

Learning from Audits Series

7 Minute Briefings

Title (3): Learning from sibling groups & earlier identification of neglect (July 2018)

1

This audit looked for opportunities to develop more timely identification of long standing neglect in response to concerns about the extent of neglect being flagged from both learning from serious case reviews and when cases progress to court, where the full history of neglect is often highlighted by a comprehensive chronology which identifies the long standing nature of parental difficulties and lack of sustained change from interventions.

2

This audit was to look at large sibling groups where there is a significant age gap between children. 38 individual parents (mainly mothers) were identified from ICS records who had a total of 242 children between them ranging from 4 days old to adult children the eldest being 31 year old. The history of involvements, effectiveness of services and understanding and links made between parenting difficulties for older children when assessing younger children has been completed.

3

Findings indicated we can improve the identification of neglect and abuse at earlier stages by: completing thorough chronologies (case notes, forms, documents) to support an accurate analysis of patterns of abuse or neglect with a whole family approach including reviewing the history of adult/older siblings; consider the parenting capacity/history for all children; and ensure accessing information about older/adult children and request the paper files where this is not on ICS. A focus is needed about recurrent themes of domestic abuse, or neglect including where there are changes in partner/father as well as children within the household. Additional scrutiny about the evidence of sustained changes and positive impact for children is needed to identify concerns and avoid optimism due to “disguised compliance” such as attending care team meetings but not effecting positive changes for children.

4

Practitioners can improve scrutiny in reviewing cases where there there have been a series of contacts raising concerns for children, including where advice has been given to engage with early help services with no engagement. The analysis of a series of contacts can ensure earlier understanding of themes and patterns of engagement and the impact of previous interventions/actions. Practitioners need to check each individual child’s records to ensure a full understanding of parenting issues, neglect and abuse to avoid missing essential information due to some children being open, closed or open to different services at different times. Where a child has been out of the Local Authority, practitioners need to actively seek background from that Local Authority area.

5

During C+F or section 47 investigations for younger children in large families, an analysis of relevant previous involvement with children’s services with older siblings is particularly important where there have been a number of section 47 investigations (including those not progressing to ICPC). Analysis needs to refer to the effectiveness of previous interventions already tried including the outcome for the child and sustainability of changes.

6

Practitioners should be alert to previous periods of child protection planning within the family for older siblings and previous history of involvement with other Local Authority areas. Access to records of previous care proceedings is also essential to ensure decision making is accurate and based on evidence of the history of the relevant parent. Each worker needs to continue to develop the child’s chronology in ICS until we can be more confident that full chronologies are embedded across the county to avoid misleading/incomplete histories. Opportunities to use admin support to build a single comprehensive chronology from a number of other documents can be developed further.

7

IROs have a role in challenging the detail and level of understanding of neglect issues particularly in larger sibling groups to ensure that the right supports are identified within the child protection plans and there is a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved to evidence change. IROs are using challenge logs, but the case note specifying any findings from the IRO reviewing the case and any areas to address would be helpful.