

“Every conversation starts with the child”

Visiting with a Purpose



Have you ever sold your house? I did, a few times. It's a really strange feeling when someone comes in and your home is 'on show'. When you are concerned that they will like (or worse they won't) it and want to buy it/not. It feels very out of control and a bit like being judged, I wonder what it must be like to have your whole life 'on show'? This week's blog has been put together by Donna Davies (advanced Practitioner) who asks you to consider the purpose of your visit. Why are you going into someone's home, do they know what to expect?

Think about your last visit to a family at home. What did you want to achieve when you went in? It might be that you are undertaking a statutory visit but this is not the reason for the visit. Ask yourself how well did that last visit facilitate the family to move forward against the child's plan? How did you as SW help them to understand how well/or not they were progressing against the plan, did you agree actions either for the family or for yourself – how will the family remember what these were?

It started me thinking about work I used to do with students around assessment planning, asking them to come up with schedule of visits and aims and objectives for each one and share this with the family at the beginning of the work. Then to evaluate and reflect on the meetings afterward in respect of whether they had achieved these objectives and if not, why this was. I still think that this is best practice and supports parents to understand clearly and puts them 'in control'. Why don't you try? Put the plan together with the family at the first visit, they and indeed you are then really clear about the next session and parents and young people can feel more prepared, more in control.

Consider this, if you just turn up without a purpose, is this respectful to the family? Even an unannounced visit has a purpose and this should be clearly shared with parents when you arrive.

Donna talks about professional curiosity and as well as undertaking the visit and doing the work you also need to be mindful and aware and finally, don't forget to write up the visit as soon as possible after it happens. Perhaps you might reflect on using a pro-forma for yourself to assist you in thinking about and preparing for the visit;

- **Purpose of the visit** (what did you intend and how does this link with the plan for the child).
- **Areas discussed** (bullet points)
- **Actions agreed** (for whom, by whom and when).

Have you feedback to the family following the visit, maybe you could consider writing a [therapeutic letter?](#)

[Using *Therapeutic Documents* - A Review. International Journal of Narrative *Therapy* & Community Work · Volume 2003 Issue 4 (2003) · Fox, Hugh · 2003

Over to Donna...

As social workers we are one of the professions who have the privilege of being able to visit families in their own homes. With this comes huge responsibility and the need to visit with purposefully. Gathering information regarding what we see, hear, feel is vital in ensuring children are kept safe. Explaining why you are there is a social worker's first task on gaining entry to the home. You may well be met with hostility

from the family, especially if the visit is unannounced. Having the skills to be able to “get your foot over the threshold” can often be the most daunting and worrying part of a visit, particularly for newly qualified workers. What if the family won't let me in? What can I say that might make them change their mind? Having a clear plan when visiting a family builds up both your own confidence as a worker but also the family's confidence in you as a professional.

What needs to be seen/discussed on your initial visit and what can wait until next time? Thinking about who you need to speak to and what you are going to ask helps to ensure that as much as possible nothing is missed.

Things to consider on a home visit. Imagine you are visiting a family for the first time, there are concerns about neglect. School report that the children arrive presenting as hungry, look malnourished and have been seen hiding food. When you visit and share these concerns with parents, mum proudly shows you her full kitchen cupboards. What does this mean? Does this mean the children are being fed well or that despite there being plenty of food in the house the children aren't being fed well. If so why is this? Are there any other professionals who might have information? Such as a school nurse or Health Visitor, if not are these professionals you could include?

Consider what work would be useful to gather further information. Direct work with the children around their favourite foods or what mealtimes looked like at home. Who's the best cook in the house? What's mum or dad's favourite meals. With agreement from the family, visiting at mealtimes might be an option. You could then observe how comfortable/familiar this was to the family by how they interacted with each other. You could also think about what to ask the parent similar questions to the children around do you sit down together or separately for meals, who does the cooking?, what do you enjoy eating?.

The following tool could be used as a prompt to help you to consider what might be happening in a family (hypotheses) and possible questions you might ask when visiting a child at home. This would help to ensure you gathered enough information to be able to make decisions around future support and recommendations for the family to help keep the children safe, healthy and achieve their potential.

This tool focuses on each room within the house. It also helps to consider the power dynamics within each of these areas. This will help to gain a clearer picture of family dynamics and how each person interacts with others and their role within the family unit.

