

# Document 10: Guidance for Agencies Completing the Chronologies

## Background Information

### The Purpose of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* provides a useful summary of the purpose of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews:

*“The purpose of reviews of serious child safeguarding cases is to identify improvements to be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. ... Understanding whether there are systemic issues, and whether and how policy and practice need to change, is critical to the system being dynamic and self-improving.*

*Reviews should seek to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. They are not conducted to hold individuals, organisations or agencies to account, as there are other processes for that purpose, including through employment law and disciplinary procedures, professional regulation and, in exceptional cases, criminal proceedings. These processes may be carried out alongside reviews or at a later stage.”*

### Definition of a Serious Child Safeguarding Case

*Working Together 2018* defines serious child safeguarding cases as those in which:

- abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected **and**
- the child has died or been seriously harmed.

Serious harm includes (but is not limited to) impairment of physical health **and** serious / long-term impairment of a child’s mental health or intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development (although this is not an exhaustive list). *Working Together 2018* advises that consideration be given to whether impairment is likely to be long-term, even if this is not immediately obvious. Even if a child recovers, serious harm may still have occurred.

Child perpetrators may be the subject of a review, if the definition of a serious child safeguarding case is met.

## Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance is intended to provide specific guidance to agencies when asked to complete a Key Event or Organisational Chronology for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. The aim is to ensure a professional standard and consistency across agencies.

### Who should complete the Chronology?

Chronologies should be completed by a **senior member of staff who has had no involvement with the case**. This individual should have access to all relevant information and records relating to the case and should be given the opportunity to query facts with staff where necessary.

A Senior Officer within the agency should **quality assure and sign off the chronology** prior to its submission.

Further advice and support is available from **[insert contact details of individual able to provide advice and support]**.

## Purpose of the Chronologies

### What is a Chronology?

A chronology is a succinct summary and overview of the significant dates and events in a child's / young person's life. Chronologies are also used to capture significant organisational changes.

When undertaking a local child safeguarding practice review all relevant agencies will often be asked to complete a 'Key Events Chronology' of their agency's involvement **and** a chronology of any organisational changes which may have impacted on frontline practice during the same period.

Individual agency chronologies will be collated to produce an Integrated Chronology. (This will often be colour coded to facilitate an 'at a glance' overview of agency involvement.)

### Why are Chronologies Useful?

Children and young people are most effectively safeguarded if professionals work together and share information. Single factors in themselves are often perceived to be relatively harmless. However, if these factors multiply and compound one another, the consequences can be serious, and on occasions, devastating.

Chronologies are used as an analytical tool to help understand the impact of events and changes on a child / young person's developmental progress. They can reveal risks, concerns, patterns and themes, strengths and weaknesses within a family, and can identify periods of professional involvement, support and its effectiveness. Chronologies enable the Review Team to gain a more accurate picture of the whole case and highlight gaps and missing details that require further assessment and identification.

It is recognised that the relevance and / or significance of an event can change over time. A historical event which appeared insignificant or irrelevant at the time may become highly significant in the light of further information or subsequent events.

## How to Complete a Chronology

## What is a Key Event Chronology?

A 'key event' is a significant incident that impacts on the child's / young person's safety and welfare, circumstances or home environment. This will require a professional decision and / or judgement based upon the child / young person and family's individual circumstances.

It is crucial that the information recorded in a chronology is **relevant and succinct** to avoid key events becoming lost in a mass of insignificant and irrelevant detail.

The events or incidents that should be recorded will vary from case to case depending upon the nature of the risks and harm. The following are some examples but this is not an exhaustive list:

- Contacts or referrals about the child / young person / family;
- Assessments undertaken;
- Strategy Discussions;
- Meetings and Child Protection Conferences;
- Child Protection enquiries and Section 47 investigations;
- Non-accidental injury and significant injury or neglect events;
- Attendance / admittance to hospital;
- Births, deaths, serious illness of adults and children and young people in the family;
- House moves;
- Changes in family composition, including new partners, separations, non-family members moving into family home;
- Criminal proceedings and outcomes;
- Civil proceedings involving the family;
- Change in school and school exclusions;
- Change in GP;
- Self-referrals and any referrals to other agencies / teams;
- Court proceedings and changes in legal status, including periods when a child / young person became looked after by the local authority;
- Police logs detailing relevant incidents at family home or in relation to family members, such as reported incidents of domestic abuse, drunken / anti-social behaviour;
- Child / young person's absconding behaviour / missing from home;
- Attempted suicide or overdose of child / young person or family member;
- Specific support offered to family;
- Events showing capacity of family to work in partnership and engage with professionals;
- Frequent presence of unknown adults;
- Any event in the child's life deemed to have a significant effect on them, such as separation from main carer leading to poor attachment.

### What Time Period should the Chronology Cover?

The time period covered by each review will be identified based on the potential learning likely to be achieved. There is little value in identifying weaknesses in professional practice or procedures that have already changed. All agencies will be informed of the relevant timeline when asked to complete the chronology template: this will usually be included in the 'Case Summary' provided or the Terms of Reference. Please focus on this time period when completing your chronology. **However, do include any Key Events outside of this time period if they are likely to be required to understand the pattern of child neglect and whether early help interventions could have been beneficial.**

In some cases a chronology for a child / young person may start with events that occurred prior to his or her birth.

### Why Do I Also Need to Complete a Chronology of Organisational Changes?

The purpose of a local Child Safeguarding Practice Review is to identify improvements to current safeguarding arrangements to prevent, or reduce the chance of, similar incidents in the future. Improvements may be linked to practice issues but they frequently also require changes to the organisational and "systems" factors that shaped behaviour (such as organisational/team aims or culture and the level of resources available to deliver services.)

The chronology of significant organisational changes is, therefore, important to help to identify where organisational and "systems" factors influenced actions.

Again, it is crucial that the information on organisational changes recorded in a chronology is **relevant and succinct** to avoid key events becoming lost in a mass of insignificant and irrelevant detail.

#### **NOTE: Disclosure of Chronologies**

Agencies should be aware that a request may be made by the Police or Court for chronologies to be disclosed when information is being gathered for a criminal case. If requested, we will not provide a copy of your documents but will, instead, forward your contact details to the Officer seeking disclosure so that direct contact can be made.