******Writing directly to the child**

**and young adult**

**in case recording**

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This guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Case Records for Children in Care (Including Retention)](https://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_case_rec_lac.html?zoom_highlight=record) and [Recording Policy and Guidelines](https://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/g_recording_guide.html?zoom_highlight=recording).

## **Introduction**

As professionals, we are all ‘writers’ and spend a huge amount of time conveying our thoughts through the written word. To keep our work and decision making focussed on the child, our record keeping (as much as possible) should be written directly to them.

For the purpose of this document, the definition of a child is a person who is under the age of 18 and of legal responsibility. The definition of young adult is a an adult aged between 18 and 25 years of age.

Social care practitioners should write documentation which the reader conveys a sensitive, factual approach to recording information appropriate to the individual.

## **Why should we direct our record keeping directly to the child?**

There are huge benefits of writing directly to children and young adults in our case records. When practitioners break down information and imagine they are having a direct conversation the child or young adult, they remove professional jargon and best explain why decisions and/or plans were made. This is particularly important if children decide to gain access to their records when they become adults.

[The MIRRA (Memory – Identity – Rights in records – Access) study](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/oct/childrens-voices-omitted-care-records-ucl-study-finds) (2019) identified that the voices of children and young people are largely absent from their care records leaving them with ‘feelings of blame and a lack of self-worth’. Professor Elizabeth Shepherd, who led the study, suggests social care records are vital for ‘memory-making and identity’ for adults who were in care as children, she adds ‘we must ensure care records put the experiences of the child at her heart of them’.

## **When is it appropriate to direct my record keeping to the child?**

The practitioner should imagine they are writing to the child or young adult, who will one day see their record. Where this is not possible, it may still be a powerful tool to write directly to parents or other family members.

Case recording directly to the child or young adult should be completed in the following circumstances (the list is not exhaustive):

* Case summary
* Case notes for the individual child or young adult (being careful not to link to other siblings) (including QA oversight)
* Child Protection Conference reports and plans
* Child and Family Assessments and plans
* Joint [Housing] Assessments
* Early Help Assessments and plans
* CLA care plan Part 1 and Part 2
* Pathway plans
* Supervision and management oversight – there should be a section written to the child or young adult.
* Pen Pictures of children
* Front Door Service, Request for Support – Next steps rationale for decision should be written to the child or young adult.
* Child Permanence Report
* Agency Decision Maker Decision - Case note summary of why the decision has been made.
* Return Interview following a period of missing
* Child in Care Reviews

**When is it NOT appropriate to direct my record keeping to the child?**

* Where a child or young adult has sadly died
* Where we are **not** making a decision or undertaking any meaningful enquiries about safeguarding, such as.

-Any information requests, unless we identify safeguarding concerns relating to them

-Court requests

-Occupational Therapy requests, in which there are no obvious safeguarding concerns

-Identifying we need to complete a Missing Interview for a child. We are not making a decision; this action is enabling the case worker to complete a conversation with the child on their return home and triangulate the information obtained

* Reflective supervision
* Court reports
* Chronologies
* Front Door Service – Initial Triage comments
* ARP and CIC Panel referrals and minutes of actions- this information will be included in the child/ young adult assessments
* Safeguarding alerts
* Audits and moderations
* Youth Justice Referral Order Panel Report
* Youth Justice Pre-Sentence Report

There are instances where we are managing a significant amount of information and from different professionals in a short space of time. Examples include:

* Initial triage comment’s part 2 in which case direction is being recorded
* Strategy discussions and S47 Outcome forms and plans
* All meeting minutes/summaries including Child in Need, Child Protection, CAHMs and DCSMs, Permanency Planning Meetings and Placement Stability Meetings.

In these instances, there should be a section within the form/minutes written to the child or young adult which summarises the discussion/actions/rationale for decisions, rather than writing the whole document to the child or young adult.

NB: Reports and statements written during the Public Law Outline (either pre or post application) or for the purpose of the Youth Court process should continue to be written in the third person. For example, Letter Before Proceedings, Social Work Evidence Template, Viability Assessments.

In addition, chronologies within documents should not be written directly to the child. Chronologies within Liberi are formulated from case notes. However, if case notes are written to the child, these will pull through to the chronology. Therefore, the first box of the case note should include information for the chronology and NOT be written to the child or young adult. The main body of the case note, would then be written to the child or young adult.