Bedroom –

this should
Asking the
is more



bedroom and that the parent isn't showing you the room they want you to see.

ask the child to show you their bedroom,
happen on every child protection visit.
child to show you rather than the parent,
reassuring that this is actually the child's

Does the child have clean bedding appropriate for the weather? If not why not. Parents may say "the bedding is in the washer". Was the bedding in the washer last time you visited? Can you see it in the washer? What is the state of the mattress? Does it look like someone may have been sleeping on it without bedding? How does the child's bedroom compare with the rest of the house? Is it decorated/set-up for the age of the child? Does the child look/appear comfortable in the bedroom? Is the child able to close his door and have his/her own personal space?

The serious case review following the death of Victoria Climbié highlighted the fact that workers did not go upstairs and so were not aware that she was in fact sleeping in a bath.



Kitchen

Is the kitchen of a general/hygienic standard? Is there evidence food in the cupboards/fridge? Is this enough to feed the size of the family and how long for? Depending on how far away the shops are does this seem a reasonable amount? How do you get to see inside cupboards or the fridge if parents refuse? Who cooks tea? Who decides what you are having for tea?

Bathroom – Is the bathroom clean/hygienic? Is there evidence of the bathroom being use? I.e. is their washing equipment, toothbrushes? If a parent tells you there is just them and the children, is there evidence of any other toiletries male or female which suggest otherwise? How do you challenge this? If so when is the right time to do this?

Living room - Is the living room child friendly? Does it suggest that the child spends time in there? Is it clean/safe?

If there are very young children is there a safety gate on the door to prevent them getting upstairs or into the kitchen?



In terms of power dynamics - Who is in charge of the TV remote control? Who draws the curtains when it gets dark?

Outdoor Space - Is the garden/yard safe for children to play in? Does it have a secure fence if the children are small? Is it tidy i.e. rubbish or any objects which a child could hurt themselves on? Is there an outdoor shed/garage. If so what is in there? If chemicals or garden equipment are stored do the children have access to this? Also when considering if a parents has been told that a particular person must not live in the home is there evidence that someone may be hiding/spending time in there?

This list is not exhaustive and should be built on. There could also be a different focus depending on what the referral was about i.e. neglect, drug or alcohol misuse. Some questions or areas within the home may be more important than others as would be what the worker was looking out for to raise or lessen any concerns which may cause harm to the child.

Professional curiosity helps workers to keep an open mind and not taking what people say as the absolute truth. This is not to say that parents/carers are never honest and purposefully try to hide aspects of how they are living however this could be the case. Ferguson 2011 highlights the fact that

“The house is a space that provides opportunities for family members to keep aspects of their lives and parts of themselves hidden by attempting to stage-manage what the professional gets to see and know”. Announced as well as unannounced visits give social workers the opportunity to see how a family is actually living.

Nikki Wilson has asked that you are gently reminded of the 'Mind of My Own' training which is coming soon. The course is aimed **at staff working with families** in children's social care and Local Area Teams. All case holding staff are expected to be trained in the use of Mind of My Own and use it within day to day practice.

Prior to attending the Mind of My Own training, you need to sign up for a worker account to enable you to use the app during the training session. Please see instructions below for how to sign up. There is also a video about the app if you would like to familiarise yourself with it before the training.

<https://vimeo.com/402935081/151f6510bd>

1. Go to workers.mindofmyown.org.uk
2. Click on Sign up
3. Select York Children Services as your organisation and then type out your name and email address
4. Click continue
5. The account will then need to be approved by the Service Mind Of My Own admin. Once it is approved, the worker will receive an email asking them to create a password.

Course Dates (choice of 6)

Monday 9th November 2020 09.30 – 10.45

Monday 9th November 2020 11.30 – 12.45

Tuesday 10th November 2020 11.45 – 12.30

Thursday 19th November 2020 10.00 – 11.15

Friday 20th November 2020 09.15 – 10.30

Finally, please remember to share your thoughts on this blog and any other with me, your feedback is vital, is this blog useful? What are your thoughts/tips on recording?

| What is going well | What is not going well | What would you like to change |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Comments | | |

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Dallas

Resources/Further Reading:

Ferguson (2011). Child Protection Practice. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.