

## Chronology Practice Guide

### What is a Chronology?

A good chronology helps practitioners understand what is happening in the life of a child or family. Simplistically it is a list in date order of all the major changes and significant events in a child's or family's life that details patterns of behaviour, including periods where there have been significant challenges or when things have been stable and going well.

Practitioners can use the chronology to analyse the impact of their history on the child, leading to improved understanding of how to promote the child's safety, wellbeing and life chances.

Good chronologies support work with children and families by –

- Organising information in a meaningful way, enabling concise summaries of concerns to be shared with the child, family, partner agencies and the court
- Informing planning
- Providing an accurate picture of the child's journey
- Helps explore trends that facilitate predictions and analysis
- Identifying risk factors, often helping to identify risk at an early stage
- Helping to recognise the cumulative impact of harm such as neglect which may not be immediately recognisable from looking at one incident
- Highlighting gaps that need further assessment
- Outlining what work has been tried previously and what worked and what did not
- Providing an analysis of the situation
- Supporting meaningful life work with a helpful clear understanding of a child's history.

A chronology is an important tool in avoiding 'start-again syndrome', where current circumstances are taken in isolation and professionals do not adequately assess risks to a child because these have not been considered in their historical context. This often results in supportive interventions being repeated even though these have not created change in the past and there is no evidence as to why these would now be effective (Brandon et al., 2008).

The case chronology should always be read when a case is allocated.

### When is a Chronology Required?

All allocated cases need to have an up to date chronology.

Whenever key decisions are made there should be consideration of the significant events in the family history and the impact on the child and family.

### Using Chronologies for Assessment

Chronologies are essential to a good quality assessment and decision-making. They provide a historical overview of risks, themes and patterns, the previous involvement of services and professionals, and identify times when things have gone well. This will enable the features from the child's history to be considered in assessing how the child and family should be supported.

Chronologies should be completed at the start of an assessment to inform the entire process and be updated for all significant events and at least every six months.

The chronology should not replace case records, which include more detailed information and analysis. There should be a clear distinction between the case record and the chronology. A chronology does not replace the need for a case summary which should be recorded on each open case at a minimum of 3 monthly intervals.

### **What is Recorded in a Chronology?**

The chronology should not be repetition of information in the case file but key events that significantly affect a child's life.

Core elements of chronology should include –

- Key dates of birth of the child and their family.
- Life events such as bereavement, marriages and separations, significant illness/accidents, hospital admissions and transitions i.e. change of school, change of address.
- Family issues such as criminal activity (especially violence), domestic abuse, substance misuse, parental mental or physical ill health, homelessness, financial problems, imprisonment and missed appointments.
- Key professional interventions by social care and partners – referrals, assessments and interventions by other agencies such as a parenting programme, input on health needs, substance misuse. **Include outcomes.**
- Key risk events such as an injury, neglect evidence, missing, CSE or trafficking. **Include action taken and outcomes.**
- Key decisions such as strategy meetings, child protection conferences and reviews, child in care reviews, legal decisions.
- Positive events and periods when things are settled or going well should, where possible, also be included.

A chronology is **not** –

- Just a reference to events or contacts without context.
- A case narrative.
- Copied across from LCS history without being edited. Excessive and unfocussed entries detract from identifying and understanding a child's journey.

Practitioners should use professional judgement about what detail to add to the chronology and what events to include.

A chronology should be concise and contain sufficient information about a significant event or sequence of events but should not be so detailed that they become difficult to read or that important issues or patterns are lost.

### Good example of a Chronology

Event Date	Event Details	What does this mean for the child / ren?	Source / Location on Child's file
31-Jul-2018	Domestic abuse incident between Mary and James. Mary presented at Police Station to report black eye and bruise to her foot. She had been kicked and punched. Mary is 6 months pregnant.	Unborn Baby has been exposed to domestic violence and this may impact on her development when born.	Details in the contact record.
31-Jul-2018	Progressed to Referral. Single assessment to be completed	Assessment required to understand whether unborn baby and family need support in light of the domestic abuse incident that has happened to make sure baby is safe.	
14-Aug-2018	Assessment confirms concerns to unborn due to James's alcohol misuse and ongoing domestic abuse. Refer to Strategy Meeting.	Unborn baby is at risk of being exposed to harm.	Assessment and Strategy meeting notes in forms.
01-Sep-2018	Health share concerns about Mary's mental health. Police report 2 x DA incidents. Progress to ICPC.	<p>Mary is suffering from depression, her low mood could impact on her ability to respond safely and appropriately to the baby when born.</p> <p>The domestic abuse incidents both involved James hitting Mary in the stomach whilst pregnant which could impact on the baby's physical and emotional wellbeing whilst in utero.</p>	Case notes dated 31.08.2018 and DA reports in forms.
14-Sep-2018	Unborn baby made subject to Child Protection Plan under category of Emotional Abuse with domestic abuse highlighted	<p>Safety plan agreed for James and Mary not to live together until further assessment has been completed.</p> <p>Mary to contact the police and EDT if James approaches the house.</p> <p>Mary to be given support re her mental health issues and James to attend an alcohol reduction programme. This will mean that the new born</p>	CP plan and notes of the meeting.