**A case recording example:**

**Reason for contact**

Home visit by Sarah Brown SW. George was seen and everything is going well, and we are continuing to support the development of positive time together which is part of our plan to help you achieve a safe and happy home life.

**Detailed notes**

George, I came to see you today and we spent some time talking in your bedroom. You seemed happy today and you were laughing and joking. You told me that you’re getting on much better with your mum and there haven’t been any arguments. You said school was going well to and you’d managed to stay in school for the last 3 days, which is a big achievement for you. I was really pleased to hear this.

**Part 2 Write Up**

There was a definite change in you George today, I could see you and mum have used the approaches we had discussed together to manage conflict. You have both have done this by initially having time out when things are heated, then allowing each other space to speak, listen and acknowledge each other’s perspective. This has begun to improve their relationship and support them to develop confidence in using varied approaches, rather than falling back into a previous cycle of behaviour. George, I felt you were calmer and happier than I have seen you for a while. We need to continue to build on this and continue the sessions to strengthen the progress we have made. This Links to our agreed Early Help outcomes in the agreed Early Help plan.

## **Tips for workers on writing to the child or young adult in case recording and record keeping**

1. It is easy to worry about the level of understanding the child or young adult has at this moment in time, at their current age, but they may not be reading it until they are an adult. You can write to the child as they are now or as if they are a young adult reading their file. Whichever you do, the key point is to use simple language, short words and sentences, avoiding jargon, and explain anything a non-professional would not understand. Using more common words does not mean being patronising or missing out important information.  A key test of how well you understand something is being able to explain it to someone else.
2. Be sensitive, warm and empathic and use a gentle tone.
3. On recording case notes specify whether you spoke directly to the child or young adult and what was discussed. E.g., “You told me/Your Mum/Dad told me…”.
4. Don’t be tempted to dilute information or actions linked to worries or risk when you write to the child or young adult. It is important that case recording continues to evidence what is going well but also, what we are worried about and what needs to change for the child or young adult to be safe.
5. Separate out fact and opinion and clearly identify strengths, safety, and risk - good records will contain both facts and opinions but there should be a clear distinction between the two, otherwise, it becomes all too easy to mistake opinion for fact and to leave opinions unsubstantiated.
6. Use different methods of communication. – use relevant pictures or photos, for example of a courtroom or judge, to build context.
7. Use rapport – include something you learnt from the child or young adult when writing to them. E.g., “during my visit we talked about your love for Manchester United” or “you showed me your new Barbie and how you had learnt to plait her hair. You seemed very pleased with your new skill, and I was very impressed”.
8. Be empowering – remind the child or young adult what they have done well. E.g., “I was really impressed by the way you were able to tell me (the IRO) what you wanted, and all the adults or identified supportive people listened carefully”.
9. Accurately record the wishes, feelings and views of children, young adults and their families - practitioners firstly need to know what they are. This can only be achieved through spending time with children and adults and forming a trusting and meaningful professional relationship.
10. When making decisions which impact on the child or young adult’s life, we need to clearly explain to the child or young adult our rationale for the decision made and the action taken.

## **Practice Examples**

**An example of a home visit case note written directly to a child**

During my home visit, you sat in the lounge for a while whilst I talked to your mum about the plan, we have made together keep you safe. Mum and dad have agreed that mum will make sure that he hasn’t drunk too much when he comes to visit you. She will know if he has drunk too much if he smells of alcohol, struggles to talk clearly and is wobbly on his legs. If she is worried that dad has drunk too much, she will ask him to go home to his house and visit you the next day instead. Dad has agreed that he will go home and thinks this would be a good idea to keep you safe and to make sure you have the best possible time with him when he visits.

Mum and dad have also agreed that mum should ring 999 if dad gets cross and also to ring Pat from next door who will come to collect you and take you back to her house.

**An example of a home visit case note written directly to a young adult receiving support from the Strengthening Independence Service Sensory Team :**

Cooper, we met at your home dad welcomed me then mum joined us in your lounge. I'm glad to hear that you are enjoying college and learning new things. Maths currently being your favourite subject. You have been very busy with your theatre production, ‘The Grinch’ and your work experience with the Samaritans, and your football club who you meet on Saturdays. Your work experience opportunity was so positive you would like to undertake more in the future. It sounds like you are making good use of your cane and becoming more confident off campus in unfamiliar places. You have also improved your cooking skills and can make some tasty meals, such as pasta with tomatoes and ham and cheese omelettes. I'm sure your parents would appreciate it if you cooked for them one day.

