Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

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Practice Guide Chronologies

Children's Social Care

Policy Governance

Title	**Practice Guide Chronologies**
Purpose/scope	To provide practice guidance in relation to completing chronologies
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Practice Guidance: Chronologies

Background:

This guide is for practitioners working with children and young people supported by to children's services. It includes principles of documenting key events for children and young people and should be read alongside our 'Life Journey Practice Guidance' and our 'Language Guide'.

It is accepted that children and young people's sense of identity is formed by understanding their lived experience. It is important that they understand why decisions have been made with regards the involvement of children's services. If children and young people do not understand their story, it can affect their identity and self-esteem and invoke a sense of shame throughout childhood and into adult life.

Our core principles and values in terms of maintaining children and young people's records are to:

- record information that clearly evidences a child's lived experience.
- ensure that key events which occur include information from the perspective of the child, including triangulation through observations and relationships held with professionals and extended relational networks.
- ensure that they are person centred.
- obtain key information relating to a child's experiences, strengths and relationships and ensure that this is clearly captured within their records.
- encourage all agencies to consider the child's lived experience first.
- ensure that children and young people are consulted and able to participate in decision making and the support they receive (in an age-appropriate manner).
- consider that the child or young person will potentially read this information as an adult.

It is our aspiration for all children and young people that any recordings we make will document their journey. All children and young people will understand the reason for the involvement of services considering their age, stage of development and understanding.

In respect of statutory intervention, children and young people will be supported to understand any actions/decisions taken. Their views in relation to these will be explored and recorded.

Often children and young people rely on the information contained in Local Authority records to reconstruct personal stories. The quality and content of their records has a significant impact on lifelong wellbeing and their sense of self. The information written, will have an impact on the way that young people view and understand themselves.

Often recordings can be adult-focussed or describe events from a professional perspective. This can then create negative memories. It is important that a balanced narrative of the child's journey and their own life story is evident.

Guidance on Compiling a 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 journey of the family. Chronologies play a key role in practitioners understanding the family history and journey to date. It can be used as an analytical tool to support the formulation of assessments and act as a point of reference for completed assessments and in turn, shaping support needs. It can be a useful tool for determining the child's journey with family members and ensuring accuracy and triangulation of information.

What is a chronology?

A chronology tells the story for the child - showing important events, people that matter to them and their life history. It should outline clearly events that have happened and how we know. The key to a good quality chronology is to outline the impact that events have had on the child, how decisions were made (including what options were discounted) and how conclusions were reached.

A chronology should be balanced and set out the strengths of the child's situation and their achievements, in addition to areas where support and need was identified.

Chronologies are a vital tool for our work alongside children and their families, supporting practice in various ways.

They are key to:
- capturing significant events in a child and family's life.
- considering a child's felt and lived experience.
- understanding the identified needs of families – as well as the impact on children and young people.
- identifying protective factors and next steps in a range of contexts.
- understanding the strengths of a family.
- understanding patterns and themes within a family unit and a child's life.
- understand support that has made available to date and the impact that it has had.

> *"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)*

Chronologies are set out as a table with three 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 should be included?

Significant events should focus on the circumstances that had a positive or negative impact on the child's lived experience. They might include:

- Key dates of birth, deaths, marriages, co-habitations, relationships, religious celebrations, this can lend key information on any times of the year that could be a challenge for the young person
- Childhood history of parents.
- Transitions and life changes, house moves, changes of carer, family time arrangements.
- Social care support – areas of need identified, support provided and outcome
- Parental factors and impact on the young person, domestic abuse incidences, relationship breakdowns/formations, mental ill-health episodes, episodes of substance misuse
- Medical information- Injuries, incidents of hospital admission, episodes of mental ill health, immunisations
  Any relevant medical family history which could impact on the young person now or in the future
- Missing information, frequency, triggers, places visited
- Incidents of racism and oppression.
- Key professional support, what's been tried, missed appointments, engagement, other professionals involved.
- The child's voice – when seen, observed behaviour, views sought.
- When the child has been provided with explanations and what words were used.
- Family and organisational responses to support.
- Outcome of referrals and actions taken.
- Milestones and achievements
- Education history, training and employment including achievements, qualifications, changes of school, periods of exclusion, absence.
- Changes in the child's legal status and caring arrangements for care experienced young people
- Key events and decisions- including relating to siblings, members of the relational network and care planning

The information recorded in chronologies should be succinct and to the point. Practitioners should avoid an indiscriminate transfer of case recording as too much information is likely to lessen the chronology's effectiveness and impact. Usually, two or three sentences detailing an incident or event and its' significance will be sufficient and will help practitioners identify relevant patterns when it comes to analysing the information at a later point. In addition to

supporting the child/young person to understand their life history in a clear and concise manner.

Important features of a chronology:

- Chronologies should be factual, accurate and balanced.
- They should state whose views were sought and what they were.
- Where professional judgement is used, an outline of how this was applied for example a hypothesis on the impact of the child.
- Be concise and provide detail without replicating case recording. Information should be summarised to record key events.
- Provide direction as to where further information can be sought if needed within the child's file.
- Be a 'live' document allowing for unplanned events to be included and be regularly updated with new information and reviewed often.
- Include the action that was undertaken by each multi-agency partner and the outcome for the children.
- Should be one document for each individual child. Multiple chronologies should be compiled into one working document.
- Should make clear any decisions that have been made in relation to siblings that impact on this child
- Should include medical appointments that have not been attended, declined professional visits, non-attendance at school and the reasons why.
- Different agencies have different demands and focus. Professional judgement is necessary to determine what constitutes a 'significant event'. Multi-agency teams will need to have a clear consensus on the impact on a child/ young person when deciding upon significant events. However, understanding that a child's experience is not merely an outline of dates or professional information.

When Should a Chronology be Started?

- A chronology should be started as part of completing the initial contact when a child/young person receives support and be regularly updated during the period of social services involvement with the child.
- Multi-agency partners e.g. health, education, police, children's centres are likely to already hold key information from before the start of social care involvement and this must be reflected within the document.
- Note: It is important that although the chronology may be started when involvement starts, the document also contains historic information relevant to the present day.

Who is Responsible?

All multi-agency partners are responsible for contributing to a chronology. Information sharing between the multi-agency team is essential to ensure that the records of all agencies are compiled together in one succinct document.

Note: The process will work best when there is a shared sense of responsibility by all for gathering, recording and passing the information to the lead professional

Learning from practice reviews:

An effective chronology should identify patterns and themes which make the child's lived experience visible and should have their voice at the centre.

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 needs and strengths over time
- Assess frequency, duration and severity of needs identified and likelihood of change
- Identify patterns: for example, a pattern of domestic abuse or substance misuse, a mistrust of professional help, care experienced parents or parents of children who have been supported via children's services themselves and the impact this can have.
- Make connections: for example, alcohol use increases during periods of transition or school attendance drops when parent is struggling with their 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 alongside the family

Additional resources:

- [Research in Practice: Completing Social Work Chronologies](#)
- [Community Care Inform: Writing Chronologies](#)