		baby will not experience and witness domestic abuse.	
21-Sep-2018	Mother moves to own tenancy - 6 Park Avenue, Wibsey. James will not be living with her.	To reduce the risk to the unborn baby as set out within the safety plan.	
01-Oct-2018	Birth of Myley Bethany Jackson at 6pm. Mother is remaining in hospital and initial care is positive. Mother is breastfeeding. Social Worker to contact maternity ward to discuss plans for discharge.	Myley is being cared for in a safe environment and receiving love and good care from her mother. The discharge plan is that Mary will return home with Myley and Mary's mother will stay with her for the first week so that Mary has support with caring for Myley.	Case notes
02-Dec-2018	Recommendation to step down to Child in Need. There is no evidence of contact between Mary and James and no further incidents of DV. Myley is meeting her milestones. Mary is accessing mental health support	Mary has continued to keep Myley safe and is no longer in a relationship with James. James is seeing Myley in a safe way supervised by Mary's mother. Myley is benefiting from living in a safe and loving home environment.  Mary has received treatment for her depression and is no longer suffering from low mood. Mary is therefore emotionally responsive to Myley who is developing well.	Meeting notes
04-Jan-2019	CiN Review. Myley continues to make good progress. Universal services are in place to support the family. CiN plan recommends closure in 3 months if progress continues.	Myley is well cared for and safe at home with her mother. Mary is continuing to access support for her mental wellbeing and has positive support from her mother and friends and family. This means that Myley is benefiting from good quality care and seeing other people which is helping her development and social skills.	Meeting notes
31-Mar-2019	CiN Review. CiN threshold no longer met. HV to take lead professional role.	Myley is safely cared for with her mother. Health Visitor will continue to be involved to monitor Myley's development and welfare in	Meeting notes

		line with the usual routine developmental reviews and checks. Mother will continue to engage with mental health services. Myley will continue to spend supervised time with her father.	
04-Apr-2019	Closure agreed Julie Bridges TM	Parents and key family members and professionals are aware of the safety plan and the need to re refer if there are further domestic abuse incidents or the couple resume their relationship. This will ensure that Myley continues to be cared for well and safely in the future.	

**Producing a chronology for Court**

The purpose of the chronology to be submitted to the court is to assist in understanding the case history by identifying and dating key events.

A good social work chronology can help to cut down on the need for the filing of statements, as at an early stage the parents and other respondents will be directed to make statements in response to the local authority case and to provide a position statement in response to local authority documents. These will include the chronology and a schedule of facts upon which the Court is invited to make findings. If facts are not in dispute it will not be necessary to seek statements from the witnesses concerned.

The chronology must be kept simple.

Whilst cases often have extensive complex histories, a Court Chronology must primarily refer to the past **two years**, although if an historical significant event continues to have current relevance, then this should also be included.

It is important to include the dates on which social workers were allocated to the case or ceased working on the case.

The chronology must be a balanced document so should include information that does not necessarily support the local authority case. It is important to consider parental strengths as well as concerns.

**Ask yourself:**

Have I included all events or changes in circumstances that had a significant impact on the child?

- Only include a CP/LAC visit if something **significant** happened
- Don't clutter up the chronology by copying and pasting case notes or including lists of dates of visits

Is it easy to read?

- Multiple significant events may be **grouped** together eg: Between April – June 2012 there were 23 incidents of absconding which increased in frequency and duration each week, rather than listing all 23 separate incidents

Is the outcome clear for each event?

- If events are significant they require a **response** – a chronology of incidents with no details of what was done raises questions about the SW involvement
- If there was no action, explain why not

Is the evidence included?

- Where relevant, bring together information from a **variety of sources** and always identify the source
- Always reference other documents clearly

The Court chronology can be downloaded from LCS into a word document and then edited. The LCS guidance (below) will show you how to do this.

**LCS Chronology Guidance Can Be Accessed Here:**

<K:\Children's Department Shared Area\LCS\Guidance\General LCS Guides\LCS History and Chronology Quick Reference Guide V11.docx>