

South Gloucestershire Integrated Childrens Services

Supplementary guidance on holding strategy discussion where more than one family is involved

Introduction

There are often circumstances where children from two, or more families are involved in a situation that requires a strategy discussion. Whilst there is clearly an advantage in discussing information, with contacted professional, that is pertinent to the risks posed to all involved children, great care needs to be taken to ensuring that any information that relates to one of the children, and their family, is only shared with professionals that are involved with that family.

In general terms there are three common circumstances where strategy discussions for children from multiple families might be required. These are:

- Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child from one family has cause significant harm to a child from another family.
- Where children from different parents live together as one family, or where multiple generations of children live within one household (i.e.: aunt and niece who are both under the age of 18).
- Where an organised or serious situational risk is posed to multiple children. For example, child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation.

The above list should not be considered exhaustive, and professional judgement needs to be exercised by the chair of the strategy discussion in consultation with their service manager.

Specific guidance

For each of the situations detailed above, the following advice should be followed by the chair of the strategy meeting:

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child from one family has cause significant harm to a child from another family

In these circumstances there should **ALWAYS** be a separate strategy discussion held for each child/family. Separate Strategy Convening forms should be prepared, and each meeting recorded separately within Mosaic. Additionally, each strategy should only be attended by professionals directly involved with the child/family being discussed (with the exception of Police and Community Health, who represent core agencies as defined within Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018).

Where children from different parents live together as one family, or where multiple generations of children live within one household

This situation is more complex and professional judgement needs to be exercised. It is likely that any risk posed will impact upon all children who live within the household. Similarly the impact of care/parenting, be that from a step-parent, grandparent, etc. is likely to affect all children within the home. As such a decision can be made to hold one strategy discussion, but care needs to be given to the recording of information that is pertinent only to an adult who is directly related to one of the children.

Where a decision is made by the chair to consider all of the children as one family unit, this needs to be clearly explained at the commencement of the meeting, consideration needs to be given to any challenge raised by another professional who is in attendance and all such discussions must be recorded with the minutes.

Where an organised or serious situational risk is posed to multiple children

A *Complex Strategy Discussion* strategy should be called. This should be chaired by a service manager, or head of service, and should only be used to discuss the situational concerns (such as an individual or a location that is impacting upon a group of children) and personally sensitive information that relates to any individual child should not be shared, or recorded in the minutes. This meeting should not be used to establish a threshold for child protection enquiries (as defined by Section 47, Children Act, 1989). Subsequently, consideration needs to be given separately to each child known to be involved, as to the threshold for significant harm, and as necessary separate “child protection” strategy discussions should be convened, and this is where individually sensitive information should be shared and recorded. These could take place before the “complex” strategy, for children already known to be impacted by the situation, or might need to be arranged afterwards, where children have been identified within the “complex” strategy.

For further guidance please refer to the *Complex Strategy Discussion Policy*.

Conclusion

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018 (paragraph 26), clearly states:

Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare, and protect the safety, of children, which must always be the paramount concern...

As such we need to take a pragmatic approach to ensuring that we have sufficient information to make appropriate decisions to safeguard children. However we have a responsibility, under the *General Data Protection Regulations, 2018*, to ensure that we take care with any information that we receive. Subsequently, if you are in doubt seek advice from your service manager, or the Customer Information and Feedback Team and ensure that you appropriately record your rationale for any decision made on the child’s Mosaic file.

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