You have told me about your plans to hire a personal assistant to help you with your social activities over the summer. I think this is a great idea and I can support you with finding the right person for you. You have also told me about the trips and activities you have with your friends and family. I hope you have fun and enjoy yourself.

Since you are going to receive money, I want to talk to you about how to manage your finances and budget for your expenses. You have a lot of things that you want to do and buy, but you also need to think about saving some money for the future. If you need any help with managing your money, you can ask your parents, your personal assistant, or me. We agreed I could see you at college in 3 months’ time.

**An example of a plan written directly to the child:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What needs to happen? | What is the change we are looking for? | What do the child/young adult/family/professionals feel might impact on the changes/tasks being successfully achieved | How will it happen? What are the Tasks? | Who will do this? | By when | Wellbeing / Safety Goal | What is the expected impact? |
| Sam, you need to have your 8-week childhood immunisations | You will be best protected from childhood diseases | Sam, your mum finds it difficult to take you to health settings as they make her feel very nervous and anxious | Nanny Jean has agreed to take you for your immunisations at the Doctors surgery and your mum will wait at home to give you a cuddle when you get back | Nanny Jean | 12 January 2023 | Once you are immunised, you will be best protected from childhood diseases | You will be less likely to get sick and have a healthy development |

**An example of an entry to a Pathway Plan written directly to a young adult, (identified within the workers views related to where the young adult lives):**

Samir, you have settled in Bradford and are making good use of your time working and attending college to study English and Math's. From our discussions you tell me you are doing all that you can to support you to have stable accommodation and do not want to be at risk of eviction or being made homeless. When I visited recently you showed me you are comfortable navigating your way around and it was nice to be shown around some of your favourite cafes.

Samir, I know you want to eventually have safe affordable housing of your own and you are aware of the KCC 18+ Local Offer access help with your first month’s rent and deposit, as well as a Setting Up Home Allowance to help buy essential items for the home. You say you have no intention of moving out of Bradford in the foreseeable future but will let your Personal Advisor know of any changes to your circumstances.

You are a bright adept young man who I feel will continue to thrive and prosper wherever you choose to settle down. There are no immediate concerns for your stability, safety, or well-being for this review period.

**An example of an extract of Child in Need minutes (Chair’s report) written directly to the child:**

During the meeting, your mum shared how she has been using some new ways to support you in working through your angry thoughts and feelings. She told us that sometimes when you are angry, you can hit out and shout at her. Prior to you both working hard with Marie (the Social Work Assistant), mum said she would sometimes end up smacking your bottom, as she does not know what else to do. However, you and mum have now agreed a great plan for her to help you calm down using different ways such as ten second countdown and quiet time. Mrs Read (from school) has noticed you using some of these new ideas when you feel angry at school meaning you are not hitting out at your school friends as often. Well done, Harry.

**An example of an extract of Record of Strategy Discussion (Reason for**

**Strategy Discussion) child:** (We can record a summary written directly to the child or young adult at bottom of the meeting minutes)

Mario, we received a referral from Early Help Worker Julie Jones. A Professionals Meeting had been held on 07/12/22 between Early Help and Child and Young People Mental Health Service (CYPMHS) and you had been rated HIGH RISK by CYPMHS in terms of a harm to self and suicide. Professionals are very worried that you have limited family support and whilst your nan (who you live with) does all she can to keep you safe, her health problems mean she is not able to leave the house as often as she would like or take you to your health appointments.

The referral told us that you often self-harm (by cutting your arms with blades and scratching at your face with your nails) and have said that you have regular thoughts of killing yourself. You also often use social media to share your thoughts of harm.

Due to these worries, this meeting was held to share the work that professionals are doing to support you and agree a plan to discuss with you and your nan to help improve how you are feeling.

**An example of supervision analysis (what do you think will happen if things don’t change section) written directly to the young person:**

Jaycee, your Social Worker Julie has shared that she is worried that you are often going missing, and we do not know where you are. When we don’t know where you are we are worried that you may be being encouraged to smoke weed and drink alcohol. When this has happened, we are worried that you might get hurt like when you were beaten up by another young person. We have worked together to bring together a plan which you have done so well to stick to for most of the time and we are so pleased that you came to your last Child in Need Meeting to share your thoughts about what is happening. We are also pleased that you have been at home when Julie has visited recently and talked about how you are feeling.

