Chronologies: Practice Guidance – September 2024

# What is a Chronology?

Chronologies are a vital tool for practitioners working with children and their families, supporting practice in several different ways. They are crucial to:

* + capture significant events in the 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

A chronology is a list in date order of all the major changes and events in a child’s life to date, drawing upon the knowledge and information held by our department and other agencies involved with the child and family.

# Why chronologies are needed?

Assessments must consider past events and their relevance to a person or family's current situation. Past behaviours are a good indicator of future behaviours; therefore chronologies support the identification of patterns and in turn the early identification of need. An accurate chronology can assist the process of assessment and review. It is an analytical tool which practitioners can use to help them to understand what has, is and could happen in the life of a child or adult.

The purpose of a chronology is to provide practitioners, supervisors, children, and their families (and possibly the court) with a chronological list of significant events in a child's or their family's life. Completing a chronology is a complex activity,

practitioners need to decide what constitutes a ‘significant event’ and how much detail to include.

A significant event could be an incident that impacts on the child's safety and welfare and home environment, as well as those positive events such as times the families have managed difficulties well or good outcomes for children occurred. This enables the reader to quickly gain a picture of formative events and patterns of behaviour, and to analyse the implications of the overall history to improve decision-making, avoid delay and ensure proportionate responses.

When assessing and understanding impact upon the child the question must always be “so what?”; so, what does this event mean for this child at this time, and why is it so important to include within their chronology.



# Compiling a Chronology

The central principle that provides a foundation for all practitioners completing chronologies is that they are a process that should run alongside all involvement with children and their families. It will be helpful for practitioners to understand working with chronologies in three main stages:

* + opening and maintaining
	+ reviewing and analysing
	+ utilising and presenting information

## Stage 1: Opening and updating

From the point of referral, there should be an open chronology for all families open to a practitioner which should be maintained on a day-to-day basis. Key events will be succinctly added to chronologies as they occur, providing a clear account of all the major changes and significant events in the lives of the child and family on an ongoing basis.

## Stage 2: Reviewing and analysing

The list of events which will result from Stage 1 is not an end in itself but practitioners, their managers and networks will regularly explore, review and analyse the information to aid their understanding of what is happening and decide next steps. This might take place in supervision; network meetings; review meetings, child protection conferences or legal planning meetings.

## Stage 3: Utilising and presenting information

Finally, practitioners will be required to prepare their ongoing running record of events to present and utilise this information, depending on the context and audience. An example might be summarising periods of time rather than listing every event in evidence for court or preparing a chronology for life story work which may highlight key events significant for the child’s identity.

Key questions that practitioners might need to consider at this point might include:

* + How will this information be used?
	+ What sorts of information may need to be highlighted for this purpose?
	+ How might a lengthy running record be effectively summarized?
	+ Is there any confidential or particularly sensitive information that may need to be removed for this purpose?

Following the preparing of this information at a point in time, the practitioner is likely to return to the previous stages as their work with the child and family continues.





*Image from Research in Practice, Completing Social Work Chronologies.*

A chronology is not expected to be a repetition of the narrative contained in case recordings, it 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 the incident or event and its significance will be sufficient and help practitioners identify relevant patterns when it comes to analysing the information at a later point.

A chronology should draw on various sources of information such as archived records and information from the family and other agencies. It is important to involve the child or young person and family in the process of completing the chronology.

The involvement of family members provides an opportunity to check the accuracy of information and it can assist the practitioner in obtaining family members' perspectives on particular events and to develop an understanding of their impact on individuals within the family.

A simple test is that the chronology should not confuse or mislead in assisting with a clear understanding of the child’s life.



# Practice Standards

* + All children will have an up-to-date chronology
	+ They must be regularly updated as a minimum within three months and prior to any review, child protection or strategy meetings and when a service ceases
	+ Existing chronologies on children who no longer receive a service or who are new to us, must be updated/started at the point of referral and part of the Assessment
	+ Chronologies must be held on the child’s electronic record

# Quality Assurance

Ensuring that all children have an up-to-date chronology is an indication of good practice and will routinely be explored by Team Managers within opportunities such as supervision, and by reviewers in practice reviews and dip audits, team performance data will also be produced to indicate how well Teams are performing.



# Appendix 1

Significant events should focus on the circumstances that had a positive or negative impact on the child.

