PRACTITIONERS GUIDANCE ON CHRONOLOGIES.

**Purpose of guidance**

This guidance sets out some clear priorities and expectations in relation to chronologies and how they are used in Children’s Services within South Gloucestershire Council.

**What is a chronology**?

A chronology quite simply is a tool to help structure information and provide a factual overview of history and sequential significant life events in a family’s life. They do not replace case recording, assessments or reviews, they act as a road map highlighting specific information at a specific point in time.

**Why are chronologies important?**

Chronologies have many functions and purposes, primarily they are a tool to aide analysis in terms of risk management, care planning and making decisions, reducing the opportunity for drift and delay.

When updated regularly and used well, chronologies should enable any practitioner working with the family to understand key events that have happened in the life of a family and the impact this has had upon the child and/or parenting capacity.

*“Chronologies provide a key link in the chain of understanding needs/risks, including the need
for protection from harm. Setting out key events in sequential date order, they give a summary
timeline of child and family circumstances [or those of an individual using adult services], patterns
of behaviour and trends in lifestyle that may greatly assist any assessment and analysis. They
are a logical, methodical and systematic means of organising, merging and helping make sense of information. They also help to highlight gaps and omitted details that require further exploration, investigation and assessment”.( Care Inspectorate Scotland 2010)*

Informed decision making is based on qualitative information. A chronology should highlight strengths and vulnerabilities within a family, significant events which had an impact either positively or negatively, and define patterns of behaviour which occur within a child’s lifespan. This information enables well informed plans to be developed and reviewed over a period of time.

Serious case reviews have repeatedly found that the absence of a good chronology contributed to poor safeguarding arrangements for a child –

One of the first major child protection inquiries into the death of **Maria Colwell** noted that:
“Inaccuracies and deficiencies in the recording of visits and telephone messages played a part in the tragedy… the importance of recording actual dates and distinguishing between fact and impression”.

The **Jay Report** (2014) on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham found that there was a chronology in fewer than half the cases looked at (43%) where it would have been appropriate to have one. Most chronologies were out of date, with significant gaps. Professor Jay concluded that: “…It is likely that the absence of structured chronologies contributed to key information being missed when decisions were made”.

Lord Laming, in his report into the death of **Victoria Climbié** (2004) was unequivocal in stating: “I regard the inclusion in any case file of a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date chronology as absolutely essential”. Recommendation 58 of the Laming report stated that a properly maintained chronology ‘must be kept on every file’.

The importance of a chronology also featured in the case of **Peter Connolly** (2008); 'What is lost is any holistic sense of the wider picture - the real experience of the child, the real risks which he faces. Thus, for example, in the case of Baby P any meaningful overview by way even of a simple chronology would surely have alerted social work professionals to his predicament', Family Justice Council.

**Key aspects of a chronology**

A chronology is not an assessment but is an ongoing analytical tool which when used effectively informs assessments and plans, and enables support and intervention to be reflective of the lived experience and needs of the child and family.

Key principles:

* Every child should have a chronology based on factual information and not opinion which is compiled at the start of their assessment enabling an analysis of strengths and worries to inform the current work plan
* A chronology must be based on up-to-date and accurate case recording. Any
inaccuracies or deficiencies will impact on the quality of the chronology and limit its
usefulness. If any inaccuracies are discovered, clarity should be sought and if required the
chronology amended.
* Chronologies should be shared with parents and children where appropriate on a regular basis. This provides an opportunity to check the validity of the information alongside supporting the family to reflect on the totality of information, and impact this may have on their ability to provide care to a specific child/children. It also provides an opportunity to assess the ability to empathise with the child’s lived experience and what their role could be in the recovery from this.
* Chronologies contribute to an emerging picture enabling current events to be understood in the context of historical information.
* For children this helps to prevent start again syndrome, over optimism and viewing incidents in isolation.
	+ They help to keep the child at the centre of the experience with regards to identifying risks, themes and patterns of behaviour and subsequent impact from this.
	+ They assist in identifying connections amidst intergenerational patterns of behaviour whilst understanding what and whom the child perceives as significant or not.
	+ Chronologies inform current and future care plans. Chronologies help those caring for a child understand their background and provide appropriate responses and standards of care
* Chronologies are a sequential story of events which should be updated and reviewed on a regular basis; a chronology that is not reviewed has limited relevance. The strength of a chronology lies in the reporting of facts, times, dates and impact.
* Chronologies provide accumulative evidence of emerging needs and risks, and flag when a multi-agency response may be required. In turn this can support the assessment and management of risk particularly for children in cases where neglect is present.
* Chronologies can act as a signpost to key information when undertaking assessments and reviews. They also highlight patterns where change has taken place, and/or where barriers exist that subsequently require further exploration.
* Detailed chronologies enable effective life story work to take place for the child
* Audits need to reflect on the quality of the chronology, we need to ensure they are fit for purpose, have value, are up to date and support their core function; which is to aide ongoing assessment and plans
* Chronologies need to be reviewed and reflected upon in supervision sessions. This ensures that matters of quality and compliance with core/minimum standards are met whilst evaluating their effectiveness in terms of contributing to decision making and achieving positive outcomes for children and their carers.

**When** **is a Chronology required?**

Chronologies must be available on all files held on children and their families within South Gloucestershire.

For a child they should commence at the start of their assessment and be available should they require accommodation or become involved in the children protection and PLO process. For children that are previously unknown to services and for those who require immediate accommodation, a summary chronology should be produced alongside the request for a placement, this will be used to inform the decision making and any matching process.

