- ❑ Assess frequency, duration and severity of harm and likelihood of change
- ❑ Look for patterns: for example, a pattern of violent relationships or physical neglect
- ❑ Make connections: for example, alcohol use increases during periods of transition or school attendance drops when parent is struggling with mental health
- ❑ Identify successes and difficulties over time
- ❑ See what interventions have worked/not worked, been tried/not tried
- ❑ Share with a family/and network (factoring in confidentiality) as a reflective activity
- ❑ Share with other agencies to aid a collaborative approach to working with the family

Updating the chronology on LCS tab every three months for reference. However, if you are new to a child's case and working through case notes/reports - this is a good time to complete/update a chronology as you are already completing the work to source the information to aide your understanding of the particular child/ren and family.

Note: A good chronology relies on accurate and up-to-date case recordings where fact and opinion are clearly distinguishable. Remember, a family's chronology can follow them for a long time, and it is important that the information is objective and accurate.

Additional resource - Writing chronologies - Childrens (ccinform.co.uk)