We would like for you to think again about having some counselling as we wonder if your experiences as a younger child might be impacting on how you are feeling now, and Julie will talk about this with you again when she visits. Julie will also talk to you about getting some help from professionals who are trained to support young people who are misusing drugs. We would like you to be helped to lessen how much weed you are smoking.

**An example of writing a case note to a child receiving the support of Youth Justice Services:**

Sam, we met today at the youth hub to continue our work to explore the impact of physical harm on others. Harming another person means that person becomes a victim of your actions because they have been hurt. We used a workbook to record our thinking. We had a conversation based on made up situations, of people who had experienced harm and talked about how they may have felt. You were able to tell me how those individuals may have been affected physically and emotionally. I noticed that you found it difficult to identify how the person you hurt may have felt or what may have happened to them since this occurred. You told me that the victim of your offence did not listen to you and therefore, you reacted. I asked if you thought your rection was, ok? You told me that you do not think that you used abusive and threatening behaviour.

I was curious about your experiences of violence; meaning harm being caused to something or someone and if you had been a victim of harm. You told me that you had seen a lot of violent behaviour growing up, but you didn’t want to talk about this any further. This seemed like a difficult subject for you, so we agreed to talk more about this later in our work, when we know each other better.

I noticed that you were quiet in our session today and did not answer many of the questions I asked you. I am unsure if this is due to us not knowing each other very well or if the way the session was delivered did not suit your communication/ learning needs. I wondered if the questions may have brought up difficult feelings for you, which you were not able/ did not want to put words to identify them.

In the next session, we will use an activity called ‘zones of regulation’ to help you think about and manage your reactions and responses, so that you are less likely to get into further trouble or be harmed yourself.

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

**Does the recording need to be written to the age of the youngest child in a sibling’s group of various ages?**

The information does not need to be age specific as the child will be able to access their files as an adult. However, this should be written in a factual and sensitive way using simple language, short words and sentences (avoiding jargon), and a gentle tone supporting the language to be sensitive and warm.

Good practice is to only write to the child or young adult you are recording on and to keep case notes separate. However, there may be some case notes which are appropriate to consolidate and if this is the case, you should make sure all the children or young adults are included by name, so you are writing to them all.

**How do I write of incidents of harm, such as rape?**

We need to maintain accuracy of information and transparency so as not to misguide why significant decisions and impactful actions have been made for the child or young adult. However, we should carefully consider the language we use to convey this message. E.g., “Sidney, this may be very difficult to read and to understand, we made this decision/were concerned as we became aware that your dad had sexually assaulted your Mum which caused her harm. This made us worried about your wellbeing and safety”.

Although this may feel uncomfortable to write this is part of this child/ young adult’s history and we need to consider they will be reading this information as an adult.

**Do we write to a child who has died?**

We will not write to a child/ young adult who has died. However, we need to consider how we record this information in a sensitive way, as this information may be read by their family members at a later date.

**How do we record the specific detail required to support clear documentation of a specific service or intervention without oversimplifying this recording? E.g., during a Strategy Discussion or Section 47 investigation?**

We can include this information at the bottom of the minutes/summary of discussion and this will support us in explaining our analysis and decision making based on the information we have received. This information needs to detail the concern/ worry/ and what action was taken to mitigate or manage the concerns, who would be doing this and when it would likely happen. In some instances, involving more than one child or young adult you may choose to record this information on a separate case note for the individual child or young person, summarising in the main body of the case note the decision or action made.

**Does a case allocation need to be written to the child (this provides case direction to the case worker)?**

This entry provides direction to the case worker who will support the child or young adult. The manager will also write to the child or young adult to explain the decision and action taken, this can be in the same entry or a separate case note.

Heading: Writing to Olly.

"Olly, I have asked Sophie Hall (your Early Help Worker) to help you. She will meet with you and talk about your worries about going to school and what makes you anxious."

**How do we record supervision on a child/ young adult’s file?**

Supervision is a reflective space to consider a child/ young adult’s journey, lived experience, interventions, the practitioner’s experiences of working with the family, and hypotheses. Due to the reflective nature of the discussions, it is not necessary to write the whole supervision record to the child/ young adult this should be located in the analysis on the supervision. However, there should be paragraph at the bottom of the Early Help supervision form under the Context section, alternatively on the Liberi Supervision form under the Reflection / Child current experience section which is written to the child or young adult.