They might include:

* + Parental Family History (pre-child) including marriages, births, deaths, serious illness and changes in the make-up of the household including new partners and separations.
	+ Key dates of birth, deaths, marriages, co-habitations, relationships.
	+ Childhood history of parents.
	+ Transitions and life changes, house moves, changes of carer, contact arrangements.
	+ Social care intervention - Injuries, neglect of care, incidents of hospital admission, parental incidents including domestic abuse, substance use, violence, criminal history.
	+ Incidents of racism and oppression.
	+ Key professional interventions, 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 intervention.
	+ Outcome of referrals and actions taken.
	+ Child’s health history, immunisations, injuries and hospital admissions.
	+ Education, training and employment including achievements, qualifications, changes of school, periods of exclusion, absence.
	+ Changes in the child’s legal status and placement history of children in care.
	+ Events of religious/cultural significance e.g. baptism, bar mitzvah.

## The above list is not exhaustive nor does every item listed have to be included and professional judgement must be exercised based upon the child and family’s individual circumstances.

*The following document can be read alongside Research in Practice, Completing social work chronologies.*



**Appendix 2 – Example chronology**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Event date | Event details | Impact | Evidence |
| 25/01/2000 | Mr Harris is born |  |  |
| 20/10/2004 | Miss Baron is born |  |  |
| 25/10/2021 | Jimmy Harris is born |  |  |
| 25/11/2021 | Mr Harris is arrested at the home address on suspicion of assault.Miss Baron is recorded to have a split lip and black eye. It is recorded on body warn camera that Miss Baron says, “he punched me and grabbed Jimmy out myarms”. | Jimmy is 4 weeks old at this time and is present during an alleged significant, physical assault of his mother. It is very likely Jimmy was scared and distressed during this incident. | Avon & Somerset Police report – Incident 123-251121 |
| 26/11/2021 | A strategy discussion is held in respect of Jimmy and a joint section 47 enquiry begins. Miss Baron states she is moving back to her mother’s in Gloucester and Mr Harris has been verbally and physically abusive throughout their 2 yearrelationship. | Miss Baron identifies domestic abuse happening during pregnancy and would have impacted Jimmy in utero. | North Somerset Council records – Liquid Logic case notes |
| 10/12/2021 | 999 call made by Miss Baron to Gloucestershire Police stating Mr Harris hasattended her mother’s | Jimmy remains at risk of being exposed to aggressivebehaviours. | Gloucestershire Police report – Incident 123-101221 |



|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | home and tried to kidnap Jimmy. | Jimmy would have likely been scared by theseevents. |  |
| 13/12/2021 | Mr Harris attends Weston-Super-Mare, Healthy Living Centre to meet with the allocated social worker. Mr Harris advises he is moving back to Glasgow at Miss Baron has informed him therelationship is over. | Jimmy will not be aware at this time, however, may experience loss given his father moved from the area. | North Somerset Council records – Liquid Logic case notes |
| 16/12/2021 | Family network meeting held with Miss Baron, Mrs Baron (MGM) & Mr Baron (MGF). Clear plan for Jimmy not to spend time with Mr Harris without Mr or Mrs Baron and Miss Baron advises she has blocked Mr Harris and he has moved to backto Glasgow. | There is a clear family safety plan for Jimmy including the family members who are involved in his life. | North Somerset Council records – Liquid Logic case notes |
| 18/12/2021 | Jimmy’s single assessment concludes and recommends nofurther action. | Jimmy’s needs are being prioritised by hismother. | North Somerset Council records – Liquid Logic casenotes |
| 24/12/2021 | A social workerbelieves they see Miss Baron & Mr Harris | Jimmy witnessesa second significant | Avon & Somerset Police report – |



|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | arguing on the sea front in Weston-Super- Mare. Jimmy is crying is his pram. Social worker phones 999 and while on the phone to the police witnesses Mr Harris punch Miss Baron. On police arrival Jimmy is wearing only a baby grow and the outside temperature is recorded as -1. The Police exercise their powers and place Jimmy with Mr & Mrs Baron in Gloucestershire. Miss Baron & Mr Harris both arrested for child neglect, cruelty and MrHarris for assault. | physical incident between his parents at the age of 3 months and is basic needs were neglected by virtue of being improperly dressed in cold conditions. Jimmy was probably extremely scared and confused by the incident. | Incident 123-241221 |