Team Managers should regularly review the chronology to ensure it is up to date and reflects the current plan of support and prevents delay in the management of worries and concerns.

**Chronologies for children should always include (but not be limited to);**

* Outcomes from previous referrals, assessments and requests for services
* Births, marriages, separations, bereavements or changes in the household composition.
* Where health needs are identified as an area of need either for the carer or child, any missed appointment should be recorded and used to analyse any significant impact as a result of this.
* Episodes of substance use and or mental ill health
* Incidents where domestic abuse has been reported to have taken placeregardless of outcome
* History relating to criminal activity including convictions, sex offender’s registration, consideration by MAPPA or MARAC.
* Any allegations/disclosures with outcomes
* Missing episodes including how any debrief took place and any information of relevance gathered as part of the RHI process. Any steps taken as a result.
* Periods where a child or family member has previously been looked after.
* History where child protection concerns have been raised including any period when a child protection plan or court order was made..
* Information about SERAF completion and plans made as a result of any CSE concerns/escalation/reduction in risk.
* Child protection information - strategy discussions, outcomes of sec 47 investigations, dates of child protection conferences, their reviews and dates when plans have ended.
* All looked after episodes including those with family members or networks of support
* Information about levels of engagement or non-engagement with professionals including where access to the child is restricted or refused
* Improvements of the child’s presentation and what contributed to this
* Changes in school attendance and or presentation.

All entries in a chronology need to include an outcome and impact, otherwise the entry is meaningless. Entries in a chronology need to hold significant information – for example, not every visit should be included but where significant work may have been achieved in relation to change or a concerning observation has been made, this should be included.

Within a child’s record we are trying to build a picture of their lived experience and therefore we need to analyse the impact of events, interactions and experiences. Our aim is to increase resilience and build on strengths enabling different positive outcomes to be achieved for a child/ young person. Where this is not possible we need to think about what else could affect a positive change for the child, this may mean living apart from their family and circumstances that are causing them harm. – The information within the chronology will assist in the making of these difficult decisions.

**Final Thoughts**

Chronologies have a key role within Children’s services. Understanding the significance of accumulating concerns and complaints is key to keeping children safe. They are a part of our core standards and therefore must be available on every child’s record. They are a crucial document to ensure that the children and families we serve enable us to make informed decisions so that we provide the right service at the right time thus ensuring that as far as possible children are supported to achieve to the best of their potential and safeguarded from harm.

**Key articles and research.**

Why a chronology should be the first thing you do in an assessment - <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2018/08/15/chronology-first-thing-assessment/>

Writing Chronologies Guidance 2018 - <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/writing-chronologies/>

Learning and Improvement Report Southampton Local Safeguarding Children Board - [Serious case review: allegations against foster carers and the abuse of children in foster care](https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/filetransfer/2018SouthamptonAllegationsAgainstFosterCarersOverview.pdf?filename=AA58F75CEDE68892A73FB681FE246B8371684F102152F0AA780A14959D3BCE5767137B3B2A935011CBAEC3068664FF681AA6D2524E357BAB96C006752CCD756759AD77BD1E389823A55CFAAE74B2EE64F46C611AD1724BE1AC50776135EBAAAFFECACF7BE1367AE63EA03E8B4EF013E2582BEE54D1AC2DE257F2CF7CAC60653DCF288AD66386C2ED9BAF102C1535D1B9955126EE7EFC29ECDEEF5092157113A7727960D47808F2ACC97AC35C5785933330F4&DataSetName=LIVEDATA)

[Serious case review: Young Person 'F'](https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/filetransfer/2018AnonymousYoungPersonFOverview.pdf?filename=AA58F75CEDE68892A73FB681FE246B8371684F102152F0AA780A14959D3BCE5767137B3B2A935011CBAEC3068664FF681AA6D2524E357BAB96C006752CCD756759AD77BD1E389823A55CFAAE74B2EE64F46C611AD1724BE1AC50776135EBAAAFFECACF7BE1247BFC24B132894BF725E36C29E561D3BF2AE456DAF34BAE737A3AD92BE2C9749447B5E3937B889706DDE8D2B762A013CFE1DCDCBF83914C2F&DataSetName=LIVEDATA)

[Serious Case Review: Sexual Abuse by a Foster Carer](https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/filetransfer/2019AnonymousSexualabuseOverview.pdf?filename=AA58F75CEDE68892A73FB681FE246B8371684F102152F0AA780A14959D3BCE5767137B3B2A935011CBAEC3068664FF681AA6D2524E357BAB96C006752CCD756759AD77BD1E389823A55CFAAE74B2EE64F46C611AD1724BE1AC50776135EAAAAFFECACF7BE0247BFC24B132894BF72FE96132E35DD7AF2CF85DD3CA58B9776536CB72BCDD76A5C1EDB1D7A3B927624DF54A750231E9C763B391790267E1&DataSetName=LIVEDATA)

[Serious Case Review: The Placements of child PB](https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/retrieve2?SetID=B141E65A-13DD-4554-8EA1-790E2413DA66&searchterm=foster%20carer&Fields=%40&Media=SCR&Bool=AND&SearchPrecision=20&SortOrder=Y1&Offset=6&Direction=%2E&Dispfmt=F&Dispfmt_b=B27&Dispfmt_f=F13&DataSetName=LIVEDATA)

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Linda Fraser & Helen Moore