

Guidance on Completing a Chronology

What is a Chronology?

A Chronology is an ordered, dated record of significant events in the child's life. It can help identify patterns of events, concerns, positives, strengths and unmet needs;

Provides a clear account of all significant events in a child's life to date, based on knowledge and information relating to the child and family;

Reflects the best knowledge about a child's history at a point in time.

What is a significant event?

Professional judgement is required to decide whether particular circumstances or events are significant for a particular child and family. A significant event is anything that has a positive or negative impact on the child. It does not have to happen directly to the child but can be any change in circumstances or events that have, or may have, consequences for the child.

What is the purpose of a chronology?

An effective chronology can help identify risks, patterns, issues in a child's life. It can help in getting a better understanding of the immediate or cumulative impact of events. It helps us to make links between the past and the present, helping to understand the importance of historic information upon what is happening in a child's life now. Importantly a good case chronology can, at a later stage, help children, young people and families make sense of their past.

Why are they important?

Lord Laming noted the importance of a chronology in both the enquiries into the deaths of Victoria Climbié (2004) and Peter Connolly (2008) and stated in recommendation 58, that "all Directors of social services had to ensure that every child's case record had a "properly maintained chronology".

Review and Analysis:

Review and analysis of a chronology is essential. If it is not reviewed and analysed, the chronology would serve little if no purpose. A chronology helps structure information which informs analysis and decision making; as such they are an essential tool in effective assessments and interventions.

The supervision process can be used to review and analyse a chronology. They can also be subject to peer review where staff review each other's chronologies and determine if any patterns, timescales and risks which could be identified.

Key Factors for an effective chronology:

Accurate:

A chronology must be based on up-to-date and accurate case recording. Any inaccuracies or deficiencies will impact on the composition of the chronology and limit its usefulness. If any inaccuracies are discovered, clarity should be sought and if required the chronology amended.

Up to date:

Chronologies should reflect the best knowledge about a child's or adult's history at a point in time. It will need to be amended and updated in light of any new information received. Best practice is to add the information about the significant event or change as they occur.

Detail:

A chronology should contain sufficient details about a significant event or change but it should not be a substitute for recording in a case file. Chronologies should NOT be repeats of the case file, be time consuming to compile, so detailed they are difficult to read or so overwhelming that important issues or patterns are lost amongst the detail. Deciding detail of an incident or change is a matter of professional judgement.

Examples of what should be included in a chronology (this list is not exhaustive):

- Previous history of involvement/ receipt of services from an agency
- Incidence where a child is considered to have suffered harm/ or is at risk of harm
- Child absconded/ gone missing
- Any episodes of self-harm
- Any significant parental factors (domestic abuse; substance misuse; mental ill health) that may have an impact on the child.
- Significant child health issues
- Changes of GP
- Non-attendance at appointments
- non-availability at home visits
- Attendances at A&E/ out of hours services/ excessive use of health services etc
- Education training and employment history (including changes in school/ absences/ exclusions etc)
- Any changes in a child's legal status
- Changes in where a child lives, including placement history of children in care
- Changes in family structure, people living in child's home, excessive visitors
- Any history of offences
- Dates of meetings or professional activities (e.g. conclusions of assessments, receipt of referrals) where important decisions are made about a child's life.

Good practice for maintaining case chronologies

How chronologies are compiled and how they are used and referred to in practice will make a significant difference to improving outcomes for children.

- Commence chronologies at the start of involvement in a case.

- Enter relevant information as it occurs.
- Enter information throughout involvement in the case, an out of date chronology cannot provide full information for further analysis and planning
- Be brief in chronologies and reference where in the case records more detailed information can be found.
- When adding information to case chronologies consider its relationship and relevance to previous information. (E.g. numbers of missed appointments; A&E appointments; police call outs to a home; numbers of injuries over time etc.)
- Build in regular reviews of the chronology to assist in case planning and evaluating progress, for example in preparation for reviews or as part of supervision
- Share the information being placed in chronologies with children, young people and families as appropriate. This can be to: a) check for accuracy of information b) check children and families' views and perceptions of the information/ events.
- Remember to specify the date of the event/ information received.
- Identify/ evidence the source of the information.

END